

Enlightenment, *Isvara* and the Steady Application of Knowledge

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2019-10-05

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3957>

Mark: Is an enlightened one actually free and limitless? They have realized the true nature of the self as limitless awareness but from the perspective of the *jiva* are they not still as limited as anyone else? It seems the most concrete and simple difference is that the enlightened one now sees the limitations in controlling the material world and therefore stops stressing to control it.

Rory: Enlightenment is a shift in the locus of one's identity from the *jiva* to awareness, the self. This is not an act of "becoming," because there was never a time we were not the self, it's simply the removal of ignorance about our nature.

For the *jnani*, the knower of the self, there is a qualitative difference in the way that one approaches life. The *jnani* no longer looks to the world for fulfilment, which changes everything, because the worldly person is utterly dependent on the world for his or her happiness and is thus subject to constant frustration, pain and suffering – because, as you said, trying to control the material world creates enormous stress. Instead, the *jnani* derives his or her happiness and satisfaction from within. They act not for happiness, but out of happiness. In that respect, everything is turned inside out.

At the same time, at a quantitative level, the *jiva* remains such as it is – an apparatus set up a certain way by *Isvara*, according to one's *prarabdha karma* (the *karma* apportioned for this particular lifetime).

Given the nature of *maya*, the body and mind will always be subject to limitation: whether in the form of limited knowledge, the conditioning effect of the *gunas*, time, sickness or mortality. There's no getting around that. But because your sense of identification is no longer rooted in the body-mind-ego, their limitations are no longer your limitations. That's the freedom – not somehow perfecting the body-mind into immortality, which would be like trying to perfect a shadow into substance (never gonna happen), but realising they are just finite objects appearing in you, awareness.

Mark: Advaita Vedanta teaches the concept of oneness, so when I say limitations in controlling the "material world," this "material world" is synonymous with the Self. If we acknowledge limitations in controlling this "material world," then aren't we also accepting that the Self is limited because there isn't actually a separation between the two? At the very least, the Self is limited to control the apparent objects within *maya*. In other words, if the Self is limited to control the objects, even if the objects are not real, isn't this showing a limitation? The objects are the Self (even if dependent on the Self as *mithya*), yet the Self can't control the objects; this sounds like a limitation to me. Again, I want to be clear, I get that the objects are neither truly existent nor non-existent, that they depend on *satya* for its seeming existence. Yet despite that, the Self can't control the objects. Limitless literally means without ANY limits. I don't see how we get around this point that the Self is indeed limited in

this way.

Rory: I think what you're missing here is *Isvara*. Indeed, I've heard James say that understanding *Isvara* is the key to everything. Generally, *Isvara* is absent from most of the modern Neo-Advaita teachings; they focus exclusively on the *jiva* and the self. However, by discounting *Isvara*, it's impossible to grasp the entirety of the teaching.

You said, "the Self can't control the objects," which is true at the absolute order of reality (which we call *paramartika satyam*). At the absolute order of reality, from the "perspective" of the self, there are no objects. There is nothing other than it, for it is undifferentiated, limitless and without beginning or end.

However, courtesy of *maya*, the empirical order of reality (*vyavaharika satyam*) appears within the self, consciousness, much as a dream appears in the sleeping mind. Out of *satya* (the self, the independent causeless cause) appears *mithya* (the universe of objects, the dependent effect, i.e. the pots created from the base substance of clay).

This empirical order of reality is the Creation of *Isvara*. Another word for *Isvara* is *Saguna Brahman* - meaning the self with attributes, as opposed to *Nirguna Brahman*, the attributeless self (which pertains to the absolute order of reality pervading and underlying this relative Creation).

Isvara is often called the Controller, for It ordains and governs the laws of the Creation, shaping the fabric of Creation from its own substance. At the level of form, everything, gross and subtle, is *Isvara*.

So the tricky thing is, at one level (*paramartika*, the absolute order of reality) it's true to say that the self doesn't control the objects, because at the absolute level there are no objects to control. But when we're talking with reference to objects, we're always talking about *vyavaharika* - the empirical/relative level, which is completely governed by *Isvara* - aka *Saguna Brahman* (the self + *maya*), which is running the whole show - and IS the whole show.

I think what's tripping you up is mixing these orders of reality. Understanding these orders of reality is important because otherwise it can get very confusing. (Heck, the topic of *maya* is inherently confusing. As Krishna says, it confuses even the enlightened!).

