

Meditation: A Practice of Growth and Insight

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Today

1. Immersed in ego
2. Struggling with ego
3. Awareness of ego
4. Undermining ego
5. Embracing ego

Context – Degeneration Foreseen?

1000s of years ago, contemplative adepts projected that during the present period, levels of contemplative awareness would rapidly diminish, giving rise to major environmental, social and psychological problems (Huang Po, 1982; Marra, 1998).



Defining Ego

- “Your idea or opinion of yourself, especially your feeling of your own importance and ability” (Cambridge Dictionary)
- “The self especially as contrasted with another self or the world” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
- “That portion of the human personality which is experienced as the self or I” (Encyclopedia Britannica)
- “The self, particularly the conscious sense of self ... ego refers to all the psychological phenomena and processes that are related to the self and that comprise the individual’s attitudes, values, and concerns” (American Psychological Society)

1. Immersed in Ego



Source: Roman & Littlefield

- Ego-led and caught up in self
- Limited awareness of ego
- Mundane objectives
- Led by emotions, impulse, desire
- Suffering and confusion
- Like plankton driven by the tide

“All of our problems can be traced to one source,
our concern for ourselves whom we cherish the most”
(Wheel of Sharp Weapons, Dharmarakṣita)

1. Immersed in Ego



Attachment: “The over-allocation of cognitive and emotional resources towards a particular object, construct, or idea to the extent that the object is assigned an attractive quality that is unrealistic and that exceeds its intrinsic worth”

“A thirst that can never be quenched”

1. Immersed in Ego

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Ontological Addiction: Classification, Etiology, and Treatment

Edo Shonin¹ · William Van Gordon¹ · Mark D. Griffiths¹

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Abstract Despite the fact that there is increasing integration of Buddhist principles and practices into Western mental health and applied psychological disciplines, there appears to be limited understanding in Western psychology of the assumptions that underlie a Buddhist model of mental illness. The concept of *ontological addiction* was introduced and formulated in order to narrow some of the disconnect between Buddhist and Western models of mental illness and to foster effective assimilation of Buddhist practices and principles into mental health research and practice. Ontological addiction refers to the maladaptive condition whereby an individual is addicted to the belief that they inherently exist. The purposes of the present paper are to (i) classify ontological addiction in terms of its definition, symptoms, prevalence, and functional consequences, (ii) examine the etiology of the condition, and (iii) appraise both the traditional Buddhist and contemporary empirical literature in order to outline effective treatment strategies. An assessment of the extent to which ontological ad-

ditioned self, (ii) deconstructing the imputed self, and (iii) reconstructing a dynamic and non-dual self.

Keywords Ontological addiction · Attachment · Biopsychosocial model of mental illness · Buddhism · Emptiness · Non-self

Introduction

The biopsychosocial model of mental illness asserts that biological, psychological, and social factors each play a role in the onset of mental illness (Engel 1978). It was formulated as an alternative to the medical model, that from the late 1970s onwards, was increasingly regarded by the scientific community as a form of biomedical reductionism (Ghaemi 2009). However, despite the more inclusive approach of the biopsychosocial model, it is not necessarily compatible with

Ontological addiction:
“The unwillingness to relinquish an erroneous and deep-rooted belief in an inherently existing ‘self’ or ‘I’ as well as the impaired functionality that arises from such a belief”

1. Immersed in Ego

International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



The Development and Validation of the Ontological Addiction Scale

Paul Barrows¹  · Edo Shonin²  · Supakyada Sapthiang² · Mark D. Griffiths³  ·
Déborah Ducasse⁴  · William Van Gordon¹ 

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Abstract

Ontological Addiction Theory is a metaphysical theory of mental illness which conceptualises psychological suffering in terms of excessive ego-centeredness. This study aimed to develop and validate the Ontological Addiction Scale (OAS) and compare OAS scores with mental health measures. A 31-item prototype scale was developed based on traditional Buddhist theory and contemporary models of addiction. An ego-centeredness form of the Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI) was the main criterion measure. For mental health measures, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) were used. The prototype OAS and two shorter versions showed excellent internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Construct validity was evidenced by medium to large correlations with criterion measures. OAS scores showed strong correlations with PHQ-9, GAD-7 and RSES, suggesting a clear relationship between OAS and mental health. The OAS appears to be a valid and reliable instrument suitable for assessing OA.

