

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

WELCOME

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

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.

SO LET'S GET STARTED

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, called "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.

Last session we discussed judgments and intentions. We examined the unreality and toxicity of judgments and the beneficial power of loving intentions. I hope that since then you have been noting the arising of judgments, replacing them with discernment, and setting conscious intentions to love at the beginning of each day.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

In this session we will now explore the third A of awakening, **Acting with love**.

Appreciative attending inspires radical reverence, which in turn inspires us to act with love. There are three inseparable strands of acting with love to nurture Life: to love ourselves, to love others, and to love all of Life.

It's very difficult to love others unless we first love ourselves. First, we must take very good care of ourselves and become our own ideal parent, treating ourselves as if we were our own cherished child. The practice of self-love involves optimizing our vitality through rest, good nutrition, exercise, stillness practices, good sleep, regular routines, time in Nature, and fun.

It also involves asking for, opening to, and receiving the love of others. You love yourself by letting others love you. This means you need to be able to ask for help. If you have a Love Wound, you need to borrow the love of others temporarily at times to heal that wound. If you never learned to love well, you need people who are skilled at loving to teach you how to love, which requires that you connect deeply with others.

The second strand of love is to love others and devote our lives to benefitting others. In this way, we balance living for "me" and for "we." But it's in living for "we"—which includes "me"—that we find our purpose, meaning, and ultimate fulfillment. Our intention is to nurture the harmonious vitality of all.

The third strand of loving is to love the planet that sustains us and care for all of Life.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

So how do we practice loving ourselves, loving others, and loving all of life? This will be the topic for the bulk of this course, because as an art, loving requires both knowledge and skill in the various love practices. I've identified 31 love practices that we will be exploring in detail. For today, let me now give you an overview of them:

The **first practice** is *abstaining* from harm. This includes harming yourself and others in words or deed. We abstain from good-now-bad-later impulses and cravings, such as lashing out at someone in anger or engaging in harmful addictions. Instead, abstaining involves metabolizing anger into constructive responses to harm and finding loving ways to soothe ourselves. Sometimes the loving thing to do is painful, such as telling someone a painful truth they need to know, so it requires discernment to insure we abstain from causing harm even when causing pain. Sometimes we can't help but harm someone for a greater good, such as in the extreme of protecting ourselves from an attacker.

The **second practice** is *compassion* for self and others. Compassion is acting to relieve our suffering and the suffering of others. Sometimes this may just involve giving others our caring attention and support.

The **third practice** is *forgiveness* of self and others. This involves liberating ourselves from negative judgments of ourselves and others, honoring the reality of things, and seeking to deeply understand the conditions and causes that drove us and others to cause harm. With deep understanding and the transcendence of judgment, we cultivate the conditions for forgiveness to arise.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

The **fourth practice** is *protection*. This includes protecting ourselves and others from harm. It also includes protecting the One Life of this planet of which we are all an inextricable part.

The **fifth practice** is *caution*. This entails taking care to minimize or avoid risk of harm—both the risk of harming others and the risk of being harmed.

The **sixth practice** is *connection*. This is the practice of safely seeing others and being seen by others. When we connect, we share with others what is going on in our lives and what we are thinking, feeling, and doing in response. This connection helps us to not feel alienated and helps us to manage life's ups and downs.

The **seventh practice** is *authenticity*. This is the practice of being “real” with others while varying how transparent we are with others depending on the intimacy of the relationship.

The **eighth practice** is *collaboration*. This is the practice of cooperation and teamwork to achieve goals we cannot achieve on our own.

The **ninth practice** is *trust*. This includes trust in ourselves and our own goodness. It includes trust in the practice of love. And it includes taking progressive steps of trusting in people who prove themselves to be trustworthy.

The **tenth practice** is *assertiveness*. This is the practice of asking for what we want, telling others what we don't want, and setting limits on others as needed.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

The **eleventh practice** is *affirmation*. We affirm both our own and other people's innate goodness. We freely give praise where praise is due. We affirm the good qualities and behaviors of others.

The **twelfth practice** is *nurturing*. We nurture the growth, well-being, and vitality of all of life, including nurturing ourselves and nurturing others. Nurturing comes in the form of guidance, support, encouragement, and believing in ourselves and others.

The **thirteenth practice** is *acceptance*. This is a practice that springs from our practice of appreciation. We accept ourselves and others for exactly who we are and we accept the way things are. In all things we say, "I consent." Through acceptance, we create the conditions for healing, growth, and constructive change.

The **fourteenth practice** is *consideration*. We consider the feelings, wants, and needs of others. We think through what would be beneficial and what would be harmful to others. We practice being as mindful as possible of the consequences of our actions on others.

The **fifteenth practice** is *empathy*. We inquire deeply into the experience of another to understand their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. In this way, we help others to feel known.

The **sixteenth practice** is *kindness*. This is the practice of an attitude of unconditional friendliness towards ourselves and others, even when we are upset or angry.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

The **seventeenth practice** is *generosity*, in which we freely and joyfully give of our time, our attention, our talents, and our material resources to benefit others. The generosity of love gives with a full and open heart and hand without expecting anything in return.

