

SESSION 17: Protection

WELCOME

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

If you're new to this course, I strongly recommend that you review the first ten sessions because they make up the core foundation. You'll need this 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.

In our last session we discussed forgiveness of others. I hope you've been able to reflect on this over the past week and have begun the practice of forgiving others.

Today we will turn from forgiveness to the practice of protecting ourselves and others from harm.

SESSION 17: Protection

What is Protection?

To protect someone or something means to shield it from injury, damage, or destruction. In our relationships and affairs, we protect ourselves and others from experiencing harm. Examples include learning self-defense, not going down a dark alley alone in the middle of the night, and reading the fine print before signing a contract.

Preventing a young child from running out in the street is protection. You protect yourself from the elements by wearing clothes and living in a home. In our society, you need to protect your civil and political rights, and you protect yourself or others when you fight off or flee from an attacker.

We also protect our resources. Locking your car or house protects to some degree against people breaking in and stealing. Saving money for a rainy day is protective. Having home, health, and life insurance protects against financial catastrophe. Painting and other home maintenance tasks protect the building from rot and decay.

You protect your health and vitality when you eat well, take good care of yourself, manage stress skillfully, and cultivate your spirituality. You also protect yourself by surrounding yourself with loving people who love you.

Your immune system protects you from infection, and you protect yourself from infection by having safe sex, washing your hands, and eating unspoiled foods. In the days of COVID-19, you may have protected yourself by wearing a mask or social distancing.

SESSION 17: Protection

You can protect our world by participating in our democracy, speaking out against injustice, and participating in environmental initiatives. Standing up to evil with love is a necessary form of protection. Some people devote their lives to protecting our country by joining the military.

Life feeds on life, so all life forms develop ways to protect themselves. To stay alive, you have to eat (destroy) either animal or plant life every day. And predatory people victimize others every day.

Among humans, an estimated 1 percent of us suffer from psychopathy, and 4 percent suffer from sociopathy. People with these antisocial personality disorders lack empathy, show disregard for others and for rules, lack remorse or guilt, and are often violent. Psychopaths tend to be more controlled, manipulative, and calculating, as they're unable to form attachments with others.

Among some attorneys and senior executives, rates of psychopathy may be as high as 4-12 percent. The highest rate of psychopathy is in Washington, DC at an estimated 3.48 percent, where political power is concentrated.(1) About 15-25 percent of male offenders in prison suffer from psychopathy. These individuals are spiritually blind, lacking a conscience and the capacity to feel authentic love for others. They're often charming, manipulative, deceitful, and dangerous. If you don't take care to protect yourself, they can cause you great harm. Psychopaths in positions of power have caused considerable pain to people, nations, and the world.

About one-third of all Americans have a criminal record, and arrest rates have risen 35 percent since the 1960s.(2) While psychopathy afflicts only a small percentage of people, all of us are vulnerable to criminality.

SESSION 17: Protection

In fact, nearly everyone has broken the law from traffic tickets on up. Many people are arrested for drug-related crimes driven by addiction or for crimes of passion, often while intoxicated. **If you look closely within, you'll see that you, like everyone else, have the seeds of criminality inside you. These seeds can grow under the right conditions of adversity and impairment to make us harmful to ourselves and others.** Likewise, it's wise to see the capacity for criminality in others. **We need to protect ourselves from this universal human trait.**

We are also all porcupines at the ball, advertently hurting each other, such as when we step on someone's toes or accidentally cause a car accident due to carelessness. No one is always fully aware or 100 percent in control.

All of us have egos, with a core concern for our own survival and comfort. We're all subject to feeling anger when hurt or frustrated, and we're vulnerable to harming others in ways both large and small. We can also hurt others out of our need for status by judging them and putting them down. This starts in the school yard with teasing and bullying, and continues into adulthood with gossip and even adult bullying. **But to judge another person is to do violence to them.**

We're all prone to selfishness as well, taking something for ourselves at the expense of others. It might be as small as taking the last parking space or the last serving of food. This is acted out socially in societies that lack equal opportunity, where there is an uncrossable disparity of wealth between the "haves" and the "have nots." Society also needs to protect people from prejudice, discrimination, and social injustice.

On a national and international level, we must protect ourselves from nationalism, greed, and exploitation.

SESSION 17: Protection

Humans have a nasty predilection to demonize and dehumanize others outside of our group and to dominate, exploit, or enslave other groups. A casual reading of any history book shows the need for protection from these dark human forces.

