

Isvara 1 and Isvara 2 Redux

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2019-10-04

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3956>

Jack: I have a question about *Isvara*. If I understand the teaching correctly, you make a distinction between *Isvara 1* and *Isvara 2*. *Isvara 1* is the undifferentiated Self, or *sat-chit-ananda*. *Isvara 2* “arises” out of the Self. It is *maya*, or God, as understood in the West. *Isvara 2* creates, sustains and destroys the material universe.

If my understanding is correct this far, my question is this: often in Vedanta *Isvara 2* seems to be represented as an impersonal force. He is the laws of *dharma* and *karma*. While I can see that God does certainly have an impersonal nature, and I can also see that man has an inherent tendency to anthropomorphism, I can't let go of the notion that God is in some way also very personal.

I grant that sometimes in your lectures *Isvara* is presented as personal and sometimes as impersonal. But it seems that the emphasis in Vedanta is that *Isvara* is really a machine, albeit a conscious machine of sorts.

James: We emphasize the mechanical impersonal aspect of *Isvara 2* to make a seeker realize that God is not synonymous with a person's religious beliefs. In other words, God is not a big *jiva* with *karma*, likes and dislikes, etc. which is caused by personification and generates pernicious sectarianism. For instance, both teams in a sports match pray to (their version) of God to win the match. What is poor God to do? Make both win or both lose? So, in this case, God is *karma phala data*, the one that gives the results of the action, i.e. it produces a result based on the total actions connected to the event itself, which, when you think about it, includes the conflicting desires of both teams, the weather, the personalities of all the coaches and players, the nature of the audience, the weather, the alcohol the fans drink, the cheerleaders, etc.

If a person has criminal *samskaras* and involves God in his thinking, what's God to do but to take the same approach, i.e. consider the whole situation in determining the result? I watched a film on Netflix recently about a cartel hitman who went to church every day and prayed to God. At the same time the victim, a drug dealer for the cartel, prays to God for protection. Again, what's God to do?

The way we explain this problem is to say that *Isvara 2* is *Isvara 1*, pure awareness plus *sattva*, the intelligent blueprint that projects the universe. In other words, its “intent” is pure, i.e. it doesn't have an agenda; it just presents, i.e. projects, a value-neutral idea. When the human *jivas* appear, long after the evolution of matter into a life-supporting environment, the value is added by them. From a temporal standpoint *sattva* had to be the predominant *guna* at the moment of creation because *rajas* and *tamas* are not intelligent. They unconsciously project and conceal in tandem. Well, we can't even say they unconsciously project, because “unconscious” implies consciousness. Anyway, we know this because we can observe that the Creation is intelligently designed.

We do this so *jivas* won't blame God for the evil in the world, which encourages them to develop *bhakti* for God, which will encourage them to behave morally and seek to

know God. Their seeking actions will engage *Isvara 2* as *karma phala data*, which will eventually lead them to a qualified teacher and to Vedanta, an impersonal means of knowledge. Not everyone will have the same nature and the same degree of desire for freedom so *Isvara 2* (who is actually *Isvara 1*) will bring them to the teaching and the teacher according to their *karmas*.

But it's impossible for *Isvara 1* to bring anyone to *Isvara 1* because everyone is *Isvara 1* already. There is actually no connection between *Isvara 1* and *Isvara 2*, because if there were, there would be no freedom. Why? Because the actions of the world and its *jivas* would impact on awareness. But awareness and God are in two apparently different hermetically sealed "dimensions" of one non-dual reality. So God is not the same but it is not different from unborn, non-dual awareness, which doesn't make sense from duality's perspective.

In any case, when the *jivas* appear, once the material universe is set up, they are subject not only to *sattva* but to *rajas* and *tamas*, which on the individual level cause them to act according to the predominant *guna* operating at any moment in their subtle bodies. *Isvara 2* is not affected by the *gunas*, because *Isvara 2* is actually *Isvara 1*. So the *gunas* don't bind it. But when *rajas* and *tamas* hide the *sattva* a *jiva* becomes momentarily ignorant of God, i.e. what is good, and commits actions that disturb the *dharma* field and produce *papa karma*, i.e. "sin, an archery term that means "to miss the mark," meaning their actions are not God-centered, they are ignorance-centered, ignorance being the belief that they can complete themselves by doing actions, which again is both true and not true.

It is true that consistently disturbing the *dharma* field leads to more disturbance and eventual mental breakdown, although in the long run hitting bottom will eventually cause a person to seek the truth because life continually swings between two dualistic poles. It is true, however, if an individual worships God with *sattvic* emotions, thoughts and actions, such an individual will eventually be set free, assuming the desire for freedom is strong enough to manifest (via *Isvara 2*) a teacher and a valid impersonal means of knowledge.

Krishna's subtle help, i.e. bias for Arjuna, is due (1) to Krishna's special mandate as an *avatar* and (2) because of Arjuna's relentless commitment to *dharma*. He is so committed to *sattva guna* that he is willing to not serve *Isvara's* will to avoid injuring his teachers, relatives, etc. Behind every action, good and bad, is a desire for freedom so eventually even the Duryodanas of this world come to God.

Jack: I'm just having a hard time squaring that with my experience and perhaps personal religious bent. Sure, God does have a machine-like impersonal quality. That's what keeps the universe going both physically and spiritually. But God also seems to have a personal nature to desire our spiritual growth and relationship with us.

