

SESSION 4: The 3 A's - Attending

WELCOME

Welcome again to our course on realizing a life of love! It's good to be with you!

Love is essential, but it's also challenging, because it's a skill that can both be simple and complex. Most of us had caregivers who were wounded to some degree in their capacity to love, so they couldn't teach us how to fully love and be loved. Many of us experienced some degree of trauma and neglect that left us feeling unlovable and challenged in our capacity to love and be loved. We entered adulthood with a Love Wound.

Fortunately, we can learn to love and heal our love wound. We do this through the practice of the WellMind Method. The WellMind method is the practice of the 3 A's of Awakening to love. The 3 A's are attending, appreciating, and acting with love. While the 3 A's may sound simple, the practice of the 3 A's can be profound. Through the practice of the 3 A's, you will heal your love wound and realize a life of love.

In our sessions together, we're exploring love and its benefits. We're talking about the love wound. We're studying the 3 A's and how to apply them to our lives. We're practicing many heart-mind practices for cultivating reverence. For acting with love, we're studying in detail 31 different love practices. By the time you finish this course, you will be well on your way to realizing a life of love.

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If you have a severe love wound, you might want to consider combining this course with psychotherapy to help you heal. If you have a moderate or mild love wound, this course will help you to heal and grow. If you don't have a love wound, this course will still help you to grow and transcend the limitations and suffering of the ego.

If you are new to this course, I strongly recommend that you review the previous sessions, because the first ten sessions make up the core foundation upon which the rest of the course is built. You'll need this foundation to benefit from the remaining sessions.

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SO LET'S GET STARTED

Last session we discussed the impact of the Love Wound on our lives and how to begin healing the Love Wound. Today we will explore the first A of awakening, Attending.

Again, the 3 As of awakening are Attending, Appreciating, and Acting with love. Attending leads to appreciation, which then leads to skillful loving action. Appreciation has two meanings, however: both understanding the nature of things and understanding the value or sacredness of Reality. Both of these aspects of appreciation arise from careful attending. Together, the twin practices of Attending and Appreciating (“Appreciative Attending”) generate wisdom and reverence, which enable us to fulfill our purpose—to nurture and savor Life. Inspired by reverence for Life, we can then take Action with love, while enjoying each brief and precious moment of existence.

ATTENDING

Attending is the first step in the practice of loving. It means to pay careful attention to what is happening or what has happened in order to develop a deep appreciation or understanding of what is, what was, and what might be.

We practice attending with a kind, curious, nonjudgmental attitude. It’s called “appreciative attending” because we attend with an appreciation that “what is” is as it must and can only be at this moment. We attend without condemnation, which allows us to see clearly and honestly what’s painful and harmful without having to hide from the truth.

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There are two aspects to Attending. **The first is to attend to the Now**—the present moment experience of sights, sounds, sensations, smells, tastes, feelings, mental images, memories, thoughts, understandings, urges, and intentions, as well as the experience of awareness or consciousness. We do this through presence practices like meditation, silent prayer, tai chi, qi gong, yoga, and the practice of presence throughout the day.

When we fully attend to the Now, our compulsive thinking calms down, and we experience a sense of space between ourselves and our experience, which allows us to witness that experience. We start seeing our experience instead of just being our experience. In psychology, some call this defusion because we're no longer fused with our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Then, we can realize who we truly are apart from our experiences and begin to see that our beliefs about ourselves and others are constructions of the mind. We see that the mind creates a worldview that is, at best, an imperfect reflection of Reality.

The second aspect of Attending is to carefully investigate the endless stream of causes, actions, and consequences as they arise and pass away. This is a practice of inquiry into past and present events, actions, and consequences, which deepens our understanding and wisdom. It enables us to appreciate the truth, seeing more clearly what is and why.

When we look carefully at things through Attending, we develop insight and see what's happening within the mind and in the world. We see that there's an unchanging witness inside us that observes the unfolding of Life from both an internal and external perspective. This witness recognizes that we aren't our thoughts, feelings, urges, understandings, beliefs, or pain, as those constantly change. This is a liberating insight because it helps us begin to not take our mind quite so personally.

