



# Dismantling Racism: Beyond Labels and the Ego

Usually, when we think of racism, we think of believing that one is superior to another based on race. However, it works the other way round too. One can believe that one is inferior to another based on race. In other words, one is being racist towards one's own race.

Now let me briefly broaden the subject. We can also believe that we are superior or inferior to another based on religious belief, or nationality, or even the language we speak—such as believing that you're superior to another because you speak English and the other doesn't. The pattern is essentially the same.

So, basically, racism is based on the tendency to identify with a certain characteristic, taking that as *who you are*. However, in reality, you are not your race—just as you're not your religious belief, or nationality, or the language you speak. Yet, we may identify with such things, taking them as who we are.

Having formed a sense of something as who we are, we then form a sense of something else as who *others* are. So now in our minds, others are different from us. With this idea in place, what naturally follows is comparing: *Who is better?*

In Buddhist speak, all this is the ego at work; and racism, briefly, is the doings of race-based ego.

From the Buddhist point of view, the ego or sense of self isn't something real. It is not you, not your self, but just a *sense* of self. It *feels* a lot like you, but isn't you. So, the ego is a kind of misunderstanding—a very common one. In Buddhism, this fundamental kind of misunderstanding is usually called ignorance, which is the underlying source of suffering.

So, if you reduce racist thinking, you're reducing the ego within you, which is a step towards ending suffering.

## Ways to Reduce Racism in You

The most effective way to reduce a large chunk of racist thinking is to deliberately create conditions for yourself to know people of other races. By this, I mean getting to know them well enough to become friends. Only then can you see them as human beings more than you see them as people of another race. Then the mental wall between you and them will naturally come down.

Along the way, you'd probably notice the many prejudices in your mind that you didn't know were there.

Another thing you can do is to become mindful of your speech and your intentions behind it when speaking of your own race or that of another. Notice how you feel.

For some people, racist thinking in them may also be based in a personal sense of inferiority. By devaluing a certain racial group, even if only in their minds, they may feel superior and thereby compensate their sense of inferiority. In this situation, they would benefit much from finding ways to reduce their sense of inferiority.

Who you surround yourself with is also important. What they say and do influence you whether you are aware of it or not. The same applies to your media consumption. How the media portrays different races influences our perceptions.

## Summary

Racism is not just about overt acts of discrimination, but also about subtle biases and assumptions we hold about ourselves and others based on race. Addressing racism requires a multipronged approach to tackle the root of the issue: the ego's tendency to divide and compare. By cultivating self-awareness, challenging our biases, and embracing empathy and compassion, we can work towards dismantling racism within ourselves.

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