James: We don't say it doesn't have a personal nature, meaning it exists. Anything you can think exists because thought exists. But we say it isn't real, for the reason that there is no actual way to tell the difference between good and bad *karma*. Good *karma* sometimes produces bad results and bad *karma* sometimes produces good results. So we say that *Isvara 2's* good nature apparently exists and *Isvara 2's* evil nature apparently exists, meaning *Isvara 2* isn't actually real. This is why people claim that Vedanta is atheistic. It is, but it isn't. Why? Because you can't appreciate

your identity as unborn awareness unless you acknowledge *Isvara 2*'s role as the Creator of the world and the giver of the results of your *jiva*'s actions.

In your example, you only consider the beneficial aspect of *Isvara*, the positive contribution to an individual's life. But you can't separate the beneficial power of *Isvara 2* from its detrimental power, because good depends on the concept of bad and vice versa. It has to be responsible for good and evil or else you need to invent a Devil, in which case duality is real. Personal worship of *Isvara* is duality. But duality is not the kiss of death if you understand non-duality, which requires knowledge of *Maya*, i.e. *Isvara 2*.

Anyway, is there actually a difference between our desire for freedom and the desire of *Isvara* for us to be free? No. It is just freedom, viewed from two different standpoints. Desire for freedom has to be *Isvara* because *jiva* doesn't desire to be free before it desires to be free. The impulse arises on its own from the unconscious mind, i.e. *Isvara 2*. The desire is not a problem for *Isvara 2*, because *Isvara 2* is actually *Isvara 1*, which is completely detached from *Isvara 2*, which is non-different from the Creation. It only becomes an issue for *jiva* because it may cause *jiva* to violate *dharma*. This is why Krishna, speaking as *Isvara 2* says, "I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*."

Jack: A couple of examples: I've read about how you met your *guru*, how you were going to quit the spiritual life and then through a series of events wound up at a door where he was teaching. To me that's not an impersonal force based on your *karma*, though that must have been a factor, but God reaching out to you, guiding you in a very personal way.

James: I agree, but it wouldn't have "reached out" if I hadn't offered done all the prayers, i.e. actions required to know the truth. If I'd led a criminal life I would have been so *rajasic* and *tamasic* I would never have come in contact Swami Chinmaya. *Isvara 2* is sentient. It listens and it responds to *jiva*'s actions. Remember, "*jivo brahmaiva na parah*." The *jiva* is non-different from awareness. It just thinks it isn't. *Jiva* is sentient too. So there is a connection (*sambandha*).

Jack: It's like when you talk about in the *Gita* where Krishna says he won't fight Arjuna's fight but then steers the chariot into a rut so the arrow will just miss Arjuna. If Krishna were just the manifestation of an impersonal force, he wouldn't interfere in this way but just let *karma* play out.

James: See above.

Jack: I recognize that you say it's great to have a personal deity. But, and perhaps I'm reading too much into this, it seems to me the thrust of Vedanta says go ahead have a personal deity, but now that *Isvara 2* is ultimately impersonal.

James: There is actually no contradiction. Speaking as a *jiva*, I know *Isvara 2* is impersonal but I worship it in every form because it ultimately depends on *Isvara 1*, i.e. existence/consciousness. If I'm free, I'm free to worship God in any way I want. On the other hand, if there is no connection between *Isvara 2* and awareness, there

is no *Isvara* 1 and no *Isvara* 2. They are both just teaching tools Vedanta uses to remove duality. There is only *Isvara* 1, which is silly because one implies two. Language is always a problem because it evolves in duality so any statement implies something else; even the statement “it exists” implies non-existence. So Vedanta is not about gaining knowledge per se. It is about removing ignorance. Period. For what’s left once ignorance is gone there are no words.

Jack: I get that the Self from which *Isvara* 2 and all Creation comes from is impersonal in that it is just pure undifferentiated awareness. But to me in a profound way *Isvara* 2, or God, is more than just a machine but has personality and will and desires to draw us to him if only we will cooperate.

James: Yes. But only if we cooperate. It is profound for a *jiva* to realize that God is on its side, has its back, so to speak. It’s exciting. *Isvara* 2 is sentient and we are sentient. *Isvara* 1 is neither sentient or insentient, which are dualistic categories. It is the knowledge, i.e. awareness, that is not opposed to ignorance of both. In any case, there is a personal relationship. It is the primary relationship of every individual, whether or not they acknowledge it. We are born devotees of God.

Vedanta is very intelligent and compassionate, unlike the Neo teachings, which don’t understand the value of God. After all, it’s not awareness that is seeking to know. It is awareness appearing as an ignorant human being that seeks to know. So we have to cut it some slack and pander to its belief up to a point. It’s never an either/or – unless it is. It’s a both/and – unless it isn’t.

Jack: Please help clarify this for me. Many thanks!

James: Hopefully, you stand clarified! ☺ But *Maya* is a very difficult topic.

One more issue just to tidy this *satsang* up. You say “*Isvara* 2 creates, sustains and destroys the material universe.” This can’t be true, although we say it all the time for the benefit of those whose minds are not refined. Creation implies intelligence, which implies consciousness. Consciousness can’t create matter, because it would have to have a dual nature to create. But if it has a dual nature it won’t be limitless, i.e. free, because one part of its nature will affect the other part. Consciousness/existence “stands alone,” meaning there is no other principle. It is “one without a second.” It is unchanging, so it can’t modify into a second principle. So it is not a Creator. Only when we take the world of duality into account do we call it a Creator, which as I mention above, we ultimately dismiss. When you teach Vedanta you need to throw the hungry dog a bone. You can’t tell it that its hunger isn’t real and that its tummy is already full. So there are always tricks going on, which we are happy to expose at the right time.