

# SESSION 40: Respect

## 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 humility. I hope you've had a chance this week to reflect on your own humility and how to cultivate humility. Today we will explore the love practice of respect.

### What is Respect?

Let's start by discussing the nature of respect. Respect has two components. One is an attitude of appreciating or valuing someone or something. The other is showing your high regard or consideration for someone or something

## SESSION 40: Respect

through your actions. Like with love, respect is attitude followed by action.

There are different types of respect, however. You can respect others, yourself, and all of Life or Nature. You can respect laws, rules, social norms, or customs. You can also respect dangers and obstacles in your way.

There are also different ways of respecting yourself or others. You might respect someone because of their special abilities, qualities, achievements, social status, or virtuous behaviors. You might also respect yourself when you act virtuously or achieve something difficult.

For the purposes of love, there is another, more fundamental type of respect. That is respect for yourself and others simply because we exist as human beings. This type of respect is unconditional.

There is also a foundational respect for Life because Life is sacred. Then, there is a humble respect for Reality with all of its perfect imperfections, paradoxes, and polarities, and for the sacred ground of being. This is a spiritual respect, knowing that this eternal moment is unconditionally sacred.

We show respect for others in many ways. One is by being polite, kind, and courteous. We honor people by showing care, concern, and consideration for their needs and feelings. Respectful people treat others with unconditional dignity. People deserve our respect for their dignity, even when they have behaved shamefully. It's also respectful to defer or yield to others, such as giving up our seat on a bus for an elderly person.

It's important as well to respect other people's basic rights for autonomy, freedom, equality of opportunity, and freedom from injustice, exploitation, or other harms.

## SESSION 40: Respect

We all deserve respect for our individuality and differences, including our different opinions, beliefs, values, religions, and ways of seeing things. Respectful people, for example, respect that some people are liberal, and some are conservative. Respectful people agree to disagree and don't hate, acknowledging that we each have our own unique, conditioned, subjective world view. Respect is nonjudgmental and nonviolent.

Respectful people respect the feelings, wishes, or traditions of others, even if they disagree. I have a relative who believes that people who murder should be executed rather than imprisoned in order to save the state the costs of imprisonment. While I vehemently disagree, I must respect his right to his own opinion.

We may not respect evil actions, for example, but still respect that someone who commits terror, murders, or rapes children is still a sacred human being. Their sacred nature is beyond judgment. We treat them with respect even as we condemn their behavior and contain them. We contain, confront, and limit evil, while respecting that evil is a sickness that is an essential and unavoidable part of the fabric of Reality.

When we're respectful, we respond to disrespect with respect so as not to contribute to a vicious cycle of disrespect. Respectful people don't respond to harm with harm, if at all possible. We see the degeneration of respect in our current disrespectful American politics. Countering disrespect with disrespect further polarizes people and fans the flames of conflict, hatred, and contempt. It's toxic and unloving.

Respect is the opposite of the humiliation and contempt of disrespectful people. An "eye for an eye" eventually leaves the whole world blind.

## SESSION 40: Respect

It's also important to respect challenges, difficulties, and even pain. All of these can be sources of growth and wisdom. They're unavoidable, so disrespecting them is disrespecting Reality.

You can't truly respect others if you don't respect yourself, however. If you've been wounded, your trauma may have left you with a core, primordial lack of self-worth. Part of healing is regaining a sense of your intrinsic goodness and worth despite your flaws and failings. Self-respect is vital and essential—the core of self-love.

Self-respect includes respect for your right to be treated fairly with dignity, care, and consideration. Self-respect is at the core of assertiveness.

You also respect yourself when you act in respectful ways. This means acting with love, integrity, accountability, and living in accord with your values.

### **Benefits of Respect**

Now let's discuss the benefits of respect. Like all of the love practices, respect is good for everyone. First, it's cyclical. When you give respect, you're more likely to get it back, especially when you assertively insist on respect in return. So respect others if you want to be respected.

Respect is good for relationships, as everyone wants it. When you show others respect, they feel good, which generates trust, goodwill, collaboration, problem-solving, and compromise. It promotes the resolution of conflict and the repair of ruptures.

Since respect benefits others, it feels good to respect them. You know in

## SESSION 40: Respect

your heart that you're acting in accord with goodness and love.

Respect reduces the chances of harm. There's a saying on the street, "Diss me, and you die." I work in a forensic hospital, where staff members who are disrespectful to patients have a much higher risk of being assaulted. When you hurt others by being disrespectful, you increase your risk of being hurt back.

Alternatively, when you maintain your respect in a hostile environment, you also maintain your self-respect. As with all of the love practices, doing good by being respectful helps you to feel good about your actions and minimizes remorse and regret.

