

More Questions Concerning the Difference between *Brahman* and God

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Ingrid: Hi again.

This is quote from Ramana. Here they have translated "*brahman*" as "God" again.

"Distracted as we are by various thoughts, if we would continuously contemplate the Self, which is Itself God, this single thought would in due course replace all distraction and would itself ultimately vanish; the pure Consciousness that alone finally remains is God. This is Liberation." ~ Sri Ramana Maharshi

I see *brahman* is God here.

Ted: The translation is incorrect. As explained in previous emails, God is *brahman*, but *brahman* is not God. God is *Isvara*, which is *brahman* conditioned by *maya* and thereby endowed with the "limitation" of limitless *iccha* (will or desire), *jnana* (knowledge) and *kriya* (power to act, or "create"/manifest). God therefore is a relatively limitless, but nonetheless a limited, objective phenomenon appearing within the scope of limitless conscious existence, which is *brahman*.

Ingrid: But my dream that was giving the message in English, not in Norwegian, said, "Only God is real."

I know it means only *brahman* is real.

Ted: Good. Your understanding of the message is correct.

Ingrid: I guess *Isvara* as the dream is what created this message so I would understand what is real. And only *brahman* is real. But since the word "God" was used, I cannot see why *brahman* is not "allowed" to be called God.

Ted: It is for the reason explained above. *Isvara* (God) is *brahman*, but *brahman* is not limited to being *Isvara*.

Ingrid: *Isvara*/God (*Isvara* 2) gave me the word "God." It cannot be wrong then to call *brahman* God. If it IS God.

I see you mean I can call it God if I separate the two.

Ted: Yes, as I mentioned in a previous email, you can call *brahman* God if you understand the difference between *brahman* and God, for it is true that God is *brahman* in the sense that just as water is the substrate upon which the ocean depends for its existence, so *brahman* is the substrate upon which God depends for its existence. Hence just as water is not defined by the objective phenomenon of the ocean (there are many other forms of water, such as lake, pond, river, ice, cloud, rain, etc.), so *brahman* is not comprehensively defined as God.

Ingrid: I see it is important to differentiate between these, but do not see why *Isvara* actually gives me the word GOD for the real, and then why Vedanta is so reluctant to use it when *brahman* IS God.

Ted: Dreams are not the authority on truth. Vedanta is the authority. I know that sounds judgmental, but it is not said in the sense of trying to foist a belief system on you. Vedanta consists of the truths revealed to the ancient *rishis* (i.e. seers) in deep states of meditation or through thorough contemplation of experience. Just as Newton didn't invent the law of gravity but instead discovered it through scientific investigation, so the *rishis* didn't invent the essential nature of reality but rather discovered it through "spiritual" investigation, or self-inquiry.

Dreams are experiences that are comprised of *vasanas*, or impressions left in the causal body, which is basically the subconscious mind, from past experiences. Though they may reveal the truth, they may also be inaccurate or inaccurately interpreted.

Ingrid: It is not the Christian or any other God-picture anyway, but real God.

Ted: If you are so attached to calling *brahman* "God," then you can continue to do so. But I have explained why Vedanta is reluctant to use the term as a synonym for *brahman*. Vedanta is very precise in its use of language because language is the means by which we understand ideas, which especially in the case of the subject at hand (i.e. the essential nature of reality) is vital because the words function as indicators of that which cannot otherwise be known – that is, it cannot be known as an object.

Ingrid: I really would like to understand more about the real.

Ted: The real is limitless conscious existence. All objects appearing within limitless conscious existence are only apparent. That is, their existence is dependent upon limitless conscious existence. In other words, we can take any or all objects away and limitless conscious existence remains limitless conscious existence, but if it were possible to take limitless conscious existence away, then all objects would cease to exist.

Ingrid: I know this world is within me, as I am God, *brahman*.

Ted: You as an apparent individual person are not God, for you have limited knowledge, power

and are not all-pervasive, whereas God is relatively unlimited (only *brahman* is truly limitless). You are *brahman*, however, in the sense that the essential nature of you is the same essential nature that is the essential nature of everything, and that essential nature is the fundamental reality, which is *brahman* – i.e. limitless conscious existence.

Ingrid: It seems as if *brahman* and *Isvara* are two aspects of the same God.

Ted: God is an aspect of *brahman*, but limitless conscious existence is not an aspect. Limitless conscious existence is the fundamental reality of all aspects.

Ingrid: And *jiva* is microcosm. *Isvara* is macrocosm.

Ted: That is correct.

Ingrid: Then I like the words *Isvara 1* and *Isvara 2*, since then God is God for both. But in a way I do not see why God is more used for *Isvara* than *brahman*. I got the word “God” for *brahman*. Then *Isvara* would be something else.

Ted: The difference between *brahman* and *Isvara* as well as the reason for using different words to indicate the two has been explained.

