

SESSION 29: Nurturing

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 affirming both ourselves and others. I hope you've had a chance to practice affirming yourself and others this past week.

Today we will be discussing the love practice of nurturing the well-being of ourselves and others. This is a critical practice for enhancing and maintaining our vitality and for helping others to optimize their vitality.

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To begin, let's define nurturing. **To nurture is to promote the growth and development of yourself and others.** Relationships are inherently unstable, so they require our nurturing to thrive. When you're loving, you provide this nurturing, helping your relationships blossom and stay vital. If you neglect them, they will wither.

You nurture others in part by affirming them, as we explored in the lesson on affirmation, and by supporting them, providing feedback, guidance, and teaching. Nurturing also **involves helping** (see the lesson on Helping), **encouraging, and hoping for others** (see the lesson on Hope).

Examples of nurturing include mothers and fathers with their children, coaches with their clients, and teachers with their students. A good therapist will nurture their clients' growth and healing. Friends and life partners also nurture each other.

You nurture your own growth through self-care, affirmations, your spiritual practice, engaging in the daily practice of love, and recruiting the support and guidance of others.

Now let's discuss the benefits of nurturing yourself and others. Nurturing is essential and life-giving. We wouldn't be able to exist without it. Despite the wounds you may have suffered in your life, you wouldn't be reading this right now if it weren't for the nurturing of untold millions who have directly and indirectly contributed to your growth and development.

When you nurture yourself, you enhance your vitality, which helps you to better love others. You can't quench someone else's thirst if your well is empty.

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Self-nurturing also helps to reduce your pain. This makes it easier to savor this gift of life.

Nurturing others fosters their vitality, growth, resilience, happiness, the realization of their full potential, and their joy. As with all aspects of loving, it's profoundly fulfilling. Since we are all one spiritually, nurturing others is really nurturing yourself.

Apart from the inherent fulfillment of nurturing others, there's the practical consequence that **those you nurture are better able to nurture you back.** As with all of loving, what goes around often comes around.

Now let's discuss **the barriers to nurturing.** Like all of the love practices, nurturing is a skill that may not come naturally if we weren't nurtured growing up. If our parents didn't know how, we have a case of "the blind leading the blind."

When we have a love wound, our focus and life agenda turn toward easing our pain. Our wounds cause us to become compulsively self-preoccupied, so it's more difficult to nurture others when we're in pain because we see them only through the lens of how they can help or hurt us. In this case, we may also find ourselves looking more to be nurtured by others than to nurture them in turn. We may even find ourselves compelled to use them in selfish and self-serving ways. When we're wounded, it's simply more difficult to put others first. **To fully nurture others, we need to heal our own love wound.**

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Hurt can turn into anger and hatred, causing some people to succumb to exploiting and even abusing others. These are manifestations of a wounded or diseased ego, untamed by the force of love.

If we haven't made nurturing others a priority, we will neglect them and perhaps be indifferent to them. We won't give them the time they need. **To nurture others, love needs to be our life priority.**

When we view others in terms of what they do or don't do for us, then we can fall prey to resentments, anger, judgment, and contempt. In this case, nurturing others becomes replaced by coercion, impatience, controlling behavior, or trying to "fix" others. Out of frustration that they aren't meeting our expectations, we may resort to blame, verbal or physical aggression, or just plain meanness. **Since negativity begets negativity, our lack of nurturing further wounds us in a vicious cycle of hurt.**

Punishment isn't nurturing; it's part of the cycle of hurt. We don't nurture people by inflicting pain on them. We need only look at our criminal justice system to see that it promotes criminality rather than heals it.

We also can't nurture others if we impose our own beliefs, values, and agendas on them. We must respect their freedom to live as they see fit, even if it's unskillful. The people in our lives need our support to freely grow into their fullness from their own authentic, lived experience according to their beliefs, values, predispositions, and passions.

Now let's talk about how to **cultivate nurturing**. You can learn to nurture by surrounding yourself with nurturing people, learning from them, and practicing nurturing. **It's a love skill that you can develop over time.**

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As with all of the love practices, **start each day by setting an intention to be nurturing, first to yourself and then to others.** Reflect on the benefits of it. See the need, and with compassion, dedicate your life to it. Heal your love wound so that you might better focus on nurturing others and see that nurturing them is also nurturing to you. Start your day in stillness, tapping into the Force of Love that you might be a channel for this force.

Be your own ideal parent, and practice affirming yourself, listening to yourself, honoring your truth, being kind to yourself, and showing yourself compassion. Meet your needs, protect yourself, assert yourself, and believe in yourself. Establish a core support group of people who can nurture you. When you're fully vital, you will be better able to nurture others.

