

Maya or Isvara Comes First?

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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. On 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 (*vikeshpa*). When it is operating, *Isvara* as *jiva* 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, i.e. 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 no *jiva* or *Isvara*. But if this is 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. 😊

~ Love, James