

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

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 nurturing both ourselves and others. I hope you've been able to put this into practice this past week. Today we are going to discuss how to cultivate an abiding sense of our innate goodness and lovability.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

When we're loved unconditionally while growing up, we likely develop an implicit sense of our innate goodness or inherent, unconditional lovability. Because of trauma and neglect, however, we may lose this sense of our lovability or innate goodness. If that's the case, we have a Love Wound.

We can also lose this sense of our innate unconditional goodness when our caregivers only love us conditionally, such as when we behave, get good grades, or do good deeds. When we didn't behave in lovable ways, we got the message that we weren't lovable.

Our sense of our innate goodness also takes a beating when we venture out into the world. We live in a world of judgments based on our traits, capabilities, achievements, and actions. We experience this from the beginning in school, where absolute unconditional goodness is replaced with relative, trait-based goodness based on how smart we are, how athletic we are, how cool we are, or how good we are at this or that. If we measure up or end up on top of the social hierarchy, we're good. Otherwise, we aren't so good. This is a form of social trauma. I believe **this assault on our innate goodness along with trauma and neglect at home are key causes of depression, anxiety, addiction, loneliness, and antisocial behaviors.** Jean-Jacques Rousseau was of this mind when he asserted that we're born inherently good, and it's society that corrupts us.(1)

Society also crowds out our sense of our innate goodness through the acrimony of politics and the continuous barrage of bad news in the media. These negative inputs give us constant messages that say people are basically bad, harmful, selfish, and self-serving. The media doesn't highlight the millions of acts of kindness and altruism that make life possible from day to day.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

Another assault on our sense of our **innate goodness comes from our cultural perspective on human nature**, in particular the idea of original sin.(2) This philosophy asserts that we're basically bad and must do good deeds, asking God to forgive us and give us redemption.

An ancient Chinese philosopher named Mencius articulated an **alternative model of human nature**.(3) He saw human nature as being innately good and that the realization of our full potential for goodness is nurtured first by the love of our family, then through socialization, and finally by our own efforts, including reflection and contemplation. This view of the innate goodness of humans is confirmed by the observations of altruism in very young children, who instinctively share and help others.(4)

In this view of human nature, evil or psychopathy is a sickness or perversion of our development. It's a kind of damage to our innate goodness, most often caused by neurobiological factors along with trauma and/or neglect. Psychopathy, which has an estimated prevalence of about 1%(5) (more in a place of power such as Washington, D.C., where the incidence is as high as 4%), is the result of some combination of nature and nurture

A small minority of people do seem to have what some researchers call a "dark core of personality," although we all have seeds or traces of dark traits to some degree.(6) The dark traits obscure our innate goodness through the ego's exclusive self-concern devoid of any love, care, or concern for others. A very small number of people with sadism even take pleasure in the suffering of others. We can think of this as an illness of the personality. This is the aspect of the Love Wound in which we don't feel reverence for others or oneness with them.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

The “**Dark Factor**” (or “**D-factor**) obscures our innate goodness. It’s described as the basic tendency to **maximize our own benefit at the expense of others**, accompanied by beliefs that serve as justification for our harmful behaviors. You might call it selfishness. People with a strong dark factor won’t act to benefit others unless it benefits them. They won’t take pleasure in the success or benefit of others. They’re wounded in their capacity to love.

There are nine dark traits that make up the *D*-factor:

1. ***Egoism***. The excessive concern with our benefit at the expense of others.
2. ***Machiavellianism***. Manipulativeness, callous affect and strategic-calculating orientation.
3. ***Moral Disengagement***. A lack of morals that leads to unethical behavior.
4. ***Narcissism***. An all-consuming motive for self-aggrandizement.
5. ***Psychological Entitlement***. A conviction that we deserve and are entitled to more than others.
6. ***Psychopathy***. Primarily callousness, lack of remorse or shame, and lack of a conscience.
7. ***Sadism***. Intentionally inflicting physical, sexual, or psychological pain or suffering on others in order to assert power and dominance or for pleasure and enjoyment.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

8. **Self-Interest.** The single-minded pursuit of personal gain without concern for others.

9. **Spitefulness.** A tendency to harm someone even if it causes some harm to oneself. This harm could be social, financial, physical, or an inconvenience.