### **Barriers to Respect**

Unfortunately, there are many barriers to respect, all of them rooted in the ego-mind system. These include arrogance, pride, and lack of humility that lead to the judging and discounting of others. Here are some more specific barriers:

1. Hurt, which compels us to want to hurt back. At the root of hurt is a fear for our safety, comfort, and belonging. So fear poisons love, leading to anger, hatred, indifference, and disregard.
2. Conflict, which leads to frustration and anger. It can also fuel a disrespectful discounting of the other.
3. Compulsive self-seeking, which can crowd out our love and concern for others.

## SESSION 40: Respect

4. Unjust social institutions, which cause people to grow up in violence or poverty without equal educational opportunities. These fail to respect the basic human rights we all possess for safety, love, health, and opportunity.
5. Our narcissistic culture, equates human value with status and attributes. Pride, arrogance, and power all compel their victims to disrespect those who are different or less fortunate. They fuel hatred and even paranoia. We live in a spiritually diseased society that poisons our unconditional respect for one another. One only need turn on the TV for five minutes at night to hear the disrespectful political vitriol on the news.

### Cultivating Respect

Humility is a prerequisite for respect. When you're humble, you see that it isn't all about you and that everyone is equally sacred and deserving of respect. We are all partially right and partially wrong. Respect that there's no one right way to believe. Respect everyone's freedom and autonomy to think as they wish and make choices for themselves. Respect that people are where they are in their life journey because of their conditions and conditioning.

Respect diversity and recognize the value of our differences. Accept that people and circumstances are as they must and can only be. Instead, realize the arrogance of judgment, and replace it with discernment. Respect the preferences of others, and honor their concerns, treating them fairly. Show that you understand and respect their point of view. They will then be more likely to respect your point of view.

Treat others with kindness and courtesy as you address them respectfully with "Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr.," and so on as appropriate.

## SESSION 40: Respect

Be the first to give respect. Don't wait for others to be respectful first. Then, be unconditionally respectful. Practice the Golden Rule, treating others the way you would want to be treated. Since everyone wants affirmation of their inherent worth, affirm others. Since everyone wants to be asked rather than ordered around, ask for what you want others to do. Since everyone wants to be given choices, give people choices.

When there's conflict (and there's always conflict), separate people from the problem and from their evil, ignorant, unskillful, or otherwise destructive actions. Instead, see destructive people as disabled or sick in destructive ways, spiritually blind and caught up in greed, hatred (fear and hurt), or delusion. Just as you wouldn't judge a blind person for their disability, don't judge others for their spiritual disabilities. Hold them in your heart with love and respect, even as you hold them accountable for their behavior and work to contain their harmful actions.

If someone treats you disrespectfully, take the high ground. Don't counter disrespect with disrespect. Abstain from rude, hurtful, judgmental, contemptuous, or disdainful attitudes and remarks. Never insult, bully, ridicule, antagonize, threaten, or intimidate. Strive to abstain from any harmful behavior, no matter how hurt or angry you might be. If necessary, get away and get help to cool down and ground yourself back in love before you speak or take action. Commit to a life of nonviolence.

That is one way in which you respect yourself, knowing that you're sacred and have a right to exist even if you don't always feel that way. Protect your self-respect by acting with love and integrity as you forgive yourself for your daily mistakes and imperfections, taking accountability for your actions and living each day with a renewed intention to love. Live true to your values and morals so that your basic self-respect for your existence is

## SESSION 40: Respect

enhanced by your respect for your intentions and actions.

Respect the spiritual lessons of humility, wisdom, acceptance, insight, and compassion that spring from hurt and injury. Respect the laws, norms, and customs of society, except when they're harmful. Then, respect the process of constructive change, and engage in nonviolent protest to replace unjust laws and social policies.

Out of your humility, respect Reality. Remind yourself that circumstances are exactly as they must and can only be. See your judgments as egocentric and self-centered. This will give you the serenity to change what you can and accept what you can't.

Respect the dangers and fragility of life, understanding that life feeds on life. Let your respect inspire you to act with caution and protection. (See the lessons on caution and protection.)

Respect is one of the many ways you enhance Life and benefit others. It springs from the attitude of love—a reverence for yourself, others, all of Life, and Reality.

### OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of patience. As you will see, the practice of patience with ourselves and others is critical for maintaining our vitality and benefit to others.

**In the meantime, between now and then, I encourage you to practice the following:**



## SESSION 40: Respect

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 this lesson on respect. Reflect on the benefits of respect and on any barriers to respect that you experience. Are there any opportunities that you see to enhance your practice of unconditional respect? IF so, add these to your daily intentions.

**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!**

© 2021 Michael McGee, M.D.