

Isvara and Jiva

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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Larissa: I do need to ask a question regarding *maya*. Is it true for me to say in a very simplified way that *maya* (experience) is awareness plus matter (subtle and gross)? Or is it potential, a dormant power existing solely as the *sattva guna* until *rajas* and *tamas* arrive, *Isvara*, or the causal body?

Sundari: The way you have worded the question is rather jumbled, so let's see if this short explanation works for you, as this teaching is central to *moksa*:

Isvara as pure awareness prior to *maya* manifesting is called *paramatman*. Although *paramatman* is called eternal and imperishable, "eternal and imperishable" infer non-eternal and perishable, and since *paramatman* is non-dual, it is neither. It is "isness," being. It is simply that which gives rise to everything, that which is self-knowing and, when objects are present, knows objects. It is prior to and the knower of both the *jiva* and *Isvara*. Therefore it has no qualities.

The most subtle "aspect" of this teaching is the irreducible fact that because consciousness implies unconsciousness, it is not, strictly speaking, true to say that awareness is conscious. Awareness is without qualities, it is the non-experiencing witness, and although it gives rise to all objects (who are not conscious) and *Isvara* associated with *maya* who is conscious, awareness is not "conscious" in the same way. Awareness is that which makes consciousness possible in that consciousness is reflected awareness. *Isvara* is conscious because with the appearance of *maya* there is something for awareness to be to be conscious of, i.e. objects. *Isvara* is not a person; conscious and unconscious objects (*Isvara* and *jiva* respectively, i.e. the creation) arise when *maya* (ignorance) appears.

Pure *maya* is pure *sattva*. When *tamas* and *rajas* arise then awareness apparently becomes a *jiva* and is deluded by *maya*. *Sattva* seems to be clear and pure only with reference to the objects appearing in it, which are impure. *Isvara* is the wielder of *maya* but is never deluded by *maya*, so is not modified by ignorance. Purity and holiness are projected by the *jiva* when

it is under the spell of *sattva*. Our experience confirms this if we work out the logic: awareness is without parts; being part-less, purity and impurity are dualisms. *Maya* is a power that exist in awareness or it could not be unlimited. When *maya* manifests *Isvara* "becomes" awareness in the role of Creator associated with *maya*. *Isvara* is *maya*, beginningless ignorance. The world we see with our senses and the senses with which we see it is *Isvara's* creation. *Maya* is eternal because it is a power that exists in awareness and awareness is eternal; this is why *maya* is said to be beginningless. Although its appearance gives rise to the apparent reality which is not real, *maya* is neither real nor unreal. *Maya* creates the categories of real and unreal. Without *maya*, there is no creation, no *jiva* and no *Isvara*. Personal ignorance (*avidya*) ends for the *jiva* when the self is realised to be its true nature, ending its cycle of incarnation and suffering, but *maya*, or cosmic ignorance, continues unchanged although it is not always manifest because the creation is not always manifest. When ignorance, or *maya*, does manifest, *Isvara* in its capacity as the Creator appears, followed by the apparent creation (*Isvara srsti*), the world of

sentient beings and insentient elements.

Isvara is also always present in awareness but is either manifest or unmanifest with reference to awareness. Therefore *Isvara* associated with *maya*, like the *jiva*, is not real either although, in terms of the apparent person, *Isvara* is “relatively” real and eternal. In other words, *Isvara* associated with *maya* is eternal or permanent with reference to the *jiva* and the objects it experiences but impermanent with reference to awareness. To say that *Isvara* associated with *maya* is eternal with reference to the *jiva* does not mean that *Isvara* is limitless with reference to awareness. This is because ignorance or *maya* only “operates” on a tiny fraction of awareness and because *Isvara* is resolved back into awareness at the end of the creation cycle. The words “operates on a tiny fraction of awareness” are also used simply to put *maya* in perspective because the self has no parts and cannot be quantified. It is important to understand this because “partially covered” means that awareness is never actually covered because it is aware of the partial covering brought about by the manifestation of *maya*.

The big question is: what is the relationship between *jiva* and *Isvara*? *Jiva* can't see a world that appears to be “out there” unless it is aware and *Isvara* can't create the whole objective world unless it is aware. We know that *Isvara* is aware because its creation is intelligently designed: it all hangs together perfectly.

So there is essentially no difference between *jiva* and *Isvara* except in their capacity to create. *Isvara* creates the objective world and *jiva* creates the subjective world. They both appear to be conscious because consciousness is the common denominator. This is why Vedanta says they are “essentially” the same. If this is true, then we can eliminate both *jiva* and *Isvara* as real and take ourselves to be consciousness.

We can eliminate them as real because their capacities are different. *Isvara* is not a person with likes and dislikes and *jiva* cannot create the sun, moon and the stars. And we can eliminate them because neither *Isvara's* creation nor *jiva's* creation hides consciousness. It is always present prior to the creation and prior to the birth of individuals. You can't have a macrocosmic creation without consciousness. Something had to exist before *Isvara* could “bang” the creation into existence. That something we call *paramatma*, pure consciousness, free of both *Isvara* and *jiva*.

