



What is God?

Intelligent people consider their relationship with the creator, sustainer and destroyer of life as their most important relationship since every other relationship depends on it. Emotional problems associated with secondary relationships are quickly and efficiently remedied if we appreciate the primacy, power and reliability of our relationship with God. It is an eternal relationship, whereas human relationships are fluctuating, fragile and perishable. Vedantic inquiry and religious activities increase our knowledge and experience and strengthen our bond with God.

(1) God is a Formless Creator

God, the intelligent all-pervading principle, maintains the whole universe in perfect harmony through a network of universal laws. It is pointless to speak of intelligence without a body, a means of expressing itself. But because it pervades everything it is not limited by a finite body, so its body, *Maya*, is also all-pervading, just as space pervades every object appearing in it. In the absence of hands and feet and other organs, the Self, limitless awareness, creates by virtue of the awesome power of *Maya*, beautiful intelligent Ignorance (*sankalpa Shakti*). Although it is bodiless in the conventional sense, *Maya* can assume temporary, finite forms for the sake of communicating with the devotee, epiphanies for instance.

In Vedanta, the word creator is a figurative, not a literal description, because the entire creation is pure existence/consciousness which is eternal and uncreated. Both inert matter and the living beings in the creation are eternal, a teaching which

is backed up the law of the conservation of energy which states that matter cannot be created or destroyed. The Bhagavad Gita says the universe has no beginning, middle or end. Because of the fact that creation is virtual, not actual, it is pointless to ask why God created the universe.

We call God a creator, however, because the universe, which is non-separate from God, eternally goes through passive and active phases in the same way that we appear when awake and disappear when we sleep. So God doesn't need to create matter and living beings because they exist eternally. So what does God do?

God Doesn't Have an Active and Passive State

The question is figurative also because God isn't a doer. But we need some way to communicate, so we say that God 'activates' matter and the conscious beings when they are in a passive state. This 'activation' is in terms of illumination. Matter and conscious beings are created, sustained and destroyed by the complex law of karma. Simple observation shows that everything is intelligently designed and follows scientific principles. It is not a random process. God doesn't have an active and a passive state. It is eternal ever-shining consciousness. The seemingly independent law of karma generates the two states and when the passive state has run its course, it is 'activated' as it presents itself to ever-shining, ever-present awareness.

Just as we only create when we are awake and cease to create when we are asleep, we only create karma when we are alive and not when we are dead. But neither we or our bodies cease to exist when we die. The body wears out over a period of so many years and then 'dies,' which is to say it enters its dormant or passive state until such time as the law of karma generates a new body, according to a very subtle complex process, in which case it appears again, acting out the same tendencies it did in the previous life just as you do the same things today you did yesterday.

The Law of Karma Gets God off the Hook

As far as human beings are concerned, the law of karma causes birth, death and rebirth according to *punya* and *papa*, technical terms that mean good and bad actions. A good action is one that takes the universal laws operating in every situation into account and a bad action is one that causes the doer to contravene

the laws at the behest of its fears and desires. Good actions are not necessarily actions that get you what you want and bad actions often have good consequences. If you robbed a bank yesterday, you may wake up happy today but your happiness will be definitely circumscribed by considerable fear because the law of karma is built into every person. If you perform actions in harmony with God's laws you will have a fortunate birth next time, if not, not. So according to the law of karma, God activates your world. The nature of the world and your world specifically does not depend on God's will but on the law of karma alone. So blaming God for natural disasters or worldly calamities or for your bad karma is pointless. You can only blame the group mind or yourself because the law of karma depends on the nature of your actions or collective actions, war, for instance. And you can't blame society either because you are free to think differently. The activation/illumination of the universe includes the creation of the body-mind-sense complex. So the law of karma gets God off the hook.

(2) God Protects Us

God protects us in four different ways. (1) It provides a solution for every problem. For hunger food is provided. If you are sick medicine is available. If you are in doubt about something, God has given you an intellect to investigate the problem and come up with a solution. Science, for instance, helps us discover solutions to various problems. Unfortunately, God does not implement the solutions. God supplies the food but you need to put it in your mouth. The technical term for this type of protection is *laukika sadhananam*.

(2) The second method is knowledge of the rituals provided in the karmic portion of the Vedas that solve certain problems. With insight a devotee can discover which subtle power (deity) in the creation is responsible for a particular problem and invoke that deity with a ritual that will neutralize the problem. This type of protection is called *shastriya sadhananam*. For instance, many problems are caused by negative thinking. By chanting certain mantras, which are basically positive invocations of the Self in the form of these subtle mental powers, the negative thoughts are dissolved, the mind becomes peaceful and the problem goes away.

(3) Miracles. Occasionally, in answer to a devotee's intense and sincere prayers, a miracle is provided by *Isvara*. This method is called *aloukika sadhananam*.

(4) In answer to prayer the Lord gives the power of inner strength and changes the devotee's attitude (*bhavanam*) toward life so that a problem becomes an easily resolved normal situation. (*adhyatmika sadhanam*)

Of these four solutions, the first three are unreliable as they are object, not subject, dependent. Since they are unreliable, a backup solution is helpful. Changing your attitude is immediate and reliable because it only depends on you. For outside problems your problem has to stand in a cue until God takes care of the others in front of you but inside problems only rely on you. All you have to do is change the thought that is creating the problem and keep the resolving thought in mind until the agitating thought no longer appears.

(3) God is the Boss

Because we are totally dependent on God, God is the boss. So how do we know what God wants? Scriptures are God's instructions for living. There are no scriptures for other conscious beings because they don't have free will and little knowledge and power. They are only programmed to serve the creation. We are God's wild card. Owing to our amazing intellects we have great knowledge and power and, aided by free will, we are easily corrupted, can contravene the law of karma, destroy the world and come to grief. Since God is a compassionate non-dual Boss, It does not want us to suffer so It supplies a set of moral and ethical principles that must be followed.

Devotion is our natural state but when our values run contrary to universal values and we become solely devoted to gratuitous desires and fears we become demons, not devotees. Demons are always destroyed because they eventually run up against God and...well...the result is never pretty. Even demonic souls who outwardly show devotion live in vain. Witness the long line of disgraced 'holy' men...the 'crazy wisdom' gurus who flouted *dharma*...in the last fifty years.

On the other hand, once you surrender to God, liberation is guaranteed. Surrender, however, does not exempt you from your responsibility to practice *dharma* and avoid *adharma*.

If you understand God as a creator, protector and ordainer, you are a true devotee and are well prepared to attain the greatest goal of life.

This article is based on a transcript of one of Swami Paramarathanada's talks.