

# NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

## Chapter 14 – Analyzing Difference

*“The self truly exists, and it is inherently different from the mind-body complex.”*

That is the claim that we are investigating in this chapter.

In Chapter 12, we saw that if the self truly exists, then it must be the same as the mind-body complex (MBC), or different from it. There is no third alternative. From doing the meditations in Chapter 13, we have discovered that the self cannot be the same as the MBC. In this chapter, we try to discover whether the self is different from the MBC.

Before we get to the Dalai Lama’s presentation, let’s review what it is that we are looking for. We are looking for a truly existing self, a self that exists as it (sometimes) appears to exist: truly, independently, and in a way that makes it totally different from the MBC.

### Candidates for the True Self, the “I”

Because there are people studying this chapter who have lots of experience with Advaita or Awareness teachings, let’s look at this in a way that allows us to take advantage of the teachings we already know.

Let’s think of the various senses, ideas and concepts that we might have for what a True Self might really be. That will help us find the truly existent self that will be our target of refutation. There are many possibilities, some of which might resonate with you more than others. Whatever resonates the most will be an important target of refutation to work with. The possibilities include these. Feel free to add your own ideas to this list:

- The soul, as spoken about in Christianity.
- The idea of you, maintained by God.
- The doer, chooser, author or controller of the MBC.
- The Cartesian thinker, as in “I think, therefore I am.”
- The template for your identity, which exists in a subtle realm somewhere.
- The shape of your body as a unique outline of your identity.
- The contour of your mind, which creates and maintains your identity.

- An entity located perhaps behind the forehead, or perhaps in the Ramanian Heart (on the right side of the chest).
- The set of memories that maintain the identity of the MBC over time.
- The set of deepest and highest values that give meaning to the MBC.
- The true “me” that you want to be and aim to be.
- The Higher Self, as spoken about in the New Age teachings.
- The Atman, the pure, individual consciousness that is said to be the core of your identity.
- Absolute Consciousness or Global Awareness, which is your True Self as well as the nature of all beings and all phenomenality. It is limitless and borderless. It is pure clarity and light and knowingness.
- (Fill in your own here \_\_\_\_\_)

There is no need to refute all of these notions. You only need to refute the one(s) that you may feel a pull towards. You may feel like this (or may not):

*“I know that the emptiness teachings say I’m not supposed to have a self like these, but I’m not sure. Sometimes I feel as if one of these may really be my self.”*

So when you do the meditations, consider using that self in the inquiries.

### The Dalai Lama’s First Point

*If the “I” and the whole range of impermanent phenomena were inherently different, the “I” would absurdly not have the characteristics of impermanent phenomena, namely, being produced, abiding, and disintegrating.... (pp. 145-146)*

His first point has to do with the nature of compounded, impermanent phenomena. These kinds of phenomena are produced from parts and due to causes and conditions. As soon as they are produced, they begin to change due to further causes and conditions. Much of the time, we feel that the “I” is like that too. We feel that we might die and come to an end through causes and conditions.

The MBC is a compounded phenomenon that disintegrates moment to moment. The Dalai Lama’s point is that if the true self were inherently different, then it would NOT be able to be an impermanent phenomenon, but would have to be a partless, non-compounded, non-disintegrating phenomenon.

This is not at all obvious at first. Why can't the MBC and the "I" be different and the "I" still be a compounded, disintegrating phenomenon? After all, the Dalai Lama himself gave the example of a horse being a different entity from an elephant, and they are both compounded, disintegrating phenomena. Maybe the self is like that too, and STILL inherently different.

### Unpacking this Point

Let's unpack the Dalai Lama's first point. Again, he says,

*If the "I" and the whole range of impermanent phenomena were inherently different, the "I" would absurdly not have the characteristics of impermanent phenomena, namely, being produced, abiding, and disintegrating.... (pp. 145-146)*

What he may mean is this:

1. If the true self, the "I," is inherently different from the MBC, then it must inherently exist. (For it would have to inherently exist in order to do anything, including being different from the MBC).
2. If the "I" exists inherently, then it does not depend on causes and conditions (because inherently existent phenomena do not depend on anything).
3. If the "I" does not depend on causes and conditions, then it does not have the characteristics of impermanent phenomena, namely, being produced, abiding, and disintegrating.
4. Therefore, if the true self, the "I," is inherently different from the MBC, then it does not have the characteristics of impermanent phenomena, namely, being produced, abiding, and disintegrating.

Line (4) is the Dalai Lama's first point, unpacked.

If all this reasoning makes sense, then we are able to refute the difference between the MBC and the "I" – because we may be sure that the "I" DOES disintegrate. Therefore, the "I" cannot be inherent, or different from the MBC.

If this reasoning does not make sense, then that's OK. This first point is not that important. The second point is much more powerful and helpful.

### The Dalai Lama's Second Point

If the “I” and the MBC were inherently different, then

*...[i]t also could not have the particular characteristics of either body or mind, and thus would have to be observed entirely separately from body and mind. When you search for what the “I” is, you would have to come up with something separate from mind and body, but you cannot. (p. 146)*

This one is easier, and quite powerful.

If the “I” and the MBC were inherently different, then several illogical and outlandish possibilities present themselves:

- The “I” and the MBC could exist without each other.
- The “I” could exist without the MBC.
- The MBC could exist without the “I.”
- If the MBC dies, the “I” can remain.
- If the “I” dies, then the MBC can remain.
- The “I” would not have any mental or physical characteristics.
- The MBC can eat dinner, and we can't say that “I” eat dinner.
- “I” can go to the bathroom, and the MBC does not go to the bathroom.
- You will be able to locate the “I” someplace other than the vicinity of the MBC.
- Whatever the MBC does, we can't say that “I” do it.
- The MBC and the “I” have absolutely nothing to do with each other.
- The sorts of difference in this list violate the conventions of everyday usage. But Buddhism and the emptiness teachings accept worldly conventions as a way to communicate with others and live in harmony with them. The MBC and the “I” cannot be truly, inherently different.

Apart from the MBC, not even the **conception** of the “I” exists. If the conception of the I doesn't exist, and the “I” doesn't have anything to do with the MBC, then just where would it be?

### Conclusion

So the MBC and the true self, the “I,” cannot be inherently different from each other.

If you feel that the “I” is one of the options listed in the list of candidates above, then try to find it in both ways:

- In the context of the mind and body.
- Apart from the mind and body.

If you can’t find it in either case, then it can’t be the same as the mind-body, or different from the mind-body. Therefore, the true self, the inherent “I,” does not exist anywhere.