Consciousness – me – is never affected by *Isvara's* creation or by *jiva's* creation. It is the knower of both.

Or you can look at it this way: it is clear that *jiva* is conscious. Larissa is conscious. It is also clear that *Isvara* is conscious because the creation is consciously designed. Inference tells us that and inference is a valid means of knowledge. We do not have to meet *Isvara* in person – not that *Isvara* is a person – to know that it is conscious. So if Larissa's consciousness depends on *Isvara's* consciousness and *Isvara's* consciousness depends on *paramatma*, pure consciousness, then both Larissa and *Isvara* are pure consciousness. An effect (*jiva*) is just the cause (*Isvara*) appearing in a form. We can't apply the same logic to *Isvara* except loosely because consciousness does not “cause” *Isvara*. *Isvara* – beautiful, intelligent ignorance – is something altogether different. *Isvara* is not an effect but it is a cause with reference to the creation. There is only one awareness out of which everything arises and depends upon, but awareness is always free of the objects. Awareness is *adjata*, unborn. Vedanta is the path of the unborn because it reveals that although there appears to be a creation, nothing ever really happened from awareness' point

of view. All objects are made up of awareness and dissolve back into awareness in that they appear in the mind and the mind appears in awareness. The mind/*jiva* (subtlebody), like all objects, is an object known to you, awareness. The thoughts that appear in the mind belong to the *gunas*: *Isvara*.

The apparent reality (*mithya*) is a union of *paraprakiti* or higher reality (meaning *Isvara*) and *aparaprakiti* (*jiva*) lower reality. Their common identity is *uparaprakriti*: awareness. *Isvara* is the both the intelligent cause, that which shapes the materials into form (without ever losing or modifying its own nature), and the material substance, meaning the effect from which the forms are created. In any case, both *Isvara* and *jiva* depend on pure consciousness but pure consciousness does not depend on either. If you don't depend on the world or on Larissa, you certainly can't be either one of them.

They are merely ideas appearing in you, pure consciousness. You never experience a *jiva* or an *Isvara* apart from the thought of them. They are objects known to you so they cannot be you. The whole problem starts when you identify with the body, which makes it look like the world is out there, that you are dependent on it and that whatever is in charge of it is controlling you.

The world we know is called "apparently real" because it is not always present and always changing. As long as the apparent entity, or the *jiva*, is still embodied in the apparent reality, enlightened or not, it is subject to *Isvara*, the Creator. We know the world is not real because when you analyze it, it resolves into empty space and space resolves into consciousness insofar as you cannot know space without consciousness. It is an object known to you. There is just you, consciousness, in which the *jiva*, Larissa, appears in a particular a priori environment, i.e. *Isvara*.

Isvara creates, sustains and destroys the whole universe. Within *Isvara's* creation are innumerable *jivas*, individuals: plants, animals, humans, insects, etc. *Jivas* are living beings with gross, subtle and causal bodies. Human *jivas* have intellect which makes them self-aware, self-reflective. This means that they can interpret their experiences. The way that a *jiva's* subtle body interprets its experience is its "world." Its interpretation is its "creation." When we say the world would not be there without the mind (subtle body), we mean *jiva's* interpretation, its projection, would not be there, not that the material world, the senses, subtle body and the *vasanas* would not be here. We call the *jiva's* creation "*pratibhasika satyam*" or "*jiva srsti*," the subjective reality. There is only one Larissa and she sees things a certain way owing to her conditioning. *Isvara's* creation is called "*vyavaharika satyam*," the objective world. This is the world of science, the objects and the laws which are not under the control of any *jiva*.

We need this teaching so the *jiva* does not confuse its creation with *Isvara's*. The *jiva* is in *Isvara's* creation and is required to respond to it. This is called *dharma*, appropriate response. If it responds properly to what *Isvara* wants, it will be in harmony with *Isvara*, the creation, meaning its environment. But if it is living in its own world, gets a request from *Isvara* and responds according to its fears and desires, likes and dislikes, it is quite possible that it will run afoul of *Isvara* - read: its circumstances - and suffer. So this teaching makes it aware of the difference between the subjective and the objective realities. If it is clear which is which, it can choose to follow *dharma*, not its own desire in case they are different. There is no problem with *jiva's* desires as long as they conform to *dharma*.

The *jiva* looks out through the body, identifies with the senses, perceives a world

and thinks that it is seeing what is actually there. It knows it didn't create it. The *jiva* is seemingly responsible even for *Isvara's* creation insofar as unless it looks out through the senses and the mind there is no world for it. But the *jiva*, which is actually awareness, can't perceive a world unless *Isvara* has already done its job as a Creator.

The saying "the world is there because I see it" is true from the point of view of awareness, not the *jiva's*. The *jiva* is seemingly responsible for the external creation insofar as it doesn't exist (for it) unless it perceives it. However, it should be clear from the example of deep sleep that the *jiva* doesn't create the world because there is no world for it when it is asleep. Yet the world is there for other waking *jivas*. That shows that some other factor - we call it *Isvara* - is the Creator.

~ Much love, Sundari