

Isvara Takes Care of Isvara

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Tony: It's great to be writing to you again, James! I haven't been a very diligent student in terms of asking appropriate questions, because now that I have got the basics I've just been trying to apply the teaching myself to doubts as they arise. It's been quite good, actually, since both myself and my ignorance are here, so all I need is a correct understanding of Vedanta and everything is in place – *tutto a posto!* I've also continued to listen to your recordings to make sure I've got the method straight.

I read your Chapter IX of the new book, concerning *dharma* and *karma yoga*, and it is very good. I recognised that I am one of those unfortunates that has never been able to “figure out what to do with his life.” Certainly, I have played a lot of roles and been an earnest seeker (now a finder!), but I've never been able to recognise my predominant *samskara* and develop to the fullest my relative nature. The trouble has been that I was always interested in too many things and I could never settle on developing anything in particular at the expense of the others. Thus I've been technical, literary, a thinker, artistic, musical, a religious and a family man, and a seeker too. The trouble is, now that I know who I am (and gaining confidence in that every day), what am I “to do” in the relative sense? I know it doesn't really matter what I do, but maybe there is still a residual desire to get something out of this world. Yes, that's probably it.

James: The question is why you think that anything you might “get” from the relative world that would be permanently fulfilling. It's always going to be a zero-sum game. There is a downside to what you are getting now and a downside to what you will “get” if you do something different. Coupled with your confession that you have not been focused on one thing but hopped around the issue is excessive *rajas*, I'd say, that the issue is *rajas*, which is going to go with you no matter where you go, unless it is purified.

Tony: Despite that, my former attachment to fruits of action and the anxieties that go with that are slowly melting away. Vedanta is like the gentle warmth of springtime, caressing a frosted ground. I also know that my doer still has to deal with the fructifying *karma* and follow the *dharma* of looking after the family (which has now become much easier since seeking stopped), so I'm not going to be running off to India anytime soon to become a *sannyasi*. It's interesting that Nisargadatta after his realisation was not that clear on what to do next – he departed for a time from his family and business to take up the life of a renunciant in the Himalayas, only to turn back after realising it was pointless for him to do that.

James: It is just a matter of continuing to take the *karma yoga* attitude with reference to what you are doing and to keep discriminating. You are getting positive results. Spirituality is evolutionary, not revolutionary. The causal body is incredibly conservative and yields to new input reluctantly.

Tony: One question I have is in relation to *prasad*. As an enquirer I am trying to “liberate myself” from the world, but at the same time I’m asked to be grateful, thank God for everything in it and love the world. I think that where this question is leading is related to Krishna’s comment that, “...by austerities one is not liberated.” Is it actually the case that I am not trying to “get rid” of the world or “escape” it, but instead get rid of my ignorance and wrong notions about it? Once I am free of my wrong notions, I can accept and love the world as it is and appreciate that it is me. I wonder though whether the *prasad* concept for the *karma yogi* can in some way bind me to the idea that the world is real or perpetuate ignorance because it assumes duality.

James: You never get rid of the world. Liberation is freedom in spite of the world. Yes, the problem is only the way you see the world, in a word: ignorance. See it from the self’s perspective until the idea that the world is zero-sum, *mithya*, becomes a binding *vasana*. *Karma yoga’s prasad* concept is for people who are attached to the world to some degree. Your doer must be attached to the world in some way because it wonders about what it should do. If it knew the world was not real, it wouldn’t have that concept. *Prasad* means that you see what you have right now as a gift. If you are happy with what you have, you won’t long for more or better or different. But the gift is not so much what you “have,” i.e. your *karmic* circumstances, although they are a gift, but *prasad* is gratitude for the gift of life itself. You only want what you want for Tony because you love Tony, and Tony is not a gift you gave yourself. We are always in debt to the Lord and happy to repay our debt with the right attitude and the right actions.

Tony: I know that you’re not usually in the habit of giving direct advice, but I’d appreciate you checking my logic on the following “issue,” if you don’t mind. I’m asking this because it’s related to my developing a mind that is conducive to enquiry, not for some limited and relative ends, and so I’d like to lay it to rest.