1. Immersed in Ego

Table 10 Ontological Addiction Scale (OAS-12) Short Form

The following 12 questions will help you reflect on the extent to which ego governs your choices, thoughts and behaviours How often during the last year have you...?		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Felt you needed to receive more attention or affection from a person you care about?	0	1	2	3	4
2	Thought about how you could avoid experiencing discomfort?	0	1	2	3	4
3	Felt uplifted when you were praised?	0	1	2	3	4
4	Felt good when you experienced fewer challenges?	0	1	2	3	4
5	Felt you needed to do better in order to avoid shame or humiliation?	0	1	2	3	4
6	Felt an increasing need to occupy yourself to avoid being on your own?	0	1	2	3	4
7	Found it hard to accept your mistakes and shortcomings?	0	1	2	3	4
8	Found it hard to overcome rejection?	0	1	2	3	4
9	Felt low when you were criticised?	0	1	2	3	4
10	Felt inferior to others?	0	1	2	3	4
11	Stopped being kind to somebody you care about because they offended you?	0	1	2	3	4
12	Felt worried about not being recognised after having acted in others' interests?	0	1	2	3	4
OAS-12 total					/ 48	

3. Felt uplifted when you were praised

4. Found it hard to accept your mistakes or shortcomings

10. Felt inferior to others

1. Immersed in Ego

European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-019-01029-6>

INVITED REVIEW

Borderline personality disorder: from understanding ontological addiction to psychotherapeutic revolution

Déborah Ducasse^{1,2}  · William Van Gordon³ · Véronique Brand-Arpon¹ · Philippe Courtet^{1,2} · Emilie Olié^{1,2}

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EXPLORE

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If «Me» is not as it seems, what about diagnosing and treating mental illness?

Déborah Ducasse ^{a, b}  , William Van Gordon ^c, Philippe Courtet ^{a, b}



Article

Ontological Addiction Theory and Mindfulness-Based Approaches in the Context of Addiction Theory and Treatment

Paul Barrows ^{* } and William Van Gordon ^{}

Religions 2021, 12, 586. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080586>

<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions>



Source: Total Shape (<https://unsplash.com/>)

2. Struggling with Ego



- Dissatisfaction and disillusionment
- Contemplating suffering
- Contemplating happiness
- Search for greater meaning
- Search for peace and tranquillity
- Suffering propels personal and spiritual growth
- But can also be ignored!

2. Struggling with Ego

Mindlessness

Mindfulness



2. Struggling with Ego

Mindlessness involves being:

“Much like a robot; thoughts, emotions, and behaviours ... are determined by programmed routines” (Bodner & Langer, 2001, p. 1).

“Mindlessness diminishes our self-image, narrows our choices, and weds us to single-minded attitudes” (Langer, 1989, p. 55).



Source: Rock'n Roll Monkey (<https://unsplash.com/>)

2. Struggling with Ego

Conventional hallucination:
The perceiving of that which is not



Source: Maria Teneva (<https://unsplash.com/>)

Inverted hallucination:
The non-perceiving of that which is

3. Awareness of Ego



Source: Max Van Den Oetelaar (<https://unsplash.com/>)

- Mindfulness
- Concentrative meditation
- Creating breathing space
- Recognising ego
- Calm and centre the mind
- Can get stuck here!

3. Awareness of Ego

Breath awareness:

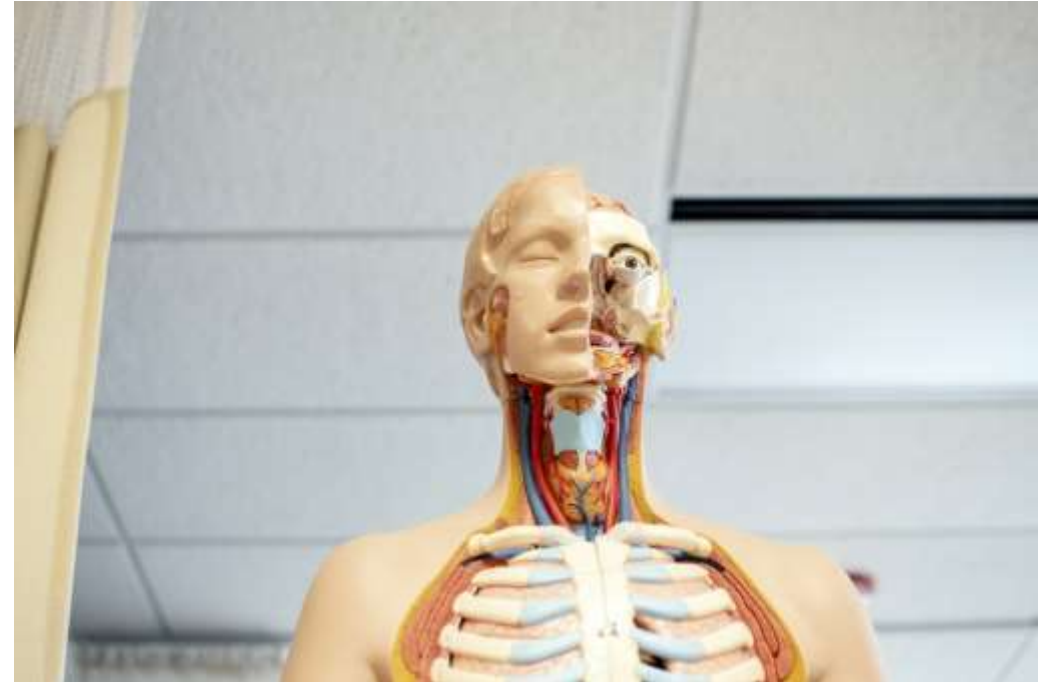
- A meditative anchor
- “Tie” the mind to the present moment
- Each breath is unique
- It has a beginning, middle, and an end
- It has a texture and a taste
- Let it follow its natural course
- Don’t be a “breather”
- Focus should be open and encompassing



Source: Jason Leung (<https://unsplash.com/>)

3. Awareness of Ego

- Follow the breath inwards, and become aware of the body
- Allow the body and emotions to be soothed by the breath



Source: Nhia Moua (<https://unsplash.com/>)

3. Awareness of Ego

- Follow the breath out of the body - see where it goes
- When you breathe out, the trees breathe in
- Follow the breath through time and space
- There is only one breath, and we all share it



Source: Cristofer Jeschke (<https://unsplash.com/>)

