

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

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.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

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.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

SO LET'S GET STARTED

Last session we discussed the first A of awakening, *Attending*. Today we will go deeper into the practice of attending by exploring the most foundational practice of the practice of love—the practice of presence.

Again, as a reminder, 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* to benefit all of life—others and ourselves—with a loving heart, while enjoying each brief and precious moment of existence.

PRACTICES FOR CULTIVATING REVERENCE

Let’s begin by talking a little about the various heart practices I will be teaching you in this course. People have used the practices I’ll be teaching you for thousands of years to cultivate reverence. You can use them as a form of spiritual reparenting to rewire your emotional brain.

Our innate goodness is obscured by our self-centered thinking. The appreciative attending practices for cultivating reverence that I will be teaching lift the veil of the ego, allow us to experience the sacredness of all things, and help us experience everyone’s intrinsically sacred nature (of course, everyone includes us). Along with good trauma treatment, they heal our love wounds and trigger liberation from compulsive self-centeredness.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

These practices are about **connection to our own inherent goodness and to others**. They help us go beyond the painful sense of being a separate, deficient self apart from everyone else so that we can experience our interconnection—our oneness. As you develop more of a sense of oneness, your reverence for others and all of Life will grow. When we awaken through the following practices, we awaken on behalf of the whole world, including ourselves.

As you experience that we are all one, you will also see that despite our differences, we are all ultimately the same. We all possess innate goodness, we're all afflicted to some degree with self-centeredness, we have all wounded and been wounded, and we all need love. The differences between us are matters of degree.

These practices will also help you to not take your mind's opinions personally. If you're afflicted with self-hatred, "I hate myself" will be replaced with "there is self-hatred." You'll gradually experience your identity to be the field of loving awareness in which experiences of unworthiness and hatred merely arise. This creates a crucible of reverence that can hold painful experiences with compassion.

You may fear the reverence practices I will be teaching you will make you soft and passive, but that isn't true. Actually, **love will make you a powerful force for beneficial change**. Look around you, and you'll see that hatred isn't dispelled by hatred, only by love. So these practices plant seeds of goodness, and with time, you'll confront evil with goodness and affirm your capacity to do other than evil.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

While you will likely notice immediate benefits, be patient. It sometimes takes hundreds to thousands of repetitions to heal our love wounds, transcend our ego consciousness, and sustain an awakening to love.

Bolster your commitment, faith, and hope by recognizing that millions of people over thousands of years have successfully healed and transformed their lives with some version of these practices. All you need is a *willingness* to consistently do them. They will work if you do the work. Know that no one is so wounded, flawed, or deficient that they can't benefit if they're authentically willing.

There are two ways to do these practices. One is in a formal way, where you set aside time for silence, stillness, and solitude, preferably before you start your day. Whenever you do it, even five minutes a day can make a difference, but if you can devote up to an hour, you will experience benefits much faster. Consistency is key to changing the brain.

The second way is to engage in the practice of appreciative attending throughout your day, cultivating a more continuous experience of loving presence. You can think of your formal practice as priming you for your practice throughout the rest of the day.

There are many different attending practices. Some build up concentration on one focus of attention, such as your breath. Others focus more on having a wider field of awareness of sights, sounds, other sensations, thoughts, and feelings.

I recommend starting with the presence practice I'll share with you now. Then, experiment with the other practices you'll learn as you continue. You may want to try each one for a few months and then mix them up.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

CORE ATTENDING PRACTICE: THE PRACTICE OF PRESENCE

So let's now practice the core attending practice: the practice of presence. This practice is core to the other appreciative attending practices because **presence creates the capacity for the other practices to have an effect.** You'll work on anchoring your attention on your breath while continuing to note other mental experiences in your peripheral awareness. Then, you'll practice what's called "choiceless awareness," where you let go of a focus of attention and let be whatever arises in your awareness.

The practice will gradually increase your appreciation of the sacred nature of things, and you'll experience more peace, ease, insight, clarity, and freedom to act wisely with love. While this awakening practice of presence will require intentional repeated efforts, with time, it will become more of a natural reflex for you.

The choiceless awareness part of it is what you might call "being awareness." From an open, spacious place within you, you will attend to anything and everything that arises during the practice without trying to control it. You will let it come, let it be, and let it go. You'll experience a freeing sense of Life just happening as it does, as the constricting sense of self that tends to crowd out love will gradually ease. Then, you'll experience yourself as a love-infused part of the sacred flow of Life.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

At first, of course, your mind will be very busy. I have a very, very busy mind that rarely ever settles, even after forty years (off and on) of attending practices. If your mind doesn't settle, that's perfectly okay. Just try to notice brief moments of stillness between your thoughts. Note your awareness of all this thinking, and try to notice the experience of non-doing—a sense that you're just having an awareness of Life flowing within and around you. This will gradually dissolve away the illusory sense of self.

