

# Isvara, Jiva, Jagat and the Gunas

Sundari (Isabella Viglietti)

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## **Isvara-Jiva-Jagat Identity (Aikyam): The Four “Orders of Reality”**

**Awareness** ~ Before the projection of *maya* is referred to as “pure” consciousness/awareness, or *paramatman*, amongst many other names, including *Isvara*.

“Pure” serves to define awareness as “having no qualities” but is not actually a good word because it implies that awareness could be “impure,” which it cannot. However, what is important to understand is that it is used to distinguish “pure” awareness from awareness plus *maya*. The word “before” is also not correct because there is no before or after in awareness. Ram explains this beautifully in the e-*satsang* below mine where he unfolds two creation theories. Time and space do not apply to awareness, as they are objects known to it. As Edwin our editor beautifully puts it, definitions are the stuff of duality but they bring the clarity that helps us transcend it.

**Maya** ~ *Maya* is a power (*shakti*) that exists in awareness or it would not be unlimited. It only “covers” a small “portion” of awareness. We have to use the words “covers” and “portion” in order to teach but they are not strictly speaking correct, because they have spatial and temporal implications while awareness is beyond space and time and has no parts. *Maya* is the principle that gives rise to duality. It is also called ignorance.

**Isvara** ~ Once *maya* is operating, awareness “assumes” the role of Creator and apparently identifies with *maya*. Awareness in association with *maya* (ignorance) is then referred to as *Isvara*, or “God,” the Creator, preserver and destroyer of the objects in the *dharma* field. As such it is also known as the macrosmic mind, the causal body or the deep sleep state. *Isvara*, or *maya*, is a “limiting adjunct” for awareness in that it causes awareness to appear as the limited world. Again, this implies a sequence of “events” which is not correct, because it infers time; we describe it so because we need to understand the distinction between the real and the apparently real, *satya* and *mithya* (read James’ e-*satsangs* below; he explains this beautifully).

**Jiva** ~ Awareness, under the spell of *maya*, identified with the subtle body, is called *jiva*. The subtle body is an *uphadi*, or limiting adjunct, for awareness. The *jiva* is the microcosmic mind, or individual. The subtle body is made up of the mind, intellect and ego. Sometimes the *jiva* is defined as awareness plus the five sheaths: the physical sheath (*anamayakosa*), the vital air sheath (*pranamayakosa*), the emotional sheath (*manomayakosa*), the intellect sheath (*vignamayakosa*) and the bliss sheath (*anandamayakosa*). There is only one *jiva*, because there is only one awareness appearing as many apparent *jivas*, or individuals.

**Jagat** ~ Awareness appears as the creation (*jagat*) when ignorance (*maya*) is operating. It is an effect and is called the apparent (*mithya*) reality. It includes all the gross and subtle objects in existence, the objective empirical world and the subjective psychological world.

**Gunās** ~ The creation comes into existence with the emergence of the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *tamas* and *rajas*. *Sattva* is intelligence and knowledge; *tamas*, a heavy, dense energy, is matter, the substance of the creation; *rajas* is the dynamic active energy, also known as that which transforms objects; psychologically, it is known as the mode of action and desire. The *gunas* make up everything in creation from thoughts to gross objects. In effect, the *gunas* are another word for *Isvara*.

*Isvara* plus *jiva* and *jagat* make up the *dharma* field. Their common identity is non-dual reality, awareness, out of which these four “orders” arise. Although they share a common identity as awareness, they are not the same as pure awareness. However, all the orders and the objects within them depend on awareness, but awareness is always free of them. A good analogy is H<sub>2</sub>O. Water is pure H<sub>2</sub>O. So are the ocean (*Isvara*) and the wave (*jiva/jagat*). But while the wave and the ocean are dependent on the H<sub>2</sub>O, the H<sub>2</sub>O is free of both the wave and the ocean. Pure awareness is free of *Isvara*, *jiva* and *jagat*, but *Isvara-jiva-jagat* has a dependent existence on awareness.