That's why it's true that the self is actionless and limitless (at the absolute order of reality, which is the essence of existence and all that there actually is, appearances notwithstanding), while at the relative/empirical order of reality, *Isvara* (the self + the *upadhi* of *maya*) governs and controls the entire universe of names and forms. The self both does and does not, depending upon one's perspective.

To make things even stickier, within the empirical order of reality (*Isvara's* objective world) we also have a third order of reality, which is called *pratibhasika satyam* - the *jiva's* subjective world, a personal creation of thoughts, beliefs and fantasies superimposed onto the objective field. Like *Isvara*, the *jiva* is also non-separate from the self. But whereas *Isvara* is the self plus the macrocosmic *upadhi* of *maya*, the *jiva* is the self plus the microcosmic *upadhi* of a body-mind-sense complex.

Mark: Doesn't Advaita Vedanta teach that this limitless awareness was and is

always our true nature, regardless of if we realize it or not?

Rory: That's correct.

Mark: If so, the only difference for the enlightened one is this realization, and literally nothing else about "reality" changes, thus the only loss of limitation is the loss of the sense of limitation, but the limitation still is as prevalent as ever. Again, just because one's perspective has changed on viewing the limitation doesn't change the fact that the limitation is still there.

Rory: It's true, the *jiva's* limitations remain because as a finite form in the empirical reality it is by its very nature limited. Self-knowledge, however, negates that sense of limitation because your identity shifts to awareness and the *jiva* is seen as what it is: just another object appearing in you, awareness.

Mark: And on the other side, one who has yet to realize the Self is still just as much the Self as the enlightened one even though not aware of it.

Rory: Absolutely. Contrary to appearances, there's nothing BUT the self; and nothing else anyone could be.

It might seem counter-intuitive, but the truth is a *jnani* isn't any more the self than the most ignorant of people. Donald Trump is as much the self as Ramana Maharshi. ☺ The only difference is the *jnani* has knowledge, and gets to enjoy the fruit of that knowledge, whereas the *samsari*, obscured by ignorance, generally goes about making a mess of things as they seek to satiate their lack-driven desires and attachments.

Mark: Of course the teachings say the enlightened one's *vasanas* become non-binding and won't collect more *karma*, therefore not creating the conditions to reincarnate again, but must we all not accept and acknowledge that we can't know this with certainty?

Rory: No, I wouldn't say that. When the *vasanas* are rendered non-binding, you'll know and experience that first-hand and with utmost certainty.

The steady application of self-knowledge to the mind neutralises binding *vasanas* because desire is based on a sense of lack and need at the core of the *jiva's* psyche.

The realisation that you are already whole and complete and that nothing in the world can be added to or subtracted from you is what tames the mind and its binding desires and aversions. The wind gets taken out of their sails. You find that what once consumed your energy and compelled action loses its power over you. It might become a mere preference or it may slip away from the psyche altogether. Either way, you no longer find your mind pushed and pulled by uncontrollable compulsions, desires or fears.

Vasanas will still arise, such being the nature of the mind and *gunas*, but, when self-knowledge is firm, they lose their gravity and power to overwhelm.

This does necessitate steady and consistent *nididhyasana* (applying self-knowledge to one's mind and life), and some *vasanas* are easier to neutralise than others. The *Gita* states that some can be overcome quite quickly, like wiping dirt off a mirror, while others take a while to clear, like smoke from a fire, and the more ingrained tendencies are like carrying a foetus in the womb (in other words, it's a process that takes its own time and cannot be rushed). But with commitment, a person can quickly begin to see the benefits themselves. This isn't something one needs to take on faith. It's just a matter of putting in the work and seeing the results for oneself.

Regarding *karma* and rebirth, the only way to guarantee that you won't accrue *karma* and further rebirth is to fully assimilate the knowledge that, as the self, you never had *karma* and were never born to begin with. 😊

In a sense, it's like giving up the lease on a property. Everything here is seen as belonging to the lessor, *Isvara*. Shifting one's point of identification from *jiva* to self, from *satya* to *mithya*, is the key. This isn't an act of denying the relative order of reality, but contextualising it as the play of *Isvara* appearing in you, the eternal awareness that is the self.

For the duration of the *jnani's* lifetime, his or her *prarabdha karma* plays out like a pre-wound clockwork toy. But no new *karma* can be accrued, because there's no one there to claim it. The *jiva* has essentially been taken out of the picture. There's only you, the self, and the play of *Isvara* appearing in you.