

## SESSION 33: Sensing the Sacred Part One

### 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 love practice of consideration. I hope you've been able to practice consideration this past week. In today's session, I'll be sharing with you the first of a two-part series on contemplations for cultivating awe and wonder. These contemplations will help to develop your sense of the sacred nature of all that is.

It is said that Socrates once said, "Wisdom begins in wonder." Our session today will hopefully be a wonder-full session for you.

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### What is the sacred truth of Life?

The following contemplations counter habituation and remind you of the sacred truth of Life. Close your eyes and listen deeply as I speak. Make an effort to be still and present as you absorb the information. Anchor on your breath, and let your mind quiet as much as it can.

These contemplations use concepts as pointers. They work best when pondered slowly and carefully in a meditative state. While you can listen to them now, you'll get the most out of them by contemplating them one at a time for several minutes. I recommend staying with one thought a day.

1. Consider our place in the vastness of space. Note that there are 100 thousand million stars in our galaxy alone and two trillion galaxies in the observable universe. That's about one billion trillion stars in the universe. To put that into perspective, there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on earth. Now, consider the estimated size of the universe—93 billion light years across. (One light year is about 6 trillion miles.)
2. Consider our place in the vastness of time. Note that the universe is about 13¾ billion years old, the earth is about 4½ billion years old, and life on this planet is perhaps 4 billion years old. We, humans, have existed on this planet for only about 150,000-200,000 years. We have thus existed as a species for only about 1/20,000 of the time of life on this planet, and each of our lives is about 1/40,000,000 of the time of life on the planet.
3. Reflect on your place in the vastness of humanity. We are the latest of about 7,500 generations of humans. You are one of about 100 billion people who have lived on earth, and there are about 8 billion people on the planet. About 300,000 babies are born each day, and 150,000 people die every day.

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4. Consider Life—your life and all of life. See life for what it is—a self-organizing and self-perpetuating process of the Universe. Consider the miracle and natural genius of Life—of this dynamic process that continues to grow ever more complex with the flow of energy from the sun through our planet. Note the gift we are each given to be part of the dance of Life.
5. Consider your senses that perceive life, as well as your organs to take in air, water, and sustenance from other life forms. Consider your capacities to keep going, protect yourself, and reproduce. Sense the primal urge of Life within you to live and to perpetuate itself. Tap into the wordless wonder of Life and of your life.
6. Consider the vastness of all of life on this planet and the mind-boggling interconnecting system of all life forms on earth. We share this planet as part of a web of an estimated 9 million to possibly a trillion species that all need each other to survive. Sense the vastness of life on this planet—and our very small part of it.
7. Note that all your experiences arise from your mind. You're experiencing a representation of Reality that your brain constructs for you to experience. Take note of the fact that you can't and will never experience Reality directly. Therefore, that Reality is an eternal mystery. Marvel at the ultimate inconceivability of Reality.
8. Note sights, sounds, tastes, and smells. Marvel at how the brain constructs a dynamic, 3 dimensional, real-time, multisensory experience.
9. Observe that your brain—the most complex structure in the known universe—also constructs feelings, thoughts, urges, understandings, and sensations in your body. Note the brain's capacity for conceptualization,

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visualization, and imagination. Perceive the processes of remembering, planning, and reasoning. See that all of this is constructed for you to experience and happens automatically. Somehow, the brain does this with about 100 billion neurons and more potential connections—trillions of trillions—than there are atoms in the known universe. How amazing.

10. Notice that in addition to sensory experiences, thoughts, feelings, urges, and mental images, you have an awareness of these mental events through the still and unchanging nature of awareness. There is also awareness of awareness. Marvel at the mystery and inconceivability of awareness and the miracle of consciousness.

11. Reflect on the workings of your brain. What happens to awareness when neurons stop transmitting electrical signals, such as under anesthesia? Consciousness momentarily ceases to exist. See that awareness is like the dynamic, organized sequence of sound waves of a symphony—mysteriously generated by a neural symphony or perhaps transmitted by that neural symphony. When you inquire closely, you'll see that you're like a wave, and the wave is a dynamic organized process of matter and energy. The wave isn't the water but requires the water to exist. You are the same. You aren't your brain, but the workings of your brain. How wondrous and mysterious.

12. Ask yourself, "Who am I?" Reflect on this. Notice that you aren't your thoughts because thoughts come and go. Our sensory experiences constantly change, so you are none of these experiences. As you attend closely to your experience, notice a felt, coherent sense of "I." Ask yourself what this is. See that this experience is also constructed by your brain. When you look

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closely enough and long enough, you'll see that your sense of self and everything else you experience is constructed. As you see this, you'll stop taking yourself personally because there's actually no one to take personally. This is profoundly liberating. In particular, realize that shame, self-hatred, and judgment are also products of brain activity, triggered by prior events such as trauma and neglect. When you truly see this, you'll feel compassion for the experience of pain.

13. If you look closely, you'll see that the essence of consciousness is compassionate. Appreciate how wonderful it is that Nature generates this quality of consciousness.

14. Reflect on your experience of Nature and Life. See if you can sense a sacred life force that flows through all of Life. Sense it in animals, plants and trees, and people. Sense the whole vast, dynamic process of life on this planet. Sense yourself as one minute but sacred part of this sacred life process, and sense your profound dependence upon this vast life process. Sense your interdependence with it, as well as the force of life within you. Sense that this life force is both personal and impersonal. Feel that life is about life and that you've been gifted with the experience of life. As you reflect on this, you may notice profound feelings of reverence, humility, and gratitude. You may feel a calling to love the one life of which you are a part.

These and other contemplations help us to freshly see the awesome nature of existence and reality. They get us out of our rut of dullness and habituation. They help us to see that life is Awe-mazing. I hope these contemplation swill help you to awaken to see that the ordinary is truly extraordinary.

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### OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of empathy. It is in knowing the experience of another that we create the capacities for connection, compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. For this reason, empathy is a foundational love practice upon which several of the other love practices depend.

**In the meantime, between now and then, I encourage you to practice 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. Read the printed material that comes with this session. I suggest you contemplate one or two thoughts a day over the next week. See if you can go about your day with fresh eyes, seeing the miraculous in the mundane. As you go about your day, remind yourself that this moment is sacred, you are sacred, and everyone you meet is sacred.

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**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!**

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