### **Self-Knowledge, Self-Realisation, Self-Actualisation and Moksa**

**Moksa** ~ *Moksa* is discriminating awareness from the objects in it. Understanding the *Isvara-jiva-jagat* identity (*aikyam*) is of paramount importance because the *gunas* are *Isvara*, meaning the environment, which includes the *jiva*. It is important to not only to discriminate the self from the objects, but to actualise what it means to be self-realised in the apparent reality. This is because self-realisation is not *moksa*. Hear that again.

**What is self-realisation?** ~ Self-realisation is an experiential term and means that one has understood that one’s true nature is awareness. However, self-realisation is an experience. It is therefore not real in the light of Vedanta’s definition of what constitutes reality as “that which is always present and never changes,” meaning you can “lose” your self-realisation if the knowledge “I am awareness” is not firm.

**What is self-actualisation?** ~ To be self-actualised means (1) that one has fully discriminated the self from the objects appearing in it (the *dharma* field, one’s conditioning) and (2) that that knowledge has (a) rendered the *vasanas* non-binding and (b) destroyed one’s sense of doership. *Moksa* is discriminating the self from the not-self. Through discrimination, the *jiva*, the individual under the spell of self ignorance, understands that it is actually the self, limitless awareness, and not the person it thinks it is. *Moksa* is for the *jiva* because the self is already free. This knowledge allows the *jiva* to live free in this apparent reality. This means that the *jiva* is not bound by his or her conditioning.

**The *gunas*, or the “ropes”** ~ The word *guna* means “rope,” aptly named because the three *gunas* are bound to each other and they bind the person to objects. As the components that make up the *dharma* field, the *gunas* govern the creation of everything. This of course includes the *vasanas* that motivate the individual and the individual’s relative nature (*svadharma*) that gives rise to “their” conditioning. This conditioning is then reinforced by their environment and life experiences, which are also made up of the *gunas*. So managing the *gunas* is nothing less than understanding how to relate to the totality of your environment, your gross and subtle bodies. The *gunas* are not a problem unless you identify with them or if you are unaware of them. The *gunas* are always present and operating on the *jiva* and the *dharma* field because the causal body is there whether the *jiva* is present or not,

enlightened or not. The *gunas* condition the *jiva*, or subtle body, at all times other than in deep sleep, *nirvikalpa samadhi* and of course once the self is actualised as one's true nature.

**The three forces in creation** ~ *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* correspond to the three forces in creation: *rajas*, *vikshepa shakti*, which is the projecting energy; *tamas*, *avarana shakti*, the concealing energy; and *sattva*, the revealing energy. When *maya* operates, *sattva* (pure knowledge-intelligence) is the first *guna* to emerge. It is known as pure *maya*, and becomes the nature of the mind. *Tamas* and *rajas* appear next. *Rajas* and *tamas* are the main cause of ignorance; they extrovert the mind, turning it towards objects. When a person is *sattvic* the mind is turned inwards toward awareness, its nature. This happens when *rajas* and *tamas* have been largely eliminated. *Sattva* feels very good. With *karma yoga* and the practice of self-knowledge it can become the person's predominant *guna*. Purifying the mind is to aim for a *sattvic* mind.

Liberation, or self-knowledge, means that you have assimilated the knowledge that you are whole and complete and that the "person" that you used to think you were is no more than a notion in you, awareness. When ignorance (*avidya*) of yourself as awareness has been removed by self-knowledge, *maya* (macrocosmic ignorance and its effects) still obtains and the *gunas* continue to condition the subtle body, the "person," but they are rendered non-binding, as the doer has been negated by self-knowledge. They have nothing to do with you, awareness, because you know that you are not the subtle body, the person/doer. You are *trigunatita*, beyond the *gunas*.

