

SESSION 39: Humility

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 helpfulness. I hope you've had a chance this week to practice helpfulness. Today we will explore the love practice of humility.

What is Humility?

Let's start by discussing the nature of humility. Humility means to have a realistic and accepting awareness of our strengths and limitations, along with an understanding of our place in the larger scheme of Life. To be humble is to

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be free of both pride and shame. This means freedom from an entitled sense of self-importance, as well as a sense of unworthiness.

When fully awakened, humility provides us with freedom from the egoic sense of self. We become “unserved.” We realize that we’re both special and nobody special at the same time. There’s neither pride nor self-deprecation. With the falling away of the illusion of self, we think of ourselves less. In fact, C.S. Lewis purportedly said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” We have an unconditional reverence for the gift of Awareness and a realization of our inherent goodness and worth, just like everyone else.

Free of self, humility is also unself-conscious. Imam ash-Shafi’i said, “The loftiest in status are those who do not know their own status, and the most virtuous of them are those who do not know their own virtue.” While we may be aware of our gifts, good qualities, and contributions, when we’re humble, we don’t consider ourselves better than others because of these qualities. Instead, we consider ourselves blessed.

Humility gives us a proper perspective. Humbly, we see that Life is about Life. It’s only about us to the degree that we’re a part of Life. We see our oneness with an absolute dependency on Life. We see that we’re just a tiny but sacred part of a vast process of Life. We see that we’re subordinate to a graceful and intelligent Life force that flows through us. Therefore, everyone’s needs are just as important as our own.

Our care extends beyond ourselves to everyone and all of Life. We live not for ourselves, but for the One Life of which we are a part. We live to give and for the greater purpose of loving. Humility allows for this to become our life agenda.

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Humbly, we see that we're all equals among equals. Though we differ in our gifts, we're all equally sacred, along with all of Life's beings. No one is more important than anyone else. Free of ego, we see through the false social hierarchies that divide us from one another. Because we know we are all equally special, we have no need to be special. Liberated from the affliction of self, we're free to be ordinary. This is a great relief, as we let go of senseless striving.

Secure in our sacredness, we experience humble gratitude for this gift of life, for the grace that sustains us, and for the talents we have been gifted, as well as for any favorable circumstances that have shaped our lives. Gratitude replaces pride, arrogance, and entitlement, and we give our lives over to our higher purpose. We live for the fulfillment of putting others first, and the drive to do our best replaces the drive to be the best.

Secure in our sacredness, we're also secure in our fallibility and limitations. We know that we're flawed just like everyone else, and that's OK. Humility allows us to be realistic and honest about both our flaws and failings, as well as our virtues. We don't overestimate our strengths or rationalize our failures. Knowing we're always in some ways wrong, we're teachable and humbly open to feedback. We lose our concern with being right and instead focus on seeking out what is right. Free of self, we can be accountable while at the same time not taking criticisms personally. Instead, we seek out and accept criticism. We're also quick to apologize when we're wrong.

Knowing that we're limited, we live to serve a great cause that we know won't be realized in our lifetime. We recognize that the contributions of our great efforts will be small, yet still important. While we know that we matter, we also know that it's likely no one will know of our contributions 10,000 years from now. That isn't the point.

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Humility helps our efforts to manage our ego and live in alignment with love. It allows us to see our vulnerability to vanity, selfishness, self-deceit, and considering ourselves to be the center of the Universe. We see our urge to pursue pleasure, gain, praise, and fame as substitutes for true joy, peace, and fulfillment. We recognize our vulnerability to overestimating our strengths and virtues while rationalizing away our mistakes and flaws.

We see that a good life involves living true to our higher purpose and principles with the help of family, friends, a higher power, rules, traditions, institutions, role models, and teachers. We know that we need the wisdom and feedback of others to stay on track, and we know the necessity of being accountable to others, given our fallible natures.

When we're humble, we make decisions based on a sense of shared purpose. Since life isn't all about us, our concern expands to everyone. We live to contribute to the common good and live a virtuous life rather than a hedonistic life of self-concern.

Humble people are modest, not boastful. They let their actions speak for themselves and don't feel the need to draw attention to themselves. Instead, they just dig in and do their work. Also, they don't take compliments personally. Instead, they're grateful for the talents, gifts, and contributions of others who allowed them to achieve. In this way, humility liberates us from the need for praise, compliments, or recognition, while acknowledging the human need for affirmation and support. We can act without needing to claim the results of our actions as our own. Instead, we experience ourselves as being a channel for a greater force of Good that flows through us. We lose the drive for self-aggrandizement. With this comes freedom from striving, as we humbly see that there's nothing to strive for.