Spiritually and philosophically, it's important to note several realities. For example, we live in a universe of opposites, polarities, and paradoxes. Light and dark, good and evil, love and hate, order and chaos, life and death. **These universal polarities are all part of the necessary perfection of all things.** If we make an intention to live a good, loving life aligned with the forces of Life and Good, then we must protect ourselves and others from the necessary polarities (e.g. evil) that will always exist as part of this one sacred Reality.

We live in a dangerous world with threats both large and small coming at us from many places. Besides hurtful people, there are the destructive forces of nature, disease, and famine. For all of these reasons, part of living a life of love involves protecting ourselves and others from harm.

Benefits of Protection

When we protect ourselves and others, we preserve life. Protection creates a greater sense of safety and security in an unsafe world. When we're unharmed, we're better equipped to go about the job of living and loving. So protection preserves our vitality, reduces stress and worry, and promotes calm. **It allows for a blossoming into our full potential, a realization of all of which we're capable.**

SESSION 17: Protection

Since we're all part of one unified dynamic web of life (Gracious Orderly Dynamic, or G.O.D), protecting the planet ultimately protects all of life, including us. When we benefit others through protection, we in turn protect ourselves.

Barriers to Protection

Barriers to protection include being in unsafe environments, such as prisons or high crime neighborhoods. The greater the risk of harm, the less capacity we have to protect ourselves.

Disability can be a barrier as well. Predators tend to prey on the weak and vulnerable, such as those with intellectual or physical disabilities, as well as the elderly who may have cognitive or physical impairments.

People with psychiatric illnesses may not be able to protect themselves. Homeless people suffer a higher incidence of rape, theft, and assault. People with addictions often fail to protect themselves, acting with desperation to feed their habit and taking risks such as sharing needles or robbing others.

Some people are impulsive, setting themselves up for harm. This can include people with antisocial personality disorder, who act impulsively out of greed or anger. People with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) can also act impulsively, failing to take necessary precautions.

Social structures that enforce discrimination and injustice are barriers to protection. Examples include patriarchal societies, where men are at the top and women are at the bottom. In our society, there are both wealth and health inequalities that leave people in poverty with greater risks of harm due to violence, disease, and fewer education and work opportunities.

SESSION 17: Protection

It's well documented that being Black can be a barrier to protection, as police are much more likely to arrest a Black person than a white person.

Cultivating Protection

There are several common sense ways to protect yourself and others. You can protect your health and vitality by exercising, eating a healthy diet, getting rest, having fun, engaging in a stillness/spiritual practice, doing something meaningful, loving, and letting other loving people love you. You can also do so by wearing sunscreen when you go out in the sun and wearing adequate clothing to keep your body warm and dry.

Protect your home and property by locking your windows, doors, and car. Don't hide a spare key in an obvious place, and consider a security system in high crime areas. Don't go into your home if it looks like someone broke into it, and write down the serial numbers of your electronic devices in case of theft.

Protect yourself when you're at home by never answering the door to someone you don't know and never letting strangers know you're home alone. If someone doesn't leave, call the police, and have emergency numbers easily accessible. Keep the number for poison control handy, as well as phone numbers for trusted neighbors or nearby friends. Keep a first aid kit, a fire extinguisher, and flashlights.

Protect yourself financially by getting insurance (life, home, renter's, auto, and health) and by saving money, as you live beneath your means.

Wear a seatbelt when driving, and wear a helmet when you ride a bike.

SESSION 17: Protection

When you go somewhere, make sure someone knows where you are and what you're doing. If you go out at night, try to go with a friend, and be vigilant, paying attention to the people around you. Avoid walking in unlit areas, such as alleys or parks, and don't wear earbuds that reduce your ability to hear sounds around you. Have a cell phone with you at all times so you can dial 911 in case of an emergency. If you walk at night, wear brightly colored, reflective clothing. It will make you more visible to cars and less likely to be robbed or assaulted.

Don't leave your valuables unattended, and have your key out when you approach your front door. If you feel someone is following you in a car, change direction, or cross the street. If they still follow you, head for a police station or a business where you can ask for help. Always have money for transportation home if you get stuck. If you're dependent on a bus or train to get home, know when the last one leaves. If someone grabs your belongings, let them go. Putting up a fight can put you at great risk.

Avoid getting intoxicated in unsafe places with people you don't know well, and don't drink in bars alone. Never drive after drinking, and always keep track of how much you drink or drug. Also, don't leave your drink unmonitored where someone might slip a drug into it.

If you see something concerning, be a good citizen, and say something. You may save a life by getting help or warning someone else if you believe they may be in danger.