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Attending also helps us develop our understanding that everything is impermanent except for the unchanging nature of our still, spacious awareness. We see that everything arises and passes away. This appreciation of impermanence triggers an appreciation of the preciousness of this fleeting life. **Appreciating impermanence puts everything into proper perspective**, leading to tremendous compassion for all of us who will soon enough lose everything we hold dear. We see the necessity to live each day wholeheartedly and cease our compulsive strivings for money, power, and status, which mean so little in the grand scheme of things.

Through Attending, we begin to appreciate the causes and consequences of our actions, gaining an understanding of karma. We begin to see what's wholesome that leads to beneficial consequences and what's unwholesome that leads to harmful consequences. We develop a deeper understanding of why others behave as they do, noticing that everyone operates with mixed agendas borne of both fear and love. We see that most people are wounded, afraid, and caught up in ego compulsions to secure their survival and comfort, as well as to pass on their genes. We appreciate our collective human struggle with selfishness, self-concern, and our woundedness, which naturally builds our capacity for compassion and forgiveness arising out of our reverence for life.

For healing, **it's most important to attend to our pain**, inquiring deeply into our trauma-induced negative beliefs and experiences or our Love Wound. This inquiry must be made into the center of the wound so that we can clearly see the trauma (including the trauma of neglect), hurt, and resulting misbelief that we are bad or unlovable. With sufficient inquiry, we eventually see the delusional nature of these negative judgments we received from others and believed.

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The second critical thing we must attend to is intention. When we look closely, we can see that a key intention arises with a Love Wound to heal it and ease the pain of feeling unlovable. Careful Attending allows us to see how our actions are driven by an intention to get others to love us, admire us, or respect us so that we might feel lovable. This often manifests as people-pleasing or pursuing achievement.

Attending to intention also allows us to see when we act out of fear to prevent others from criticizing or rejecting us. Many of us feel unlovable when criticized or rejected.

As we attend deeply into the center of our Love Wound and into its origins, we eventually see beyond the illusion of our unlovability. Attending allows us to sense our innate goodness beyond and before our woundedness. In the stillness of Attending, we experience the healing sense of our wholeness beneath our wounded sense of brokenness. In moments of still presence, we begin to tap into the experience of our oneness with all that is, beneath our experience of separateness. We discover that the essence of pure consciousness is loving. We rediscover our loving nature—a sense of goodness that's beyond good and bad. We sense the sacred Life force that comes from beyond us but which flows through us with its drive to benefit and perpetuate Life.

When we rest in this pure, loving awareness apart from the thinking mind, **a natural healing and purification of motivation is triggered.** We see how important it is to love, and we're liberated from the need to procure our lovability, as this is a given.

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The clarity generated by appreciative attending triggers this refinement of intent. Once we rediscover our original lovability prior to our wounding, there's a natural transformation of our intent from trying to restore our lovability to just loving ourselves and others. Once our lovability is a non-issue, fear of criticism and rejection assumes its proper proportion. This awakening frees us to love profoundly, purely, and authentically.

Finally, **Attending gives rise to reverence**, which is the appreciation of the sacredness of existence, of Life, and of Reality. We recognize that there's a sacred force that flows through all of Life, and we're just one tiny part of a vast interdependent web that we're utterly dependent upon. We all arise from one ground of being so that we're all separate and one at the same time.

With profound humility and gratitude, Attending helps us see the world through fresh eyes—like the eyes of a child. This creates awe, wonder, and amazement (awe-mazement!) about the world.

Our minds are designed to pay attention to things that affect our comfort, security, or acceptance by others. If there's a loud noise, for example, our mind will become present, thought will stop for a moment, and we'll look around to see what caused the noise. If we smell something delicious, we'll attend for a moment to determine the source. If someone yells at us, we'll stop what we're doing and pay attention to them.

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The mind is also designed to pay less attention to things that are no longer novel or immediately relevant to our safety, comfort, or survival. This is called habituation. While our minds still scan our surroundings, we go back to our default mode, lost in our thoughts and feelings. Instead, Attending is the practice of intentionally retrieving Awareness from the mind's default mode to naturally counter habituation and restore our original experience of awe and wonder.