**Macrocosmic vasanas** ~ The *gunas* are called macrocosmic *vasanas*, i.e. they belong to *Isvara*, or the total, the creation, not to the person. As an apparent person, or *jiva* (the self under the spell of ignorance), they are in the driver's seat, so to speak. The person thinks he/she is a doer, so they drive him/her relentlessly until he/she gains the direct knowledge of his/her true nature as awareness. There are basically four stages to the *guna* teaching which can be applied to people at different levels of their spiritual development.

## The Four Stages of the *Guna* Teaching

**Stage 1** ~ The *guna* teaching is very effective for doers (*karmis*); these are people in the world, not going for *moksa*. As a *karmi* one uses the knowledge to accomplish things in the world and get what one wants. One can gain knowledge of the *gunas* without realising the self and use this knowledge very productively to live a better life. It is possible to "uncouple" the *guna* teaching from Vedanta and apply it "on its own," so to speak. This would be very useful for people in the human resources field, as well as a more enlightened approach to psychological counselling and related therapies.

**Stage 2** ~ This is for the application of *karma yoga*. As a *karma yogi*, how does one really understand what giving up the results of your actions are unless one understands what makes up the *dharma* field? Also, the *karma yogi* uses the *guna* teaching to purify the mind as well as identify their conditioning. This is the most powerful way to negate the doer.

**Stage 3** ~ Once the mind is purified, one uses self-knowledge to discriminate the self from the not-self. This means that your conditioning does not belong to you. At this stage, unless you really understand the *gunas*, you may, as is common among

many highly-qualified inquirers, get stuck with the most subtle teaching of all, the relationship between pure awareness and *Isvara, jiva* and *jagat*. Remember, it does not work to superimpose *satya* (pure awareness) on *mithya* (*Isvara, jiva* and *jagat*). If superimposition happens, even though the self is known, it will remain indirect knowledge, i.e. the self will still appear as an object. And you will still think you have to “get” it or you will still have to wait to have that final experience that will prove you are awareness! Direct knowledge and self-actualisation is the difficult part. Therefore full understanding of the *Isvara-jiva-jagat* identity (*aikyam*) and the *guna* teaching is of paramount importance.

**Stage 4** ~ In the fourth and final stage, self-knowledge has fully removed the ignorance of your true nature and you know without a doubt that you are beyond the *gunas*. This means that knowledge and ignorance are both “gone”; they are simply objects known to you. Only you, the self, remains. This is *moksa*.

### **Typical Symptoms of *Rajas, Tamas* and *Sattva***

Start observing them. Each of your thoughts and feelings are *guna*-driven. See which ones are *sattvic*, which are *tamasic* and which are *rajasic*. Understand the implications of identifying with each kind of energy and the thoughts they cause. Start observing all objects (the world around you, or your environment) from this perspective. It will be obvious that no one is doing anything, it is all a play of the *gunas*. You will be amazed how clear it all becomes once the *gunas* are identified: it is like having 20/20 vision.

When *rajas* is operating, the person will be projecting, arrogant, passionate, angry, frantic, overstimulated/active/driven, extroverted, jittery, can't sit still, afraid, dissatisfied, insatiable, possessive, jealous, controlling, can't sleep, bored, wired and tired – to name a few. *Rajas* triggers fear-based thoughts and actions; the person will project their stuff onto “others” or the “world” and he/she will go “unconscious” (*tamas*). One tends to speak too quickly, do things too quickly, drop things, bump into things, break them, have accidents and injure oneself. In the extreme he/she will be totally extroverted, driven by passion and desire to gain whatever object he/she is fixated on, certain that the joy is in the object. The mind is turned completely outwards.

When *tamas* is operating, the person will be in denial, blaming, holding onto the past or using it as a reason to justify action or inaction or as an avoidance strategy to deny his or her fears, making excuses for why he/she can't be honest or make decisions, rationalising, dithering, living in potentia, not be able wake up or get out of bed in the morning, exhausted, complaining, dull, lazy, depressed, feeling a victim, feeling the wrongs of the world on his shoulders, unloved or that the “world” is unloving or a bad place, cruel, uncaring, self-absorbed, etc. Here the mind is clouded, dull.

