

How Can We Love Both Good and Evil?

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Jane: In one of the *satsangs* I am currently reviewing, Ramji mentions that we have to love both good and evil. Though I understand the teaching logic and have no problem with it in the classroom, to implement it in one's daily life is another matter. When I come upon a video where animals are horrifically mistreated before being killed to be turned into meat for food, I just can't "love" what I see; I end up feeling physically sick and unable to watch the whole video. I may think: this is not real, it is a thought in my mind and feelings on my part, all this is but a projection in consciousness; I "should" be able to love evil as manifested by these men who are just expression of *Isvara's* will; these butchers are ignorant.

Surely those acts are *adharmic*, so how can I be asked to love them? Could not this teaching encourage people to carry on with horrific acts with the argument that it is *Isvara* that permits it through them or even sanction their evil doings like Muslim extremists who murder whilst saying "with the grace of God." How do you go about this issue of loving evil behaviour amongst human beings?

Rory: It's tricky to know the context of Ramji's comment without hearing the *satsang* in question, but here's my take. In Vedanta, we speak from different levels – and what's true from one level isn't necessarily true from another. It can confuse people. That's why it's helpful to bear in mind the three orders of reality: *paramartika satyam* (the absolute, the indivisible self); *vyavarika satyam* (the empirical, objective realm of *mithya, Isvara*); and *pratibhasika satyam* (the subjective, personal, private world of the *jiva*).

At the level of the absolute (*paramartika*), awareness embraces all with love. Awareness is love, the light and substratum by which the Creation exists and functions. The self is rather like the sun in that it shines upon all, granting life to all, whether good or bad and without a hint of favouritism or reservation. The very same self illumined and lent life to both Hitler and Gandhi. It's not actively involved in the *mithya* world, yet the *mithya* world appears in it, as a dream appears in consciousness. Whether it's a pleasant dream or a nightmare, the light of consciousness shines just the same. The self sees no separation; it only knows the indivisible wholeness of its own nature. There's no good and bad for the self, because the self is everything. It's likely this is the level of understanding Ramji was talking from.

Of course, at the *mithya* level, we inhabit the empirical world of *vyavaharika*, the universe created and governed by *Isvara's* cosmic principles. At this order of reality, "good" and "bad" are determined by *dharma* and *adharma*.

Dharma is *Isvara, Isvara* functioning through the laws of creation to ensure the harmonious functioning of the Creation. Like any organism, the entire universe functions according to an innate, inbuilt homeostasis. Anything that disrupts this homeostasis and endangers the creation is *adharmic*. *Dharma* is built into all creatures and isn't something we generally need to work too hard to figure out. That said, living in an *adharmic* society can make it a great deal harder because we tend to internalise warped values and erroneous belief systems.

At this level, evil is evil and is something that should be challenged. The *Bhagavad Gita* is not just a *moksa sastra* but a *dharma sastra*. Krishna doesn't tell Arjuna to hang up his bow and quiver and go sing *Kumbaya* with Duryodhana. He tells Arjuna that, as a warrior, it's his duty to fight and to go slay his enemy and thus restore *dharma*. It's not going to a neat little skirmish either, it's going to be a bloody, brutal, terrible war. *Dharma* has to come before *moksa*, which is why *dharma* is the very foundation of the *Gita* - and why we call this the *dharma* field. *Dharma* needs to be protected by overcoming *adharma*; otherwise society falls into chaos and there would be no one left to attain *moksa*. *Dharma* is therefore the bedrock.

It can be difficult living in a society that operates in some highly *adharmic* ways. I generally don't watch or read the news, because, like you, I find it difficult to see the needless cruelty and suffering mankind inflicts on animals, the planet and each other. I take whatever relevant and appropriate actions I can to help deal with issues, as I believe is our duty as citizens of the world. We each have a responsibility to contribute positively to the society in some way.

A person's *svadharma* of course varies. Not everyone is born to be a warrior like Arjuna. The *svadharma* of some of us is to deal with the world's insanity by first dealing with the insanity in our own minds, overcoming *samsara* and bringing peace to the world by liberating our own minds. None of us is divorced from others or from the environment around us. We each contribute in our own way and should ensure our contribution is a positive one.

One of the prime qualifications in Vedanta, and something that naturally strengthens with sustained inquiry, is dispassion. This isn't an unfeeling dispassion. It doesn't mean that we become unfeeling robots. It's a dispassion that allows objectivity. We see what's in front us, can distinguish how best to act, and we do what we have to do if and when it's appropriate. When I was younger I was one of those people who was so ridiculously sensitive that it was almost painful just to exist in this world. The cultivation of dispassion has made it much easier to just do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.

Dispassion also helps us to see the larger picture. From the *jiva's* perspective, we can never see the bigger picture. Very often the seeds of good are hiding within the seemingly bad, and indeed vice versa. Sometimes terrible things pave the way for incredible leaps forward. It often happens that otherwise awful things such as wars are responsible for breakthroughs in things such as technology and medicine that change the world for the better. On the other hand, things that may seem to be wonderful at the time can have terribly negative consequences.

This doesn't mean we should abandon *dharma* and adopt an apathetic attitude. *Dharma* should always be maintained. But it's a recognition that everything is *Isvara* - the good and the bad - and only *Isvara* ultimately knows why things are the way they are. This recognition makes it easier to embrace everything with love, or at least to accept everything, while continuing to play our part in maintaining *dharma*.

At the level of *vyavaharika satyam*, it doesn't work to superimpose *satya* on *mithya*. There's always a right or wrong; there's always a *dharma* and *adharma* that should be observed. That said, we can do this while continuing to love *Isvara*, to love God, who is the very essence of all things everywhere.

I've been reading and watching an adaptation of the Ramayana, and what struck me was that the bad things - such as Rama being exiled from his kingdom and his wife

Sita being abducted by Ravana – were actually necessary in the grand scheme. They were conspired by the gods to ensure that a certain outcome would be achieved, i.e. that Rama would end up fulfilling his destiny and slaying demons such as Ravana. His suffering was necessary to set him on that path. Even some of the seeming villains, such as his step-mother and the twisted maid who poisoned her mind against Rama, were depicted as having made a sacrifice – playing the villains and becoming despised just so Rama could be set on the path of his destiny and eventually fulfil his *dharma*. It's quite a thought-provoking and wonderful story.

Just to add to the previous message regarding Ramji's comment on evil, I decided to run it by Ramji to see what he thought. Here's his comment:

“The only thing I would add is along the lines of the ‘hate the sin, not the sinner’ idea. I didn't mean that you had to love evil actions, i.e. violence. If justifiable anger and revulsion are suppressed behind an idea of love, *adharma* will grow and *dharma* will suffer. So, according to one's nature and circumstances, one should fight evil, particularly negative thoughts, since they don't change situations outside and disturb the mind too. What I meant was that we need to convert the anger and disgust into a *sattvic* energy so the *rajas/tamas* doesn't pollute the mind. So one needs to switch one's thinking from the act itself to the doer and forgive, i.e. love the person doing them, not the evil act itself, because he or she wouldn't act *adharmically* if he or she knew better.”