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Benefits of Humility

Now let's discuss the benefits of humility. Since humility is foundational to the practice of love, it enables the fulfillment of loving. All other virtues flow from it. Free of the tyranny of self, we experience peace and grace as we live in harmony with Life's purpose, investing ourselves in others more fully and with less fear.

Humility improves relationships by reducing fearful self-preoccupation and inspiring us to focus on others. It neutralizes narcissism, entitlement, and self-serving manipulation. By empowering the capacity to love, it ushers us into the harmonious resonance of loving and being loved, which opens us to the many benefits of love.

It also improves our relationships by reducing prejudice and judgment, making us more accepting of both ourselves and others. Humble people are more helpful, which also improves relationships.[1] Because humble people can admit when they're wrong or have made a mistake, humility helps repair relationships. Through the process of repair, it builds stronger bonds.[2] Because we don't need to be right all the time and recognize we may be wrong, we're more open to listening to and understanding other people's points of view. We see that there's often no one right way to see a situation, so we value other perspectives. Since it feels good to be valued, understood, and affirmed, people respond positively to our humility.

It also frees us of both shame and pride, helping us to learn and grow because we're less defensive.

Humble people are both more effective and successful in life, with success defined in terms of our capacity to contribute. Studies have shown that humble people are not only better managers and leaders, but have better

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overall job performance. [3][4] Even students who are humble do better academically. [5]

Through inner awareness of and management of ego, our inner self-control leads to greater outer self-control of our behaviors. As a result, humble people live more skillfully. As we live in harmony with the calling to serve Life, we experience the many fruits of love, including a sense of serenity, purpose, fulfillment, and wholeness.

Humility empowers skillful assertiveness and courage because we see it isn't just about us but about what is true, right, and good. It empowers and frees us to do the next right thing because our self-esteem isn't at stake.

With humility comes wisdom. When not clouded by illusory self-concern or self-delusion, we can see clearly what's best for everyone.

Barriers to Humility

Now let's discuss the barriers to humility. Pride, shame, and egotism are the chief barriers to humility. When we're caught up in ego and the illusion of self, our mind processes all experience through the lens of self. Then, our life agenda becomes self-serving self-aggrandizement or desperate attempts to secure a sense of worthiness. This poisons our harmonious interdependence upon the whole of Life.

Pride blinds us to the division within us between the force of Goodness and the force of unskillful ego. It fuels an unrealistic and inflated sense that we're greater than we are, and it creates the illusion that we're the author of our talents, gifts, achievements, and lives.

Along with pride comes the poison of arrogance. Proud people put their will

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above everyone else's. They consider themselves more important than others. The world serves them, rather than the other way around. Life works for those who believe in God and those who don't believe in God, but not for those who believe they are God.

Another barrier to humility is entitlement, which comes from pride and arrogance. Entitled people lack humility because they don't see their place in the order of things. They think that the world owes them, rather than seeing that all that comes to them by way of grace and love is a gift.

Judgment is another barrier. When we judge others, we put ourselves above them in some way, which is contrary to the truth. While we may discern that others are less gifted or somehow unskillful, judging them to be less worthy takes away the humble awareness that we're all equal. It isn't our place to judge the Sacred.

People caught up in the illusion of self can fall prey to self-deprecation and even self-hatred when comparing their attributes and social status to others. This also poisons humility, which arises from the unconditional sacredness of all beings.

Self-righteousness is a close cousin of pride and poisons humility in two ways. First, we lose our humility when we incorrectly take credit for the good that comes from our good traits. Second, self-righteousness blinds us to the ways in which we're wrong. When we fail to see the truth of our flawed nature, we lose our humility.

Another barrier is a lack of self-reverence as a result of neglect or trauma. A painful sense of unworthiness leads to painful self-preoccupation, disconnection from others, and self-deprecation. The sense of our innate

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sacredness is damaged, so we can no longer experience ourselves as equals among equals.

Cultivating Humility

Now let's discuss the practice of humility. The practice of humility is at the core of our lives, as we work to do good and live for The Good. It enables a process of corrective inner confrontation of our weaknesses and unskillful urges and actions.

Humility is foundational to the practice of love, so it's highly important to cultivate it. Through the practices of attending, contemplation, and appreciation, you can free yourself from the illusion of self and the tyranny of the ego, which are the causes of all suffering and sorrow.

