

Mindfulness
For Everyday Living
YMCA.
1st and 3rd Tuesdays
13:30 – 15:30



*What is capable of
seeing, hearing,
moving, acting
has to be your original
mind.*

Our discussion for November 4th is all about the EGO.

The question of whether the Ego is considered good or bad for individuals and society is one often discussed in philosophy, psychology and religions all around the world.

1. I've chosen to start with Freud's psychological viewpoint:

- The **id** is the instinctive part of the mind — it wants immediate pleasure and gratification.
- The **ego** is the rational part — it balances the id's desires with reality.
- The **superego** is the moral conscience — it represents the internalised values and rules of society (often learned from parents and culture).
- Together, these three parts form the structure of personality.

Why they're good for society

- **The ego** helps people make sensible decisions and live cooperatively. It keeps impulses under control and allows people to think before acting. Without it, society would be chaotic.
- **The superego** encourages moral behaviour — empathy, fairness, guilt, and responsibility. It's what stops most people from lying, stealing, or harming others.
- These forces help individuals live together peacefully, creating **social order** and **ethical standards**.

When they can become harmful

- **An overactive superego** can make people feel excessively guilty, anxious, or rigid about rules. This can lead to moral judgement, perfectionism, or intolerance — which might cause social tension.
- **An inflated ego** can lead to selfishness, arrogance, or dominance — qualities that harm cooperation and empathy.
- On the other hand, **too weak an ego** means people might struggle to handle conflict or resist pressure, which can also cause problems in society.

In summary...

The **ego and superego aren't bad** — they're actually what make civilisation possible. But when they become **too strong or too weak**, they can create personal and social problems. A healthy society depends on **balance** — where reason (the ego) and morality (the superego) guide our instincts (the id) without completely suppressing them.

2. Christianity's view on the ego.

Christianity doesn't talk about the "ego" in the Freudian or Buddhist sense, but it does talk a great deal about the **self, pride, and humility** — which are closely related ideas. In Christian thought, the **ego** can be understood as the **self-centred part of human nature** — the part that wants to live independently of God, seeking its own will and glory rather than God's.

The Ego as the "Old Self" - In the New Testament, St Paul often speaks about the **"old self"** or **"flesh"** — the part of us that is ruled by selfish desires.

He contrasts this with the **"new self"**, which lives according to the Spirit of God.

"Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

— Ephesians 4:22–24

So, the Christian path involves **dying to the ego** — not in the sense of destroying personality, but of letting go of self-centredness and learning to live in love, humility, and service.

Pride vs Humility - In Christian theology, **pride** (the elevation of the ego) is often called the **root of all sin**.

Pride says, "I know better than God," or "I don't need anyone else." By contrast, *humility* — which means seeing oneself truthfully and depending on God — is considered the highest virtue.

Jesus teaches: "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*"

— Luke 9:23

This means letting go of the **ego's need to control** and allowing one's life to be guided by love and faith.

The Transformed Self - Christianity doesn't aim to *erase* the self, but to **transform** it. Through spiritual growth and God's grace, the ego is no longer at the centre — **God is**. When this happens, the self becomes freer, more compassionate, and more loving — similar in spirit to the Buddhist idea of awakening, but with a relationship to God at its heart.

In summary...

- ◆ **Christianity** calls us to *surrender* the ego — to let go of pride and self-centredness so we can live in harmony with God's will and love others selflessly.

3. Why Buddhist philosophy asks us to let go of the ego?

In Buddhist philosophy, the ego is seen as a *false sense of self* — the idea that "I" am a separate, permanent individual who must constantly protect, improve, and defend myself. Buddhism teaches that this belief in a solid, independent self is an illusion. Everything, including what we call "me", is constantly changing — thoughts, emotions, the body, and even our sense of identity.

Why the ego causes suffering - The ego leads to attachment ("I want"), aversion ("I don't want"), and ignorance ("I am separate from others"). Because the ego always compares, resists, and clings, it creates feelings of fear, pride, jealousy, and dissatisfaction.

For example:

- 🌱 When someone criticises "me", I feel hurt.
- 🌱 When someone praises "me", I feel proud.
- 🌱 Both reactions come from being attached to an idea of *who I think I am*.

This is what Buddhism calls *dukkha* — the fundamental unsatisfactoriness or suffering of life.

Letting go of the ego - When Buddhism says to "*let go of the ego*", it doesn't mean we must erase our personality or stop functioning as a person. It means we learn to see through the illusion of a separate, fixed self. Through practices like meditation, mindfulness, and compassion, we begin to realise that the self is not something solid — it's a flow of experiences, thoughts, and perceptions arising and passing away.

When that happens, we become:

- 🌸 Less self-centred
- 🌸 More peaceful
- 🌸 More compassionate, because we no longer feel truly separate from others

In summary...

Buddhism asks us to let go of the ego because it is the root of suffering.

