

SESSION 28: Affirmation

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 lovingkindness. I hope you've had a chance to begin to practice the lovingkindness meditation.

Today we will be discussing the love practice of affirming ourselves and others. This is a critical practice for healing both our Love Wounds and others' Love Wounds.

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To begin, let's discuss what is affirmation. **To affirm someone is to acknowledge their value or goodness.** You affirm someone when you compliment, encourage, or praise them. You also affirm others when you show them appreciation or notice their good efforts and contributions. Examples include, "I see you put in a lot of effort on that report. It was very clear and detailed," or "You are a good friend. You're always so supportive of me."

It's **just as important to affirm yourself as it is to affirm others.** We are often our own harshest critic, so affirmation starts with us.

Unfortunately, too many people want to tear each other down rather than build each other up. The world is full of negativity and criticism. People fail all the time to show appreciation for the many things we all do for each other. All of us can tend to take each other for granted. Some people are indifferent or downright demeaning. So appreciating and encouraging others can make a big difference. When we affirm others, we boost their spirits and their motivation. Sometimes, affirmation can make all the difference between succeeding or giving up when things get tough.

While growing up, you probably received criticism from your parents and maybe your teachers. If you're like most kids, you were probably disciplined for misbehavior. On the other hand, you may have also been praised for good behavior. The question is whether you felt loved and valued regardless of whether you were "good" or "bad?" If you didn't feel affirmed, loved, and valued when you misbehaved, you may have experienced a wound to your sense of your worth. If you only felt valued when you were good or when you performed well in sports or in school, you may have developed a sense of **self-worth based solely on your performance or good behavior.**

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As a result, you may only feel good when you're receiving praise. If you look around, you'll probably notice that many of your friends or family members also feel that their goodness is conditional. It isn't an uncommon wound to have.

The most damaging feeling of all is that you didn't matter to your parents. This is an emotional Love Wound that can cause a lifetime of problems, including anxiety, depression, anger, and relationship issues. Most adults are in pain because they weren't sufficiently loved.

Now let's talk about the many benefits of affirmation. How does it feel when someone gives you a compliment? That good feeling is what other people feel when you do the same for them. You can brighten someone's day just by praising them. That is why affirmation is one of the love practices.

Everyone has a need to **feel valued and appreciated**. Everyone needs encouragement. In fact, thousands of years ago, acceptance by our tribe was essential for our survival. Back then, rejection meant certain death. Even today, being accepted and appreciated by others makes life easier. It hurts to be rejected or unappreciated. We all have a biological need to feel that we belong and matter to others. When we affirm each other, we provide much-needed support.

Affirming others is good for you in two ways. First, it just feels good to say something nice to people. When you see that you have brightened someone's day, you feel better, too. **What you give to others, you ultimately give to yourself.**

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Second, because love begets love, when you put good out into the world, it will eventually come back to you. Your affirmations create a resonance of appreciation. You cultivate goodwill in the hearts of others, who are then more willing to give of themselves to you. Be careful here, however. Make sure your intent in affirming others is to give and not to receive.

Affirmation of our unconditional goodness and worth (your own and others') is a great and necessary gift. Everyone deserves to feel that they're good and worthy, no matter how unskillful or destructive they might be. Remember that people who are destructive or evil aren't bad; they're sick in a bad way. Just like you, everyone deserves affirmation of their innate worth simply because they are human beings.

Buried in affirmation is acceptance. While you might not accept someone's harmful behavior, you can and should affirm their basic worth. Ironically, people are more likely to change for the better when they feel that others value them despite their shortcomings. Your affirmation of yourself and of others helps everyone to heal, learn, and grow.

There are a lot of hurting people in the world. In some way or another, just about everyone is having a hard time. Just as you need love, support, and encouragement, so do others. You can make a world of difference by just **looking for opportunities to encourage people** when the opportunity arises.

You must also affirm yourself. Once you're grown, **it's up to you to be the ideal loving parent to yourself that you may not have had growing up.** You can't rely on others to meet your needs for affirmation or to give you the love you didn't get as a child. After all, when people are hurting, they may not be very loving to you.

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So you might have to borrow this love from others, such as therapists and mentors for a period of time, but eventually you must take over the job of affirming yourself. When you do that, you're no longer emotionally dependent upon others to feel good about yourself. You can let go of the expectation that others have to behave in a particular way in order for you to feel OK.