Ingrid: When *Isvara* uses the word “God” for the real and teaches this to this *jiva* (Ingrid), this means *Isvara* sees *Isvara* as God and would like Ingrid to do the same. And I do. Yet *Isvara* is not real.

Ted: Exactly. *Isvara* is not a personal entity with an agenda. *Isvara* is not a cosmic person who is trying to teach you lessons. *Isvara* is the personification of the impersonal *dharma*-governed law of *karma* that governs the operation of the manifestation.

I really don't understand why you are so concerned about justifying the use of the word “God.” Who cares about the word that is used as long as you understand its meaning. This attachment to the word is entirely tangential to understanding the true nature of reality. If you want to call *Isvara* “God,” go ahead. But you will encounter resistance from Vedantins who understand the difference between *Isvara* and *Isvara*, and employ the word “God” to denote *Isvara*. You'll simply have to understand that the reason they are resistant to the using the word “God,” or *Isvara*, for *Isvara* is valid because within the context of Vedanta, the term God/*Isvara* is used in a very precise way to indicate the difference between the fundamental reality, which is limitless conscious existence, and the creator-sustainer-resolver of the apparent manifestation, which is a product of *maya* and is only an objective phenomenon – albeit the grandest object there is – whose existence depends upon limitless conscious existence.

Ingrid: I know dreams are also unreal. I know I live with this body, which I see, and in dreams there is a

kind of body, but that these bodies are unreal. I wonder if I can see the unreal even more clearly than I do.

Ted: Once you know that all objective phenomena are unreal, there is no more clarity to be gained concerning the unreal.

Ingrid: I guess I want to be total free of all *vasanas*...

Ted: You cannot be so. *Vasanas* are the only reason you as an apparent individual are incarnate. The manifestation gives the *jiva* an arena in which to experience his or her *karma*, which is composed of *vasanas*. If all *vasanas* were gone, the person would die.

You can be free of *vasanas* in the sense of not being attached to the likes and dislikes, the desires and fears, to which they give rise. This freedom comes only through knowledge. Once you have fully assimilated the fact that no object can give you the sense of total security, peace and happiness that is your already-existent nature, then your attachment to the objects of those likes and dislikes drops away. This is what is referred to as neutralizing your binding *vasanas*. When the *vasanas* are rendered non-binding, we are no longer compelled to obtain or avoid objects. We are no longer driven by our desires. We are free of dependence on objects for our sense of well-being (i.e. our sense of security, peace and happiness). This ultimate inner freedom is *moksa*.

Ingrid: ...and identification with limited objects. I only want to be in God, *brahman*. I am this, so I cannot be more in it, but I do not feel I am free of *vasanas*. I want to keep my mind on the self, although I am the self.

Ted: Your desire smacks of *mumukshutva* (i.e. a burning desire for liberation), which is one of the essential qualifications of the student. Keeping your mind fixed on the self is the basis of the process of *nididhyasana* (i.e. the continuous meditation on and application of the teaching to each and every moment of your life), which is the practice that will solidify the self-knowledge that is tantamount to freedom.

Ingrid: I try to keep silent, focused on the scriptures, etc. I am living an ordinary life with a six-year-old son. I socialize with him, but otherwise try to be silent. I work and meet people, so everyday things are happening. I am saying this so you know I am not being fanatical.

I do try to develop some talents, like painting, poetry and singing. So I do follow my *dharma*, although my son is mostly what I have time for. And Vedanta.

Ted: Your lifestyle sounds conducive to the practice of *karma yoga* and self-inquiry. Practice *karma yoga* when you are interacting with others or developing your talents. And make time for self-inquiry (i.e. reading about Vedanta, watching or listening to Vedanta talks, etc.) every day. This is the means by which you will progress toward the assimilation of self-knowledge and the realization of your true nature.

Ingrid: Sometimes I think I am *rajasic*, as I cannot keep as quiet as I want to. I want to be quieter and manage this. I know Vedanta does not talk about quietness, but I really do not see why when it helps to get a silent mind, a *sattvic* mind.

Ted: Vedanta does talk about the importance of cultivating a quiet mind. A *sattvic* mind is the only mind in which self-knowledge can take place. All of the spiritual practices – i.e. *karma yoga*, devotional worship, meditation and energy management – are designed to cultivate a quiet mind. The mind doesn't have to be silent, but it does have to be *sattvic* to the degree that it is not agitated by compelling desires that unduly extrovert its attention and prevent it from turning within and engaging in effective self-inquiry.

Ingrid: Is solitude the same as keeping quiet or I do not know people talking a lot in solitude?

Ted: I'm not sure exactly what you mean here, but the mind doesn't have to be totally silent, but simply quiet enough to turn within. Basically, a quiet mind amounts to a mind that is free of binding *vasanas*.

Ingrid: One can be quiet and it helps to quench neediness, etc. for objects or whatever I can say. To be independent, free of them, and to trust in God and destiny, that *Isvara* will deliver all that is needed.

