

Roles of Iswara in Advaita Vedanta

Why is it important?

- 1) A clear, correct, and consistent definition and understanding of the roles Iswara in Advaita Vedanta is necessary for the study of ultimate goal of self-knowledge.
- 2) To remove the possibility of conflating Iswara with Atma. [Iswara ≠ Atma or Brahman]
- 3) To remove the possibility of conflating Iswara realization with Self-realization.

Roles of Iswara

1. Iswara as Creator, Sustainer, Destroyer & "Purusha"

- a) **Iswara is Brahman associated with the creative power called Maya** - defined as the *Srishti-Sthiti-Laya Karta*—the cause of creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos.
- b) **Vedantic Definition:** In the *Brahma Sutras* (1.1.2), this is called the *Tatastha Lakshana* (the functional definition) of Iswara: "That from which the origin, sustenance, and dissolution of this universe proceed."
- c) **Is Iswara "Purusha"?**
 - i) **Yes**, in the cosmic sense. In Vedic literature (like the *Purusha Suktam* of the Rigveda), *Purusha* refers to the Cosmic Being—Consciousness functioning through the macrocosm.
 - ii) **Important Distinction:** Do not confuse the noun **Purusha** (Cosmic Consciousness) with the adjective **Paurusheya** (human authorship).

2) Iswara and the Upanishads: The Concept of "Apaurusheya"

- a) **Clarification on terminology:** The standard Vedantic term is **Apaurusheya** (*a-pauruseya* = "not created by any human or finite individual"), rather than *Apurusha*.
- b) **Is Iswara the "Author" of the Vedas/Upanishads?**
 - i) Strictly speaking, in Vedantic tradition, **Iswara is not an "author" who composed the Vedas**. If Iswara wrote them like an author writes a book, the Vedas would be subject to bias or personal limitations (*Paurusheya*).
 - ii) Instead, Iswara is considered the **Revealer** or **Manifestor** of the Vedas. At the beginning of each cosmic cycle (*Kalpa*), Iswara "breathes out" the eternal cosmic laws and wisdom without altering them.
 - iii) **Textual Reference:**
 - (1) "*As smoke spontaneously arises from a lighted fire fed with damp fuel, even so, my dear, the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda... are the breath of this Infinite Reality.*" — **Brahadaranyaka Upanishad (2.4.10)**
 - (2) **Analogy:** Just as sunlight reveals the objects in a room without "inventing" them, Iswara reveals the Vedic mantras to the minds of the ancient *Rishis* (seers/listeners).

3) Iswara and Karma Yoga

- a) Karma yoga is not merely ethical action. Without Iswara, what you practice is simply **samatva** (equanimity) which is good, but not yet yoga . **The moment you recognize Iswara, that ordinary samatva is converted into karma-yoga** . Here is exactly how Iswara plays a role:
- b) **Iswara as the Giver of Results (karma-phala-dātā)**
 - i) When you perform any action, the result does not come from your effort alone. It comes from an **infallible order** — the law of karma, which is non-separate from Iswara . Therefore, **Iswara is the karma-phala-dātā**, the giver of the fruits of actions, and you are only the **karma-kartā**, the doer of action .
 - ii) **Example:** When you shout (cause), the sound waves travel at a specific speed (effect). You exercised free will — itself a gift from Iswara — but the resulting effects, governed by the laws of physics, unfolded naturally . Iswara is that **order itself**.
- c) **Iswara as the Law of Dharma (karmādhyakṣa)**
 - i) The karma-yogī recognizes that **dharma (moral order) is not separate from Iswara**. Conformity to dharma, when looked upon as Iswara, becomes worship. **You cannot be a karmayogī without this recognition** — an atheist can be ethical, but not a yogī. The Lord presides over the law of karma as **karmādhyakṣa** .
 - ii) **Key point:** You have to play different roles in life — father, son, employee, employer. Every role carries a script, and **dharma is that script**. When your likes are pitted against what is right, and you give up your like to do what is right, **that action itself is worship offered to Iswara**, because you are in tune with Him.
- d) **Iswara as the Recipient of Your Offerings (īśvarārpaṇa-buddhi)**
 - i) The karma-yogī performs every action — whether mundane worldly action or religious action — as an **offering to the Lord** . This is called **īśvarārpaṇa-buddhi** . It is the attitude of a servant who goes about doing various actions for the sake of the master .
 - ii) You do not need to perform only *special* rituals; **every time you conform to dharma recognizing it as Iswara, you are worshipping Him** . As the Gita says: "Through one's duty, worshipping him from whom is the creation of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, a human being gains success." (Gita 18.46)
- e) **Iswara as the Source of Grace in Results (Iswara-prasāda-buddhi)**
 - i) When the result comes — whether favorable or unfavorable — **you take it as prasāda, a gift from the Lord** . This is because the result is determined by the laws that are non-separate from Iswara . You cannot say, "The laws have changed, so my food is not good" - there can be a mistake in your karma, but the law itself is innocent.
 - ii) **Practical attitude:** While cooking you may not think of Iswara, but after cooking you offer the food to Him. The way the food turns out is determined by the laws of Iswara — **you receive it as His grace** .
- f) **Iswara as the Platform for Self-Growth**

i) Iswara is not authoring your life by its own discretion — **you are the one who write your script through your actions**, and Iswara extends the helping hand you ask for. Life is not pre-written or random; the cause-and-effect relationship is completely impersonal. **The blank page of your future is filled by the causes you put forth today** . Iswara provides a **platform for selfgrowth (yoga-Sastra) and self-discovery (brahma-vidyā) [Self-knowledge]**

4) Iswara and Upasana Yoga

- a) Upāsana is **mental worship** — it is a purely mental activity (*mānasa-vyāpāra*) with **saguṇa-brahma** (the Lord with attributes) as its object . Here, Iswara's role is distinct:
- b) **Iswara as the Object of Meditation (upāsya devatā)**
 - i) In upāsana, you dwell **reverentially upon the Lord** as an object of worship . You look upon Iswara as something different from yourself — there is **jīva-Iswara bheda** (duality) . **This is why it is called bheda bhakti or dvaita bhakti** .
 - ii) **Example:** In the **Sāṇḍilya Vidyā**, you meditate upon Paramatma as manomayaḥ prāṇa-śarīraḥ — one who is full of knowledge, associated with prāṇa, and full of effulgence . In **Vaiśvānara Upāsana**, you meditate on the Lord as having various limbs of the cosmos .
- c) **Iswara as the Means of Mental Purification and Expansion**
 - i) While **karma-yoga gives purification of the mind** (*antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*), **upāsana-yoga gives onepointedness and expansion of the mind** . By meditating on the **viśvarūpa** (cosmic form) of Iswara, you see everything as sacred and do not resist or hate anything .
- d) **Iswara as the Goal of Krama Mukti**
 - i) The yogī who follows **saguṇa Iswara upāsana** (meditation on God with features) attains the **supreme beginningless abode** — that is Iswara Himself — through **krama mukti** (gradual liberation) . This is **far superior to any finite result from karma or dharma** .
 - ii) **Why superior?** Upāsana yields **infinite result** because it connects you to the Infinite. Karma and dharma yield only **finite results** .
 - iii) **Caution:** **This should be conflated with Self-knowledge.**
- e) **Iswara as the One Who Burns All Papams**
 - i) The Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.24.3 declares that the **Vaiśvānara upāsaka's** pāpams are burned like the fibers of iṣīkā grass in fire. As an Īśvara-upāsaka, properly qualified by the relevant śāstric conditions, he may subsequently attain krama-mukti.”

5) The Common Thread: **Jīva-Iswara Bheda in Both Paths**

- a) In **both** karma-yoga and upāsana-yoga, you operate with **duality** — you are the devotee, and Īśvara is the Lord . This is a deliberate and necessary stage:
- b) Detailed in the table below:

Aspect	Karma Yoga	Upasana Yoga
Relationship	You as doer offering to Iswara	You as meditator meditating on Iswara

Key Attitude	Īśvarārpaṇa-buddhi + Prasāda-buddhi	Reverential dwelling on the Lord
Medium	Physical, oral, mental actions	Purely mental activity
Purpose	Antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi (mind purification)	One-pointedness + expansion of mind
Result	Preparation for jñāna	Krama mukti or preparation for jñāna

c) **Important note:** Both paths preserve the *kartṛtva* (doership) — the sense that "I am the doer" is not yet negated. Only *jñāna* (self-knowledge) can negate the sense of agency. Therefore, karma-yoga and upāsana are preparatory steps, not the final destination of *Jnana Yoga – Self-knowledge*.

6) Iswara before Self-Knowledge: The Triangular Format (Vyavaharika Domain)

- Yes**, before realizing one's true nature through *Jnana Yoga*, an individual operates entirely within the realm of duality (*Dvaita*) and relative reality (*Vyavaharika Satyam*).
- In this domain, reality is naturally experienced in a **Triangular Format (Triputi)**:
 - Jiva**: The individual seeker/experiencer (bound by limited body-mind).
 - Jagat**: The experienced external world / nature.
 - Iswara**: The supreme Governor, Creator, and giver of the fruits of action (*Karma-Phala*).
- Purpose**: This 3-fold framework is vital for *Karma Yoga* and *Upasana Yoga*. It gives the Jiva a sense of moral order, humility, and a devotion target to purify the mind (*Chitta Shuddhi*).