The first practice is the practice of attending. Along with the other practices, it leads to awakening. You can't see the illusion of self and the workings of ego if you don't look closely. Looking leads to seeing. When you see the illusion of self and the truth of your sacred nature, self falls away, and humility arises. You'll see that we're all fundamentally the same and one with each other despite our differences.

Practice vigilance in your practice of attending. Be vigilant to egoic impulses and look deeply at your underlying intentions. Is your intention fame, pleasure, gratification, self-aggrandizement, to manipulate or control others to get something from them, to acquire something, to fill an emptiness, to hurt others out of anger, or to deceive? What is the underlying core emotion? Is it rooted in fear, anger, or greed, or is your intention rooted in reverence? Look closely at your urges to engage in "good-now-bad-later" behaviors. Look for pride, smugness, snobbery, shame, vanity, entitlement,

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or arrogance. See when “I” and “ME” are active. Let the light of your nonjudgmental, kind awareness cause them to fall away.

Practice radical honesty combined with nonjudgment and radical reverence for all experience. Honor egoic intentions to secure your safety and comfort, while abstaining from acting on unskillful, harmful, or unfulfilling intentions.

Notice that they harm you and others. Look deeply to see your vulnerabilities, unskillful urges, and unwholesome intentions. Look closely and visualize the long-term consequences of considered actions. Abstain from actions that will cause harm.

See clearly and realistically your place in the grand scheme of things and the calling of Goodness to serve Goodness. When you make this your guiding star, it will lead you in your navigation of egoic urges. Attending enables you to grapple with your weaknesses, lovingly confront them, and stay grounded in your humility, harnessing humility as a force for enhancing virtue and good character.

Attending also leads to a humble appreciation of the gift of awareness, which then triggers gratitude. When we look, we see that life is gifted to us, and we have a debt to Life—a mandate to give back. In your practice of appreciation, combine self-inquiry and clear seeing with radical, unconditional self-reverence. Hold unworthiness and self-hatred in the crucible of your reverent, kind awareness. Accept your imperfections and limitations. See that you will be wrong, fall short, and make mistakes every day of your life. See that we all are and will always be imperfect and limited. This is exactly as we must and can only be. It’s all good. Acknowledge your mistakes and shortcomings, taking responsibility for

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your behavior.

As part of your practice of attending, listen carefully to others, and value what they say. Seek to understand over being understood. Inquire, be curious, and seek knowledge. No one has claim to ultimate Truth, so realize that you don't have all the answers. Actively seek feedback, knowing that you have blind spots. Invite others to help you see what you can't see.

Let go of striving to "be good" because you're already good. Replace this with a humble effort to do good. Knowing that you're already good will diminish any self-preoccupation. Feeling the call of Life and your indebtedness to Life, you'll humbly give yourself over to serving Life.

Engage in your life of service without arrogance, bossing, fuss, or a sense of superiority. Renounce self-indulgence, as you also take good care of yourself and savor the many pleasures of life. In all things, set your intentions on being a channel of love. Live to do good and not to be great.

Be wary of praise, noting how it can poison humility. Instead, renounce seeking praise or acclaim. Watch for the poison of self-importance. When these qualities of mind arise, let them fall away in the light of your awareness.

Acknowledge your needs and be willing to ask for help. Humbly depend when necessary on the assistance, generosity, and grace of others. We all must draw on forces outside of ourselves to manage the unskillful forces within us. We practice humility with each other.

Make it a habit to gratefully recognize the virtues and contributions of others. When credit comes your way, attribute it rightly to your gifts, to

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grace, and to the goodness that flows through you, as well as to others. Take care not to fall into the illusory trap of ego. See that ultimately there is no “you” to take credit.

Put others in the forefront of your thoughts, which will counter your self-preoccupation. Drop judgments and replace them with discernment.

As with all of the love practices, be patient, gentle, persistent, and kind with yourself. See that cultivating humility is a lifelong process. It’s the rare person who achieves perfect humility. All we can do is engage in the practice as best we can, moment by moment, day by day. With steady effort, your humility will blossom and bear fruit, and the fruit of humility will then nourish your capacity to love and all of the lives you touch.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we’ll discuss the love practice of respect. This can be one of the more challenging of the love practices, especially when the mind is clouded with anger and judgment.

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.

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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 this lesson on humility. Reflect on the benefits of humility and the barriers in your life. Reflect on how you can cultivate your humility. You may want to journal on the practices you would like to incorporate 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!

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