

SESSION 36: Sensing the Sacred Part Two

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 a recent session, we discussed Sensing the Sacred, Part One. In today's session, I'll be sharing with you the second of the 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.

The following contemplations counter habituation and remind you of the sacred truth of Life. If you are listening to this, close your eyes, and listen deeply as I speak. Make an effort to be still and present as you absorb the

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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 or read 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. Reflect on all of the conditions and processes that must exist in order for you to exist—air, sunlight, water, minerals, earth, food, the vast diversity of life on this planet, and other people. Consider the thousands of biochemical processes in the trillions of cells of your body that must happen in a balanced, coordinated, and harmonious way for you to be alive. Think about the self-sustaining and regenerating nature of life with its incredible complexity. Allow yourself to feel wonder and awe.
2. Reflect on the mystery of the origins of life and on the billions of years of evolution that led to your existence. Recognize the necessity of imperfection, such as mutations that led to evolution, and how those mutations led to more and more complexity such that Nature eventually created the most complex structure in the known universe—your brain.
3. Note that you're made of the same stuff as everything else: matter. You come from elements shed from the stars. See that you're the Universe aware of Itself. If you can, sense your rootedness in a unitary ground of being from which everything arises. Through sensing this, experience your oneness with all that is and the love that naturally arises from sensing this.
4. Consider humanity and civilization—the many billions of people over

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thousands of years who have contributed to the creation of this civilization that we enjoy. Think about how Nature has designed us to collaborate in the trillions of ways that we do to sustain and perpetuate our species and civilization. Recognize how the power of love overcomes a more primitive form of selfishness that threatens our collective survival. See the essentiality of love and deeply appreciate it.

5. Consider your own individual life and all that had to happen for you to be reading these words. You are the product of 7,500 generations of humans and tens of thousands of generations of pre-human life forms. Think of all the love and care our ancestors had to give to each other for your parents to meet and give birth to you. Reflect upon the tens of thousands of people who have, directly or indirectly, contributed to your survival and growth or supported you over your lifetime. Think of all of the meals, clothes, and other supplies that others have provided for you.

6. Think of the odds of your coming into existence—the odds that the particular sperm cell out of about 300 million sperm cells merged with the egg that began your life. Think of the odds of your parents meeting and of each of the roughly 7,500 prior human generations surviving long enough to pass on their DNA. Think of the odds of the earth existing in this exact size, composition, and distance from the sun. Physician and therapist Ali Binazir calculated that the odds of any one of us existing are infinitesimal. Reflect on how we take for granted this miracle of our existence.

7. Contemplate the incredible beauty and complexity of your body, with all of its tissues and organs. Consider that you grow from a single microscopic cell that contained all of the instructions needed to create your body within just 46 tiny molecules—your DNA. How is it that Nature accomplished such a feat as you?

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8. Imagine yourself as a visitor to your life from 20,000 years ago. Imagine experiencing our civilization—house, cars, plumbing, electricity, cell phones, computers, TVs, airplanes, etc.—as if for the first time. How awe-mazing is the human civilization we have constructed that we take so much for granted? From this perspective, the ordinary is extraordinary.
9. Consider the dynamic and impermanent nature of Reality. Observe that the only thing that doesn't change is change itself. Recognize the necessity of impermanence and death for there to be life. Consider the necessary and inevitable nature of your own death and the death of everyone you love. At first, you'll feel sadness, but then, you'll feel compassion for yourself and everyone else caught in our mutual predicament. Knowing you will soon enough die, perhaps even tomorrow, you'll experience the incredible preciousness of your life.
10. Note that Reality consists of necessary polarities—light, dark, Life, death, goodness, evil, injury, healing, order, chaos, growth, and destruction. Recognize that there can't be one without the other, and appreciate them all.
11. Perceive that your judgments of good or bad are just that—judgments. They coincide with your mind's expectations or desires of what you believe "should" be. See that the Universe is as it is, apart from your mind's judgments of good or bad. Seen in this way, judgments are revealed to be a kind of psychological violence against Reality. Recognize that when you pick a fight with Reality, you'll lose every time. Realize that judgments are different from a discernment of what's helpful and wholesome versus what's harmful. When you see the destructive nature of judgments, they will fade, and this will enhance your appreciation of all that is.

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12. Reflect on the reality of grace and the innumerable gifts of benefit and goodness that have sustained your life to this point. Perhaps the unearned kindness and help of a stranger or people who have forgiven you despite the harm you've caused. See that nothing is owed to any of us, and everything is a gift.

13. Finally, consider the necessity of pain. See that without pain, we wouldn't survive. Recognize pain as an invaluable messenger that something isn't right. See the value of pain in compelling us to make changes to enhance our survival and vitality, as well as pain's ability to trigger growth of skill and a deepening of wisdom.

The goal of these contemplations is to generate awe, which triggers reverence, gratitude, and humility. With your daily contemplation of these truths, you'll watch your appreciation and reverence grow as you also reverse your current habituation to the miraculous. May these contemplations awaken in you a renewed sense of the extraordinary in the ordinary—a rediscovery of the child's experience that life is truly awe-mazing.

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 contemplations will help you to awaken to see that the ordinary is truly extraordinary.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of generosity.

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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.

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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