



Advaita Vedanta

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Based on the words of Swami Dayananda and Swami Paramarthananda

Is there a creator?

Is there a creator, sustainer and resolver of the universe? Is there a god? If so what is *Ishvara's* (God's) relationship to me? This is such an emotive question. It has been asked since the beginning of time. Let us leave aside the emotion to one side in order to analyse fully.

Many have stopped believing in a white bearded elderly gentleman sitting in the clouds answering prayers and making things happen. Instead a vague concept of universal energy that can be called a number of things is what many come to regard as a 'divine power'. An external power that makes things happen.

The idea of a random universe is also quite prevalent. The idea that of all the minute decisions that could have been taken to create our universe, we are sitting in the only successful one and all others were annihilated. This randomness idea, for it is just an idea, is no more provable than us being made by the bearded guy in the clouds. People who believe either do so in blind faith. One is as probable as the other and neither can be proved or disproved. Believing that either is true is pure faith.

These, so called pragmatists, do not see the intelligence in the universe. Everything is here for a purpose. You see no waste in nature. There is no superficial adornment for the sake of it. Randomness for the existence of the universe is a belief system. It has no basis in fact. We have never found any trace of the 'also-rans'. No parallel universe whose parameters were so close to ours that remnants of it remains. Randomness does not operate in this all or nothing manner, randomness is a series of 'maybes'.

We have to inject some knowledge and logic if we are to have a reasonable view on creation. If we look at the empirical evidence around us, we feel that we are all separate beings living in a world of objects. An aircraft is a prime example. The passengers and crew are all individual people and seats, lights and all the workings of this aircraft are individual objects coming together as the experience of a flight. If we consider that the world is merely a collection of objects, then we are obliged to develop the idea of a creator; someone or something that made them. In other words, in a world of objects, we are obliged to invent god.

One could argue that in a world of objects one has to consider their creation and therefore the idea of a creator but that creator need not be god. I am not sure that the engineer at Boeing bringing together the parts of a seat thought of himself as god. That is the problem. Very few people think of themselves as god. At one time you used to be burnt at the stake for thinking that, but nowadays you are just locked up!

Consider it another way. Almost every object on an aircraft is man-made. It could be argued that even people are man-made but you know what I mean. People are biological systems and many would argue that such systems are a product of nature. That is why some of the earliest depictions of gods on our planet were symbols of nature. The sun god made everything possible. Water and Fire were also similarly revered. As we, as a species became more sophisticated, our invention of god became more sophisticated and organised. Modern religions are the artefacts of such sophisticated thinking.

Many would not view religions as sophisticated. They would view them as archaic. That may be so, but they do represent the latest view on god. The most modern interpretation of the creator that we have. The problem with these religions is that they do not account for everything that we experience.

If I look at myself in the universe, I find everything is given i.e. not produced by my own will or effort. If I analyse this deeply, I come to know that everything is given. The means by which I perform tasks and the results that are achieved by doing so, are given, laws and forces are given. I did not invent Gravity, electromagnetism or atomic physics. These things are given and I am bound by them in everything I do. These are laws that operate independent of me or anyone else.

In our solar system the sun is given, that it is producing light and heat that runs our entire planet is given. The earth with its tilt and rotation without which we would not have seasons or currents is given. That the earth has weather and climates that allow things to grow and sustain life is given. They all operate independently of us. We had nothing to do in their creation, they are all given.

More fundamentally that I need to have parents to be born is given. That I grow into an adult and die is given. That I am subject to illness is given. Different illnesses and how they are transmitted are given. That there are cures to some illnesses and not to others is also given. Plants are given in their infinite variety in all corners of the planet making the oxygen that sustains life. Indeed, our need to breathe is given. Our lungs are given, the fact that we need two lungs but only one heart is given. Different parts of the body and all its functions are all given. The fact that you can read this with your eyes and understand this through a complex mind is also given. If nothing is really produced but is given, then the nature of this process needs to be understood fully. One needs to

understand if all this is a 'given thing' then does it just exist or is there a giver that gives? It is the latter conclusion that gives rise to the concept of a separate god.

Let us say, for now, that these things are provided for us without us making any effort to produce them. There are laws, objects, concepts and ideas that run the universe and they existed before us and will exist after we are gone. They are, if you like, the rules by which we govern our lives. Rules that we are forced to accept because they form our reality.

