

# The Relationship Between Maya and Isvara

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**KW:** Hi, I had a short exchange with James a while back when he was less busy, but now I want to know the relationship or difference between the notion of *Isvara* with respect to *Maya*. I was given to understand that *Maya* was a product of misunderstanding *Isvara* in the phenomenal world. Can you clarify this for me?

**Sundari:** *Maya* is not a product of anything. It is a power in awareness which apparently allows for it to delude itself, so it is beginningless. But it is not endless, because Self-knowledge has the power to remove it. When *Maya* covers the mind and it is ignorant of its true nature as awareness, it does not understand who or what *Isvara* and the *jiva* are or that their common identity is awareness. The mind is under the spell of ignorance.

First and always there is pure consciousness. When *Maya* appears, awareness plus *Maya* (the *gunas*) is called *Isvara*, in the role of Creator. Lastly, matter appears. There is no point in talking about the differences between *Maya/Isvara* and the Creation, because matter does not mean anything without *Maya* and *Maya* does not mean anything without *Isvara*, and nothing means anything without awareness. They are the same because everything is awareness, but there are subtle differences that are important to understand.

*Isvara* can be equated with *Maya*, beginningless ignorance. *Maya/Isvara* are not always manifest. When *Maya* manifests, the world of objects/Creation (duality) appears as a projection on the screen of awareness. *Isvara* creates, sustains and destroys the whole universe. The world we see with our senses and the senses with which we see it is *Isvara's* Creation. But *Isvara* is the cause of *Maya*, not its effects. This is the confusing part because *Isvara* also appears as a *jiva*, or subtle body, and as such is also the effects of *Maya*. The effects of *Maya* are called *mithya*, i.e. that which makes the apparently (not always present and always changing) real appear real (always present and unchanging). *Isvara* is not really the effects of ignorance; it only appears as the apparent effects in a different form.

Pure *Maya* is pure *sattva*. When *tamas* and *rajas* arise, awareness apparently becomes a *jiva* and is deluded by *Maya*. *Isvara* is the wielder of *Maya* but is never deluded by *Maya*, so not modified by ignorance, the *gunas*. When *avidya* (personal ignorance) is removed and your nature is known to be non-dual, duality (*Maya*) is no longer an issue, even though it still apparently exists.

*Maya/Isvara* is always present in awareness, but it 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*.

*Maya* is eternal because awareness is eternal, therefore *Maya* is said to be beginningless. Although its appearance gives rise to the apparent reality, *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 realized 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.

The 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. Thus their common identity is awareness.

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, which 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.

**KW:** The idea of zero-sum game is all *Isvara* as opposed to the magical thinking associated with *Maya chakra*?

Are they *chakras* at all?

**Sundari:** What does “they” refer to? The hypnosis of duality, *samsara*, is like a *chakra* in that it drags the mind into a seemingly endless vortex of suffering. The zero-sum game refers to the fact that there is nothing to gain in the world of objects, because objects are value-neutral. The joy is not in the objects and is only to be found in you, awareness. Chasing objects means you believe you are incomplete, and therefore you suffer. Knowing what it means to be awareness and no longer identified with the body-mind as your primary identity is *moksa*, freedom from limitation, i.e. freedom from *samsara*.

~ Om, Sundari