

LZR “What is the self?”

Even though there are numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas, why so far have we not become free from the oceans of samsaric sufferings? Why do we suffer continuously? Why are we not yet enlightened? Why do we continue to suffer and suffer? We have followed our self-cherishing as if it were our best guide, a god, our best helper. We have been led by the selfish mind, the great demon, doing exactly what it says, thinking, “This is me. This is I. This is what I want.” That is totally wrong! That’s not you, that’s not me, that’s not the I. The body is not the I; mind is not the I; both together are not the I. Yet there is no I that exists separate from the aggregates.

Of course, I’m not saying that there is no I. There is an I. But what exists is nothing other than what is merely labeled by the mind. So what the I is, is most extremely subtle. We ordinary beings, like myself, never think we are acting for the merely labeled I. If, for example, when we got angry we were able to meditate right at that time—“What is I? It exists in mere name”—there would be no place for our anger. It would totally disappear. It wouldn’t go anywhere; it would just become non-existent. The place from which that anger arises, the I, would no longer be there.

Similarly, the moment that you think the I exists in mere name, right at that time you see the real I is one hundred percent not there. That proves, or identifies, to your mind that the false I is simply an illusion.

In the first moment, the mind focuses on the aggregates, and then that same mind merely labels, or merely imputes, “I” upon them. That is how we create the I. Then, in the second moment, the I appears back to our mind as if it existed from its own side, as if it existed by itself, as if it were truly existent, or, in everyday language, as if it were a real I. It appears that way because of negative imprints left on our mental continuum from beginningless rebirths by the ignorance that holds the I as real, as existing from its own side, as existing by nature. That is projected, or decorated, by these negative imprints.

Then, in the third moment, we believe, or we hold on to, this concept of an I existing from its own side as one hundred percent true. Just to clarify, not a permanent I existing alone and existing with its own freedom. Also, not an I existing self-sufficiently. Also, not an I existing from its own side completely without depending on

the substance, the imprint, left on the seventh consciousness, the mind-basis-of-all, and then experienced as both the object and the subject, the knowing mind. It is not even that, the *gagja*, the object to be refuted, according to the Cittamatra school of Buddhist philosophy.

The view of the next school higher than that, the Madhyamika Svatantrika, is that the *gagja* is the I that is not labeled by the mind but truly exists from its own side. According to the Svatantrika view, there is some existence from its own side but it is also labeled by the mind. Even that is not correct, but that is what they falsely believe. That is their right view.

However, in the view of the highest philosophical school, the Madhyamika Prasangika, this is the actual *gagja*, the object of refutation. Something that exists from its own side, even a little; something not *totally* from its own side but *something* from its own side, something small—that is totally non-existent according to Prasangika.

Realizing the total non-existence of that is the realization of the Prasangika view of emptiness. The wisdom realizing that is the only view that can directly eliminate the root of samsara, the ignorance that holds the I as real. Here I'm talking about the very subtle *gagja*—that there is something from its own side, even though it is labeled by mind. Even that is totally nonexistent. That belief is the root of samsara, the oceans of suffering. From that, ignorance arises, attachment arises, anger arises, jealousy arises, pride arises, and doubt arises. From that, the six root delusions and the twenty secondary delusions arise, and then in all the details, the 84,000 delusions.

Thus, that wrong concept, the ignorance that believes something exists from its own side, is the true cause of suffering, the principal one. From that, delusion and karma arise, bringing about all the various samsaric sufferings: the heavy suffering of the hells, the heavy suffering of the hungry ghosts, the heavy suffering of the animals, the heavy suffering of the human beings, the heavy suffering of the sura and asura beings, the suffering of rebirth, the suffering of sickness, the suffering of old age, and the suffering of death. All that comes from there. ...

Read Rinpoche's entire advice in the [FPMT Annual Review 2020: Transforming Challenges into the Path](#).