I’m employed in a mid-level bureaucratic position that, on the relative level of course, is ultimately frustrating because the employer does not afford me the resources I actually need to do my job properly (and this situation is highly unlikely to change). That frustration naturally translates as a disturbance in the emotions (anxiety) and in the intellect (because the will is thwarted). Now, the first struggle is about honestly understanding my true motivations: am I playing around in the relative field and simply anxious about results, whether praise or blame? Or am I looking to remove an obstacle to a peaceful mind? So the question is about whether I should be changing jobs and being clear about my motivations for that. On one level, I’ve had a *vasana* for ambition, so perhaps I’m ignorantly treating the job-object as a source of happiness (which it can’t be of course). On another level, I’m pretty sure the circumstances aren’t going to change. And of course there’s always the possibility that changing jobs could always lead to something worse because in a new position I’d probably have to be very *rajasic* to “prove myself” and “achieve results.” From the point of view of the self it doesn’t matter at all of course. There’s also the possibility that this is coming to “me” from *Isvara* for a specific purpose (in the relative sense) – maybe I’ve just got to stick this out and it will change when *Isvara* changes it (as for all change). Perhaps perseverance and forbearance are the goals here. I know that lately I’ve got better at accepting the “way things are.” I mean, it is possible for me to just watch the tragedy of this poor ol’ middle manager and all his problems. ☺ I’m very unlikely to ever get fired here, and I do the best I can within the constraints – perhaps I’m just being too demanding of myself or

ambitious, and maybe I can in fact get a peaceful mind despite the circumstances (it does happen regularly, but not constantly).

Anyhow, that's probably enough of that tiresome stuff. But any sage wisdom or insight you might have as a disinterested observer would be greatly appreciated.

James: I think you have analyzed it well. Since you are unsure, you will probably wait until you either figure out a subjective solution that allows you to be happy there or you will get up the courage to strike out and look for more conducive circumstances, which in any case are not certain. The problem with people who have worldly *karma* is that others are usually dependent on them, so moving on when you are already reasonably secure obviously impacts on your dependents. If I was in that situation it would be easy for me to change jobs because I am have the temperament of a renunciant and I never have steered clear of dependents my whole life long. If any one thinks they are dependent on me I see to it that they understand that it is wise to have a plan B and be ready to exercise it on short notice.

Frankly, I think you should stay where you are and adjust your state of mind. Spiritually you're in the transition stage from *karma yoga* to *upasana yoga* - disciplining the mind and internalizing it - so the last stage - discrimination - is easy. If your circumstances were *adharmic* I would recommend that you change them, but it doesn't seem that way to me. So I'd say the best way is to focus on the upside and take the downside as *prasad* - there has to be some upside to the downside, willingly contribute and keep your mind on the self in all circumstances as best as you can.

Tony: I gave up on the idea of changing jobs and I'm just practising leaving all my worldly circumstances up to God so that I can get a clear mind. I try to remember that my only goal is liberation/self-knowledge. I'll change jobs if I get a signed invitation from the universe. 😊

I have a much clearer understanding now of the three defects inherent in all objects, as well as the teaching on the location of objects and the source of happiness. With that having now "sunk in" I've re-evaluated my priorities in life towards *moksa*, but without interfering in any of life's circumstances. What will be will be. It's much more apparent to me now that the point of a job for me isn't to get fulfilment but just to do the duties that *Isvara* has given me, without wanting a particular result, since all the objects are defective: that goes for all my worldly activities: respond to the field, be grateful and direct my attention to self-knowledge. This approach is burning up the desires pretty fast when I'm clear on my goal, since at those moments I'm not doing to get.

James: Cool. *Moksa* should be the primary focus if you want to succeed. Organize your life around it, not it around your life. Understanding the zero-sum nature of life is the first qualification. It seems you have it sorted now. Good for you.

Tony: I've had some clear insights lately: one day I was feeling pretty crappy and *tamasic*, and I did some meditation and realised that if I was "really *tamasic*" then such a thing could not be known to me since *tamas* is a veiling power. That freed me

from the notion that I was *tamasic*, even though the body-mind-intellect complex went on with its same crappy, low-energy state for the rest of the day.

James: Yes, the “I” is never *tamasic*, *rajasic* or *sattvic*. It is the knower, the witness of all states of mind. Excellent!

Tony: Recently, through listening to some recordings of Swamini Atmaprakashananda Saraswati (you probably know about her, as she’s a disciple of Dayananda) the penny dropped about the nature of *ahamkara*. It is the knowledge “I am,” but it is not who I am, since it is known to me: the knowledge “I am” comes and goes, but I never do. That was a big one and I’ve been focusing on that this week. My constant mistake is to take *ahamkara* as me, and then all the other thoughts stick to it, when *ahamkara* is only a reflection of me.