Ted: This is essential to making progress toward gaining self-knowledge.

Ingrid: I just feel to live even more in inquiry as Ramana says, all the time keeping my attention on the self.

Ted: This is *nididhyasana*, which, as explained, is an essential aspect of gaining self-knowledge.

Ingrid: I guess I have the guidance to do it. Maybe I am doing okay.

Ted: You are. Have confidence in yourself and in Vedanta. You have the necessary tools to free yourself from the prison of *samsara*.

Ingrid: But still, *vasanas* can be strong, I guess.

Ted: Yes, the *vasanas* have been so deeply conditioned into us that it can take quite a bit of time and effort to erase them.

Ingrid: Is it just to focus on scripture? Inquiry? And willpower to refrain from *vasanas*?

Ted: All of the above.

Ingrid: I was thinking maybe you could visit Norway sometime. I am working at the Unity Senter in Oslo. I could see if there is interest in you coming to Vedanta Norge. I am sure you could live there, if not at a hotel, and people would be happy to learn from you. I know another place called Haraldsheim, where people can come to stay for retreats as well, if you come to Scandinavia.

I will see James Swartz in September. He will come to Stavanger. But I am sure the Oslo area would attract more people. There are not as many in Norway yet, I guess, that are into Vedanta. You could come after Swartz has been here maybe, so people do go to see him. Or maybe they will get interested in seeing him in Stavanger when they've met you in Oslo, those that do not know him. These are just ideas. I do not know if you have been around here or think it is interesting yet.

Ted: I would love to come to Norway and teach. Let me know if there is any interest, and we can figure something out.

Ingrid: I know I am the self.

So focusing between my eyebrows makes up me having my thoughts on God or visualizing Krishna/self. And I think of *brahman* while doing actions like *bhakti yoga* (*karma yoga*) is probably what I need. And reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. And the inquiry is this knowing to me (or "You are That").

All this I am asked to do, in dreams. So if I do this, it must inevitably lead to liberation?

Ted: Yes, these instructions correspond with what Vedanta prescribes. Ultimately, success is guaranteed because the goal is you.

Ingrid: I do not know how long it will take before I know I am self-actualised. At least I know I am not the doer, but my self/the self/Krishna (symbol for it).

Ted: Your understanding is correct. Now it is simply a matter of fully assimilating that knowledge. When you are as convinced that you are self/Krishna/limitless conscious existence as you once were than you were the apparent person you seem to be, then you are free.

Ingrid: I had a bad dream, which I usually do not.

Anyway, in the dream the people were so bad and I connected with God (*Isvara*) in the dream, as I realised the world I live in was not real, and that it would pass.

I mean I just talked inwardly, addressing God, since the people were mean, but I kept calm.

I did not wake up in my dream realising it was a dream as I sometimes do, and then can fly in the dream or jump or discover something. Because the dream was so real, although bad circumstances, I thought I was in the waking state.

Anyway, when I woke up I had the realisation that this is exactly how this waking state is, not real at all, which I know. And I would really want to be more awake so as to understand more of reality, so this would happen more often in waking state as well. No identification, seeing it will pass.

I try to focus on Krishna as well, t to have this one-pointed mind and not to forget my true nature, just seeing occasional thoughts as “not I,” since I am not them. They are within me or in front of me. I am the light of awareness shining upon all this.

Ted: All objective phenomena are within you. They are not in front of you. You are not a limited person with a limited point of view. You are limitless conscious existence. The mind processes the experience from a limited perspective, but understands that, truly speaking, its essential nature is limitless.

Ingrid: Is it necessary to focus on the image of Krishna or the name or is it sufficient to just focus between my eyebrows so as to remember *God/self/brahman*?

Ted: It is not necessary to focus on any image or any point. You simply focus on discriminating between the real and the apparent, the self and the “not self.” You can focus on an image or point if it helps you make the discrimination or remember your true nature, but it is not necessary to do so.

Ingrid: Krishna is myself, and I can keep the image inside my mind. I got a wonderful message in a dream not long ago, where Krishna was enormously beautiful and there was no end to him. The image seemed real and more beautiful than any painter could paint, and there was no end to it.

He was at one with the blue sky, and it would be impossible to paint, since in any painting there is boundary, like the frame. Here it was not. His body had no end, but was contiguous with the blue sky, in the same colour as he was.

Ted: This is similar to the vision of the cosmic identity that Krishna blesses Arjuna with in the *Bhagavad Gita*. What is important, however, is not the vision itself, but the truth it reveals – that is, the fact that you (for you are Krishna, so to speak) are limitless conscious existence.

Ingrid: “You are the self.” I think I remember the message was that. I wrote it down somewhere so I can double-check.

I guess holding this image in my mind can be a great help. I guess I answered myself on this.

Thank you. I hope all is well!

~ Love, Ingrid

Ted: Good application of the teachings, Ingrid.

~ Love to you as well, Ted