

Fate versus Free Will

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2013-04-18

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/381>

Kumal: I read a blog by Dennis Waite in which he totally dismissed free will. Is this the true Advaita position? If so, it is regrettable. I tried to post this reply at that site but could not do so.

Sundari: Free will is a tricky issue and one that most people struggle with. Dennis Waite is quite correct in dismissing free will, as this is the “true Advaita position” on this topic. “Position” is the wrong word to use though. Vedanta is a complete means of knowledge based on irrefutable logic, independent of any beliefs or opinions and not subject to interpretation. It does not have “positions,” which are opinions or beliefs and are thus open to interpretation. Vedanta has a twofold approach, which in both cases takes you to the same irrefutable conclusion.

1. If you think you are the doer (the person, or ego) you have limited free will in that you are seemingly free to choose one thing over another, according to your nature or conditioning. The *dharma* field operates according to certain laws, and if they are understood and followed it is possible to achieve success. If that were not the case, *moksa*, or freedom from the apparent reality, would never be possible. The apparent reality is not real, so it is possible to “take action,” i.e. self inquiry, to be free of it. If it were real, no one would ever be free of it. So if one applies this rule and takes the appropriate action at the appropriate time, desired results are usually achieved. There is no guarantee of this though, because *Isvara* runs the *dharma* field.

The other side of this is that the choices that people make, although they seem to be volitional and individual, are usually pretty predictable and repetitive. This is because most people, who have none or very limited self-knowledge, do behave like automatons although they don't think that they do. They think that they are doing the choosing but actually their conditioning (*vasanas/gunas*) is doing the choosing. Still, it does look like one has free will, and in a way the person does. From this standpoint free will gives the person the choice to “make the best” of their lives, and relative success is thus possible in the apparent reality.

2. When ignorance has been removed by self-knowledge and you know that your true nature is whole and complete non-dual awareness, what is there to choose? It is all you, awareness, and it is all good. This means that you will have negated the doer and all the objects, as well as rendered the binding *vasanas* non-binding. *Samsara* no longer exists in “your” mind, and you see everything from the perspective of the self, which means that you have non-dual vision and see everything as non-different from you.

You will still function as a *jiva*, or person, in the “world” but you will know that the person and the world are only apparently real. As awareness you will know that everything arises out of you, but you are always free of everything. Like the wave and the ocean are both H₂O, or water, but they do not exist without H₂O, whereas water/H₂O exists without the wave or the ocean.

As a liberated *jiva*, you will have understood that the *dharma* field (or *Isvara* wielding

maya) is made up of the *gunas* and it runs the way it runs whether you are enlightened or not. *Isvara* does not care if you are enlightened. The *gunas* (*rajas/tamas* and *sattva*) run everything from “your” conditioning/*vasanas* to how the sun rises and sets. The *gunas* make up the environment, which includes you, the *jiva*, or Kumal, whether you know that you are the self or not.

However, as the self you are *trigunaatita*, which means that you are beyond the *gunas*. *Isvara srsti* (creation) continues as before but the *gunas* no longer condition the subtle body in the same way. They still operate and always will, but as a liberated *jiva* you will understand what they are, how they operate, what thoughts, feelings and actions very predictably arise with all them. And you will know that it has nothing to do with you, awareness. You will automatically follow *dharma* because you value peace of mind (*sattva*) over everything else, so your choices will be in harmony with that.

The *dharma* field is like a computer game: all the possible moves are programmed into the game before you play it. Although it appears as if you are making independent moves and playing the game to win or lose, but in actual fact it is already predetermined, as you can only make the moves that are already in the programme. *Isvara*, or the *dharma* field, is playing the game.

That is why *karma yoga* is such an important teaching. It is the most sensible way to live because it relieves the pressure of getting the “right” result and is the only way to negate the doer. This means that you understand that the *dharma* field is out of your control, only *Isvara* has knowledge of all objects and controls the field for the good of the total, so you get the results that are best for you at any given time. There is no way to step out of the *dharma* field, and as a *jiva*, you never do, other than through *moksa*, which is liberation from the person, not for the person.

Kumal: Though judging by a person’s nature one can always say how that person might or even will behave or react in a particular situation, yet one must remember that the game of nature and the nature of the game is change.

Sundari: The only way to judge a person’s nature (including “your” own) is to understand the *gunas*. I strongly suggest that you study this teaching (*triguna vibhava yoga*) as its importance cannot be overstated. You are right, the nature of the game definitely is change. It is all a play of the *gunas* which make up nature (*prakriti*) and are the nature of the game, as they are constantly in a state of flux.

