

All that is here Is Īśvara
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The Vedic vision of God is unique. Although the topic of God is not meant to be open for notions or speculation, we find that the concept of God differs from person to person and from religion to religion. If there is a God, why is there so much difference in how people view that God? The answer is very clear. God is one being whom one doesn't know, and yet, whom one cannot but say something about.

Vedanta, which is found at the end of the four Vedas, has something to say about God. In fact, it is the means of knowledge, or pramana, available to know things that I cannot know through any other means—perception, inference and presumption. Although pramana is generally translated as 'authority', the literal translation is 'that which is instrumental in giving knowledge'—pramayah karanam. Prama or ma means 'knowledge'. The suffix ana (lyut) indicates the karanam, or means. The Veda is a separate means of knowledge because the subject matter of the Veda consists of those things to which my senses and other means of knowledge have no access. Each means of knowledge is independent and self-proving. For instance, both my eyes and ears are pramanas. However, the knowledge that my eyes can provide, the ears cannot provide, and conversely, the information that my ears can provide, my eyes cannot. Also, what is understood by inference is generally not available for perception at the time the inference is made. Similarly, there are certain things talked about in the Veda to which we otherwise have no access. Therefore, the Veda is looked upon as a pramana.

In the Vedic tradition, a nastika is one who may believe in God, yet does not grant the status of a pramana to the Veda. On the other hand, one who does accept the Veda as a pramana is an nastika, even if he says there is no God, like a Sankhya, for example. Sankhya is a school of philosophy propounded by Kapila, who was a person of great intellect. However, his conclusion that there is no God was an unfortunate one. Why don't we leave God alone? God is the most abused being. In fact, it takes nothing less than God to be able to handle the abuse that God is subject to. We call him names:

God is a punisher; God is terrible. Yet at the same time, he is also very loving. Various theologies give us the double message. "He loves you; be careful." It is something like saying, "I love you; get out of my sight." To a worldly authority you can apply for leniency, but God does not seem to be available for mercy petitions. Here, at least you may be able to get help from a human rights organization if you are subjected to capital punishment. You may get a last minute reprieve. Not so when you are subject to God's sentence. You go to Hell forever. It is amazing that there are theologians who try to establish that when God says, "Go to Hell!" he really means it. Thus, people have different concepts of God. Even the person who says, "I don't believe in God," is only dismissing his concept of God. When asked which God he is talking about, he will say, "You know, the God who sits in heaven and dropped down all these planets—I don't believe in that God." I would agree with that person that such a God doesn't exist. In fact, I would prove it. Such a God is, therefore, not a matter for belief or non-belief. Even the person who dismisses God is only dismissing his own concept of God. Being a rational person, he has got to dismiss that concept. But whether dismissed or not, one always has some concept of God.

It is like the situation I face when I travel. People looking at me have to make some comment, some judgment about me. They have to either accept me, dismiss me, or make some comment because I am funny-looking. Once when I was leaving a hotel, a woman pointed to me and said, "Look! What a man won't do for attention!" People have to make judgments, even when they see a picture of the swami. Many people, knowing nothing about Vedanta, have come to my public talks. Even in a new place, where I was not known at all, people came to the lecture. When we asked why they came, they said it was because they saw the picture. So, they had to deal with that picture; they needed to make a judgment. They may say, "Oh, some strange fellow has come from India," or "Another swami is here." They must say something because they have to deal with that photo in one way or another. Although a swami, of course, doesn't need to be dealt with, the picture does.

You can't really avoid the question, "What is God?" because it is a part of your psyche. Whether you have dismissed or accepted God, his existence remains a mystery to you, for you find yourself in a given scheme of things

that consists of certain laws. These laws are many and varied but they do form a universe. You can, perhaps, even reduce this entire universe to mathematical equations. You can have differing standpoints based on these equations and derive different models of the universe. One thing is very clear, however: whatever be the standpoint, there is a given world, a given scheme of things. And in the scheme of things you find you are a person, an individual. This individual has certain endowments, a physical body that is alive, was born alive, is capable of growing into adulthood, and is subject to aging and passing away. These are given facts. When I look at this body I find it consists of certain laws, *niyati*. The body is caused by, and is subject to, certain biological laws. There also are physiological laws that govern the body, and there are definitely psychological laws. So, too, there are laws governing your ability to remember, to recall. There are laws governing your knowing and not knowing. All these laws can be brought under one word: 'order'. There is a physical order outside, a biological order, a physiological order, a psychological order, and there is an intellectual or epistemological order. All these constitute one huge order that is given.

