

How Is It Possible for Evil to Exist?

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Isaac: Dear Sundari, thank you for the kind words and encouragement. I must agree that this is the teaching to end all teachings and that Ramji and you all (judging by the e-satsangs) unfold it in the best of ways.

Sundari: You are most welcome, glad to be of help.

Isaac: I am reading *Knowledge and Experience* right now, and it really helps to see all of these questions posed and answered in subtly different ways. I almost hate to ask questions because it seems all the answers are already there, sometimes many times over.

Sundari: Yes, you are quite right. Vedanta has a very specific, progressive methodology which is designed to be provocative and make you think. If you stick with it, the answers to the doubts that arise are always provided, though one must apply the teachings to one's life for them to be effective. That's where it gets difficult!

Isaac: I have a lot more study to do. I need to reread *The Essence of Enlightenment*. I believe I have Self-realization but lack Self-actualization. I also get a bit lost in the *Isvara-jiva* teaching.

Sundari: The *Isvara-jiva* teaching is the key to *moksa*; there is no way around it. It is impossible to progress with Self-inquiry and for the teachings to really work in your life unless you understand who and what both the *jiva* and *Isvara* are, what is the same and what is different and why. I have attached a short teaching on this, but it is extensively covered in James' books, specifically *Inquiry into Existence*, which is my favourite text of all. I encourage you to read it after you have finished with *Essence* (or *How to Attain Enlightenment*). It is an advanced text. Leading on from that is the *Mandukya karika*.

Isaac: One question (that is answered somewhere, I'm certain):

One of the main driving questions has always been, why does this world of seeming imperfection exist? If awareness is limitless and complete, why then are we apparently here as awareness in ignorance?

Sundari: There is no answer to why the Creation is here, except in the knowledge that ignorance is a power that exists in awareness or it could not be called limitless. But the point of Vedanta is not to explain the Creation, though it does do that. The purpose is to reveal that the Creation that seems so real and imperfect is neither. It is a mirage, a dream on the screen of the Self. The question is, what is your

relationship to the Creation? This is a non-dual reality and there is only the Self, therefore even though the Creation is only apparently real, the Creation is the Self because there is no other option. But the Self is ever-free of the Creation, the Creation depends on the Self, but the Self depends on nothing and is unaffected by everything.

Isaac: Is our microscopic focus of awareness somehow necessary for *Isvara* or the Self or is it purely some accidental by-product? Why would limitless perfection choose to introduce ignorance? It seems it cannot be an accident or by-product, because there is nothing prior to Self, so Self must have induced it somehow. If I am the Self, how did I get clouded over or hypnotized as myself and billions of other *jivas*? Does this serve some sort of function or purpose for Self?

I know you have a lot of people contacting you with questions and certainly understand and appreciate that it takes some time for responses. I respect and admire the dedication it takes to keep answering the same things over and over.

Sundari: These are reasonable questions, and you are right, all but the most highly qualified inquirers ask them. The question of why evil exists is a thorny issue which cuts to the heart of duality, the root cause of all suffering. We have answered them countless times in hundreds of *satsangs* and in James' books, and before reading my reply below, ask yourself, who is asking the questions?

The Self is whole and complete, there is nothing "outside" of it, because this is a non-dual reality. Therefore there is no "purpose" for the Creation if you know you are the Self, because you understand it to be only apparently real, a function of *Maya*, as unreal as a mirage on the desert floor, a dream or a movie. But, for the *jiva*, even though I know I am the Self and not the person, the apparent person lives in the apparent reality. Of course, from this perspective, I see evil in the same way you do: as injustice, heartbreaking and mindless. But the difference is that I know I am the Self and that there is nothing to be done about it. "Evil" will always be present in the apparent reality. It is *rajas* and *tamas* at their worst, if they could be personified, which they cannot. Even *sattva* has a dark side, which can be seen in righteous religious wars and persecution in the name of "God."

Evil is caused not by *Isvara* but by ignorance of *Isvara*. While *Isvara* can roughly be equated with the idea of the religious "God," it is not the same. When it comes to the notion of God, we are confronted with the idea that God is a Being separate from Creation and is to be found in some other world beyond ours. Or we have a modern version which tells us there is no God; instead, there is a spiritual reality beyond our minds which will answer all our problems. The understanding of God unfolded by traditional Vedanta is different from both views. We need to understand the definitions of God//*Isvara* gradually and systematically until we can see the full vision, the whole *mandala* of existence.