By loosening our attachment to "I", "me", and "mine", we experience freedom, clarity, and connection with all beings— what Buddhism calls awakening or nirvana.

4 Ego from a Western philosophical viewpoint

Ancient Roots – The Rational Self, in early Western philosophy, especially in Greek thought, the “ego” wasn’t a word in use yet, but the *idea* of a rational self was central. Plato saw the soul as having three parts — reason, spirit, and appetite — a bit like Freud’s later model of ego, superego, and id.

The *rational soul* (reason) was meant to govern the more impulsive parts. Aristotle built on this, seeing the good life (*eudaimonia*) as living with balance, guided by rational thought. In these traditions, the self or “ego” was the part that thinks clearly, chooses wisely, and seeks virtue.

Descartes and the Birth of the “I” - Fast forward to the 17th century, and we meet René Descartes, who famously said: “Cogito, ergo sum” — *I think, therefore I am*. This marked a huge turning point. Here, the *ego* became the thinking self — the core proof of existence.

For Descartes, the mind (the “I”) was distinct from the body — a separation that deeply influenced Western ideas of identity, psychology, and even religion for centuries.

Kant and the Organising Mind - In the 18th century, Immanuel Kant described the *ego* not as a separate soul but as the organising centre of experience. He saw the “self” as that which brings order to sensory input — it’s not something we can see, but something we *are*, constantly shaping experience through thought and perception.

So, for Kant, the ego isn’t a fixed “thing,” but a function of awareness — the mind making sense of the world.

Existentialists and the Search for Authentic Self - By the 20th century, thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger turned attention to the *lived* self. They saw the ego not as something static but as something we *create* through our choices.

Sartre said, “Existence precedes essence” — we aren’t born with a fixed self; we build it moment by moment.

Heidegger described how the ego often gets trapped in “everydayness” — trying to please others, chasing distractions — and how freedom means returning to a more authentic way of being.

So here, the ego is not an enemy, but a project — something to be made conscious, refined, and aligned with meaning.

Modern Reflections — From Rationalism to Awareness. In more contemporary Western philosophy and psychology, the ego is often seen as a necessary structure — the organiser of thoughts and identity — but one that can become rigid or defensive. Thinkers influenced by phenomenology (like Maurice Merleau-Ponty) and humanistic psychology (like Carl Rogers) saw healthy ego development as essential for empathy, creativity, and authentic living. In short:

*The ego is not bad — it helps us function and relate.
The problem arises when we mistake it for the whole self, losing touch with deeper awareness, connection, and compassion.*

In Summery...

Ancient philosophers: the rational soul should guide desire.

Descartes: the ego is the thinking “I”.

Kant: the ego organises experience.

Existentialists: the ego is self-invention through choice.

Modern thinkers: the ego is useful, but we mustn’t get trapped in it.

5. Let's investigate Mindfulness and the Ego — the modern, non-religious practice of training attention and awareness can understand the Ego in a fresh and practical way.

The Id and Mindfulness represents our instinctive urges — hunger, desire, anger, fear, or craving. In daily life, these impulses can easily take control when we act automatically or emotionally.

Mindfulness helps by teaching us to observe these impulses without reacting to them. When we pause and notice, *"I'm feeling angry"* or *"I'm craving this"*, we step out of automatic behaviour.

This awareness gives us space to choose, rather than being ruled by the id's demands. So, mindfulness doesn't destroy the id — it tames it with awareness.

The Superego and Mindfulness is our inner critic — the voice that says *"You should"*, *"You're not good enough"*, or *"You've failed."* While it helps us live morally, an overactive superego can create guilt, shame, or anxiety.

Mindfulness helps us notice this inner voice with non-judgemental awareness. Instead of fighting or believing every thought, we can say: *"Ah, this is the mind judging itself."*

By doing this, mindfulness softens the harshness of the superego, replacing self-criticism with self-compassion and balance.

The Ego and Mindfulness - The ego is the part that tries to manage both the id and superego while dealing with reality. In mindfulness practice, we become aware of how the ego constantly creates a story of "me" :

"I am this kind of person,"

"I must succeed,"

"I'm being watched," and so on. Through mindfulness, we see these stories for what they are: mental constructions. This loosens our attachment to them, allowing the ego to become more flexible and realistic, not defensive or fragile.

A mindful ego isn't destroyed; it becomes clear, calm, and adaptive — able to act wisely rather than reactively.

In Summary...

Secular mindfulness helps create a healthy balance among the id, ego, and superego. It doesn't take sides — it simply brings awareness to all three, allowing us to respond to life with clarity, kindness, and choice, rather than compulsion, guilt, or confusion.

🌿 Here I asked ChatGPT to encapsulate the thinking of Jon Kabat-Zinn, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Wayne Dyer on Awareness and the Ego, here's what it gave me...