Have an open and compassionate heart, but be cautious with strangers.

Look carefully. As you get to know new people in your life, be on guard for signs of sociopathy or psychopathy.

SESSION 17: Protection

These signs include callousness, lack of empathy, cold-heartedness, shallow emotions (including lack of guilt and fear), irresponsibility, glibness, superficial charm, deceitfulness, insincerity, overconfidence or grandiosity, selfishness and self-centeredness, inability to plan, impulsivity, blaming others for their behavior, anger or irritability, and violence. Other research indicates some additional possible signs of psychopathy, such as a failure to yawn when others yawn, a history of antisocial traits as a child, having short-lived relationships, or power-seeking.(3&4)

Psychopaths tend to prey on people who are weak, insecure, lonely, alone, or scared. **So don't show your vulnerabilities to people you don't know well.** Instead, show strength and confidence. If someone dangerous taps into your vulnerabilities, they can use them to manipulate you.

People with psychopathy and narcissism can be very seductive and then crazy-making. Watch out for idealization, "love-bombing," and flattery used to reel you in. Look out for victim stories that make you feel pity for them. Look for them to deny their actions, invalidate your feelings (gaslighting), make you wrong for your reactions, lie, make excuses, attempt to provoke jealousy in you, withhold attention, put you down, undermine your self-esteem, and/or selfishly and insatiably demand your attention and adoration. If they complain a lot about other people, reflect on what that says about them. Be open-minded, but clear-eyed. Inquire carefully into someone's past, and verify what you can. **When in doubt, honor your doubt until you figure out the truth.**

At the same time, **monitor how you feel in the relationship.** Are you calm and serene, or are you panicky, insecure, or anxious? Do you feel drained, confused, hurt, or exploited? Look deeply at their motives.

SESSION 17: Protection

Why are they doing what they do and saying what they say? These people are sick in a very destructive way. Remember that **love doesn't harm**. If someone seems too good to be true, they probably are. That should be a warning sign.

Combine intuition with open-minded skepticism. You may not know why you feel the way you do, but that's OK. Your brain may pick up signals and patterns that you may not be fully aware of. So take time to process your feelings with safe, loving people or a therapist who can help you gain clarity. See the lesson on trust.

Another way to protect yourself is to avoid causing harm whenever possible. Remember that hurt people hurt. So if you harm someone, they may retaliate against you. Do your best to be assertive, considerate, kind, and respectful (see lessons on these practices). And if you do hurt someone, act as soon as you can to repair the relationship (see the lesson on repair).

Life involves risk, but try to **take calculated rather than unnecessary risks** (see the lesson on caution). Don't risk your life, for example, by running a red light to get to work on time. Don't text and drive, drink and drive, drive on balding tires, etc. Think carefully before posting pictures and personal information on social media. Before taking a risk, think about as many possible consequences as you can. What risks are you taking, for example, by letting your child go on a play date to the home of someone you don't know?

Think through both short-term and long-term consequences. For example, taking on a huge mortgage may give you the thrill of a nice new home, but will you be protected from a downturn in the economy in the future? To protect your long-term vitality, avoid **good-now-bad-later behaviors** such as excessive drinking, drugging, spending, or overeating.

SESSION 17: Protection

Make these practices part of your daily way of living to protect this precious life you've been given and to protect the lives of others.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session we'll have our first of several sessions devoted to heart-mind practices for cultivating reverence. Specifically, we'll be discussing a practice for dealing with painful experiences called "RAIN."

In the meantime, between now and then, I encourage you to do the following:

1. Continue your daily presence practice—both a period of silence, solitude, and stillness in the morning and your practice of stillness in motion through 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 as in the dedication to love prayer we have been using at the end of our sessions.
3. Inquire deeply into your experience with a kind, curious eye, especially if you're in pain. Ask, "what is this?" and affirm, "this is sacred." Continue to let go of judgments as they arise.
4. Review this lesson on protection. Ask yourself what you need to do protect yourself and others from harm. Do what you need to do to protect yourself.

SESSION 17: Protection

Please take some time after our session today 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!

- (1) Psychopathy by U.S. State. Ryan H. Murphy1. Southern Methodist University. 5/26/18.
- (2) <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/just-facts-many-americans-have-criminal-records-college-diplomas>. Accessed 2/24/20.
- (3) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mindmelding/201706/9-clues-you-may-be-dealing-psychopath>.
- (4) <https://www.cheatsheet.com/health-fitness/hidden-signs-that-someone-is-a-psychopath.html/>.

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