

Isvara Made Me Do It

Ram (James Swartz)

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Terrance: Hi, James. Thanks for your reply, much appreciated! Just a brief follow-up, if I may, on “saying no to *Isvara*.” One of the key points that clicked for me during your seminar was that *Isvara* gives us our *vasanas*, good and bad. There is a relief from guilt in knowing I am not even the creator of my own *vasanas*. But with that understanding also comes a certain temptation to sidestep any responsibility for one’s own bad behavior. Yes, *Isvara* is the totality, and therefore excludes nothing – good, bad, ugly or beautiful – but saying, “*Isvara* made me do it,” is still no excuse for acting like an asshole or cheating people in business dealings, etc. One still has to exercise one’s apparent free will in the context of the life choices one makes from moment to moment: Does this action feel *dharmic* or *adharmic*? It’s not always easy to decide, but once you step back and view it from the perspective of ordinary, actionless awareness, it becomes much more transparently obvious whether or not an action is appropriate.

James: Yes, the “say no to *Isvara*” teaching implies discrimination, the view from awareness. Without it, the ego will use it as an excuse to do what it wants irrespective of *dharma*.

Terrance: I also wanted to mention that your class gave me a new appreciation for the *Bhagavad Gita*. Most of my study has been in the major *Upanishads* and commentaries thereon, as well as the *Brahma Sutras*. You’ve managed to “turn me on” again to the *BG*, so thanks for that. I guess I had been “gifted” one or two copies too many of the *BG* by orange-robed bald people in airports and bus terminals. It’s pretty amazing to me that the *BG* is also a core text for dualists!

James: Yes, indeed. It’s a great text. My *guru* taught it every day for 40 years. If you like the more “advanced” texts, you might keep an eye on the shop in the website where my teaching of *Panchadasa* at Trout Lake two weeks ago will soon appear. I think you will find it helpful.

Terrance: One part of the discussion on the *BG* helped to resolve a major problem I was having at the time. I’m referring to III: 29, “One who knows the self should not disturb the understanding of the undiscriminating ones who don’t.” I won’t bore you with the details, but I’m still trying to extract myself (as *dharmically* as possible) from long-term involvement with a spiritual system I no longer adhere to, but a system in which my role has been that of a leader and teacher. I have vacillated about whether or not to explain my shift to Vedanta, and to educate my fellow seekers and students on why the approach in question is flawed and dualistic in nature. A clearer understanding of that *BG sutra* really helped here. It’s simply none of my business to teach these people about Vedanta. I’m not qualified to do so anyway, and I have to leave it to *Isvara* whether any of these folks “find” the teaching. It’s not up to me to convince or convert anybody, or to help remove someone else’s ignorance. This too was a great relief!

James: You are a man after own my heart, Terrance. It is one of my favorite verses, one that almost singlehandedly sealed my interest in Vedanta. We lived in Idaho and suffered a plague of Mormon and *Watchtower* zealots at the door on a nearly daily basis. I always had a spiritual *vasana* but was completely turned off to religion owing to the “we know best” attitude. Having said that, everyone who doesn’t have a valid means of self-knowledge has doubts about their path, and are sometimes benefited by an oblique comment that piques their interest. But the “I’ve finally found the light” approach is a tad sickening. A gentle extraction is indeed wise.

~ Love, James