****Three Voices, One Still Mind****

Let's imagine three wise travellers, each walking through the same quiet landscape of human life. Each of them — Jon Kabat-Zinn, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Wayne Dyer — looked at the same human condition: our constant rushing, worrying, grasping, and seeking.

Each of them saw how easily we lose ourselves in the noise of thought and the demands of the ego — that voice inside that says, *"I must be more, do more, have more."*

And each of them, in their own way, invited us to come home.

🏠 Home to the present moment.

🏠 Home to the simple, aware, open-hearted experience of being alive.

🕊️ **Jon Kabat-Zinn — The Scientist of Presence** 🕊️

Jon Kabat-Zinn is a man of science — but also a poet of awareness.

When he created **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** in the late 1970s, his

vision was both radical and simple: to bring the essence of meditation — the art of paying attention, moment by moment, non-judgmentally — into hospitals, workplaces, and ordinary homes.

He stripped away the robes and rituals, not out of rejection, but out of respect, to make the heart of the practice accessible to anyone, whatever their beliefs. JKZ often says that **mindfulness is about waking up** — waking up from autopilot, from the chatter of the mind, from the illusion that our thoughts and emotions define who we are.

In his words:

"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."

In that simple image, he captures something profound. The waves are our thoughts, emotions, and life circumstances — they come and go.

*The ego wants to control them or escape them. Mindfulness teaches us to **ride them with awareness**, rooted in the deeper ocean of our being.*

🌸 **Thich Nhat Hanh — The Monk of Peace** 🌸

Where Jon Kabat-Zinn used the language of science, **Thich Nhat Hanh** spoke the language of peace. This gentle Vietnamese Zen master taught mindfulness as a way of living, not merely a technique. For him, mindfulness was *love in action* — the art of being fully present with whatever or whoever is before us, with tenderness and understanding.

He said: *"When you are present, you can love. When you love, you are present."*

Thich Nhat Hanh saw the ego not as an enemy, but as a frightened child — the part of us that clings, defends, and separates itself from others. His invitation was not to destroy the ego, but to hold it gently in awareness, to breathe with it until it softens and reveals the peace beneath.

*He taught mindfulness through washing dishes, drinking tea, or walking slowly in nature — reminding us that enlightenment is not somewhere else, but **here**, in this step, this breath, this moment.*

🌻 **Wayne Dyer — The Psychologist of Spirit** 🌻

And then there was **Wayne Dyer** — not a monk or a scientist, but a warm, human teacher who spoke to millions about self-awareness and inner freedom. Wayne began as a psychologist, teaching about emotional independence and self-responsibility. But as his journey deepened, he began to speak of something higher — what he called the **shift from ego to spirit**.

For Wayne, the ego was "the false self" — the identity built from our roles, possessions, and opinions. He encouraged us to move beyond that identity and live from what he called **the higher self**, the part of us that is loving, creative, and connected to all life.

He once said:

"The ego is only an idea you carry about who you are. Let it go, and the real you shines through effortlessly." 🌞

Wayne spoke of meditation as tuning in to this deeper field of awareness — the space where inspiration, compassion, and gratitude naturally arise. His message wasn't about detachment, but about connection — to Source, to one another, and to the quiet intelligence of life itself.

🌿 **Different Paths, One Awareness** 🌿

So here we have three different voices:

- 🕊️ Jon Kabat-Zinn's calm scientific clarity,
- 🌸 Thich Nhat Hanh's compassionate presence,
- 🌻 Wayne Dyer's inspired spiritual vision.

One speaks of **attention**,
One of **love**,
One of **intention** — Yet all are pointing to the same still centre: a
life lived from awareness rather than ego.

Each in their way said:

- * You are not your thoughts.
- * You are not your emotions.

✨ You are the awareness that notices them — the quiet witness beneath the noise.

And from that awareness, a new way of living unfolds — less about striving, more about being. Less about having control, more about being at peace with what is.

🌸 **A Reflection for us this week instead of a poem** 🌸

All of us have lived through many seasons of life, there's a great kindness in their message. It reminds us that wisdom is not something to be gained but uncovered — like the sun emerging from behind the clouds.

🌱 When we sit quietly,
🌱 when we breathe and listen,
🌱 when we let the mind settle,
💕 we rediscover what has always been here —

The spacious, peaceful awareness that has watched every chapter of our story unfold. And as we rest there, the ego — that small, anxious self that must always prove or defend — can finally take its rest too. What remains is presence, compassion, and quiet joy.

🌈 *The simple experience of being fully alive, now.* 🌈

- 💠 "The miracle is not to walk on water, but to walk on the earth in peace." — *Thich Nhat Hanh*
- 💠 "Wherever you go, there you are." — *Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- 💠 "You are not a human being having a spiritual experience; you are a spiritual being having a human experience." — *Wayne Dyer*

This discussion paper and image have been created by me and ChatGPT 🤖 Jaci 💜