THE PRACTICE OF ATTENDING

You can develop your capacity to attend by first creating a **daily stillness practice** such as meditation, prayer, or yoga. I like to do a running meditation, focusing on the sensations of my body as it moves during my morning run. I also recommend starting and ending every day in stillness, even if it's just for five minutes. Try counting your breaths before a thought arises. With the next thought, begin counting again. Your concentration will improve with practice.

You can also try **rotating your attention**. Start with your breath. Then, notice your thoughts, emotions, body sensations, what you see, and what you hear. Once your brain is primed for stillness, carry that stillness into the movement of your day. Start by paying close attention to your routine activities, such as bathing, brushing your teeth, driving, or making meals. Use the time you spend walking from place to place as an opportunity to attend.

When you're with others, give them the gift of your full attention. Note not only what they're saying, but also their nonverbal expressions. Use every interaction throughout the day as an opportunity to practice presence. You can even learn to use distractions and interruptions as opportunities to practice Attending. If your phone rings, for example, use it as a signal to wake up to the present moment.

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You can also **set presence reminders on your watch or smartphone** to go off repeatedly throughout the day. Note the sights, sounds, body sensations, thoughts, and feelings you experience in each of these moments.

It's particularly healing to **intentionally become present** whenever you're sad, afraid, angry, upset, or in any way in pain. Look deeply into the center of the pain for its source. Ask yourself, "What is this?" and "Why is this?" Stay open and attentive, asking again and again and listening for any intuitive answers that come into your mind. Imagine, for example, that someone criticizes you harshly and unjustly. Notice your anger, and continue to observe it. You might notice hurt or fear. Continue to observe, and ask yourself what you're experiencing. Is there truth or merit to what this person said? Is there truly anything to fear? What might have triggered the criticism? See if you feel any fear of unlovability, and recognize the falsity of it. As you seek to understand through your Attending, you'll be freer to respond with love rather than an impulsive misguided intention to protect yourself from the delusion of unlovability.

After three months of this practice, you'll likely experience a subtle shift in your Life, feeling freer, lighter, clearer, calmer, and more centered. When you combine this practice with the other two As, appreciating and acting with love, you'll be fully empowered to engage in the practice of love.

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IN OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll explore in greater detail the practice of presence. Presence is the foundation of a life of love and the essence of the practice of attending.

In the meantime, between now and then, I invite you to begin the following.

1. If you haven't done this already, begin a formal stillness practice, even if it is for just five minutes every morning. Link it to something else you do, like brushing your teeth. Get into a relaxed and alert posture, and simply attend to your breath or to a sensation in your body. When your mind wanders, note this and simply return your attention back to your breath or body. If you want, you can rotate your attention to sights or sounds.
2. Try to attend fully to your routine daily activities rather than be lost in thought. Try to be as present and wholeheartedly engaged in what you are doing as much as possible so that your mind stills. When thinking happens, note it and return your attention fully to what you are doing.
3. Be on the lookout for any pain or distress. When pain arises, stop yourself and ask "What is this?" and "Why is this?" Take time to look deeply into the core of the pain to see what is there. Is it fear? Hurt? Anger? Are there any negative judgments? Is your security or lovability or connection to others feeling threatened in any way? Hold your pain with kindness and care. Talk out your pain with someone you trust.

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4. Pay close attention to your intentions so that you can begin to refine and purify your intentions to just the intention to love. Start each day with intentions to love yourself, to love others, and to let others love you. Notice when any intentions arise to do anything to counter the delusion of unlovability. Renounce acting on this unwholesome intention, reminding yourself that the feeling of being unlovable is real, but not true. Notice when any intentions arise to harm yourself or others and let them fall away. Renounce these unwholesome intentions and refrain from acting on them. Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed by unwholesome urges.

Please take some time to share your reflections with your fellow members of the WellMind community and to read what others have to say as well.

Let us share and support each other in our exploration of love!