Within this order, you have a certain freedom. As a human being, you are endowed with a freedom to desire, a freedom to will, which you call 'free will'. And you have the freedom to act, to accomplish, which is also an endowment. In this order I have the power to know, to explore. That power, the faculty of knowledge, is given to me—it is not something that I gather later. All of these are given—the seat of emotion, the faculty of knowing, the sense organs, and so on. In order for me to see this world as well as I do, my physical body/mind/sense complex is implied by, is part of, this given universe. And when I increase my knowledge and see the world more clearly, both that capacity and that knowledge are also given.

So much is given, in fact, that no one can say that he or she has created anything. Nobody can claim to be the sole author of anything, including a person who has discovered something not known before. For instance, in fundamental scientific research, a person may discover a law, a phenomenon not previously known. Perhaps his name is attached to the discovery. Yet we still cannot say that he is the sole author because his very faculty to know, to discover, was already given. And there must be something already there for him to discover. Further, the people who had worked on the pro-

ject until then also have to be acknowledged. The prior generations of effort, exploration, research and discoveries, mistakes, corrections—all these are supporting him. He has a better view of things because he is standing on the shoulders of these prior generations. His being in a certain time and place to be able to take advantage of all the prior knowledge, is given to him. And so he makes a discovery. How can he say “I am the sole author”? Thus, nobody is the author of anything. That is why you will find that many works in Sanskrit don't even have authors. They are all anonymous. Some of the best verses are collected in a work simply called Subhashitani, Good Sayings. The authors cannot be traced, but that does not matter, because the writers knew they were not the authors. They understood that they were endowed with certain potentials, which are given. Even the fact that there is a potential is given. And that you have the capacity to tap a potential is given. So the most you can say is that you can tap a potential.

You find yourself in a given world with a given body/mind/sense complex. This is the truth that nobody can deny. That is why the child asks the fundamental question: “Dad, tell me, who made all this?” Dad can only say what he himself was told when he was young and never questioned afterwards. When he was young, he was told that God made all this, and nobody questions that further. His granddad also confirmed what his father said. But the boy is not satisfied. He persists with questions: “Where is that God? Have you seen him?” The father says, “I have not seen him; I hope to see him. He is in heaven.” The father's statement that God in heaven created this jagat, the world, is a literal interpretation of such of Vedic statements as: divi tishthan sarvam karoti. “Situated in divi, he made everything.” God is divi-tishtha, but a literal interpretation may not be the intended one. Divi can mean ‘in heaven’, or, more appropriately here, ‘in his own effulgence.’ Thus, the correct translation would be, “Being rooted in his own effulgence, he created everything.” Unfortunately, it is taken literally as meaning “God in heaven created this world,” resulting in a cosmological and psychological split. And it is propounded from every pulpit as such. Thus a son or daughter, maybe as young as four or five years old, will ask: “Who created heaven, Dad?” Dad, very serious, says “God.”

“Dad, who created heaven?”

“God created heaven.”

“Where was God before God created heaven?” And the child has to come up with the only answer possible: hell. God in hell created heaven. Hell was so hot, he couldn’t really sit there. To air condition all of hell is a hell of a job, and therefore, God went to heaven and kept hell for certain people. Still the questioning continues: “Who created hell?” Finally he has to say that God created hell. “Where was God before he created this hell?” The only answer Dad has left is this: “Shut up. You ask too many questions.” Whenever you cannot answer, you use authority to stifle further questions. Using abusive language when you cannot answer is an old trick.

But that nascent, growing mind, with a freshness of its own, cannot easily give up the questioning. For a long time the child persists before giving up. Then he shuts his mouth and mind about that fundamental topic, that inevitable question. Later, he may conclude that God cannot be known, saying, “I am an agnostic. I don’t say God is; I don’t say that God is not.” He relegates the topic to the background, behind more important questions like how much he has on his credit card. When it comes to whether God exists, his mind is wide open and can go in any direction, like a freeway.

But at least he doesn’t just say, “I know where God is—he is in heaven.” That person has stopped thinking and just believes what he was told. The question, however, is never given up. Do you know why? The question is simply lying there, dormant, because, as a rational being, you seek an answer. And you can never dismiss your own reason. There was a person who claimed, “You should not be too rational.” I asked him why. “Because that makes life miserable,” he said. He used reason in giving me the reason for his conclusion, and argued with me for one-and-a-half hours, just to prove that he is not rational. It was quite amazing. Basically, you are a rational person because viveka, discrimination, is your basic endowment. And it is arguably your greatest endowment. It makes the difference between a questioning person and a non-questioning person. We cannot simply just go about conducting our lives, leaving this question about God to the philosophers or to some swamis to discuss. That is not possible because this question very much affects your personal life.

