

## SESSION 23: Collaboration

### 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 the practice of authenticity. I hope you've had a chance to practice being authentic and appropriately transparent this past week.

Today I will be discussing the love practice of collaboration.

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To begin, let's discuss what collaboration is. **Collaboration is working together toward the same goal or a common good.** Examples of collaboration include one person driving while the other person navigates, dividing up chores to get everything done, or playing a game as a team. Workers collaborate when making products, such as when each person does their part to make a car in a factory.

Healthy collaboration might involve **taking turns**, such as when everyone in a group gets a chance to speak and provide their input. Collaborative people don't interrupt each other, for example; they listen to each other.

Collaboration is **sharing**. If there's one loaf of bread, each person gets a piece. It's the opposite of acting in competition solely for selfish benefit. Instead, it involves putting the common good before selfish desires.

At times, it involves yielding to the wishes and needs of others. Then, it's an **act of generosity**. If an elderly person gets on the bus when there's no available seat, the generous and collaborative thing to do is to give them your seat. Other examples of yielding might include holding the door open for someone to go through before you, letting an oncoming car turn left before you, or letting someone take the first serving of dessert. Yielding might also mean agreeing to do an unpleasant task, such as cleaning the bathroom, if someone else really doesn't want to do it. Yielding to others to benefit them is a generous form of collaboration.

It's **teamwork**, where one or more groups of people work in an organized fashion on a task. Usually, there's someone providing leadership, such as when people collaborate at work under the direction of a supervisor. But leadership can also be informal and shared by a group of people, such as in a game of pickup football.

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In a collaborative team, people have different roles that complement and harmonize with each other. Teams of people that collaborate well together are generally more successful than groups of people who don't collaborate.

**Collaboration may entail negotiation and compromise.** This means that each person in the group looks for the win-win solution that best benefits everyone. **This requires empathy—an interest in and curiosity about the needs/preference/desires of others in the group.** It also benefits from mutuality, where everyone maintains their concern not only for themselves, but for others in the group. If your friend wants to play Monopoly, for example, and you want to go to the movies, you might negotiate to go to the movies this week and play Monopoly next week. If you want to buy a car from your friend for \$1,000 but don't have the funds, you might negotiate to pay them \$500 and agree to mow their lawn ten times to make up the difference.

There are times, for example in politics, where we can't have everything we want. When people have different desires, there needs to be give and take. We often need to strike a balance between “me,” “thee,” and “we.”

**To be collaborative, you need to be flexible.** Rigid people insist on their one certain way regardless of the wishes or preferences of others. These people can be bullies. Of course, sometimes, you must stick to your bottom-line principles, such as behaving ethically or protecting yourself from harm. There are instances where it may come down to “my way or the highway.” But generally, it's good to be flexible and humble when collaborating. No one is right 100 percent of the time.

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**Collaboration benefits from creativity.** Thinking outside the box and looking for novel solutions to problems leads to better outcomes. Groups often benefit from creative brainstorming at the start of a project. A collaborative group welcomes input and ideas from all involved.

**Collaboration requires planning and organization.** You don't build a high rise building without a blueprint. Humans are especially good at thinking through and planning complex tasks like these, and endeavors like going to the moon require the coordinated contributions of thousands of people with thousands of different roles. This requires good leaders who promote good collaboration.

**It's also dynamic, which means that roles and plans may change as situations change.** If you're planning to go on a tour, but the bus driver becomes ill, you may need to find a different bus company. If the person cooking dinner has a migraine headache, someone else may need to chip in to cook.

Lastly, **collaboration requires that members of a group follow certain principles**, such as empathy, integrity, mutuality, fairness, discipline, playing by the rules, and respect for everyone's roles. If the airline mechanic suddenly decides he wants to fly the airplane and tries to take it to Tokyo instead of New York as planned, the trip will likely end in disaster.

This is where trust comes into play. Much of our daily lives depend on our trust that we will all collaborate because it's in our best interests to do so.

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### LET'S TALK BENEFITS

Now let's talk about the benefits of collaboration.

