

(Two notes)

note on Brahman vs Ishvara in Advaita vedanta

... And Brahman associated with the power of consciousness is Ishwara. All knowledge is in Ishwara and he illumines that knowledge resulting in the manifest cognition of these worlds. Are these worlds a real existence in Ishwara? Are these worlds a real existence apart from Ishwara? In Advaita Vedanta, they are nothing but the imagination of Ishwara.

So they are not really a part of Ishwara or their presence, their existence is not a real entity either in him or apart from him but it qualifies as an imagination by him of the self that he is. And this is an important distinction that will become apparent when we discuss the schools of Vishistha Dvaita and Dvaita. So all duality is the conditioned knowledge of the self by Ishwara, in Ishwara through the power of his consciousness.

The self is the true underlying reality, it is like the limit or the ground on which all this duality is superimposed or seen. It is imagined as the dualities and in the context of the imagination, when we are having a reference to the duality, we can only know the self as the one who imagines thus, therefore as Ishwara. However, even such a characterization, according to Advaita Vedanta, even such a characterization of the underlying ground reality called Brahman, the characterization of Brahman in a dualistic manner as if it is the dreamer who is dreaming the dream, the knower who is knowing the known, the seer who is seeing the seen, as having the power of consciousness through which he operates like this.

This dualistic characterization, although it is valid from the standpoint of our awareness of duality and trying to resolve the duality as being rooted in Brahman, from that standpoint it makes sense. But ultimately that also is a dualistic characterization of that reality which in its own standpoint, according to Advaita Vedanta, is to be regarded as absolutely non-dual, meaning that you do not associate duality as being intrinsic to that reality of Brahman. Brahman in its true nature, from its true standpoint, from the self standpoint, is nirguna, without duality.

But from the standpoint of imagination, from the standpoint of any reference to duality, any reference to a division, it is saguna, it is the one who is manifesting this universe, who is the cause for the universe, who is the one with the creative power to project this universe and therefore we say that is Ishwara. So this is the distinction between Ishwara and Brahman in Advaita Vedanta that the reality in its own true standpoint, from the ultimate, the highest standpoint, is paramarthika. It is without any association of duality or division, differentiation and so on.

But from a relative standpoint of cognition, from the plane of cognition that we are operating in, where we do associate difference and ask how that difference is to be resolved in Brahman. From that standpoint, that same Brahman will appear as Ishwara and Ishwara also is ultimately an appearance. That is very relevant to us in our standpoint but from the highest realization, there is no division between dreamer and dream.

It is the one self who appears as dreamer and dream but so long as you are dreaming, so long as you have reference to the dream, you know that self as the dreamer. So the dreamer-dream division makes sense from that standpoint but not from the highest standpoint of the self in whom this whole appearance is being identified. So from the self's own standpoint, it is pure non-dual existence but from the standpoint of the dream, it is the dreamer.

So it is Ishwara. And so from the dream standpoint, for us who are asking the questions, all duality is the imagination of that one singular dreamer. So it is okay, it is alright to say that everything is a conditioned knowledge of Ishwara from the standpoint of this duality.

So everything is an appearance of Ishwara, projection of Ishwara by Ishwara. So we have that bhakti channel where we can resolve all the duality as nothing but Him. And ultimately, when we completely merge our consciousness in Him without allowing any separation of ourselves from Him, that dreamer-dream duality is also merged in the realization, aham brahmasmi, there is nothing but that Brahman, that is the self and nothing but the self.

ekam eva advitiyam

note on Ishvara vs ishvara in Advaita Vedanta

A second note of clarification we can make regarding Ishwara in Advaita Vedanta. So when we described Ishwara earlier, we said he is the existence consciousness that underlies everything, in whom that knowledge of everything is and who illumines this knowledge through the power of his consciousness. He is the reality who makes himself appear as these worlds and plays through these worlds.

But here the question becomes, what about the Ishwara who is different from me? The Ishwara I am familiar with as my personal God. When everything is reduced to the one, what about the relationship between me and Ishwara? Is that totally non-existent in Advaita Vedanta perspective? Is there no such Ishwara? And the answer is, of course there is such an Ishwara, so long as there is a me who is the Jeeva, who is the human being, who is different from everything else. So long as I identify with the body and mind and say, I am a Jeeva, different from the Jagat, there is also an Ishwara who is the governor of all of this, who is the Karmapaladata.

For my karma, he is the one who is guiding this universe. It all comes together. Okay? So there is no question of myself being affirmed, a world being affirmed, without the affirmation, simultaneous affirmation of the God distinct from us and who is our protector, who is the one who is guiding us to the realization of himself and the ultimate realization of the Self in which all of these are appearing.

So the realization of Brahman happens through our connection and relationship with Ishwara. Our personal bhakti is important here to clarify, to clear our obstructions to the realization of the reality of Brahman. When we have cognizance of that fact that Brahman is the reality, we also have the realization that, hey, this Ishwara, Jeeva, Jagat, this triad that is so real to me, is ultimately the dream of that dreamer.

That is the next perspective on Ishwara. The dreamer, the singular dreamer in whom all this dream is occurring, in whom this Ishwara, Jeeva, Jagat dream is occurring, that becomes the next point of reference when we want to connect from our world of duality, from our dream world to the fact shown by the Shastra that there is one non-dual reality that appears as all this, that is being seen as all this, that all this is the conditioned knowledge of that reality. When we have that realization, that reality now appears as the one who projects, who imagines, who dreams this dream world.

So there is the dream world reality in which I am an individual different from other things in this world of my cognitions and so long as I am taking the standpoint of the dream world, I have to posit the Ishwara of that dream, of that world that I am positing and that Ishwara is as real as everything else in this. No question of I am going to affirm myself but not that Ishwara, no. So long as there is affirmation of myself as a Jeeva conditioned by body and mind, there is affirmation of this Ishwara who is the one having the Maya Shakti and who is running this universe according.

But when we have realization that hey there is the one reality of Brahman in which all of this is appearing, all of this is grounded in that, when we have that perspective we realize Brahman as the one who is the cause for the entire creation of duality. All duality is now unified and sublated in that Brahman as his creation, as his projection and therefore he now appears to us as Ishwara. And even that perspective as we said earlier is ultimately sublated in the realization of Brahman's own standpoint where there is no question of duality.

We do not bring in this question of me versus you, him and his power or dreamer versus dream. All of that is sublated, there is nothing but the Self. So all these three perspectives or all these three standpoints have validity, one sublated in the realization of the other until we realize that reality is unchanging, non-dual, absolute and that alone is the Self of all, that is Aham Brahmasmi.

So we have to go from the dream world where there is Ishwara, there is a personal relationship, there is every validity for bhakti so long as your standpoint is of a Jeeva. It is absolutely valid, it has reality and that level of reality but it is a reality that is sublated because ultimately it's a dream world and then you have the reality of the screen projecting that movie and ultimately you have even the division between the screen and the movie of screen and the play of lights, all that is merged in the realization of non-dual absolute reality that is Brahman. Om Namah Shiva.