When *sattva* is operating, the person is peaceful, calm, clear-thinking, balanced, compassionately honest, loving, secure, taking appropriate action, owning all projections, cleaning up his/her *karma*, dispassionate (especially about his/her own thoughts and feelings), unconcerned, untouched by the opinion of others or the results of his/her actions, enjoying objects for what they are, i.e. fully aware of all their inherent defects, satisfied, whole and complete – etc.

## How Do the *Gunas* Function?

The *gunas* are programmed ways of thinking and acting. They are totally predictable. All the *gunas* build on themselves, so *rajas* will create more *rajas*, as will *tamas* create more *tamas*, and *sattva* more *sattva*.

The *gunas* all work together and at any given time one of them will predominate. *Rajas* and *tamas* are inseparable. I call them the “terrible twins,” James calls them “incestuous bedfellows.” For instance, when *rajas* is operating, the mind will be projecting outwards and *tamas* will be right there to deny it. They are just the programmes that run the individual (and everything else). They are a problem if you do not have the knowledge of how the apparent reality functions or if you identify with them. For instance, if you find yourself saying, “I am *rajasic*,” or “I am *tamasic* today,” you are identified with them. The person may be *rajasic/tamasic* today but you, awareness, are not.

Remember, you are the knower of the person, therefore you are the knower of the *gunas*. Again, whenever you find yourself saying “I” press “pause” and ask yourself, “Who is talking here – which perspective am I identified with – the reflected self (the person) or me, awareness?” If you can consistently do this it will change your life forever.

All three *gunas* have an upside as well as a downside, as does everything in this apparent reality. Without *rajas* you would never get out of bed in the morning or accomplish anything. *Rajas* is the active, creative “force.” It is the mode of passion and desire. Not all desire or passion is bad, however; you need a passion for self-inquiry and a strong desire for *moksa*. It is one of the qualifications. *Tamas* is the very substance of matter, a heavy and steady energy. Without it you not be capable of endurance. You would not have the staying power to complete anything and would more or less float off the planet. You would not be “earthed” – and you would never be able to sleep.

With too much *sattva* you can get stuck in a golden cage of experiential bliss, thinking happiness is the Holy Grail and that you are quite special. *Sattva* is not the be-all and end-all, even though *sat*, awareness (of which *sattva* is the most subtle manifestation), is actually the true nature of the mind. *Sattva*, however, is a state of mind that is experienced by the doer, the subtle body. It is purely experiential and therefore does not last. It certainly will not free the person from dependence on objects or end the subtle existential suffering that comes with it. It is the last object to be released before *moksa*. Yet it is a valuable energy for inquiry and should be cultivated, as it is the *guna* springboard for self-knowledge. “After” *moksa*, *sattva*, or peace of mind, no longer needs to be the goal, although one will still make choices in alignment with it. However, once all the objects have been negated along with the doer, it will be there naturally, and if it should not be, that is fine too because you know that as awareness you are beyond *sattva*.

## Is It Self-Inquiry or a Spiritual Lifestyle?

Many spiritual seekers are looking for a way to cope with their unresolved psychological issues or as a balm to salve their emotional wounds. Often they have the vanity to think they are pure and holy because they have had some kind of transcendental spiritual experiences or because they have walked away from a *samsaric* life when their “renunciation” is actually escapism. They build a “spiritual”

identity that makes them feel less small and afraid. This is one of the negative effects of *sattva*. Being “spiritual” becomes a lifestyle.

## How to Manage the *Gunas*

Other than gaining the knowledge of what the *gunas* are and how they operate, which is half the battle, you can do a great deal to manage them through self-knowledge. This means that you know that there are appropriate actions to maintain peace of mind for the *jiva*. If you are feeling brain-dead, depressed or lazy you can do something physical like take a walk or exercise. If you are bouncing off the walls with extroversion, stress, fear or anxiety, driven by desire or action – slow down. Skip the coffee, cut down on sugar. Find some time alone where you can sit quietly and breathe in light. Once you have calmed down, meditate, sit in silence or light a candle, do a *puja*, chant or pray.