3. Awareness of Ego

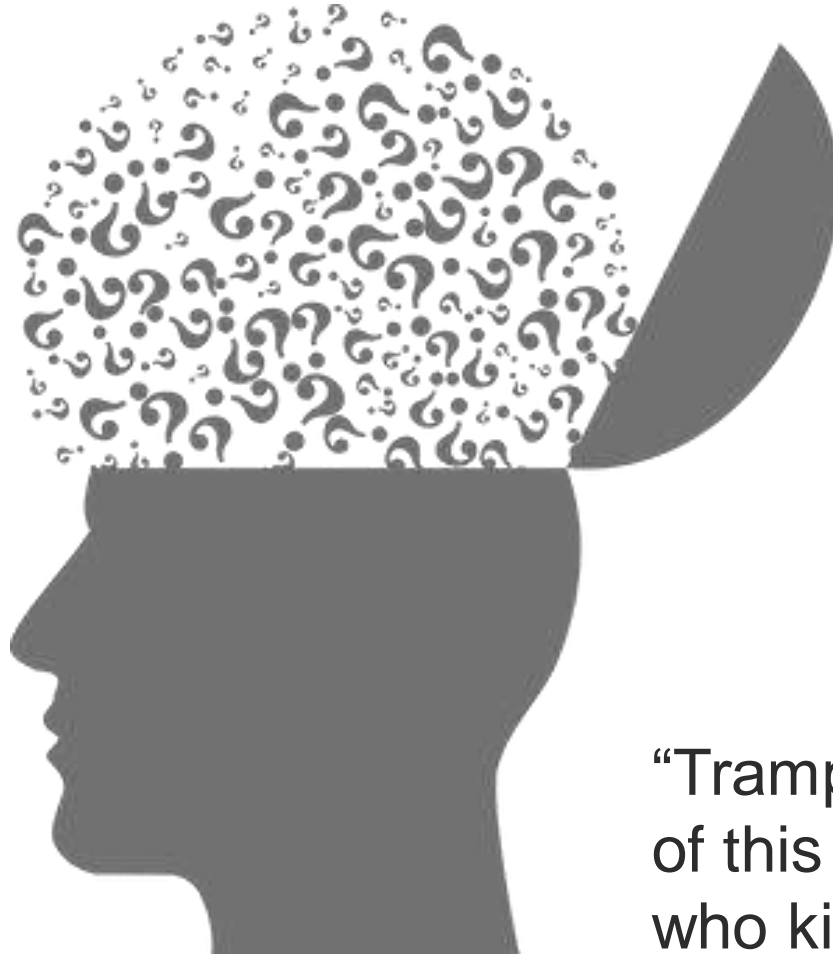


Stop

Observe the breath

Step back and watch the mind

4. Undermining Ego



- Insight meditation techniques
- Penetrative meditative analysis
- Non-conceptual
- Non-attachment
- Emptiness and non-self
- Don't forget compassion
- Taste true happiness
- Spiritual ego!

“Trample him, trample him, dance on the head
of this treacherous concept of selfish concern ...
who kills our chance to gain liberation”
(Wheel of Sharp Weapons, Dharmarakṣita)

4. Undermining Ego

[Ecopsychology](#) > [Vol. 14, No. 2](#) > [Original Articles](#)

Nature Connectedness, Nonattachment, and Engagement with Nature's Beauty Predict Pro-Nature Conservation Behavior

Paul D. Barrows , Miles Richardson , Iain Hamlin , and William Van Gordon 

Published Online: 7 Jun 2022 | <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2021.0036>

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Abstract

Although research has examined factors that account for pro-environmental behaviors relating to climate warming through carbon and resource use, very few studies have investigated factors that account for behavior that directly supports conservation of habitats and biodiversity. In particular, there remain questions as to whether nature connectedness relates to an individual's aesthetic or spiritual relationship with the objective world, or their philosophy of consciousness and selfhood. Consequently, the purposes of this study were to examine (a) the relationship between nature connectedness, engagement with nature's beauty, nonattachment and implicit theory of mind, and (b) how each of these variables predict pro-nature conservation behavior. A cross-sectional cohort study utilizing a correlational design recruited 203 male and female English-speaking adults. Participants completed a battery of online psychometric tests that assessed each of the aforementioned variables. The data were examined using bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis. Significant correlations were found between all pairs of variables. Furthermore, nonattachment and nature connectedness were found to be significant predictors of pro-nature conservation behavior, whereas engagement with nature's beauty was of borderline significance and implicit theory of mind was nonsignificant. Findings provide insight into the mechanisms underlying specific psychological and philosophical outlooks that may facilitate or impair a person's inclination to actively participate in pro-nature conservation behaviors. In particular, findings suggest that practices or interventions that foster nonattachment in addition to nature connectedness may have a role in the development of effective programs to aid nature's recovery.

4. Undermining Ego

Mindfulness (2020) 11:140–152
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-1063-4>

ORIGINAL PAPER



The Lived Experiences of Experienced Vipassana Mahasi Meditators: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Çimen Ekiçi¹  · Gulcan Garip¹ · William Van Gordon¹