The way in which I define God will determine my *bhakti*, devotion. In the first level of understanding, my devotion will be to a personified deity: a personal God. In the second level of understanding, I will worship the Lord in everything, including nature. In the final stage of understanding, I see God as the formless essence of all, both manifest and unmanifest. The final stage does not negate the previous two; it simply completes the full picture. When we appreciate *Isvara* as both form and formless, we can happily worship the Lord/God//*Isvara* as a personified deity, as the

totality of nature and as the formless essence of all things. Just as quantum physics does not displace Newtonian physics, both understandings are valid at their respective levels.

The problem with suffering in *mithya* is an issue for everyone, whether you believe in God or not. It is very difficult to understand if we look at it from the dualistic, personal perspective. Evil, *adharmic*, acts and all their many manifestations are abominations, and one cannot but denounce them if *dharma* and peace of mind are what you value. But to get involved in value judgments and become emotional about this topic is to forget the most important fact: this world is not real. Real is defined as “that which is always present and never changes” – a definition that only fits the Self, nothing else. “Apparently real” refers to everything else, i.e. the *jiva* and its field of experience, the world it inhabits.

To smile in the face of the suffering of life may be a tough call for most of us, and it is not meant to demean suffering. Even as a free being, a *jivanmukta*, Self-knowledge is not a magic pill for the ego. It does not make us immune to the stings and arrows of life as the *jiva*, even though we know they are not real. We still need to process difficult emotions like grief. What changes with Self-knowledge is our relationship to experience, good or bad. We must take the dispassionate, big-picture view to make peace with the way this world works.

The first thing to understand is that *Isvara* is not a person, doling out “good” or “bad” *karma* for any life form. *Isvara* is consciousness wielding *Maya*, unaffected by *Maya* – the *gunas*. *Isvara* is *karma phala datta* – the impersonal giver of *karma*. The *gunas* create the Field of Existence, which is a lawful universe provided for all *jivas* (human or otherwise) to live out their *karma*. *Karma* itself is value-neutral. It is just action and its results. It only becomes meaningful when we evaluate it. We either like it or don’t like it or are indifferent to it. Only in the minds of human beings does action become “*karma*.” Animals do not have *karma*, because they do not evaluate what happens to them.

When Vedanta says the world is perfect as it is, we mean that it cannot be anything other than what it is. If the world could be different, assuming *Maya* “thought” that it was not serving awareness, it would make the world a different place. But it never does. So it must be that there is a good reason for suffering. And indeed there is – it motivates a quest for understanding and Self-inquiry.

Even if these arguments are not convincing to you, what use is suffering because of the suffering you see? It not only does not change the suffering, but it also adds a bit of suffering to the total. We *jivas* have no control over results, though we can take appropriate action to get what we want or avoid what we don’t want. Make your contribution to life by giving something of benefit to the total in whatever way is right for you. If that means helping in some way, do so. But it is a thankless task, so let your contribution be an act of service without any thought of changing things or making them better or different. We must always examine our motives for doing anything; see if it is to make yourself feel better, superior or to give you a purpose in life. Often do-gooders have a hidden agenda, which is really about them rather than the people or situation they purportedly serve. Many have low self-esteem, and “helping” is a way to feel better about themselves. Act to help because it is your nature to do so – or just because you can – with the *karma yoga* spirit, and leave the results to *Isvara*. You cannot beat the system. *Karma yoga* is the only way to peace.

Some people respond to this knowledge by saying: “If one cannot change anything

because it is not real, and it is perfect the way it is, why bother trying to help anyone, why do anything?" But Vedanta says: Why not help if everything is perfect? Your helping is also perfect. If it is your nature to help, you will help. If not, not. If it is your nature to sometimes help and sometimes not, then that is the way *Isvara* created you. "Do-gooders," as we call them, are not that popular with *Isvara*. This is because this kind of mind usually believes that it knows better and sets out to "save" the world or people. This is not a good motivation for doing anything to help, because you are assuming you know more than *Isvara* does in delivering *karma*.

To understand the big picture requires an understanding of how the Field manifests and works. When *Maya* appears, *Isvara* in the form of the Creator appears and the Creation apparently manifests. The Creation is made up of and originates from the *gunas: rajas, tamas* and *sattva*. They are impersonal forces that shape the way duality (*samsara*) plays out. This world may not be real, but it exists all the same because you experience it. The *gunas* are what make the Creation possible - and - there is no way for this reality to manifest or function if the *gunas* do not have the capacity to play out from one end of the spectrum of good to the other, so-called, bad. That is the way it is, no point breaking our hearts over it. If we want a game called "Life" this is the only way it can be. In the world of duality, nothing exists without its opposite. If there was only good, the whole show would end. We want the show to end not by changing it but by understanding how it functions so that we can end the way we relate to it that causes suffering.