Kumal: And choice (free will) plays a big part in it.

Sundari: Choice and free will *apparently* play a part in it, but that depends on who you think you are and which perspective you are looking from.

Kumal: The truth is all-inclusive and not just isolated.

Sundari: This is true, but it is not the truth as Kumal sees it, it is the truth according to Vedanta. See my first paragraph. If you want to benefit by self-inquiry into Vedanta, it is imperative that you drop your opinions and beliefs and not try to fit

them into Vedanta. Self-knowledge only works if you look at your beliefs and opinions in the light of Vedanta and NOT the other way around.

Kumal: And there is plenty of chance for choice.

Sundari: There are *seemingly* plenty of *apparent* choices for the *apparent* person who thinks they are the person. Apparent success is possible in the apparent reality. But there are no real choices because all choices are determined by the person's *vasanas*/conditioning, which upon investigation are revealed quite indisputably to be governed by the *gunas*, i.e. *Isvara*, or *maya*.

Kumal: The comforting thought is that no one is free to make a wrong choice, if such a thing as that even exists in the first place, and nobody's fate has been left to chance.

Sundari: This is true, there are no real "wrong" choices. All choices are part of the field, and whichever choice you make will take you where you are supposed to go. There is no such thing as fate or chance, everything is run by *Isvara*, or the *gunas*, and works out perfectly, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

The only issue here is who you take yourself to be. If you think you are the *jiva* and can "get" something from the objects, believing the joy exists in them, you will be sadly disappointed over and over again. This is the source of all suffering because the objects are all empty, value-neutral and incapable of giving anything other than temporary bliss. So, driven by desire, the *jiva* with its likes and dislikes sooner or later inevitably concludes that *samsara* is a zero-sum game.

Kumal: Choice exists, if only for one to discover the meaning of life and how precious it is and not to exist as a mere automaton.

Sundari: The only meaning of life is to discover your true nature as awareness. If freedom, or *moksa*, is part of the *jiva's karma* and if the individual is qualified and has understood that the objects are empty, then Vedanta comes to the *jiva*. This is why the qualifications are so important for Vedanta; it takes a mature mind to assimilate the knowledge. Vedanta is the only complete means of knowledge available to remove the ignorance of your true nature and to free you from the person. But, the mind must first be purified to receive the knowledge.

Kumal: We live in a world where only good ever happens and evil has no place, and every choice is a good one and every chance is worth taking.

Sundari: This is true, it is a benign world when you understand its true nature. Non-duality is not opposed to duality, it just reveals what it is and sets you free of it. Nor does duality disappear when you have realised your true non-dual nature. This is the same as saying ignorance is not a problem when you know what it is; it only has power of you when you don't know what it is. Ignorance (*rajas/tamas*) is what creates all the suffering and the so-called "evil," all the bad things that happen.

When ignorance of your true nature is removed by self-knowledge, this is the end of suffering for the person. As long as you take yourself to be the person, you are bound by the *gunas*, chasing objects, thinking that the joy comes from them. Nothing in *samsara* lasts, so when you are free of it, it can no longer harm you or cause you suffering. You will know that nothing can add to you or take away from you: YOU are fullness, *purna*. Then life is beautiful, and the only security that is real is known to be you, awareness. Nothing gives it to you and nothing takes it away.

Kumal: The dialogue or monologue by Sarah Conner in *Terminator II*, “No fate but what we make,” rings true to one’s own experience.

Sundari: This is a belief that the so-called spiritual arena likes to believe is true, which is why *The Secret* was so popular. It has no real bearing on truth though, because no one “makes their own fate.” It is true that it seems like you have a choice as to how you respond to the events of your life, but it is not “your” life. “Your” life belongs to *Isvara*; how it turns out is not up to the *jiva* and never will be. As I have already stated several times already, it is “your” conditioning that causes you to respond however you do, positively or negatively. But your conditioning is given to you by *Isvara* as well.

This last statement of yours is only relatively true if you take yourself to be a person; you then have an apparent choice to follow *dharma* or not, but what do you think determines that choice? Only the *gunas*, or *Isvara*. The doer is only one constituent that makes up the field of action. There are many other constituents at play, as mentioned a few times in this email.

However, as I stated above, it is true that the *dharma* field is a lawful universe and operates according to certain universal principles. If as the *jiva* you understand and operate within these laws, you can take the appropriate action to achieve a desired result. If this were not the case and the individual could not succeed at anything, then no one would take any action, because what would be the point?

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari