

Criticism, Self esteem and the Doer

Dear Ram,

As you know, I have been struggling to properly understand the "doer" aspect of myself.

On examination of my thoughts and actions, I find that the problem with taking myself to be the "doer" is the resulting feeling of "did I do well? did I do poorly?" I know that as the "doer" I have only a very limited control. Yet, even if I have a *some* control, this feeling of "gauging" whether I did well or not inevitably arises.

However, I find that a dysfunctional tendency to judging/evaluate my actions arises only when I feel my actions are being/will be judged/evaluated by "others", and not otherwise. Because my focus shifts from "doing" to evaluating how "others" would be judging me.

So, I feel now that the problem with "doership," to a large degree, lies not in taking myself to be the "doer", but thinking that there is an "other" who is observing/judging "me." And this is dysfunctional because while I might be the "doer," as far as "reality"/awareness for me is concerned, I am the only observer of all things, and there is no other "observer" of myself.

However, not just saying it, but truly living it would mean that one's fundamental motivations to "do" things need to be re-evaluated, because one cannot "get" anything by fame/success/being liked by others (which mean nothing if I truly understand that I am the "only observer" and hence am actually always "alone.")

I am not sure if this understanding is correct, or if the mind still confused about the concept of "doership" in some way?

Dear Graham,

Your understanding is correct. When you do an analysis of action, you can make two conclusions. First that there is no doer, that doing happens because awareness activates all the factors in the field of existence by its mere presence. So if you are going to say that there is a doer you would have to lay equal responsibility at the feet of the *gunas* and the self. But since neither the *gunas* or the self are capable of action, there is no actual author of action. It (apparently) happens. If there is not actual author...looking at it from the level of the self...there is an apparent doer if we take the apparently reality into account. Unless you have an idea that the dishes need to be washed the dishes will not get washed. So the doer is an idea in the intellect which the self under the spell of ignorance enlivens, making individual actions possible. So in this sense there is a doer. It is not a real doer. But for all intents and purposes we can take it as a real doer with reference to its situation in Maya.

The problem with the self masquerading as a doer is that it thinks that it is limited, incomplete and inadequate when *avidya* is operating. (A *jnani* has no such problem. He or she just does what is asked by life and does not think about it because he or she knows that action and its results are unreal and that the self is not a doer. But a *samsari* is in a different situation because he or she lacks self confidence.) The self is actually limitless and completely adequate to deal with any situation, including the positive and negative opinions about it of apparent others, but when *avidya* operates it has lost its confidence. To regain confidence it looks to validation from others. This is called *matsarya*, in Vedanta. In this context it means that it compares itself to others. It is a symptom of *rajas*.

One thing that happens when the self apparently becomes a doer, is that self ignorance appears as the question about the appropriateness of one's actions. It is a natural question but it is a proxy for the fundamental doubt about the nature of the doer, the self. (Remember, if there is a doer and it is a conscious being, it has to be the self in so far as there is no other candidate because reality is non-dual). So 'did I do OK?' is really "Am I OK?" This is a problem because no action can provide an answer to this question. Even in the case where a doer can achieve success in the world with skillful actions and garner the good opinions of others, his or her self worth would be conditional, limited to the field of his or her actions. A great businessman, for example, may be a lousy lover. So success through action in one arena does not remove low self esteem across the board.

Although it is true to some degree, your statement that you "find that a dysfunctional tendency to judging/evaluate my actions arises only when I feel my actions are being/will be judged/evaluated by "others", and not otherwise" is not completely true. For example, you are lost in the forest and there is no one else to evaluate your attempts to become unlost. You will question every turn that you make. It is also true in *samsara*. You often find individuals who are treated with the greatest respect and enjoy the high opinions of others who are totally lacking in self confidence...because only you can validate yourself.

Your statement " So, I feel now that the problem with "doership," to a large degree, lies not in taking myself to be the "doer", but thinking that there is an "other" who is observing/judging "me." And this is dysfunctional because while I might be the "doer," as far as "reality"/awareness for me is concerned, I am the only observer of all things, and there is no other "observer" of myself" is absolutely correct. The operative words are 'thinking that there is an other.'" It means there is no other. If there is someone judging and observing you it is just yourself under the spell of ignorance. And you remove this self judgment but accepting the knowledge that you are whole and complete, pure and perfect as God made you. Even if you cannot see that you are judging yourself unfairly and you actually believe that others are judging you, you need not care what they think because they really do not care what you do or who you are...although they seem to. They judge you unfairly because they have unconsciously judged themselves unfairly. This kind of self judgment is difficult to accept, so they project their own inadequacies on you. And you swallow it because you do not know that you are fine as you are, both in a relative and an absolute sense.

Your final statement " However, not just saying it, but truly living it would mean that one's fundamental motivations to "do" things need to be re-evaluated, because one cannot "get" anything by fame/success/being liked by others (which mean nothing if I truly understand that I am the "only observer" and hence am actually always "alone" is also true. You are the sole authority with reference to your actions. And since it is a fact that action will not produce liberation but action is necessary to prepare the mind for liberation, one's actions...assuming one's sole motivation is liberation...should be directed toward obtaining a pure mind. And one's self judgments should be limited to how successful one is with reference to this goal, not the opinions of others concerning one's identity or the appropriateness of one's actions in the world.

If you want high self esteem as a doer going for *moksa*, you need to do your *sadhana* in a professional manner. To take a professional approach, one should be very clear that *moksa* is the only worthwhile goal. This whole spiritual thing starts with an inquiry into one's motivations.

Graham: Of course, I do truly appreciate that if one must be a "doer", there is no better way to do that than with a "*karma yoga*" attitude. Yet, I find it difficult to break dysfunctional habits, which were all created from the deeply held past assumption that it's very important to be successful/liked by others, etc. Do you have any advice on how to break/change such habits, in addition to maintaining a karma yoga attitude?

Thanks and love as always

Ram: One way is not to associate with people who make negative judgments about you. Or if you care for them, then confront them and make it clear that you do not appreciate their views because they are not true. You would be surprised how quickly people shut up when you confront them. This particularly applies to parents who are generally the source of most major self esteem issues. They brainwashed you when you were too young to understand what they were doing and unless you were properly weaned or you weaned yourself properly, there will be a mom and pop in your mind most of the time criticizing and complaining about you. Drop friends who cannot refrain from criticizing you. I am ruthless about this issue. It is fine with me what people think and I am happy to hear a negative judgment once or twice. I will think about it and see if it is reasonable or not. But if it persists it can be a deal breaker. On very rare occasions I spend time helping the person to see that it is their own inadequacy that is being expressed. If you want the opinion of others, take scripture's opinion to be your own. It says you are fine in every way.

Graham: How does one cultivate a better control over one's mind and focus of attention (so that when with "others," I can focus only on doing the "right thing", rather than on how my actions would be evaluated?) (I recently discovered I might have a mild case of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - nothing that bothers me personally (because it is as it is), but just mentioning in case that's useful to know in any way).

Ram: Well, in the last analysis this seems to be is a dispassion issue. You have to find out why you care what others think. I am not a good person to give advice on this issue because I never did care what people thought about me. I always thought that everyone else was crazy and I just did what I wanted. Anyhow you will be happy to know that there is no law (yet) that requires you to care what people think. *Samsaris* in general are fools, so why value their opinions?

Also, see to it that your lifestyle is sattvic. The ADHD info was useful. It sounds to me like your mind is pretty *rajasic*. *Matsarya* is a symptom of *rajas*. So you counteract it by creating a more peaceful environment and habits. What is your age? Are you in your twenties?