Many enlightened people do not bother managing the *gunas* and simply accept whatever transpires in the *dharma* field, knowing it has nothing to do with them. This practice is fine if the underlying motivation is not a refusal to face binding *vasanas* or a way to camouflage the doer. If the mind is agitated or dull because of your life choices or lifestyle, freedom will not be that free unless you acknowledge the cause of the agitation in the light of self-knowledge. This is a common trap for spiritual seekers and one the ego likes. Often it is not lack of self-knowledge that is the problem. It is just that the “self-realised” person is avoiding doing what it takes to change their behaviour – meaning staring down their *vasanas* and getting their actions and lifestyle to conform with *dharma*.

## Practical Lifestyle Management

Take a look at your lifestyle and change what you can. Diet is very important for *guna* management. Learn which foods cause which *guna*. Examine what you do for a living, how you recreate, spend money and exercise. Stop hoarding unwanted “stuff” (psychological and otherwise). Examine your relationships with people. Don’t keep company with people who bring you down or if you can’t avoid them see how the *gunas* run them. See where they want things to be different and the pain it causes. People can’t help being true to their predominant *guna* when they are unaware that there is choice.

The practice of seeing how the *gunas* operate in yourself and “others” will put you in a whole new world of perception. Of course there really are no “others,” as there is only one self with three *guna*-manufactured bodies. By that I mean that they work the same way in everyone. The *gunas* run the show for everyone who is identified with the body-mind and the story of personhood.

If the predominant *guna* is *tamas*, clean out your cupboards, give away everything you don’t really need, stop staying up or getting up late, stop eating *tamasic* foods, get some exercise. Educate yourself about proper nutrition. *Guna* management is just common sense. Avoid depressants such as alcohol, sleeping pills and drugs. Be constantly on the alert for denial of any kind.

If the dominant *guna* is *rajas* be on constant alert for mindless activity, aggression, arrogance, projection, desire and extroversion. *Rajas* and *tamas* are the real problem-makers. Check your diet. Too much sugar, coffee and other stimulants exacerbate *rajas* and induce it. So do many over-the-counter as well as prescription

medications. More than half the planet seems to be on some kind of tranquiliser, and it is not hard to see why. James says that *rajas* is the disease of the twenty-first century.

If you observe too much *sattva* stop pretending that you are “special” because you have “out of this world” epiphanies, spiritual knowledge and lots of bliss, stop pretending that you are very holy because you meditate, chant for hours or have an enlightened *guru* (or worse, that you think you are an enlightened *guru*) or you think you have the moral high-ground because you are a vegan/vegetarian and live on sprouts.

Get real, keep it humble and keep up the practice of self-knowledge. The point here is that everyone has a predominant *guna* which will not only create their most entrenched tendencies (i.e. *vasanas*) but it will also be what has conditioned them to have a particular kind of nature. There is no right or wrong here, no better or worse. We do not make ourselves the way we are, *Isvara* – the *gunas* – do. The “work” involved in self-inquiry is identifying the *gunas* through self-knowledge and allowing the knowledge to help “you” manage the *gunas* by dis-identifying from them and standing as awareness.

## **You Can Choose the *Guna***

Once you find yourself acting a particular *guna* out, just observe what is going on. As a person you have relative free will to choose what action to take to achieve a desired result, and thus success in the world is possible. One can make “the best of one’s life” as a *jiva*. However, those choices themselves are determined by your conditioning, i.e. *Isvara*, or the *gunas*. Don’t judge or beat yourself up, be dispassionate about whatever is going on – it’s a movie after all. Trace back the train of events, thoughts and feelings to their source and identify what triggered them.