7) After Self-Knowledge: The Binary Format

- Yes**, once Self-Knowledge dawns, the 3-fold framework collapses into a simple **Binary Format: Atma** (Self) and **Anatma** (Not-Self).
- The Shift**: Through *Atma-Anatma Viveka* (discernment between Consciousness and matter), the seeker realizes that everything falls into two categories:
 - Atma**: Pure, unconditioned Consciousness (the ultimate Subject).
 - Anatma**: Everything observed—Jiva, Jagat, and Iswara
- Status of Iswara**:
 - Iswara's *macrocosmic body/conditioning* (*Maya / Samashti Upadhi*) is recognized as *Anatma* (and therefore *Mithya* / dependently real).
 - Iswara's *essential nature* (*Swarupa*) [Iswara-atma] is recognized as pure Consciousness—which is identical to **Atma**.

8) Iswara and The Mahavakya: *Tat Tvam Asi* ("That Thou Art") - *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7

a) Analysis of 'You are That'

i) Option 1

(1) **You = Jiva** = ((causal body + causal body + gross body) + (Reflection of Brahman in Avidya) + Brahman)

(a) You = Jiva = A + B + Brahman

- (2) **That = Iswara** = ($\sum$ of causal body + $\sum$ of causal body + $\sum$ of gross body) + (Reflection of Brahman in Maya) + Brahman
(a) That = Iswara = $\sum A + C + \text{Brahman}$
- (3) As: **(A + B + Brahman) =/ ($\sum A + C + \text{Brahman}$)**
- (4) Therefore: **(You = Jiva) =/ (That = Iswara) [Duality relation]**
- (5) Therefore: **Option 1 is the incorrect solution**
- ii) **Option 2**
- (1) **You = Jiva-atma** = (Jiva – ((causal body + causal body + gross body) + (Reflection of Brahman in Avidya)))
(a) You = Jiva-atma = Brahman
- (2) **That = Iswara-atma** = (Iswara – (($\sum$ of causal body + $\sum$ of causal body + $\sum$ of gross body) + (Reflection of Brahman in Maya)))
(a) That = Iswara-atma = Brahman
- (3) As: **Brahman) = Brahman**
- (4) Therefore: **(You = Jiva-atma) = (That = Iswara-atma) [Identity relation]**
- (5) Therefore: **Option 2 is the correct solution**
- iii) **Summary,**
- (1) Jiva =/ Iswara [Dual relation]
- (2) Jiva-atma = Brahman [Nondual relation]
- (3) Param-atma = Brahman [Nondual relation]
- (4) Jiva-atma = Iswara-atma [Nondual relation]
- iv) The above analysis is based on the traditional Hermeneutic method called **Bhaga-Tyaga-Lakshana** (retaining the essence while discarding non-essential conflicting attributes). This analysis can also be shown as per the following table:

Domain	Tvam ("You")	Tat ("That")	Relationship
a) Vyavaharika <i>(Literal Meaning / Vachyarth)</i>	Jiva: Conditioned by individual body-mind (<i>Vyashti Upadhi</i>); limited knowledge, limited power.	Iswara: Conditioned by cosmic power (<i>Samashti Upadhi / Maya</i>); all-knowing (<i>Sarvajna</i>), all-powerful.	Jiva $\neq$ Iswara <i>(A wave is not the entire ocean)</i>
b) Paramarthika <i>(Implied Meaning / Lakshyarth)</i>	Jiva-Swarupa: Pure Consciousness (Atman) stripped of body-mind conditioning.	Iswara-Swarupa: Pure Consciousness (Paramatman) stripped of cosmic Maya conditioning.	Jiva-Atma = Iswara-Atma = Brahman <i>(Water of the wave = Water of the ocean)</i>

v) **Classic Analogy: The Wave and the Ocean**

(1) **Literal Level (*Vyavaharika*):** The small wave (*Jiva*) says to the vast ocean (*Iswara*), "You are huge and create me; I am small and fragile." Here, Wave $\neq$ Ocean.

(2) **Essential Level (*Paramarthika*):** If you strip away the temporary shapes (*Upadhis*) of "wave" and "ocean," what remains? **H₂O**. Water = Water.

9) **Key takeaway:**

- i) Iswara is indispensable in the relative domain (*Vyavaharika*) for living, purifying the mind, and gaining knowledge.
- ii) Iswara in the absolute domain (*Paramarthika*), the limitative adjuncts fall away, leaving only non-dual Brahman (*Ekam Evadvitiam*). [Iswara-atma = Atma/Brahman]