Of all species, only humans have achieved the capacity for civilization, in part due to our incredible capacity to collaborate. Life is truly a team sport. Look around at the room you're in. Think about the thousands—or even millions—of people who contributed in some way over thousands of years to the fact that you're able to read this: the building, lights, furniture, the food you ate in your most recent meal, the clothes you're wearing, and so on. It took a mind-boggling amount of complex collaboration to create the circumstances of this moment of your life!

Now, ask yourself: if you were alone in the world, would you be able to create the life you have on your own? Obviously, the answer is “absolutely not.”

Now, imagine a world in which no one collaborated, and everyone was in competition, out for themselves. What would that be like? When you think it through, you realize that civilization would crumble. We might even go extinct.

The truth is, **we need to collaborate to survive and thrive.** This is why collaboration is a love practice. Collaboration is not only good for everyone; it's necessary for our survival.

Collaboration is generally a better way of getting things done than competition. When you watch young children play soccer, it's every child for themselves as they all compete to kick the ball. As they get older, they learn to keep their positions and pass the ball. The team that collaborates the best is the one that wins the game.

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The same is true of companies that collaborate harmoniously. They do much better than companies in which there's a lot of conflict and competition among team members. Efficient families also often maintain collaborative roles, where one person generally does the shopping, another person takes out the trash, and another person pays the bills.

**Collaboration is a win-win process rather than the win-lose approach of exploitation and coercion.** When there is coercion, people suffer a loss of freedom, autonomy, and mutuality. Then, there is either overt or covert conflict, such as in the days of slavery or in authoritarian governments. Freedom and democracy succeed as social principles in part because of the win-win nature of collaboration.

It also **enhances relationships**. Much harm results from the exploitation and abuse enacted by selfish, antisocial, non-collaborative people. Look at your own life, and note how much better you feel about people who collaborate with you. Also, note how much better your relationships go when you're collaborative.

Ultimately, it's collaboration that creates community, and we must have community. It fulfills our need to belong and is the basis for creating our healthy interdependence.

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### LET'S TALK BARRIERS

Now let's talk about the barriers to collaboration.

**The core barrier to collaboration is our sense of separateness.** When we're isolated, we aren't connected emotionally or physically, and when we aren't connected, we can't collaborate. With connection, we feel we're part of something greater than ourselves. Then, we want to contribute.

Collaboration helps to heal our sense of separateness.

**Another barrier is fear.** This can arise as mistrust or even paranoia. Remember that collaboration requires a certain degree of trust. If you don't think someone is going to do their part or that they might hurt you, then you're likely to isolate and disconnect to protect yourself. This may happen if you've been hurt before. To collaborate effectively, you need to protect yourself, assert yourself at times, and hold others accountable. In personal relationships, trust develops over time with experience. In business dealings, trust but verify.

**Yet another barrier is anger or hostility, which erases the goodwill necessary for true collaboration.** It's difficult to care about the well-being of others if you feel animosity toward them, and it's hard to work with people if you feel anger and resentment toward them.

If you have a win-lose mentality, you may have difficulty collaborating. If there's just one seat on the bench, and it's all about getting the seat for yourself, you aren't likely to collaborate by yielding or sharing. If you're the competitive person who rushes to get in the checkout line before someone else, or if you step on the gas to get the last parking space before the other car, then you may be someone who has a difficult time collaborating.

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**Self-centeredness is a barrier to collaboration.** If all you think about is yourself, you're not thinking about others. If you're not thinking about others, you'll fail to take into consideration their needs, desires, or preferences. **Self-centeredness leads to a failure of empathy, and that's something you need for collaboration.** When we recognize that it's in our best interest to collaborate, narrow or unskillful selfishness gives way to enlightened selfishness.

Collaboration develops with the experience of an all-for-one and one-for-all family. If we grew up in an every-person-for-themselves family, we likely didn't learn how to collaborate. As with all the love practices, learning to collaborate requires intentional practice if we didn't learn it while growing up.

