

Aham Bhokta: The Sense of Enjoyership

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Zadie: Hi again, Ted.

I'd be very grateful if you could look at these questions about "*aham bhokta*," please.

I understand that doership is the "*aham karta*" thoughts, which are one of the ways *ahamkara* manifests, erroneously attributing ownership of and responsibility for the interaction of the body-mind-sense complex and *jagat* to the self/I. Is that accurate?

Ted: Yes.

Zadie: I can see that the mind is rife with those kinds of thoughts, pretty much every time it uses a verb in first-person singular, which is all the time, pretty much – part of the programme.

Ted: Yes. But it is important to understand that there is nothing wrong with speaking from the perspective of the ego as long as you understand that the ego is not your true identity and, moreover, is not technically a doer in the sense of being an autonomous volitional entity who is solely responsible for producing the results of the actions it performs. We have to play our role as an apparent individual – that is, use the physical and mental equipment of the body-mind-sense complex, exercise the person's apparent free will and assume the degree of responsibility associated with the person's *dharma* – but at the same time we need to understand that our true identity is the limitless conscious existence that is the substrate of all manifestation.

Zadie: I wanted to ask about the related "*aham bhokta*/I am the enjoyer" thing. So that must consist of thoughts/notions too? And must be another form of *ahamkara*?

Ted: Yes, exactly.

Zadie: I'm not so clear about spotting those in the mind. I think I've noticed it's more of a forward-looking thing (but I guess it could be retrospective too) that motivates decision-making because enjoyership mistakes the self for the experiencing entity and erroneously assumes that the self can be affected for the better or worse by *karma phala*/the results of what I think I'm doing??

Ted: Enjoyership itself does not mistake the self for the experiencing entity. Rather enjoyership is, as you mentioned, the thought that I am the experiencer of the objective phenomena with which the apparent individual characterized by the body-mind-sense complex is confronted.

Zadie: But that sounds like *raga-dvesas*?

Ted: The compound word *raga-dvesha* literally means “likes and dislikes.” In Vedanta, the term is used to refer to binding *vasanas*, those desires that are so compelling we cannot avoid pursuing their fulfillment. Almost invariably, they are the binding because the person feels his/her well-being depends on the presence or absence of particular objects. Though the enjoyer often harbors binding *vasanas*, the sense of enjoyership itself is not defined by the presence of binding *vasanas*. Whether the *vasanas* that impel the apparent person’s actions are binding or non-binding, enjoyership is the sense that the self is the experiencer and, moreover, as you say, is affected by experience because the apparent person is the self.

Zadie: When I saw my mind getting agitated about an event I was involved with organizing being well-attended or my speech being successful, I thought it must be that I think the results of my involvement with this event can enhance or diminish me in some way. Is that “*aham bhokta*”? Success or failure, probably, in this case.

Ted: Yes, the agitation arose due to the ego’s sense of *aham bhokta*.

Zadie: So is it something that motivates doing, like *raga-dvesas*/desire?

Ted: Technically, it is not *aham bhokta* does not motivate action. The apparent person cannot help but act, even once the mind has assimilated self-knowledge. Of course, once the mind has assimilated self-knowledge, it knows that the self is neither a doer nor an experiencer. So in a sense we could say that the sense of enjoyership does motivate the apparent person to act in the name of certain desired results that it hopes to experience. Thus the sense of *aham bhokta* is inherent in all binding desires (i.e. *raga-dvesha*, or binding *vasana*).

Zadie: Or is enjoyership more simultaneous with the experiencing of the results of action as they are happening? More akin to experiencing temporary bliss from getting or avoiding what you wanted to get or avoid? Because I haven’t noticed experiencing any thoughts in those kinds of states, like “I am enjoying this.” Enjoyment seems to be more thought-free, whereas being in “doing mode” is constantly propelled along by “I’m doing this” thoughts.

Ted: While the sense of *aham bhokta* underlies the motivations that characterize the apparent person’s sense of *aham karta*, the sense of being the experiencer/enjoyer of the results is implicit in the sense that the experience is happening to “me.”

Zadie: As an aside, as a Hindi-speaker I’ve observed that current usage of the related verb “*bhogna*” is more to do with enduring or suffering results of action! So I was wondering if “*aham bhokta*” necessarily has a positive connotation like “enjoyment.” We do because we want to enjoy? It could be that usage has changed over the millennia.

And in our temple in Manchester, which is more like the North Indian ones, it doesn't have a sanctum and inner sanctum like the South Indian ones – the gods are on open display – well, they call it *bhoga* when they hide the gods with a curtain, and the gods taste all the *laddoos* and fruit and things that we've brought as offering. After *bhoga* those offerings become our *prasad*.

Am I rambling? ☺ I just thought there might be a connection because of the word.

Ted: *Aham bhokta* refers to being the experiencer in general, whether the experience is positive or negative. In other words, in the context of Vedanta, “enjoyership” is synonymous with “experiencer-ship.”

Zadie: Thank you, thank you, thank you, O Wise and Free One. ☺

~ Love, Zadie

Ted: Love to you.

~ Ted