

# Does *Isvara* Care about Me or What I Do?

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**Jeff:** Since I'm part of the total, then is *Isvara* "rooting" for me, maybe guiding me if it's within my *dharma*? Or is *Isvara* totally indifferent to whether or not I succeed or get what I want in life? And I don't mean frivolous materialistic things or things that if given to me would take away from someone else.

**Sundari:** There are two ways to look at this: on the one hand, *Isvara* is the impersonal mechanism that facilitates our *karma*, and therefore cannot care one way or the other about our personal needs, because its job is to take care of the total first. *Isvara* must take care of everyone, saint and sinner alike. The other view is that, if we understand *dharma*, live by and honour the universal laws that run the field, we will have peace of mind and build up good *karma*, which after all is what everyone wants, no matter how "good or bad" they are. Even the criminal wants to feel good while doing bad things, and does bad things because he wants good results. For someone who understands the zero-sum nature of reality and, more importantly, understands that all is Self, breaking *dharma* makes no sense, because you know there is nothing to gain or lose here, and you are only injuring yourself by breaking *dharma*.

Lord Krishna says, "Surrender to me with single-pointed devotion and I will take care of all your getting and your keeping." *Isvara* does give us everything we need to survive, even when it does not seem to be doing so, depending on what survival means to you. The short-sighted view of how the field plays out does seem brutal and uncaring, but in the big picture it never is. It is actually the purest, fiercest love.

**Jeff:** A few questions about *karma yoga* to clarify, since much of our days are spent doing things where there isn't any stress over the outcomes, basic things like household chores, caring for our kids, mowing the lawn, etc. Is the focus here then to do our daily duty in a timely way, whatever it may be that day, and acting with gratitude and love toward *Isvara* just for having the lawn to mow or the dishes to clean or the baby's butts to change? So basically, acting in a happy, loving, grateful way? And consecrating the action to God? This can be tricky for me, because I'm thinking to myself, God doesn't really care whether or not this lawn gets mowed, so how do I really dedicate this action to It? How do you apply *karma yoga* to things you're just doing for fun where it's not really helping anyone: going for a walk, driving, watching TV? Any suggestions for a *mantra* here when doing menial tasks or doing leisure activities?

**Sundari:** A true *karma yogi* applies the knowledge to everything he or she does because they are after peace of mind and it is the sanest way to live, not because they are looking for a reward, a gold star for good behaviour. *Karma* means taking appropriate and timely action, doing our duty with equanimity, no matter how big or small the task at hand, taking the results as *prasad*. It is a sane way to live because it removes the emotional component - wanting things to be different from the way they are - your way. Thus the mind is not agitated when you don't get what you want or by boredom or anything else.

**Jeff:** Is “mindfulness” an element of *karma yoga*? I know “the power of now” is a spiritual myth, but performing tasks without thinking about the past or future or getting wrapped up in “head movies” and concentrating on the current task regardless of how menial it is, is probably necessary to act with a *sattvic* mind and thus to be sufficiently doing *karma yoga*.

**Sundari:** Yes, see above. The power of now is not a myth, it just misses the mark because “the now” is nonetheless in time. If you equate the “now” with consciousness, then it is closer to the truth. Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of our lives is that – as the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard put it – life can be understood only in hindsight but must be lived forwards. Again, here *karma yoga* is more efficient at reducing the pressure of life because you just remember to do your duty, consecrate all thoughts words and deeds in a devotional attitude to *Isvara*.

If you are not experiencing peace of mind by relinquishing results, you are not relinquishing results. It’s that simple – the doer is still there, afraid and small, still wanting a particular result because of its likes and dislikes, frustrated and afraid because it believes it needs the result to be safe or whole, as it is not getting what it wants.

**Jeff:** When we do *karma yoga*, are we thinking primarily from the standpoint of the *jiva*? Because if awareness is all there is, why would I “as the Self” have gratitude to God, since God is an object appearing in me? So it’s like having gratitude toward myself? But as the *jiva*, clearly it owes everything to *Isvara*. Though aren’t we supposed to be thinking more from the standpoint of awareness? This is where I get confused and a bit stuck. How to have gratitude toward God while you’re learning that God is in reality just an object appearing in you. It totally seems natural and true that life is a great gift that requires reciprocation, but to whom, if I’m all there actually is?

**Sundari:** Yes, indeed, *karma yoga* is for the *jiva* because *moksa* is for the *jiva*. The main function of *karma yoga* is to lessen the pressure of the *vasanas* and purify the mind so that it is capable of sustained inquiry. As the Self, you are ever-free and in no need of *karma yoga*, because you are *moksa*. Both *karma yoga* and “*moksa*” are objects known to you. But to live free of the *jiva*, while appearing as one, is the hard part. The *jiva* is the Self and beyond *Isvara*, but to live that as the *jiva*, free of the *jiva*, is very hard, and few get it right. If there is a school, that is it. Vedanta is the hardest “school” because it is completely uncompromising. There are no degrees to freedom. You either are or you are not. And for that, one needs a qualified teacher and qualifications, and you need to do the work, no fine print. There is no liberation from and for the *jiva* without *karma yoga*. But, as I explained to you before, there are levels to *karma yoga*, depending on your maturity as an inquirer.

There are three stages to *karma yoga* coupled with varying degrees of *guna*-knowledge. The first stage is appropriate for non-inquirers and is the starting point for inquirers – we call it secular *karma yoga*. It is for people who still have bondage to the world in varying degrees and are acting to get results, but with the “right” attitude. The second is sacred *karma yoga* – or *karma jnana sanyass*, for dedicated inquirers who have handed over control of their lives to the scriptures and are after negating the idea of doership entirely; and the last is *nididhyasana*, when Self-

realization has taken place, but not Self-actualization, meaning there are still impurities in the mind causing disturbance, which must be resolved for *moksa* to obtain.

~ Much love, Sundari