The **dark factor manifests as self-centeredness, insensitivity, aggression, and drives to dominate and have power.** People whose innate goodness is obscured by the D-factor aren't nurturing, are greedy, and lack modesty, integrity, and empathy.

To some degree, all of us have some obscuration of our innate goodness by dark ego forces. When we see these forces at work in our lives, we may feel that we're bad or unlovable. **Our task is to recognize our innate goodness, to honor it, and to create room for its unencumbered expression. Our calling is to nurture its manifestation in our ordinary daily lives.** In this way, we make our ordinary lives extraordinary.

Retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho Tutu spoke of this in their book, *Made for Goodness*.⁽⁷⁾ They speak of seeing ourselves "with God's Eyes." This is to see ourselves as God would see us, as innately good and sacred, just as we are, despite our dark side. They write:

"We know all too well the cruelties, hurts and hatreds that poison life on our planet. But ... we know that the catalogue of injuries that we can and do inflict on one another is not the whole story of humanity, not by a long measure. We are indeed made for something more. We are made for goodness."

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

Unfortunately, for many of us, the Love Wound obscures our goodness and hampers its manifestation. We can't see ourselves "with God's eyes." Our feelings of deep unworthiness crowd out our sense of our innate goodness. Instead, we're poisoned by **"not good enough thinking"**. A deep sense of insufficiency leads us to strive to be more and have more. This shapes our actions, relationships, and lives. It leads to distorted and misguided efforts to make ourselves "better" when we're already good. **Our sense of our unlovability also causes us to neglect both ourselves and others, leading to emptiness, loneliness, deprivation, alienation, and suffering.**

We've been talking about one aspect of innate goodness: our innate capacities for altruism and compassion that either get developed through love or damaged by trauma and neglect. There is another type of innate goodness that's absolute beyond human concepts of "good" and "bad." This is **the experience of the Universe, Reality, or Existence as fundamentally "good" or sacred—of immeasurable value whether it happens to be good for us or not.**

This experience of absolute goodness is spiritual in nature and transcends our normal sense of "good" and "bad" based on either aesthetics or whether something is beneficial or harmful. From this perspective, **there's an unconditional reverence for all that is, including evil, chaos, death, injustice, suffering, disease, and destruction.** These are all experienced as a necessary part of the sacred whole of things, beyond human judgment. Even people afflicted with the illness of psychopathy are innately good simply because they exist. The unconditional love of saints and sages arises from the capacity to experience this absolute goodness.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

A third aspect of innate goodness is **the nature of pure consciousness or Awareness, apart from the contents of Awareness** (thoughts, feelings, urges, and other sensations). In states of stillness, we can experience pure, luminous Awareness. The quality of pure Awareness is loving and compassionate. Once you've experienced this, you can see that the essence of who you are—pure Awareness—is love. And it's good.

Several heart-mind contemplative practices can help heal our sense of our innate goodness and restore our experience of our inherent lovability. The key to rewiring the heart-mind system of the brain is practice.

Here are three practices you can try on your own; they require consistent repetition. Try each one of them, and then pick one or two to repeat over time.

The first practice is called “Sensing Your Original Innate Goodness.”

Sensing Original Innate Goodness

1. Get grounded and present with your presence practice.
2. Now, imagine yourself as a child. If you can, look at a picture of yourself as a young child.
3. See your innocence. Sense your original goodness.
4. Now, merge your sense of yourself as a child with your sense of yourself now. Sense deep into the innate core of goodness within you. Sense your core perfection. See clearly, if you can, the life experiences that have damaged this sense of goodness. Feel compassion for yourself as you would for any innocent young child.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

This is a great little **practice for piercing through the illusion of self-hate and countering the core feeling of being bad or unlovable**. You may find it helpful to carry with you a picture of yourself as a child to look at from time to time when you feel unworthy.

Here is a second practice called “Recalling Goodness:”

Recalling Goodness

1. Get grounded and present with your presence practice.
2. If you feel comfortable doing so, close your eyes.
3. Bring to mind a time when you were content and happy
4. Now, merge your sense of yourself as a child with your sense of yourself now. Sense deep into the innate core of goodness within you. Sense your core perfection. See clearly, if you can, the life experiences that have damaged this sense of goodness. Feel compassion for yourself as you would for any innocent young child.
5. From these memories, connect with the sense of goodness deep within you—the part that is strong, wise, and loving.
6. Now, see if you can breathe in the sense of your innate goodness deep within you, into your belly. Become aligned with your innate goodness. Feel the energy of it.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

7. Lastly, set an intention for how you will connect with this core of your innate goodness in the days to come. Absorb the wisdom of your own reflections. When you feel you aren't enough or feel you're bad, broken, or unworthy, pause and remember this experience of your innate goodness.