The practice of knowledge, the “work,” is keeping an eye on the person and his/her likes and dislikes. Make a note of the *guna* and adjust it in light of the kind of mind you are trying to create. Make peace of mind your aim at all costs. Each time you do this, it will get easier to manage the *gunas* and it will be easier to recognize them quicker when they appear as your likes and dislikes. Consider the likes and dislikes appearing in your mind as red flags, ways to identify the *vasanas* that keep a particular program running.

It is like playing a computer game: although it appears as if you are making the moves, all the moves that are possible are already programmed into the game. If you keep up the practice of knowledge, before long you will have deactivated the like or dislike that keeps the program running. It will no longer condition the subtle body, although it may still appear. You will no longer be a robot acting out unconscious motives by reacting to your environment. If the *vasana* is still there but you do not have to act on it, it is considered non-binding. As stated above, understanding the *guna* teaching means that you understand the nature of your environment (meaning *Isvara*), which includes you as a *jiva*. It is also important to remember that it is impossible and unnecessary to deactivate all *vasanas*. Not all *vasanas* are bad; you need a *vasana* for self inquiry and to motivate yourself. As long as a *vasana* is not causing excessive agitation in the mind, it is *dharmic*. Knowing the nature of the *gunas* and *vasanas* renders the doer non-binding.

## Quote from Edwin on the *Gunas*

“As it is with all the teachings of Vedanta, knowledge is power. Sadly, many people try to control the *gunas* without understanding them. This can lead to a painful exercise in what is called “will power.” When we do things we recognize as harmful but don’t understand the mechanism at work, we make resolutions, manhandling our psyche, so to speak. Sometimes these resolutions are kept; often they are broken. And we suffer accordingly.

“As the *gunas* are *maya*, they are illusory. They draw us into the world of objects, including thoughts and feelings, and lead us to identify with these objects. The whole point of identifying the *gunas* (which are also objects) and managing them is to understand the *gunas*, not to be afraid of what is bad or become attached to what is good in the *gunas*.”

## A Fearless Moral Inventory

Conduct a fearless inventory of your likes and dislikes and see which *guna* values they represent. Be totally honest, without shame, blame or fear as you investigate what you are invested in. Be really alert, like a sharp bird with acute monocular vision, witness the person you think you are and what goes on in his/her mind and life. *Triguna vibhava yoga* (managing the *gunas*) is a great way to purify your mind and prepare it for enlightenment. All the *vasanas* and *samskaras* (a conglomeration of *vasanas*) are nothing but the results of the *gunas* and their conditioning. They become binding obstacles (*pratibandikas*) when they are not understood and controlled.

## *Prarabdha Karma*, the Effects of Ignorance and *Karma Yoga*

If the effects of ignorance are playing out ( *prarabdha karma*) and you cannot change them, accept them. Don’t resist. Do what you can to ameliorate them with equanimity and through *dharmic* lifestyle choices. Know that it is not you and it will pass; this is what *Isvara* is bringing your way as the *jiva*, and you must flow with it. Resistance keeps you tied to the person and is a guarantee of more suffering. The *gunas* are constantly changing and impersonal, like everything else in the apparent reality; what use is control? *Karma yoga* is the only solution, as there is no way to fast forward this process.

It is common among people who have realised the self to still struggle with stubborn *samskaras* and with fears that seem to have no origin. The effects of ignorance take as long as they take to subside; it is not up to the *jiva* or to awareness. Fear is an acronym for False Evidence Appearing Real, and is the very nature of *rajas*. It is part of the fabric of the macrocosmic mind, and the *jiva*, being an extension of it, has unnamed and gripping fears that emerge from the depths like monsters from the deep. *Rajas* and *tamas* are impersonal, and together these two form the main problematic components of ignorance. They are not real. They belong to the causal body, not to you. It only seems like they belong to the *jiva*, because there is always a corresponding story that comes with them. The *gunas* belong to *Isvara* and have nothing to do with awareness or with the person. The person has a story and has suffered; there is no escape if you are a *jiva*. As long as one is identified with the person, *rajas* stalks you every step of the way and the pitfalls of *tamas* are waiting to engulf you.