The entire scheme of thing, that we call the universe, is given. For me to perceive and understand the universe, I am provided with senses and a mind with a capacity for reasoning. Capacity to remember so that I can recognise an object already known to me is also given.

So, when everything is given, then the cause and effects are also given. I may not understand all the laws that go into the outcome of an effect that I make to accomplish something but one thing is very clear to me. Everything is within the scheme; the blueprint for the connections and relationships are already provided. If I do this thing, then the outcome will be that. Even if the resultant effect is not there, it is not without reason. With my limited knowledge, I may not know the reason but there is a reason for the effect not to be.

When I look at myself, and the world in which I happen to be, I appreciate that this is a very big and complex thing. My eyes are complex; my mind is complex. Every organ is complex. The whole body is complex. So, if it is given, then certain possibilities are also given. These possibilities can surface or collapse. For example, a new star may be born, an old star will die away. All these are possibilities. The dinosaur is no more yet another organism may be in the making. It is all within a certain order.

This may be accepted as Natural law, that it '*just is*'. Natural law is nature's programming. It is also a given and these possibilities can get actualised (come to be) by nature's programming but nothing can be '*just is*' for everything is an effect and every effect has to have a cause. Only nothing can come from nothing therefore if something '*is*' then it has to come from something else.

There is another possibility. These possibilities may be actualised by interference, an effort, of a living organism. Bacteria can bring about infection in a wound, an animal may create a nest; a dam may be created by a beaver. All these possibilities collapse into the capacities that are given to these living organisms to do these things. Of course, human genius is given. Humans can create different possibilities again and again, new hardware, new software is a possibility. That humans can actualise this is also given.

In fact, I cannot say, I am the author of this. I find myself in a situation where a possibility is understood by me and I am also given the faculty of understanding so that I may do so. Therefore, how can I say that I am the author? If I cannot say so then I cannot say that I am the creator of this result. I am the creator of the initialising action because I have free will. I can choose to exercise my free will. To fulfil a desire, I can do something. That much I can say. I cannot own it.

I cannot say that I am the author though society adores a person who has given society a certain knowledge or invention. And we respect people who have contributed something by naming that discovery after the person who discovered it. If you were to ask those people if they did that, they are likely to say, I was at the right place at the right time. The one who has knowledge has a natural humility. Therefore, the maximum that I can say is that I am the author of an action because I take responsibility. It is not because I realise I am the author. I happen to choose to take this action. Sometimes the result is not present other times it is. I am the author of the action and not the author of the result.

All we do is start things. How it finishes up is not up to us. Consider the example of a flight. To decide to fly you used your capacity to think (given), to buy the ticket you used the Internet (given), to choose a seat you used the airline website (given), to come to the airport you used a car (given), to board the flight you used the jet-way (given), to take off you used the principles of flight (given). You have used all these effects yet you were not the cause of any of them, they were all given. Any one of these actions could have had a different result leading to you not flying. The very fact that you make the flight is driven by an infinite number of effects that are given, i.e. not caused by you.

One can say that in a modern society, we are all connected and do not need to be self-sufficient. We use things that are 'given' by others all the time. This is missing the point. All those things you used were also given to those who think they created them. The jet-way needed to be designed, built, installed and operated. The unique creative capabilities of the human mind were used in all cases. But our power to think, to be creative is itself given. You did not specify your IQ at birth and nor did any of the hundreds of people involved in the life of that jet-way. That is why the jet-way is given because the ultimate intelligence with which it was designed, built, installed and operated was not though an act of will.

If I were the author of the result, I would always get what I want. That is not the case. Let me give you a classic example. Every evening after work, I cross the road and catch a bus home. I initiate this task because I wish to reach home every evening and this action is initiated in the expectation that I will catch the bus and reach home. But actually, there are four possible outcomes to my action:

1 As expected – I cross the road; the bus comes and I board the bus.

2 Better than expected – I cross the road and a friend in a car sees me at the bus stop and offers to take me fully home.