Of course, some people are, by nature, less cooperative. They may be obsessively rigid, oppositional, or defiant. If this is true for you, then you'll require an intentional practice of letting go, relaxing, and surrendering to some degree to the good of the group.

Sometimes, we need to do things we may not want to do. We do them because it's what's best for everyone. If you must have it your way all the time, if you can't give and take, if you need to always be "right," if you can't take direction, or if you can't compromise, you won't be able to collaborate. We can't enjoy the fruits of belonging and collaborating if we aren't willing to be flexible and cooperative.

The seduction of power can contaminate collaboration. The need to control people against their will poisons it. **True collaboration is voluntary and mutual.**



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If you're coercive, intimidating, or manipulative, you aren't collaborative. If you use threats or punishments to bend others to your will, you aren't collaborative. It simply requires respect for the autonomy of others.

This isn't to say that there isn't a place in society for the skillful use of power. Collective social efforts like war or business sometimes require discipline, control, and coercion by punishment. Our legal system uses punishment as a way of enforcing prosocial behaviors. These efforts, however, don't contain the spirit of mutual, voluntary, and loving collaboration.

### LET'S TALK CULTIVATING

Now let's talk about how to cultivate our collaboration skills.

The first step in cultivating collaboration is to **see the necessity of it**. See that you'll be better off the better you can collaborate. When the group benefits, we all benefit. See that collaboration is literally a matter of life and death!

If there's a task to be done, divide up the work. Let's say you're going on a trip. One person might do most of the planning while another person packs. If you're in a work group or playing on a team, stick to your role and stay in your lane, while looking for opportunities to be helpful to others.

Collaboration **requires skillful communication**. Effective teams talk to each other about what they need to know to get the job done.

Part of collaboration is the practice of **understanding others**, so listen, seek input, value everyone in the group, and practice respect and appreciation.

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**Collaboration is cooperation.** Avoid threats and coercion, if possible. Instead, strive to cultivate mutuality by practicing mutuality. Create a shared vision of common goals and higher good as you inspire your team to achieve your goals. Then, look for ways to support others in achieving those goals.

Collaboration **requires accepting that things aren't always going to go your way.** You must account for others' needs, preferences, limitations, and abilities. **Practice flexibility and accommodation.** Sometimes, you must let go of what you want for the benefit of the group. So practice give and take, and make allowances for each other. Find ways to capitalize on people's strengths while accommodating for their weaknesses. This is one of the secrets of great teamwork. Keep in mind that it's never just about you. It's always simultaneously about "me" and "we."

**Collaboration requires humility.** Look for win-win solutions, and negotiate. Try to find a way to meet the needs and concerns of all involved.

Remember that you want to live the paradox of autonomy and interconnectedness. Seek to find that balance. You want to avoid self-sacrifice if it will harm your vitality, but at the same time, remember the words of St. Francis of Assisi: "It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life." This spiritual ideal reminds us that the ultimate of enlightened selfishness is selflessness, which boosts the spirit of collaboration.

Practice yielding. Consider holding the door open for someone or letting someone else have the closest parking spot. When talking to others, first seek to understand before asking to be understood. Ask for what you want, but avoid making demands as much as possible. At the same time, it's certainly OK to be assertive and set limits on harmful behavior. Your needs are just as important as anyone else's. So devote yourself to the group, but protect yourself at the same time.

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**In the end, as with all the love practices, collaboration requires that we ask, “What would love do?”** When we’re working together as a group, whether at home, at work, or with friends, collaboration asks, “What is the most loving thing for all involved?” Let this be your touchstone as you practice it.

### OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we’ll be discussing and practicing a very powerful technique for transmuting emotional pain, called Tonglen. You will find it very useful when you are in emotional distress.

**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 in the meditations in the resource section of my website.
3. Practice appreciative attending. 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 negative judgments as they arise.

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4. Review this lesson on collaboration. What are barriers for you that you need to address? In what ways can you improve your collaboration skills? Look for opportunities to collaborate with others, including opportunities to yield to the wishes of others.

**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!**