## Following *Dharma*

The knowledge of how the *gunas* function alleviates existential pain and guilt and gives you x-ray vision into yourself and everyone else. It shows that no one is doing anything – or ever has. You can stop blaming yourself or anyone else for anything you did or anything that happened “to you.” Those who think that they are doers have no choice but to follow their natures. When you know you are not the doer, you can choose to drop “your” story. This is not to say you do not take appropriate action when required or that you would do harm to any part of the creation. You would naturally make choices that give peace of mind (*sattva*) and cause no injury, not because you feel guilt or duty-bound, but because you are doing what is right. This is what following *dharma* means.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari

## *Isvara, Jiva, Jagat* and the *Gunas: Maya* or *Isvara*, Which Comes First?

**Ken:** It is said in Vedanta that *Isvara* wields *maya*. Isn't it the other way around?

**James:** This is a tricky one because the word “*Isvara*” refers to both pure awareness without *maya* and pure awareness in conjunction with *maya*.

**Ken:** First, there is only pure awareness. Within pure awareness is a potential called ignorance, *maya*. *Maya* manifests. Because of *maya*, a small portion of pure awareness projects itself. The totality of this projection is called *Isvara*. *Isvara* is not a “person” but the total aggregate of creation which appears as a result of the projection. *Isvara* is the structure or system or mechanism or “machine” of the whole of creation with its inherent principles and laws that hold govern and run creation. It is because of *maya*, ignorance, that *Isvara* appears. That is, *maya* precedes *Isvara*, the Creator. The sequence therefore is: awareness -> *maya* -> *Isvara*. Hence *maya* wields *Isvara*.

**James:** In the first place, we cannot really speak of a “sequence,” because time has not happened at this level. Time is the interval between events. But the causal body (*maya, Isvara*) is the first event. We need two more events to come up with time. The third event gives us a way to evaluate the time/distance between the first two events. In fact creation is simultaneous. It all comes out at once and there is no time involved. That is why we can negate it. It is not an actual temporal creation. It is a projection. At the causal “level” there are several things to consider: consciousness, ignorance, the three *gunas* and the five elements. You can make different arguments for various sequences but the fact remains that all of these factors are required and they exist in potentia before time.

Your definition of *Isvara* is reasonable. *Panchadasi* presents both views of the relationship between *Isvara* and *maya*. Remember, it does not have to be one way or the other, because Vedanta is a means of knowledge and the way it is presented can be tailored to the doubt that is presented by the student. But your view presents a certain logical problem. Please consider the following:

Consciousness – *Isvara* – is conscious therefore it can wield *maya*. Wielding implies a doer, a conscious agent. So in association with *maya*, *Isvara* becomes the Creator (*jagat karanam*) and the dispenser of the results of actions (*karma phala datta*). But it is not a doer like *jiva* is a doer. It “does” by its association with *maya*. Its presence causes things to happen. It is like fire. It does not burn in the sense that it does not reach out and grab you and burn you. You get close to it and you get burned. So you can say it burns – but it doesn’t “burn.”

*Maya* is not conscious. It is neither consciousness nor not consciousness. It is something altogether different. *Maya* is ignorance, the apparent non-apprehension (*avaranna*, or veiling) of *Isvara* of itself brought about by macrocosmic *tamas*. *Isvara* ignorant of its nature is called *jiva*. *Maya* has another power called projection (*vikeshepa*). When it is operating, *Isvara* under the spell of its own *tamas* takes the objects reflected the subtle body to be real and because it feels incomplete owing to the veiling power of *maya* it chases objects and suffers. If *maya* is just ignorance and not conscious, how can it “wield” *Isvara*?

The limitation of this model is the fact that *maya* is made of three *gunas*, not two. So how do you account for *sattva*, the revealing aspect of *maya*? It accounts for knowledge, in our case self-knowledge. It appears in *maya* as Vedanta and reveals awareness by removing ignorance about it.