3 Worse than expected – I cross the road but the bus is so full that I fail to get on.

4 Opposite to expectation – As I cross the road, I slip on a banana skin and wake up in hospital 3 days later.

As you see, in each case I initiated the same action (crossing the road) but the results varied according to hidden variables (friend's car, crowded bus or banana skin) not of my doing. These hidden variables were given. They were hidden because they were unknown to me when I initiated the action. Most evenings, the expected result arises and I pay no attention to it. Only when the other possibilities arise does it come to my attention. When the result is better than expected, I call myself 'lucky' and feel happy. When the result is worse or opposite to expectation, I call myself 'unlucky' and feel miserable.

In truth, I have to take what is given. If I have to take what is given then I naturally need a little more understanding to have an attitude appropriate to the reality of this action and result. To go one-step further, to be objective is to recognise all that is there. Only then can I be objective. All that is there happens to include one more significant fact and that is if everything is given, is there a giver?

So, is there a higher power that creates the crowd or throws the banana peel?

We have to answer the "is there a giver" question first because if the answer is no then the above question does not apply. If there is a giver then that giver must be all knowing and all-powerful. Knowing because everything given is complex. Even the smallest single cell structure is immensely complex. Every nucleus is complex. If there is such complexity, implying so much knowledge, and everything is given, I cannot say it is not intelligently put together. I cannot say it. Everything seems to be intelligently put together. My eyes and ears are intelligently put together. My hands are intelligently put together. Nails are given to make fingertips strong. In this scheme of things, I have kidneys, liver and stomach where they should be. Every gland has a role to play and therefore this is intelligently put together.

Interesting that the 'intelligent design' lobby in America reject the Darwinian view of creation that is one of natural selection and survival of the fittest? In fact, both the Darwinian and Intelligent Design views are limited in their understanding. Nature certainly plays a major part. If nature puts all this together, then nature is intelligent and we need to understand that. In nature there are things that are not intelligent – insentient things. But even these appear to be put together intelligently. You cannot be but

impressed when you look at the unique crystalline structure of a snowflake. Before going further, there is an important point to state.

If everything is put together for a purpose then we should say that everything is **Shristi**. Let us use this Sanskrit word instead of creation because an equivalent is not available in the English language. Creation is not equivalent to shristi. Anything intelligently put together is a shristi. The whole universe is a shristi. The question is “Is there a shristi maker”? I cannot say there is none. If I say there is none, I have to prove that this putting together, like a clock or camera, also does not have a maker. If a plane takes off and lands, I cannot say it does so by itself. If I say, it takes a lot of planning, a lot of construction, a lot of hi-tech application goes into it, then I have to accept that there is a group of people who are involved in the flying of the plane and that the possibility of creating a plane is given.

If you say there is a giver, then you have to ask where is the giver? This is where modern society has lost touch with our ancestors. Human heritage lies in the answer to this question. Where is the giver? Ask any Native American, Indian villager or Australian Aborigine, where is this giver, and they will laugh at you. If he follows the spiritual heritage of his forefathers he will look at you with a big smile. The question sounds strange in his ears. He will never say “up there”, because for him, the giver is everywhere.

To ask the question is wrong because to ask the question, you have already concluded that the giver is not here just as when I say where is John Smith, I have concluded that John Smith is not currently here otherwise I would not have asked the question. That’s a wrong conclusion according to that villager. To understand indigenous culture, you should understand the villager’s attitude towards, the earth, the stars, animals and birds, fire and water. That person has an attitude, which is imbued with reverence. A reverence that means recognition of the presence of a creator and in that attitude lies the answer to the question.

“**Where** is god” Is a laughable question for that villager. Where is not a proper question. “**What** is god” can be a proper question. But some people answer this question based on their education. They are no longer in the villages. How do they answer this question? Locally they cannot find somebody all knowing. They travel the world and find that everybody has limited knowledge. They speak in their own language and others do not understand. Since there is no one that is all knowing maybe God is not available here. And educated as they are, they say “God is up there.”

The question should be what is God, not where is God because when you ask where, you have already decided how God should look. If you ask where is so and so, you are asking to know someone as a person, as an individual, occupying space, having

a certain body/mind complex. Only then can you ask where is so and so. The person has a location and you already have certain knowledge about what that person should be. The person is bound by time and space. If you know the person, you can say the person is not here so where is the person. To conclude that the person is not here you must know the person and the person's absence. You know the person and how they look. When we try to understand who the person is then the question should be what is god and not where is God.

