

Consciousness, self, I and Ego

Consciousness is at once the most familiar and also the most mysterious aspect of our lives. Its nature remains one of the greatest philosophical and scientific puzzles, and opinions differ about what exactly needs to be studied and explained as consciousness and how it relates to other aspects of our experience and identity. This talk will introduce you to what kinds of questions we can ask about consciousness, based on ancient contemplative traditions as well as modern science. You will learn about the different approaches used to address these questions as well as first-person methods for gaining insights into the nature of consciousness and its various structures.

A first theoretical part will briefly cover the definitions, theories and scientific study of consciousness. The second part will include both theory and practice and cover various approaches to consciousness and how first-hand knowledge about its various facets can help us alleviate suffering and experience a greater sense of wellbeing and even awakening. This orientation will also help us clarify the relationship of psychological views on the mind to spiritual approaches to awareness and thus assist in avoiding both psychological underpass and spiritual bypass.

We will explore how to gain experiential access to consciousness the way it presents itself in the present moment, how the sense of self (“I” or “me”) is added to the stream of consciousness and how it is impermanent and ever-changing, as well as how to cultivate a greater sense of connectedness, moving from an egocentric perspective that separates us to an allocentric perspective in which we feel like a local expression of a larger whole. We will also explore a map of consciousness based on three lenses, namely the mind (how we know), the self (our sense of identity), and awareness (how we perceive), and we will investigate how to intentionally shift from a small mind or small self to an awareness-based mind or Self and live an awakened life from self-essence, self-energy, and self-leadership.

Sources (selection):

Rick Hanson. *Neurodharma: New Science, Ancient Wisdom, and Seven Practices of the Highest Happiness*. Harmony, 2020.

Loch Kelly. *The Way of Effortless Mindfulness: A Revolutionary Guide for Living an Awakened Life*. Sounds True, 2019.

Mag. Dennis Johnson (dennis-johnson.com) works as a trainer for mindfulness-based interventions and as a psychosocial attendant. He assists individuals and groups in the process of accepting their present-moment experience with greater ease, cultivating compassion in the face of difficulty, and taking in more of the good in life. Dennis has an academic background in Tibetan and Buddhist Studies and has previously worked as librarian and freelance translator, interpreter and editor. Recently, he has pursued additional training in various mindfulness-based, psychosocial and psychotherapeutic interventions, in the context of which he also acted as a clinical research assistant at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre. His main interest lies in various forms of transdisciplinary as well as transcultural research and practice, and their potential to provide a new paradigm for individual, social and cultural transformation based on traditional knowledge as well as modern science. Dennis has served as a board member on the European Transpersonal Association and the Austrian Consciousness Studies Association.