Your view is okay. It is: both *Isvara* and *jiva* are projections brought on by *maya*. This is true because everything is awareness and it is unborn, i.e. it never did manifest the world. Or to use the popular teaching, “nothing ever happened.” So in fact there is neither *jiva* nor *Isvara*. But if thesis true, there is no “sequence” either.

Summary: Vedanta presents creation both as evolution and as superimposition. They are both useful to remove ignorance. So you are right and you are not right. 😊

**Ken:** You said that awareness shines on the *sattva* of the causal body first, then on *rajas* and *tamas*. Also, that the problem of evil does not belong to awareness but is due to ignorance (*rajas* and *tamas*). I’m paraphrasing and maybe I didn’t fully get your drift, as this went by quickly and was not elaborated upon. But isn’t the causal body made of the three *gunas*, as it is itself the direct result of ignorance (i.e. *maya*)? So why would awareness shine on *sattva*... first?

**James:** It doesn’t really. You have to remember that the purpose of the teachings are to remove ignorance of the self, not to give a description of an object, the causal body, for example. Yes, the causal body is the three *gunas* but it is more, not that there is anything more than the *gunas* when you are discriminating awareness from experience.

But this teaching is not for discriminating awareness from experience. Although the creation appears all at once because it is just ignorance, for teaching purposes we speak as if there was a sequence because the inquirer understands things in terms of the apparent reality where time is operating, so we need to have *Isvara* appear as pure *sattva* before *rajas* and *tamas* emerge to avoid the problem of blaming *Isvara* for collective evil. Of course if any blaming or explaining is necessary, which it isn’t – “evil” is just ignorance of the nature of reality – *Isvara* as the three *gunas* is to blame. But the very idea of creation is ignorance insofar as reality is actually only non-dual, pure consciousness. The teaching that *Isvara* is pure *sattva* is meant to

point out that the creation is pure knowledge, uncontaminated with *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* and *tamas* too are just knowledge in the hands of *Isvara*, but when they show up in the subtle body they apparently delude awareness, and it thinks it is a *jiva* and it subsequently suffers projection and denial. The idea is a setup to convince the *jiva* that it needs to manage *rajas* and *tamas* for *moksa*, since *sattva*, the substance of the subtle body – where ignorance is located *jiva*-wise – is required for *moksa*. It should not blame *Isvara* and do nothing. You would be surprised how many so called “spiritual” people won’t do *sadhana* because they believe that the effects of ignorance (their conditioning), which stand in the way of the assimilation of knowledge, cannot be changed. Usually these people think that just knowing the self changes their conditioning automatically, confers some kind of special “state” that solves all problems.

From the relative perspective, *jiva* and *Isvara* share more than just their identity as pure awareness, *sat*. Their *upadhis* intersect or overlap in such a way that certain *jivas*, those with a high degree of *sattva*, i.e. relatively less *rajas* and *tamas*, also “wield” *rajas* and *tamas* to varying degrees with reference to the bit of *Isvara*, i.e. the life-stream – read: environment – they inhabit. They are “little” *Isvaras* (*avatars*), meaning they have a greater impact on their environment than ordinary *jivas* who do not have *rajas* and *tamas* under their control. Of course they do not manage macrocosmic ignorance, just their personal ignorance.

**Ken:** As well, isn’t so-called evil inherent and therefore inevitable in *maya*? I mention this because it sort of came off that evil in the world could be otherwise, like if everyone knew they were awareness evil wouldn’t exist. We both know that is not going to happen. Could you clarify when you find the time?

**James:** Yes and no. It depends on what you mean by “evil.” It is ignorance of *Isvara*, i.e. *dharma*. If you understand that you are awareness in more than a purely intellectual way, your *jiva* will appreciate *Isvara* and align itself with the *dharma* field (*Isvara*) in such a way that unnecessary conflict will disappear. Unnecessary conflict is conflict born out of gratuitous likes and dislikes. It does not serve the evolutionary needs of the total. Of course conflict will not be eliminated because creation does not work without *rajas*.