Suppose God is everything. Suppose I say that all that is here is God like that villager. That is the spiritual heritage of indigenous tribes. Most of the indigenous religions of the world have that kind of reverence. That villager's attitude is born of certain understanding, which can be taught because it is knowledge. Attitude you imbibe can be disturbed if it is not born of understanding. It remains undisturbed when nobody confuses that person. When someone comes and confuses then it is disturbed. An attitude that is born of understanding cannot be disturbed. But behind that attitude is understanding and therefore one can make others understand if one understands. This teaching tradition is the student to teacher lineage heritage of India. Therefore, knowledge can be handed over. This is a very well evolved methodology for handing over knowledge.

If you persist with the question what is God, we have to say this God should be all knowing because we are talking about all that is given. All means all that one knows and all that one does not know. What is known to me and what is not known to me is defined as all.

This all is a *shristi*. If it is intelligently put together, I cannot but presuppose that all is known i.e. complete knowledge. The pot maker knows what the pot is like. He also knows how it is going to be used and he also knows how to make it – skill – as well as all the things required to make it – material. All these are involved in shristi. This universe shristi that includes my body/mind/sense complex, implies all knowledge and it doesn't take any great intellect to understand that knowledge rests only in a conscious being. Knowledge cannot be in an insentient thing. Neither, by the way, can ignorance. A rock is not capable of having knowledge. It is not capable of having ignorance either. Only a conscious being can be ignorant as we are all. If one is ignorant then one can also know. That is what the teaching is about. If one knows, one can make others know. If one is confused, one can confuse others also.

Where there is ignorance, there can be knowledge and where there is knowledge, there was ignorance also. When we talk about all knowledge then there is no ignorance. Just as a little knowledge rests in a conscious being, all knowledge also rests in a conscious being. Once you say conscious being, all knowing and all skill has to be added. Therefore, the shristi maker cannot borrow skills from anyone. That God has got to be

all knowing, all powerful also. This raises another question because we don't take into account another cause necessary for shristi.

The obvious other cause is material. The universe has a certain reality. In keeping with that reality, there must be material. Can that material be separate from the maker is an important question. One cannot say God created this entire universe out of nothing. Only nothing can be created out of nothing. Therefore, you have to say that even God has to have something with which to create this world in keeping with the reality. That is very easy to understand. That the shristi maker must necessarily have material. And here is a very important question: between the shristi maker and the material is there any separating factor? Two things are separated by space in between. So in between this god and the material, if there is a separating factor then that separating factor should be space. Then the question would be who is the shristi maker of space.

The greatest joke in the modern world is that you can say "God is up there" and get away with it. Does 'up' mean space? 'In space' means there is an address for God. If you say it is not space then you have to tell me what that address is. You cannot talk of up. Thus, god cannot be in space because the question then arises who created space. Space and time are part of the universe. In fact, there is no universe without space and time. You cannot think of an object outside space and time. How can anyone say otherwise?

In the villager's answer, there lies a great truth. The truth is that the space is also god. The earth is god, the air is god. Everything else that is here is god. That's why in India we allow any form of worship, any form of prayer because everything is god. The villager's attitude shows that, behind this attitude is the understanding that the shristi maker should also be the material. Maker and the material must be one and the same. There cannot be a separating space between the material and the maker. From one standpoint you say that god is the material and from another standpoint you say god is the maker. If that is so, then everything born of a given material is not separate from the material. The shirt you wear is the fabric; it is not separate from the fabric. You cannot make a shirt without fabric. Fabric can be without being a shirt but no shirt can be without fabric. Where the created object is, there the material is also.

Where the shirt is, the material is. Where the material is the yarn is. Where the yarn is the fibre is. Where the effect is, there the material cause is. If the material cause is also god, where the universe is, god is. Therefore, space is god, air is god, fire is god, water is god and earth is god. Everything is god. What is not god? The universe is not a creation. There is no one up there dropping the planets here and there. It is all a manifestation of Ishvara. Therefore, shristi is not just creation. The word creation denotes someone sitting there, creating something and sending it out. Since god is the material also then shristi is a manifestation. Creation from the standpoint of knowledge

and shristi from the standpoint of material cause being god, it is one manifestation. Here lies the understanding of indigenous culture.