Now, let's practice another innate goodness meditation.

Innate Goodness Meditation

1. Please come to a comfortable sitting position. Take some moments to relax in any areas of obvious tension in your body.
2. If you wish, you can close your eyes.
3. Deepen your presence now as you rest with the movement of the breath or with the sensations in your body as your primary anchor.
4. As the mind thinks, gently and firmly return your attention back to your primary anchor.
5. Now, let yourself picture in your mind someone you care about—someone who is easy to love.
6. Bring the image and sense of this person close so that you can visualize how they look at you when they're being affectionate toward you. Imagine the sparkle in their eyes when they're happy or excited. Sense their aliveness.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

7. Notice the qualities of this person that you most deeply appreciate. Is it their way of showing love? Their brightness? Their playfulness? As you sense these expressions of their innate goodness, imagine sharing your appreciation of what you see in them, as well as how they would feel to receive your expression of love and appreciation.
8. Now, imagine that they're gazing back at you, seeing the qualities of goodness that they most love about you. What do they see?
9. Note what qualities of your original goodness you most appreciate. Perhaps it's your honesty, your love of the natural world, your humor, your generosity, or your kindness.
10. If it's difficult to find qualities you appreciate in yourself, picture your happiest moments as a child, and sense your original innocence. Just as the eyes of a trusted dear one can see your goodness, put your hand on your heart, and hold your best self with deep appreciation and love.
11. Now, picture a few other loved ones, one at a time, tuning into their goodness. You might tune in to qualities you appreciate in their current selves, or if the person brings up more complex feelings, imagine him or her as a child, happy and at ease.
12. With each person, be a mirror of goodness. Imagine sharing your appreciation of their goodness with them and how they would feel in receiving this expression of your love.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

13. Now, imagine moving mindfully through your day with the intent to pause, see, and honor the secret goodness of everyone you meet. To move through the world like this is a way of living love. It's one of the greatest gifts we can offer to one another.
14. Finally, let's return to the core central practice of mindfulness and kind attention. Sense your breath or body sensations in the foreground, and allow yourself to receive any of your feelings and thoughts with loving awareness.

Don't be discouraged if you find it difficult at first to tap into your innate goodness with these practices. Your skills will develop over time with repetition.

These healing, heart-mind practices work best when combined with a daily dedication to the practice of loving—both for yourself and others. We're better able to tap into our innate goodness when we manifest our goodness in a life of loving and being loved. Together, the combination of these contemplative practices with our loving actions leads to the healing of our Love Wound and the realization of a life of love.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the loving act of Acceptance—of ourselves, others, life, and ultimately, all of Reality. The action of acceptance puts us into humble harmony with What Is and creates a foundation for doing what we can to make things better.

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

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 kind, curious eyes, especially if you're in pain. Ask, "what is this?" and affirm, "this is sacred." Continue to let go of negative judgments.
4. Practice one or more of the innate goodness meditations. As you go about your day, attend closely to see if you can detect the ego obscurations of your innate goodness, such as greed, anger, or negative judgements. Inquire deeply into these painful experiences to see if you can discern their roots in fear and the delusion of your or other people's unlovability.

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!

SESSION 30: Innate Goodness

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(2)Wiley, T. *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*. 2002. Paulist Press, New York.

(3)Mencius. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Mencius/>.

(4)Song Y, Broekhuizen ML, Dubas JS. Happy Little Benefactor: Prosocial Behaviors Promote Happiness in Young Children From Two Cultures. *Front Psychol*. 2020 Jun 30;11:1398. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01398. PMID: 32714246; PMCID: PMC7346734.

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(6)Moshagen, M., Hilbig, B. E., & Zettler, I. (2018). The dark core of personality. *Psychological Review*, 125, 656-688.

(7)Tutu, D. and Tutu, M. *Made for Goodness: And Why this Make All the Difference*. Harper Luxe. New York. 2010.

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