James: A big realization for sure. It is tantamount to *moksa*. The Tony-guy is an object known to you, a reflection of you, awareness, in the subtle body, seemingly you but actually just another object.

Tony: You said in your most recent email, “You only want what you want for Tony because you love Tony and Tony is not a gift you gave yourself. We are always in debt to the Lord and happy to repay our debt with the right attitude and the right actions.” Could you explain a bit more what you meant by, “Tony is not a gift you gave yourself”?

James: Tony and everything that Tony is and has is a gift that *Isvara* gave the world. Tony didn’t create himself or any of the objects that Tony perceives and enjoys. Neither you – awareness – or Tony, the *jiva*, is the Creator, and therefore the possessor of anything. It all belongs to *Isvara*. Therefore Tony can relax and let *Isvara* take care of what belongs to *Isvara*.

Tony: If Tony is a wave (*jiva*) that is not different from the ocean (*Isvara*), that is, nothing but water (the self, me), how is Tony a gift from *Isvara*?

James: See above. The ocean “gifts” the waves, i.e. makes them possible and determines how they behave.

Tony: Is it because I, the unmanifest, having nothing to do with the manifest in the way that the glass has nothing to do with the reflection?

James: No. The unmanifest is *Isvara*. You, awareness, have nothing to do with it, i.e. you are free of it. If you are free of it, you are also free of Tony. If you mean the self, awareness, when you use the word “unmanifest,” then yes. But unmanifest is not the right word for the self, because the self is always manifest. It is self-evident, always present as your ever-free, ever-existent consciousness. If by “*Isvara*” you mean awareness minus *maya*, then your statement is correct.

Tony: The reflection cannot be without the glass, but the glass is uninvolved. Is it that Tony is that vehicle provided by *Isvara* because of which I might know the manifest (myself)?

James: Close but no cigars, Tony. Actually, Tony can't know awareness, because he is only an inert reflection. Does the light of the moon illumine the sun? Awareness knows awareness when its ignorance of its nature is removed – assuming that *maya* has obscured it. In any case, you are coming along very nicely, Tony. Keep up the inquiry.

Tony: Thanks for clearing that up again regarding the triad of self/*Isvara-jiva* (Tony). I did have that clear before, but sometimes I wonder if I'm going backwards in understanding. I guess the assimilation and contemplation stages can take quite a while (a lifetime, even).

James: Understanding is never a one-off, because ignorance is persistent. It wants you to forget. Therefore you have to keep practicing knowledge persistently for as long as it takes.

Tony: In terms of the other point about the manifest/unmanifest: I spent a bit of time this weekend going over that. When I mentioned “unmanifest” I was referring to the self in the sense that it is never objectifiable or available for transaction.

But you are right (of course), it is not a good word for the self, since everything that is in existence has its existence “in” the self. Conscious existence always is and is always known. But is it correct to say that the self does not manifest in the sense of a verb? Since it is actionless?

James: Yes. This is a very important point. It is capable of manifesting, however, when its power of *maya* is active.

Tony: I had what you talk about in reverse, it seems, because I was thinking that *Isvara* is manifesting everything (as in being the Creator)...

James: When awareness shines on *Isvara*, the unmanifest, the world becomes manifest.

Tony: ...but you mean that *Isvara* is unmanifest in the sense of being the causal body?

James: Yes. From the *jiva's* point of view *Isvara* is hidden. It is inferred.

Tony: And also because *maya* is “that which is not.” Is that correct?

James: Yes. *Isvara* is *mithya*, and since *mithya* is as good as non-existent, it cannot actually be manifest. Its manifestation is like a dream.

Tony: Anyway, James, I won't bore you with all the little thoughts and actions that I am now constantly analysing through the lens of Vedanta; suffice it to say "it's a wonderful life" and this pathless path is starting to have a very positive effect on Tony. Yesterday the kids smashed a window with a soccer ball, and I couldn't believe how well I took it. I was only mad for about a minute, then I just got on with fixing it! A while back, something like that would have upset me for like a week!

James: Good for you, Tony. There is no sense wasting emotion on what is not real. An apparent ball broke an apparent window and an apparent person apparently fixed it. Nothing actually happened.

Tony: God bless you both, may you have long life and endless peace.

James: Same to you, Tony.