From the perspective of the *jiva* identified with being a *jiva*, this playing out is seen as personal and has all kinds of thoughts, emotions and actions associated with it. From one's personal to global view, how we see the world and what happens to us - and it - will be interpreted by how the mind is conditioned by the *gunas*, i.e. the *vasanas*, which are also generated and coloured by the *gunas*. Even though I know I am the Self and not the person, the apparent person lives in the apparent reality. From the personal perspective, we see the sadness and know that there is nothing to be done about it. Suffering will always be present in the apparent reality.

Isvara's Creation is playing out as it must. *Karma* is impossible to understand from the *jiva's* perspective, because the *jiva* can only look at what takes place in the apparent reality from within the framework of the apparent reality. This perspective will always be limited. The apparent reality will always be limited.

The only solution is to "step out of *Maya*" (the hypnosis of duality) and see it from the non-dual point of view of awareness.

To summarize:

1. It is not *Isvara* that causes horrible evil things to happen. *Isvara* is not a pervert taking pleasure in suffering or a big person with desires and fears. *Isvara* is an impersonal force - limitless awareness in the role of Creator. Because it is limitless, it has every conceivable power, including the power for so-called good and evil - ignorance. If ignorance is excluded from awareness, awareness becomes limited, which, when we investigate, we know is not possible. The suffering and evil that one sees are a result of ignorance, not *Isvara*. We know this because individuals who understand their nature as awareness do no evil. And even those who don't but understand the nature of *Isvara*/the field of existence don't do evil either, because they know that ignorance of *Isvara* is what creates good and evil, *dharma* and *adharma*.

Christ said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." *Maya* makes the impossible apparently happen: it seems to make awareness think it is an individual who does not know that it is actually whole and complete awareness. When awareness is under the spell of *Maya* it seemingly does actions that cause suffering to it and to others.

But is this really the case? Firstly, awareness is never really under the spell of ignorance, *Maya* just makes it look like it is. Awareness is never bound by ignorance, because if it was, there would be no way out of it. *Maya* is a trick of light. The eternal *Jiva* is and always has been pure awareness.

Secondly, as a *jiva*, or apparent person, identified with their body-mind (under the spell of *Maya*), nobody asks to have the conditioning they are born with and develop because of their *karma*. *Maya*, beginningless ignorance, is behind it all, from the serial killer to the wombat scratching itself to death to the lion killing an innocent antelope for dinner. How can we blame anyone for what they do if nobody is really doing anything? This may not absolve anyone of the consequences of their actions, but nonetheless, when you understand the mechanism of how the *gunas* govern everything, it gives you a very different understanding of "free will."

2. *Maya* is not real. We know this because it disappears with Self-knowledge. If *Maya* is not real, then the effects of *Maya* – good and evil in the apparent reality created by *Maya* – are not real either. Suffering is taking something that is not real to be real. As awareness, you are the witness of (apparent) good and evil. So it cannot be either good or evil, because both good and evil are objects known to you, awareness. You are never what you know.

3. Finally, and most important, freedom comes when we can see both *dharma* and *adharma* impersonally, from the dispassionate, non-dual perspective, as the inevitable playing out of the *gunas*, while still being empathic and helping when we can.

When we can see life this way, we see that there is more good in the world than bad. This is a benign universe, taking care of everyone, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. *Maya* also makes awareness realize its nature as awareness, follow *dharma* and do many wonderful things. Just look at how amazing nature is – how intricate and self-sustaining when we don't mess with it. Who could design such a perfect Creation but an intelligent Creator? Why focus on the bad? *Isvara* must take care of all life. You do have a choice. Choose to see that life is beautiful and perfect the way it is, with *Isvara* taking care of the Total in ways we do not understand as limited *jivas*. Only *Isvara* is omniscient.

As I said but bears repeating: *karma yoga* is the only way to peace of mind. Make sure you understand what it is and practise it in every thought, word and deed. We all want the world to be a better place, but it is what it is. If it could function any other way, for instance, if *sattva* ruled and suppressed *rajas* and *tamas* permanently, the whole game would end. The only way this apparent world of duality can function to deliver everyone's *karma* is if all the *gunas* function the way they do, which is why it is pointless wanting things to be different.

The only way to end existential suffering is to see that the game is not real, which is only possible with the assimilation of Self-knowledge.