Now let's discuss how to practice affirming ourselves and others. You can help yourself and others to heal through your practice of affirmation. It's like a balm for the wounded heart. **Start by affirming your own unconditional goodness** and worth every morning as part of your morning ritual. You'll need this to face a world full of harsh judgments and criticality. You aren't perfect, and that's OK. Like everyone else, you have weaknesses, character flaws, and a dark and destructive side. We all have seeds of evil within us. Despite all of this, you are good and whole at your core. You are good and whole despite the condemnations or rejections of others. Beneath any feelings of self-hatred or brokenness that you might experience lies the benign, loving, still Awareness that is you. You might start your affirmations by simply stating, "I am a sacred human being," or "At my core, I am good and whole."

This isn't to let yourself off the hook for misbehavior. But paradoxically, affirming your basic goodness helps you take accountability for your bad behavior. **Affirmation fuels positive change.** That doesn't mean you're working to change yourself from a "bad" person into a "good" person. You're simply working to change so that you might suffer less and experience more joy. To do this, you must be harmoniously helpful and not harmful. Spiritual growth isn't about becoming good. If anything, it's about realizing you are already good.

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When you start each day affirming who you are and the way you want to behave, you create the mindset for growth. Your self-affirmations will help you realize your full potential. In so doing, you will fill your heart with love so that you can give to others. You'll create the capacity to more authentically affirm others with no other agenda than the pleasure of giving them a boost.

Affirming others is rooted in a practice of appreciation, which means you stop taking them for granted. Part of your daily practice of gratitude includes acknowledging the many ways that so many people contribute to your well-being.

So go through each day **looking for opportunities to praise others**. See if you can catch them doing good, and see how many compliments and words of encouragement you can give in one day. If you look for the good, you will see the good. Then, you can affirm it. You might make it into a game to see what number you can reach.

When you compliment others, do it directly, not through others. If you're with them, look them in the eye. Give specific praise for specific actions. Don't give general praise that's unearned, which will come across as false. You can keep it brief, but make sure it's honest. As an example, you might tell a waiter or waitress, "You're very courteous. Thank you." Or you might tell your partner, "You were so supportive to me about my problem at work."

Make it a practice to notice and praise someone's steps forward rather than criticizing their steps backward. Focusing solely on mistakes can be demoralizing.

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This isn't to say that people don't need coaching and correction with regard to their mistakes and shortcomings. In fact, it's loving to give constructive feedback that helps people to do and be their best. It's also loving to set limits on inconsiderate or harmful behavior. But when giving corrective feedback, use "affirmative coaching." When appropriate, start by asking for permission to give feedback that you hope will be helpful to them. Be clear on your intent to help. Your attitude will speak much louder than your words, so make sure you're caring. Then, provide your observations along with an affirmation of how you know they can do better.

Let's say your roommate or family member leaves the kitchen in a mess. You might say, "Can I help you with something?" Follow this with, "I know you don't want to inconvenience or upset anyone. If you were to take some time to clean up when you're done in the kitchen, it would leave everyone feeling better." Or more simply, you may decide to just say, "Hey, when you're done in the kitchen, could you please clean up after yourself?" There's no condemnation or criticism in this if you say it kindly.

The point is to affirm their desire to do and be their best and to coach them in a better way rather than to condemn or criticize. People respond much better to "Please do this" than to "Don't do that." They also respond better to "I know you can do better" than to "you're not good enough." It's also useful to **affirm mistakes as opportunities for growth** rather than a condemnation of their character. In this way, you can be affirming even when you're criticizing.

While you can't control what happens around you, you can control how you respond. **You can prepare yourself each day to affirm the positive more than you condemn the negative.** You'll get so much more out of your life with this strategy.

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What it boils down to is that people need your love, support, encouragement, and guidance through affirmation. There's nothing worthier or more rewarding than building people up and helping them live their best lives. When you're affirming, the whole world benefits.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll be discussing the love practice of nurturing both ourselves and others.

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.

SESSION 26: Assertiveness

4. Begin a practice of intentionally affirming your own goodness every day and also affirming others. See how many times you can show appreciation for the good you see in others as you go about your day.

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!