Unless this question is answered to some extent, you will feel insecure and uncertain about yourself. Everyone is born helpless, and to compensate, everyone is born with a capacity to trust totally. Whichever pair of hands

picked the baby up—that pair of hands was trusted totally by the child, thank God. A baby does not have distrust or mistrust—it has total trust. It has to, because it is helpless. If you are helpless, you have to seek help. That is intelligent living. And when somebody offers help, you need to be able to trust that person. If somebody offers help but you don't trust him at all, then what would be the result? A baby is born helpless and therefore, it needs to trust. It trusts totally, but slowly it loses the trust. That is because for the growing child, dad and mom are infallible, almighty—until there is a cockroach. Then the child runs to mother, thinking mother is infallible and that she will take care of it. In fact, only after running to mother would the child even look at the insect. When the child is with its mother, there is no problem—it looks at the roach. That means the child trusts mother. Then the mother calls dad. “Don't worry, I'll call Dad.” This is how the erosion of trust begins. So, mom is fallible. But then, dad must be infallible. And dad—a big guy, comes and says, “Oh, that's only a cockroach—don't worry.” He phones the fire department! I am just given an exaggerated example. But this is how the child loses trust. You lose trust, and afterwards, all your life, you are searching for the infallible. In fact, your whole life is a search for the infallible, and unless you discover the infallible, you are insecure. But the concepts of God, that we hear about from various religious pulpits are only fallible; they exhibit traits which even humans are exhorted to overcome. I have been told that I cannot afford to be judgmental. But God himself is presented as judgmental. On judgment day, he will judge you. When we present this God as judgmental, where is the infallibility? How a person can be judgmental and still be infallible? And what is the basis of his judgment? These concepts of God that are floating around are really damaging to a human being's psychological well being. God is presented as all good things, and all the opposite qualities are said to belong to the devil, Satan. Thus you have a vertical division right in your psyche. The person, the personality, is divided. And due to that split, you feel you can't afford to have jealousy because if you feel jealous, then the devil has entered into you. But still, you do have jealousy due to some psychological reasons—perhaps due to circumstances when you were growing up. When somebody gets something that you don't, then you feel jealous. You may say, “I am not.” Then what are you? “I only feel sad.” Why do you feel sad? “Because I don't get what

others get.” What does that mean? All right, you feel sad—do you enjoy the other person’s happiness, at least? “No, I can’t enjoy the other person being happy. I get angry.” That is called jealousy—the affliction arising on seeing another’s excellence is jealousy, para-utkrstam drstva jayamanas santapah matsaryam. This santapa, sorrow, that occurs when you see another person being happy is defined as jealousy. At least, you think he is happy. In your jealousy, you cannot but think he is happy, yet that may not be true. If you were to ask that person, he might tell you otherwise. There was a person who could not get married, and got very jealous when somebody else he knew got married. But the person who got married came to me, saying, “Swamiji, I want to come along with you and be a sannyasi.” From this we can understand that all of this is our own projection. We think that others are happy, which is not totally true, and therefore, we feel jealous. We can get rid of that jealousy, but not by bracketing jealousy as Satan’s doing. Satan is not sitting somewhere, pushing jealousy into your head, deciding, “Let this fellow have jealousy today. Let him have some hatred today.” There is no such vertical division. If there were a Satan, even he could not be separate from God. By definition, such a Satan could not exist.

The Vedic vision of God is a whole vision, without such a split. And although it is a fact, not simply an option that one may choose, there is a necessity to qualify it as ‘Vedic’, for the unfortunate reason that there are dualistic versions of God. And the truth is that there cannot be many versions of God. Like the fact that one plus one equals two, the truth about the nature of God is not open for accommodation. You cannot choose to have one plus one equal three. That is not a cultural option. It is not like choosing a style of music. For instance, both Indian music and Western music have their own beauty. One is not greater than the other, and if you think that one is greater than the other, it just means that you don’t understand the other. Things are different and we have to take them as they are; we try to understand them. When that is the case, each style is valid. Music is open to your choice, but the sum of one plus one is not. It is two. You can’t say, “In my country, one plus one equals three”, or “In my culture, one plus one is four.”

So, too, there is no such option about the truth of God. If God is a reality, then definitely I have to discover that.

To be continued...