Isaac: These words are an immense help. It made me realize that my real question

about *Isvara/jiva* was coming from starting to really see the Self as the witness of everything that I used to think was “me.” As that has been revealing itself, I was having trouble with how or why one would then look at it from the point of *jiva* to *Isvara* as Creator (when it is evident that everything is Self). But even though I had read through this teaching before a couple of different ways, this time it seemed to click. It seems that it comes down to understanding non-duality from both the non-dual and the apparently dual points of view, and how to apply the knowledge, especially while living in the apparent reality. I’m oversimplifying and stating the obvious, probably. But oddly, sometimes the obvious still isn’t obvious until one (or at least “I”) knows it, I guess.

Sundari: Yes, this is how Self-knowledge works on the mind to clear out ignorance. It’s very tenacious as duality is so convincing, but if you stick to the logic and do not waver in your dedication to Self-inquiry, it will work to purify the mind. Basically, it all comes down to discriminating the Self, you, from the objects that appear IN you, 24/7. Easier said than done. That requires that you understand the Creation/*jiva* from the point of view of the Self and from the point of view of *mithya*. It does not work to superimpose *satya* onto *mithya*, and there is no way to skip it to get to the Self.

Isaac: I have also come to the realization today that I’m really still caught up in seeking an experience. I thought I wasn’t. I read answer after answer in the books and *satsangs* about this and think I “get it.” But today I realized I have a very strong *vasana* for “the Quest” or “the Mystery.” Basically, I’m still stuck in the idea of gaining a continual “something” that makes everything better. And I know the answers to that attempt. I just need to let it subside or realize what it is. At least it is exposed.

Sundari: Par for the course, it’s all you have known. It’s the biggest enlightenment myth. The hardest part is to stop seeking because the belief that what we need is outside of us is so strong. That is the nature of *Maya*, to delude. Vedanta tells you upfront that you are the sought. End of story. Okay, what does that mean? Now, that is a different matter. If you have come across the Neo-Advaita teachings, they stop there. They do not teach *Isvara/Maya/jiva/gunas*, they just tell you “you” don’t exist, there is only the Self and to just “get it.” They have no teaching.

But sadly, without a valid and independent teaching and a qualified teacher to unfold what it means to BE awareness, Self-realization makes little difference to your life. And that is the whole point – as the Self, you are already free. So *moksa* is for the *jiva* to have a great life, to live as the Self and be free of duality, suffering. It’s like being deprogrammed from being brainwashed; we call it reversing the reversal. You are doing great, and the upside is that with all the mental training you applied to whatever it is you thought you had to “find,” you can now channel that dedication into Self-inquiry. You have found the Holy Grail, so get on the Vedanta bus and trust it to take you where you need “to go,” which is nowhere. Or now here.

Isaac: Thank you for taking the time to answer my question. I will keep studying. I keep finding the exact answers to questions in all of the material, so I’ll try and avoid asking until I really get stuck somewhere. It does seem to help and bring confidence to hear a direct answer to a personal question from a teacher though. And Vedanta

is most definitely working. Every day brings more clarity in ways that I can't quite describe.

Sundari: That is the correct way to conduct Self-inquiry so that Self-knowledge can "do its job." There are five basic stages to *moksa*, and you need to complete all of them: *karma yoga* (surrendering all thoughts words and actions to *Isvara* in an attitude of gratitude and consecration, taking all results as *prasad*), *upasana yoga* (meditation, self-reflection, checking values, qualifications and motivations) and then *jnana yoga*, which has three parts to it: *sravanna* (listening/hearing the scripture); *manana*, contemplating your life in terms of the scripture, not the other way around); and *nididhaysana* – which is usually the longest and hardest part, clearing the last mental/emotional impurities. We have written a great deal about all the stages online and in the books.

Self-knowledge never fails, because it is the truth about you. It is vital to have a teacher because the teachings contain paradoxes that usually need to be explained, and also, the tendency is to interpret the teachings according to what you know. Make sure you understand all the qualifications, as they are non-negotiable if you want the knowledge to stick. Check yourself on them on a moment-to-moment basis.

Isaac: You are a wonderful teacher/expounder/unfolder. Thank you. I have a good map, and actually your last paragraph was exactly what I needed as well. I know it was in *The Essence of Enlightenment*, but this is a very concise way for me to progress and "monitor."

And as for Neo-Advaita, yeah, I get it. I think my friend who had told me about Vedanta is probably in that camp, though I don't know that he sees himself in any camp. But he recommended that I read Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta and especially U.G. Krishnamurti. Personally (as you can tell from my spiritual track record), I prefer the more "orthodox" approach. As such I'm riding along on the proper Vedanta bus and hopefully can work at fulfilling my qualifications, etc.

I wish I could be at the retreat! Maybe another time.

Thank you again for taking the time with me. I am blessed to have found you. I think I have enough to work with for a time now.

Sundari: I am very happy to have been of service to you.

~ Love, Sundari