When we look into the scheme of things, we understand it is intelligently put together pre-supposing knowledge, knowledge has to rest in a conscious being. That conscious being must also be the material cause for this scheme of things. In other words, whom we call Ishvara, or God in English, this Ishvara is not just the maker. It is also being material is the very thing that is made. The made and the maker are one and the same. Anything we think of as Ishvara is going to be absurd if that Ishvara is not both the maker and the material cause. If both are one and the same then alone Ishvara is acceptable. If you say god is formless and is in heaven, it also becomes laughable in as much formless does not have a location, formless does not need a location. If you say Ishvara is both formless and all forms are non-separate from the formless, then you need to be understood.

Even if you look at this through the eye of physics, any form is formless. If any form can be reduced to atoms, and atoms into particles. Particles have no form. Each form is formless. There is nothing that is away from Ishvara. This is the essence of what we call Ishvara. In the answer of the villager is this underlying truth that Ishvara's manifestation is this universe. Therefore, everything is sacred. This is purely spiritual. There is no belief involved here. This is a reality to be understood. It's like any subject matter that is very precise like mathematics or physics where there is a certain clarity. It's not any other subject where it is vague.

For India, in their heritage, Ishvara is everything. In other words, everything is Ishvara. Ishvara can be without the world (in an un-manifest condition), but the manifest world cannot be anything but Ishvara. The fabric can be without being a shirt, no shirt can be without fabric. The effect is never separate from the substance cause and the substance can be separate without being the effect. This is what we say that the maker/material being is one and the same. This is objectivity, spiritual pragmatism. If you are going to be pragmatic, you have to consider all that is there. Don't leave anything out. But all that is here is Ishvara and therefore there is no question of any belief.

For Vedanta, god is not a matter for belief; it is a matter for understanding. Any understanding is of course believed to be true in the beginning, pending understanding. We call this *Shraddha* in Sanskrit. It is in every regional language in India. If everything is Ishvara, there is nothing to believe. Pending understanding, you can say, "I would like to know how it is". You cannot dismiss it unless you can prove that it cannot be true. To prove that it is not true, you have to explore and understand. All that is here is Ishvara is an equation. No equation is a matter for trust or belief. It is a matter for understanding. You can't say I believe the equation. Pending understanding you accept it. Unless otherwise proved, you accept it. Then you try to understand.

This is not difficult to understand. Understanding always implies a certain model. This is how you assimilate anything. No example can replace reasoning, but an example can bring home a certain reasoning. We can cite from our daily experience here that is appropriate. When you sleep, you don't experience time, space and encounter with objects. You don't see anything. You just sleep. You are there of course but you don't experience anything in particular. When you do not experience any particular object, you cannot experience time and space. That is how time and space are. This is equivalent to a condition before shristi. Shristi is both creation and manifestation. That is why shristi cannot be translated into a single word.

There is no shristi in sleep. You wake up from sleep and there is shristi. If your waking up is half, then you don't come alive to the physical world. You still experience a world created by yourself called dream. In dream, when you think of the sun, the sun is there. Along with the sun comes space and time, simultaneously. You don't create time and space and then later put the sun there. It is a big bang. When you see the sun there is time and space as well. Whatever you think of is there – birds, clouds etc.

To think of them you must necessarily know. You cannot think of something without the knowledge of the thing. You must have some knowledge about it. You have seen, some knowledge then you can think of them. If you have seen pictures of wings and pictures of people then you can think of people with wings in a dream.

Your knowledge is the basis of creation. Apart from knowledge you have **Shakti** (power) as well. Tremendous power because whatever you think of, it is there. Before you enjoy the power of a shristi maker, you should consider one thing. You require material. For this dream creation where did you find the material? Your memories and knowledge are the material and is the source of the manifestation of a universe in your mind. That's why it's nothing but knowledge. In dream all that you have is only your knowledge. And you being the material cause, you manifest as the sun, as time and space. Time and space are you, the sun is you, the earth is you, the birds are you and the people are you. You are the maker and the material. This is your daily experience. Now you can assimilate Ishvara.

Ishvara's knowledge is manifest in the form of the universe including your body, mind, sense complex which has the possibility of creating dreams. Ishvara is manifest in the form of universe and therefore I say universe is nothing but Ishvara. You can understand what Ishvara is. That is why we do not say in our heritage, Ishvara is male, or female. Ishvara is the maker and the material and both male and female. One conscious being that is both father and mother. We don't say there are many gods; we don't say there is one god; we say **there is only god.**