Make your relationships a priority. Focus on giving (see the lesson on Generosity) while gratefully receiving from others. Seek to love, comfort, and understand over being loved, comforted, and understood.

Recognize that **nurturing others takes time, so dedicate the time** it requires. Take on what you can handle and do well rather than spreading yourself too thin. For most of us, this means nurturing our family, partner, children, a few close friends, and coworkers. That's already a lot! At the same time, look for opportunities to nurture everyone you encounter from day to day. It's amazing what just a few words of affirmation, encouragement, validation, and support can do for someone.

Nurturing requires connection (see the lesson on Connection). This means authenticity (see the lesson on Authenticity), honesty, openness, and heartfelt communication. People need this from you, combined with careful speech that doesn't cause harm.

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Being honest, however, isn't the same as being recklessly or harmfully transparent. You can be tactful, honest, and communicative at the same time. Remember that **truth spoken without compassion is a weapon that can cause great harm.**

Reliably **show up** for the people in your life, and **act with integrity** (see the lesson on Integrity). People need to know they can count on you and that they're safe with you.

Treat others with kindness (see the lesson on Kindness), and give them affection, love, and warmth. They need to feel how important they are to you. This means truly feeling that they're important to you and making them a priority in your life.

Give others the gift of your full attention. **Be fully present as much as you can.** Practice empathy (see lesson on Empathy) and curiosity. Inquire and seek to understand. Work to see into other people's hearts, and tune into their essence. It's very nurturing to be fully and lovingly known and accepted by another person.

Build people up by validating, complimenting, and affirming them (see the lesson on Affirmation). Praise them for what is praiseworthy. Open your heart, and let your care flow out. Show them respect (see the lesson on Respect), and acknowledge their experiences, including their joys and sorrows. Believe in others so that they might believe in themselves.

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Change is fueled by acceptance combined with awareness. So you nurture others by accepting them as they are and helping them to become more aware. This may seem paradoxical, but it's true. Just look at your own experience. When others condemn you, it provokes shame, which poisons growth. Love fuels growth, not shame. You can nurture others by accepting them (loving them) exactly as they are, even as you set limits on harmful behaviors. This requires that you separate people from their behaviors. This is critical, including for yourself. Your immeasurable worth isn't linked to your traits or behaviors.

Help others to grow by guiding them to problem-solve and learn. Help them to explore their experience and inquire into the causes and consequences of their actions. Teach and provide loving feedback if someone is open to it (see the lesson on Helping). Practice discernment without judgment, pointing out what you see as skillful or unskillful, paired with your unconditional reverence. In providing guidance, share your own experience and life lessons. In general, provide guidance as an offering rather than a demand. Respect people's freedom to do as they will. Refrain from being controlling or coercive.

However, if a child, family member, or friend spends money on drugs rather than on food and rent, they may have to become homeless. Painful consequences are powerful motivators to change unskillful behaviors. This may not seem nurturing on the face of it, but it is. You can unconditionally love and support people while also helping them deal with Life on Life's terms. It's simply not nurturing to enable destructive behaviors or shield loved ones from the painful consequences of their actions.

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Accountability (see the lesson on Accountability) is necessary to help people be their best, so blend it with acceptance and forgiveness (see the lessons on Acceptance and Forgiveness). It's also nurturing to have high but realistic expectations of others, as people will tend to live up or down to what you expect of them.

With children and coworkers, nurturing sometimes entails discipline, but recognize that discipline is different from punishment. If you need to admonish others, do it kindly, staying firm but gentle as you set limits and assert yourself. **Strive to avoid blame and judgment.**

You can also nurture skillful behavior by rewarding it with praise, appreciation, acknowledgement, gratitude, or other rewards, such as time or favors. **Pairing good consequences with good behaviors works to nurture positive behavior and growth.**

As you can see, nurturing involves nearly all the other love practices. **Through practicing love, you develop your capacity to nurture yourself and others.** The rewards are immense. It's what life is all about!

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll be discussing practices for cultivating the experience of our innate goodness. This is essential for healing the Love Wound and liberating us from the bonds of self-hatred.

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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.
4. Reflect on your own self-care. Are you being your own ideal parent? How are you nurturing yourself? How might you be neglecting yourself or even harming yourself? Write down what you need to do to nurture yourself and be your own ideal parent. Then make the changes you need to make in how you treat yourself.
5. Read through this lesson on nurturing. Make a list of your friends, family, and coworkers. Think about how you might nurture each one of these people. Then write down what you will do to nurture the people in your life.

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!