

The Desire That Is Not Opposed to *Dharma*

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Thomas: Hey, Ted, I was reading your recent *satsang* on the topic of *Isvara* and *sattva*, and had a question.

How do we reconcile the impersonal/mechanical, all-encompassing portrait of *Isvara* with the quote in the *Gita* where Krishna (as *Isvara*) says, “I am the desire not opposed to *dharma*”? Would it not be the case that *Isvara* is all desires?

Ted: Yes, *Isvara* is the substrate of all desires, but what Krishna is pointing out is that *Isvara* is the universal order. That is, *Isvara* is the personification of the impersonal *dharma*, the vast array of physical, psychological and ethical laws that govern the operation of the manifestation. Thus it is *Isvara* who provides the order by means of which the world functions. When one’s desires align with those laws, then they contribute to the overall well-being of the world – which includes one’s personal well-being as well, since one is inseparable from the whole. Conversely when one contravenes *dharma*, then one creates problems for others as well as one’s self.

In terms of *sadhana* (i.e. spiritual practice) and self-inquiry, actions that align with *dharma* have a purifying effect on the mind. Because they don’t produce the guilt and possible fear of being found out that at least to some degree are the unavoidable consequences of breaking the rules to get what you want, they serve to cultivate the *sattvic* quality of mind that is most conducive for doing effective self-inquiry. Moreover, subordinating one’s own personal desires to the observance of *dharma* is the chief means of neutralizing the binding *vasanas* that agitate and extrovert the mind, and thus prevent it from being able to engage in self-inquiry and assimilate the knowledge it reveals.

The reason Krishna equates *Isvara* with *dharma* at this point in the *Gita* is that he is trying to dispel Arjuna’s erroneous notion that renunciation of action means that one shouldn’t act. All action is prompted by desire, so Krishna tells him that action is fine – even for the spiritual seeker – as long as it accords with *dharma*. Arjuna doesn’t understand that non-action or renunciation of action has nothing to do with whether the body-mind-sense complex is in motion. The fact is that the body-mind-sense complex is in continuous action from birth to death. There is no choice concerning action in that sense.

The underlying truth, however, is that the self – the nature of which is pure, all-pervasive, perfectly full, partless, impersonal awareness – is never involved in action. While it is the “field” in which action occurs and the “light” by means of which all action is known, the self is not a doer. Just as the sun illumines the world but remains involved in and unaffected by the actions that takes place within its scope of illumination, so the self illumines action yet remains entirely independent of it. Thus renunciation of action is not a matter of doing no deeds, but rather a matter of disidentifying with the doer – i.e. dropping the sense of doership.

To be clear, however, giving up doership is not a matter of personal will. The doer cannot give itself up. After all, who would be doing the deed of dropping doership? Doership only goes in

wake of understanding the true nature of the self as all-pervasive, perfectly full, partless, impersonal awareness.

The reason I reiterate these four factors is that they preclude the possibility of doership, for they nullify the capacity to act. That which is all-pervasive has no arena in which to act – that is, no background against which any motion or change, which is the hallmark of action, could be measured. That which is perfectly full and impersonal lacks nothing, and thus has nothing to gain by acting or any will with which to initiate action. Yes, Krishna did say he is the desire that is not opposed to action, but remember that was a figurative statement in which the *dharma* that governs the universal order is personified as *Isvara* of whom Krishna is a manifestation. Finally, that which is partless has no instruments with which to act or any object on which to act or, again, in contrast to which any action could be delineated or measured.

The bottom line is that renunciation is not a matter of inaction but of understanding. This is why Krishna repeatedly emphasizes that *jnana karma sannyasa* (i.e. renunciation of action through understanding) is the true renunciation.

The fact that understanding that we are essentially non-doers despite the appearance of constant doing, however, does not get the apparent individual person off the hook as far as doing goes. The apparent individual is a doer within the context of the apparent reality, and moreover has been granted a modicum of free will with which to act intentionally in pursuit of specific ends. Since all actions necessarily produce results and those results have both immediate and long-term affects on the doer, the apparent individual is wise to use his free will in service to his truest intention. Thus if one wants a pure mind that is capable of gaining the self-knowledge that is tantamount to *moksa* (i.e. ultimate inner freedom) one should choose those actions that accord with *dharma* in lieu of those actions that simply satisfy the demands of the ego, reinforce one's binding *vasanas* and keep one bound to the cycle of *samsara*.

So, yes, *Isvara* is all desires. But only one who acts in accord with *dharma* will cultivate the purity of mind and spiritual maturity to understand, accept and act responsibly in the face this fact.

Thomas: Second but unrelated: In which text do we find the three macrocosmic *upadhis* that you mention in that *satsang*?

Ted: Somananda's *Vedanta-sara* (i.e. *The Essence of Vedanta*).

Thomas: Happy New Year!

~ Regards, Thomas

Ted: Happy New Year to you as well!

~ *Namaste*, Ted