

Free Will Again

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/380>

Peter: A question I keep running up against and haven't found an answer to is that of free will. If the ego, if individuality, is an illusion as Vedanta teaches, how can there be any free will?

Wouldn't the only freedom reside in the self? And if that is the case, how can there be any question of following *dharma*? If the ego is not the doer, then everything that happens is determined by cause and effect. There can be no choice, except as an illusion. So why try to do anything? Why bother with self-inquiry? Why not just accept that *karma* is going to work itself out and wait for the time when it happens to bring this particular vortex of energies to the point of liberation?

I suspect that the answer has to do with discrimination, but I haven't been able to work it out.

Ram: The ego isn't an illusion, Peter. It is a functional entity with an apparent existence. It is actually the self with three bodies under the spell of ignorance. So it has limited freedom as long as it takes itself to be limited. Yes, it is in a dream world, but it takes the dream world to be real and wants out. You want out. So you exercise free will and do various things to get out - one of which is to write to me. You have the choice to do something else like not write me and go to the bar and have a stiff one, although when you zoom out and look at the big picture you see that your choices are circumscribed by your environment, your conditioning, etc. From the self's perspective, there is no free will, because nothing is bound. It sees only itself everywhere and is happy with what it sees.

The problem with waiting for *karma* to work out is (1) it is often painful, so the wait is not always pleasant owing to the fact that pain is unnatural because the self is bliss, and (2) unless you know the secret of *karma yoga* you will keep working *karma* back in. In short, you will not get out unless you want out, you are qualified to get out and you put forth the appropriate efforts. When you do, the circumstances that are needed to get you out will manifest because it is actually the self under the spell of ignorance that wants out, and since the self is the regulator and controller of *maya* it provides the teacher and the teaching it needs to set itself free. Limited free will is part of the *maya* program. There are other discussions of this topic on the *satsang* section of the website.

Peter: I think my problem is I have a hard time with the concept of "apparent" reality.

Ram: It means that if you investigate the reality you live in, it dissolves into awareness. So it is not real, although it seems to be.

Peter: To me, that seems like a disingenuous way of saying something is unreal.

Ram: It is not real. It is experiencable, but not real, meaning unchanging, enduring.

Peter: I don't understand who is the "doer" either.

Ram: The doer is the one who is writing "I don't understand who the 'doer' is."

Peter: I keep coming across statements to the effect that I am not the doer.

Ram: As awareness you are not the doer. But as Peter you are the doer.

Peter: But then how can I have free will?

Ram: There are no choices if you are awareness, because everything is equal to everything else. You do not gain by making a choice.

Peter: And who is the doer then?

Ram: The doer is the one who thinks he or she has something to gain by choosing this over that. You think you have something to gain by writing to me.

Peter: It can't be the self, because that is actionless awareness. And if it is actionless, how can it be regulating and controlling *maya*?

Ram: It regulates and controls in its role as *Isvara*, the Creator. There is no creation for awareness, but when *maya*, which is a power in awareness, is operating the self "becomes" the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. It doesn't actually "become" a creator in the sense that it ceases to be awareness and becomes an individual doer, it just provides the light, i.e. awareness, that makes *maya* project what seems to be a concrete reality, but which, on investigation, proves to be only a dream reality, an apparent reality.

Peter: Okay, that really helps. It's analogous to the Christian concept of the "personae" of God, which means masks, though it gets translated as "persons." One has to be clear what level of "reality" one is discussing, and within those parameters, it is logical. It's interesting that the computer generation is so comfortable with the concept of levels, thanks to gaming, mostly. When I saw the movie *Inception*, everyone in the audience over the age of sixty was completely perplexed, but those younger had no problem keeping the levels of reality straight. It seems like a propitious time in history for Vedanta.

I was thinking last night how lucky I am to have "discovered" you at just the right time in my life. But of course you would say that when a person is ready, the self sends the teacher to you. It certainly feels that way. It is also becoming more and

more clear to me that everything that has happened in my life, no matter how annoying and frustrating at the time, has brought me step by step to this point.

One thing I love about the teachings is every expression of spirituality has its place in it. It isn't so much a question of "either/or" so much as "both/and." It is just a matter of understanding the purpose and point of whatever you are doing. Each *yoga* is valid for a purpose. Renunciation is a difficult concept for many, I think, because it seems so anti-life. But when one understands that it is attachment one is giving up, and investment in the results of action, it is clear it is a liberation, not a sacrifice.

Ram: Yes, it is a both/and, not an either/or.

There are basically two orders of reality, *satya* and *mithya*. *Satya* is pure awareness, and *mithya* is awareness under the effect of *maya*. *Maya* makes awareness appear as the world and the experiencer of the world. It depends on awareness, but awareness does not depend on it. It is an apparent reality because it is negatable. However, awareness - you - are not negatable. You stand alone. This is why you are free. In the apparent reality there are also two orders, *vyvaharika satyam* - empirical reality - and *pratibhasika satyam* - subjective reality. Liberation is simply knowing which reality is which. When ignorance of the nature of reality is operating there is confusion between the two orders of reality - which produces suffering.