Here are the instructions for the practice:

1. Find a comfortable position where you are upright, relaxed, alert, and balanced between an experience of relaxation and energy. You can sit in a chair or on a cushion. You can even lie down if you won't get too sleepy. You can close your eyes, but I recommend that you keep them open because you want to be able to replicate this experience throughout your day.
2. Begin with the sincere intention to attend as best you can to this eternal moment—the Now—for the period of this practice.
3. Take a few deep breaths, inhaling deeply and slowly. Exhale slowly and consciously. Let go of tension with each out breath.
4. Let your mind settle on the breath. Notice the sensation of air going in and out of your nostrils, and the movement of your chest and belly.
5. As you attend to the breath, note how your mind wanders. This is normal. When it happens, kindly and gently return your attention back to your breath.
6. While attending to your breath, also attend to the senses of your body—your feet, legs, pelvis, abdomen, chest, hands, arms, neck, head, and face.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

7. Let the tension in your body ease. Soften your hands. Ease your shoulders. Soften your jaw, letting it drop open very slightly. Feel the life inside of your hands and the rest of your body. Let sensations be received with awareness.
8. While continuing to attend to the breath, also note sights and sounds in your background awareness. If there are smells and tastes, note these as well while you continue to attend to your breath. Do this for about a minute or so.
9. As sensations, thoughts, images, memories, feelings, and urges arise, simply note them. If you wish, you can silently say to yourself, “thought,” “image,” “memory,” or “urge” to identify each one. If a feeling arises, you may wish to identify it specifically. If there is fear, note “fear.” If there’s boredom, note “boredom.” If restlessness arises, note “restlessness.” If you feel calm, note calm. All the while, keep returning your attention to the breath.
10. After a minute or so, see if you can just attend to the totality of your experience. Attend to this whole moment, with the sensations of your body, the sights, sounds, feelings, thoughts, images, memories, and urges. See if you can sense all of it. I call this “whole moment awareness.”
11. Be aware of all of these different experiences as they come and go. Let them come, let them be, and let them go. Note the constantly changing flow of experience.
12. Then, see if you can sense Awareness Itself in the background. Make a gentle effort to be aware of experience and aware of Awareness at the same time. As you do this, you’ll notice the waterfall of ever-changing experience arising in Awareness. When you attend in this way, you are present.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

13. Stay present by making the breath your primary focus of attention. This is called “anchoring” your attention on the breath. As your mind wanders, keep coming back to the breath, starting over again and again.
14. Now, when you’re ready, practice letting go whenever you’re tempted to direct your attention in any way. See if you can rest in presence itself and just be aware. This all may seem strange at first, but keep at it, and once you have an experience of it, you’ll understand it on a deep level.
15. Allow the flow of Life to be just as it is. Let go and relax with the river of experience. Sense the underlying stillness out of which all movements and sensations arise.
16. When your attention gets caught up in thought—as it will over and over—gently come back to an awareness of Awareness with a capital A, as well as the continuous flow of the whole moment. Listen to and feel the life of the moment. Continue to note the movement of your breath, still aware of other experiences as they arise and fall away. Sense Life as a sacred force living through you.
17. Without trying to control anything, and without focusing attention on any one thing, experience everything as just happening. Experience Life happening as it does. Notice if your sense of self falls away. See if you can sense a natural, empty, spacious, selfless, bare Awareness. If you can, sense how this bare, selfless Awareness is infused with love.
18. Resting in bare, spacious Awareness, experience the freedom of non-doing. Note the experience of joy, satisfaction, peace, and contentment of Life living through you.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

19. When you're ready, continue with your day, and bring this vast, spacious, still, loving Awareness to your movements. This is called being still while still moving. When you can do this, you are practicing presence.

Of course, don't expect to experience "enlightenment" in the first five minutes of this practice. I'm still waiting for enlightenment! Don't be discouraged if your wild mind, like mine, bounces all over the place, and you find you can barely experience any stillness, spaciousness, or presence at all. That's normal. The practice is simply to keep coming back to presence, 10,000 times a day, even if just for a second, for the rest of your life. Over time, the practice will erode the painful, constricting experiences of being lost in thought and caught up in emotions. It will ultimately bear the fruits of peace, clarity, and wisdom.

Since reverence arises out of stillness, this presence practice is the foundation for the other meditative/visualization practices that I will be teaching you in future sessions.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

PRESENCE IN DAILY LIFE

Now let's talk more about bringing this quality of presence into daily lives. Our wandering mind that keeps us lost in thought prevents us from experiencing appreciation. Most of the time, we're mentally in one place while physically in another.

It's useful to "check in" with the present moment from time to time to appreciate and savor the gift of consciousness, to calm and ground yourself when unpleasant emotions arise, and to regain a sense of perspective and freedom. As I just explained, to be present while living your life is called being "still while still moving." You can practice this while doing routine tasks like bathing, cooking, cleaning, or driving to work.

You might also want to set a reminder that vibrates periodically throughout the day to prompt you to "wake up" to the present moment.

Appreciation will be triggered when you're present to the experience of Life living through you. Attending in daily life lets you savor Life's experiences, whether a tuna sandwich or a beautiful sunset. When you attend to the Now, you prevent your mind from restlessly and unconsciously trying to jump forward to the next moment.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

For daily presence, practice the following:

1. Tune into your breath. It's there 17,000 to 30,000 times a day for you to note. If you're stressed or tense, breathing deeply will trigger calm and relaxation.
2. Repeatedly ask yourself, "What is this?" What are you experiencing? What sights, sounds, sensations, feelings, thoughts, urges, mental images, beliefs, actions, and reactions? Just notice them, moment by moment. This creates the liberating experience of stillness in motion. When you ask, "What is this?" you can see your experience rather than be your experience.
3. Practice looking and listening closely and carefully. Try to see and hear everything freshly and deeply. Look and listen so carefully that your thoughts are suppressed for a moment.
4. When you eat, for example, just eat. Pay careful attention to the tastes, smells, and textures of your food. Be like a scientist who is researching the experience of eating. Again, as in all things, repeatedly ask yourself, "What is this?"
5. When you talk to someone, look at them observantly, and listen fully to what they say. Play close attention to them.
6. Apply this practice of attending to as many of your waking moments as possible. Be present to what you're doing and do all things wholeheartedly.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

IN OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll explore the practice of appreciating more fully. Appreciation naturally arises out of attending, but we can also nurture it by attending in particular to our attitude.

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.

SESSION 5: Cultivating Reverence #1—The practice of presence

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!