Published online: 27 November 2018
© The Author(s) 2018

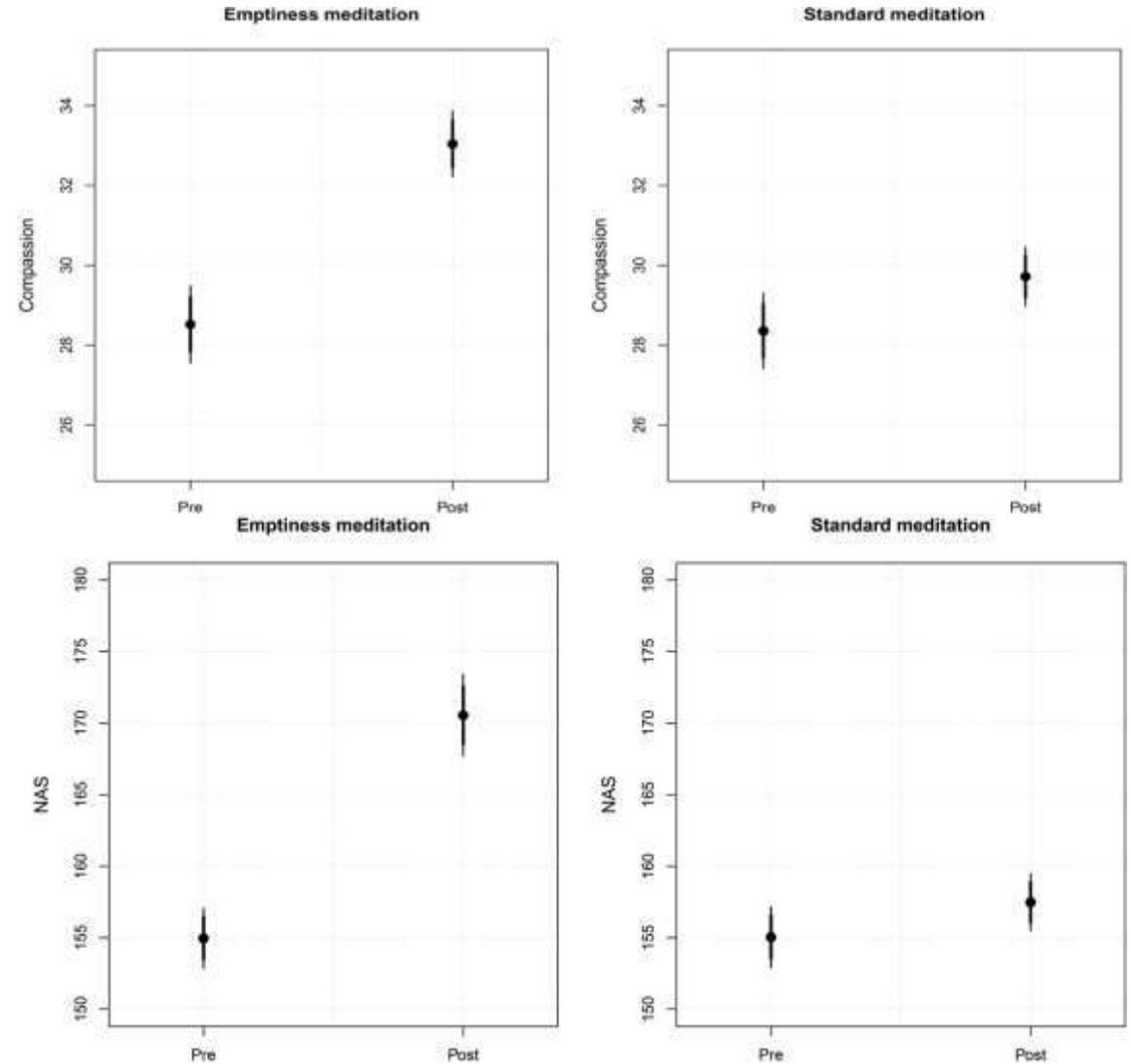
Abstract

Research into the effects and mechanisms of mindfulness training draws predominantly on quantitative research. There is a lack of understanding about the subjective experiences of experienced mindfulness meditators, which may provide additional insights into the effects, processes and context of mindfulness training. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of a novel group of experienced mindfulness meditators who practise Vipassana Mahasi (VM) meditation. The study aimed to understand how experienced VM practitioners make sense of the effects of practice and what processes they ascribe to it. Participants attended semistructured interviews, and their responses were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Results yielded overarching themes including (a) improvements in hedonic and eudaimonic well-being; (b) insights into self, others and perception of reality; (c) attaining equanimity; and (d) physical and interpersonal difficulties. Participants perceived VM as a ‘cleansing’ process whereby maladaptive responses were eliminated through mindfulness, other supportive mental qualities, decentering and nonattachment. The findings revealed a complex and dynamic set of interdependent outcomes and processes, which are reinforced by Buddhist teachings and ethical practices. This study highlights the need for additional interdisciplinary research into topics such as insight generation and supportive mental qualities cultivated during VM, novel states of well-being informed by Buddhist constructs and interpersonal difficulties related to long-term practice. Findings also suggest that incorporating Buddhist teachings and ethics into mindfulness-based interventions may enhance practitioner understanding and implementation of meditation techniques.