The **eighteenth practice** is *helpfulness*. We help each other to bear and overcome life's difficulties and challenges. We help others with that which they cannot do for themselves.

The **nineteenth practice** is *humility*. In practicing humility, we see our place in the larger scheme of life, holding ourselves as no more or less than any other person. We maintain an abiding sense of both our infinite sacredness and our insignificance.

The **twentieth practice** is *respect*. We show ourselves and others respect, unconditionally, out of our commitment to being respectful. We keep our own self-respect through our practice of integrity.

The **twenty-first practice** is *patience*. Seeing that all things happen in their own time, we are patient with ourselves and others. In this, we also practice humility, acknowledging that the world does not revolve around our expectations of how things should be or when things should happen.

The **twenty-second practice** is *accountability*. We hold ourselves accountable for our actions. We move from victim to survivor and thriver. We take complete responsibility for our lives. We also hold others accountable for their actions. We live an excuse-free life.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

The **twenty-third** practice is *integrity*. This is the practice of doing the next right thing, moment-by-moment and day-by day, even when no one is looking. We maintain our respect through our integrity and make ourselves trustworthy with others.

The **twenty-fourth** practice is *repair*. This is the practice in which we seek to make amends and provide restitution for the harm we have done.

The **twenty-fifth** practice is *courage*. Courage is doing what is right and good—what is loving—despite our fear. Courage helps fortify our integrity when there is a risk of harm.

The **twenty-sixth** practice is *discipline*. Discipline is the capacity to do what is best for us and others even when we don't feel like it, when something is difficult, or when something requires effort. Discipline involves consistency and persistence in the face of tedium and temptations.

The **twenty-seventh** practice is *contentment*. Contentment is being happy with who we are, with the people in our lives, and with our life situation, just as it is. It is a practice of reverence for this moment, for others, and for ourselves just as we are. When we are content, this moment is more than enough, and enough is a feast.

The **twenty-eighth** practice is *gratitude*. This is the practice of being thankful to others for how they have benefitted us and for the good in our lives. The practice of gratitude also stems from our practice of appreciation.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

The **twenty-ninth** practice is *hope*. One form of hope, mature hope, sees that in the long run, good prevails over evil and things will eventually work out somehow. Hope sees there is good even in “bad” situations. Hope sees a path to a better future.

The **thirtieth** love practice is *endurance*. Endurance is the ability to withstand hardship and adversity. It is the capacity to keep going when the going is rough. Our love gives us grit to persist and prevail.

The **thirty-first** practice is *devotion*. Out of reverence, we devote ourselves to the people in our lives, to our life purpose, to our love-based principles, and to the practice of loving.

So you can see that there are many ways to love. There are many ways to benefit yourself and others. Together, we weave these thirty-one practices into tapestry of the art of loving.

If you’re unsure how to act with love, ask yourself, “What would love do?” The answer will always arise in one or more of these thirty-one practices.

Sometimes when we ask, “What would love do?” the answer is obvious. If a friend needs a ride to the airport and you’re available to help, you drive them to the airport. Sometimes it is not clear. For example, imagine you’re tired and your partner or friend wants to go out. What would love do? Do we assert ourselves and say “no” to take care of ourselves, or do we yield in the spirit of collaboration and generosity and go out despite our fatigue? Maybe we take a rain check and plan something for the next day. There are sometimes no clear, black and white answers to the question “What would love do?”.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

Sometimes the answer to the question, “What would love do?” comes right away, sometimes it might take days, weeks, months, or even years for the answer to come. Sometimes the answer may come in the stillness of meditation. Sometimes it might come when we brainstorm the question with someone else. Maybe the answer comes in our sleep.

Whatever the situation, make it your life mantra to ask the question, “What would love do?” Make sure you include what would benefit you as well as others; don’t forget the “me” as you live for the “we” that includes the “me.” You won’t be of benefit to Life if you sacrifice your long-term vitality.

The day to begin asking the question “What would love do?” is today. The time to start is now. In this way, we begin to realize a life of love right here and right now. It is never too late to start loving.

SESSION 8: The 3 As - Acting with Love

IN OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we're going to talk about practice. We become skilled at any art through practice, and loving is no exception. The good news is that anyone can become more loving with practice.

In the meantime, between now and then, I invite you to practice the following:

1. Continue your daily presence practice with a period of silence, solitude, and stillness in the morning and with your practice of stillness in motion throughout the day.
2. Start your day with a morning intention to love. You might want to recite a daily intention in the form of a prayer.
3. Inquire deeply into your experience with a kind, curious eye, especially if you are in pain. Ask "What is this?" and affirm, "This is sacred." Continue to let go of judgments as they arise.
4. Review these 31 love practices. Note which ones you do regularly. Note when ones need further development.
5. Begin to practice asking the daily mantra, "What would love do?" When the answer is clear, act with love to benefit yourself and others.

As always, 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!