Keywords Mindfulness · Mechanisms of mindfulness · Interpretative phenomenological analysis · Experienced meditators · Vipassana meditation · Buddhism

4. Undermining Ego

- 1st study to directly assess emptiness: 25 advanced Buddhist meditators
- Emptiness meditation Vs. mindfulness-based meditation
- Emptiness resulted in significantly greater improvements in non-attachment, mystical experiences, compassion, +ive and -ive affect



(Van Gordon et al., 2018)

4. Undermining Ego

“Everything flows freely. Things just happen. There’s no need to try to connect events with a time or place. Ideas such as near and far or before and after must be let go of. Emptiness means that all things happen right here and right now.” (Participant 11)

“Everything is of [the nature of] emptiness but trying to find [emptiness] is impossible because it means you’re placing labels on something that can’t be labelled. You have to be emptiness rather than try and find it.” (Participant 9)

“You have to be open to emptiness. You have to know it places its mark on everything. But you don’t try to force it. You don’t ignore it either. You just allow it to come.” (Participant 2)


4. Undermining Ego

Mindfulness (2021) 12:1845–1848
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01586-1>

MINDFULNESS IN PRACTICE



Understanding and Practicing Emptiness

William Van Gordon¹  • Supakyada Sapthiang² • Paul Barrows¹ • Edo Shonin²

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In terms of the evolution of Buddhist-inspired contemplative psychology, there have been three key empirical phases during the last 40 years. The first phase commenced in the early 1980s and involved exploring the construct and applications of mindfulness along with related attentional processes. This was followed at the turn of the twenty-first century by a second phase of research into Buddhist techniques concerned with socio-empathetic and ethical awareness, such as loving-kindness meditation and compassion meditation. However, during approximately the last 7 years, a third phase of contemplative psychology research has emerged, concerned with empirical investigation into the characteristics and applications of Buddhist wisdom practices.

This phasic evolution of scientific investigation is consistent with the traditional Buddhist “three trainings” (Sanskrit:

socio-empathic awareness are necessary, as this helps to prevent the mind from becoming distracted, agitated, or anxious.

What is Emptiness?

The wisdom component of the three trainings principle encompasses practices and constructs that help to undermine suffering through cultivating insight into the true manner in which we and all things exist. In this regard, ancient contemplative notions such as emptiness, non-self, non-duality, non-attachment, impermanence, interdependence, and interconnectedness are particularly important. However, of all these wisdom principles, the most important is arguably emptiness.

Emptiness (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*) implies that although phe-

5. Embracing Ego



- Often misunderstood phase
- Ego isn't a problem
- Working in harmony with ego
- Advanced stage of awakening
- Ego as a spiritual compass
- But very few examples!

Source: Ali Kazal (<https://unsplash.com/>)

5. Embracing Ego

Participant 11: “Everything flows freely. Things just happen. There’s no need to try to connect events with a time or place. Ideas such as near and far or before and after must be let go of. Emptiness means that all things happen right here and right now.”

Participant 9: “Everything is of [the nature of] emptiness but trying to find [emptiness] is impossible because it means you’re placing labels on something that can’t be labelled. You have to be emptiness rather than try and find it.”

Participant 2: “You have to be open to emptiness. You have to know it places its mark on everything. But you don’t try to force it. You don’t ignore it either. You just allow it to come.”



Source: Saffu (<https://unsplash.com/>)

Thank you

“-All things are like images found in a mirror, and yet we imagine they are real, very real.
-All things are like mist or clouds on a mountain, and yet we imagine they are stable and firm.
-Our enemy is our insistence on ego-identities ... and our selfish concern for ourselves.
-Like all things these appear to be truly existent, though they never truly existed at all”.
(Wheel of Sharp Weapons, Dharmarakṣita)

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