

SESSION 43: Integrity

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 accountability. I hope you've had a chance to reflect on the practice of accountability, and how to best hold yourself and others accountable. Today, we will explore the love practice of integrity.

What is Integrity?

Let's start by discussing the nature of integrity. Integrity is doing what is true, right, and good. It's doing the next right thing according to your conscience

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despite urges to do otherwise. I think of integrity as a daily, moment-by-moment life practice.

We have integrity when we're consistent, reliable, and truthful, living according to our moral principles. We're responsible and accountable. While we're appropriately self-concerned, we aren't selfish. So, we avoid harming others through deceit, manipulation, exploitation, or aggression. Instead, when we have integrity, we live in accord with the principle of love as expressed in honesty, mutuality, and collaboration.

Integrity is expressed in various religions through precepts and documents such as the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Even better is the Platinum rule, which says we do unto others that which will be of most benefit to them.

The point of integrity is that we do what's right even when it's inconvenient or problematic for us. We do good even when we don't feel like it. People with integrity have a devotion to long-term gain despite occasional short-term pain. They can abstain from acting on good-now-bad-later impulses. This means putting the principle of love before destructive pleasure-seeking, distress-relieving, or other harmful impulses.

Benefits of Integrity

Now let's discuss the benefits of integrity. Integrity is good for everyone. It enhances life because when we put good out, good generally comes back to us, sometimes ten-fold. It deepens relationships and builds trust. People feel safer with us when they know they can rely on us and trust us to treat them well. Since we need and depend on the love of others for our vitality and success, the love we cultivate through integrity enhances our vitality and success.

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Living with integrity also promotes peace and wellbeing. When we've done nothing wrong, we can be at ease that we don't have to endure the painful consequences of wrongdoing. We have a clean conscience with no regrets because we've done nothing to regret. Living with integrity helps us avoid the painful consequences of dishonesty, corruption, and outright evil actions.

Barriers to Integrity

Now let's discuss the barriers to integrity. As with many of the other love practices, the biggest barrier to integrity is the ego. Urges for safety, comfort, and satisfaction without regard for others or for what's right stem from the ego. When ruled by our ego, we're spiritually near-sighted, unaware of our oneness and interconnectedness with all that is. We may be unconcerned about the impact of our actions on others, unaware that doing bad is bad for us. When the ego dominates, we're self-serving. This isn't necessarily bad, as our ego system is looking out for our survival and comfort. But evil and corruption happen when the ego isn't reined in by the service of love.

As I've said, the emotions that drive immorality are usually greed, fear, or anger. Fear can come up when we worry about negative consequences from doing the right thing, such as anger from our boss if we're honest about making a mistake or being rejected or harmed if we don't go along with what others want.

Greed can be the urge to steal something, to cheat during a game to win, or to cheat on a test to get a good grade. It can be subtle, such as a desire to exaggerate our accomplishments to make a good impression on others. Greed also sometimes involves exploiting others for our benefit.

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Anger can cause us to lose our integrity when it makes us want to hurt someone. If someone harms us, our primitive impulse is to harm back. If we aren't aware of the fact that hurting others hurts us, we risk losing our integrity by harming others. Countering hate with hate or evil with evil is a form of spiritual corruption. It takes integrity to counter, contain, and dissolve hate and evil with love.

Delusion underlies anger, greed, and fear. We don't see that it's best for us to do the right thing, even if it's difficult or distressing. That sounds contradictory, but when we awaken to love and experience our oneness and our calling to serve, it's no longer just about us—it's about all of life. Imagine you see someone being beaten up on the street. You do the right thing by calling 911 and sternly shouting at the aggressor to stop. This may put you at risk, but your concern is to stop someone from being harmed out of your sense of connection to the victim. That is integrity.

They say integrity is what comes out of us when we're squeezed. It's easier to do the right thing when we're feeling good. Stress, adversity, illness, and hardship can all make it more difficult.

After all, we want to feel good, not bad. But adversity can cause us to turn inward and become self-preoccupied. When we're in pain, it's natural to want to tend to that pain. Many of my patients have robbed a liquor store to quell their withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Others have mugged people to get money for drugs and food. They did this because they were in pain, desperate for relief.

Addiction is a type of painful impairment that robs victims of their integrity. The cocktail of shame and compulsion causes people to lie, conceal,

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manipulate, and do whatever is necessary to feed the addiction.

Our environment is another very powerful barrier to integrity. At the extreme, people in criminal environments like prison or crime-infested neighborhoods can experience overwhelming pressure to do bad things.

An economic system that exploits people for the gain and comfort of others is a subtle barrier to integrity. Capitalism without social justice constraints can create a corrupt environment that harms the disempowered and unfortunate.

Another barrier to integrity is culture. It's habit, tradition, or "the way things are." This was the case for thousands of years with slavery. It also manifests as sexism, racism, consumerism, and ways of living that harm the environment. Totalitarian governments that oppress people also create a corrupt culture that makes living with integrity difficult, if not life-threatening.

Cultivating Integrity

Now that we've reviewed the benefits and barriers to integrity, let's discuss how to cultivate our integrity. Begin to cultivate integrity by recognizing its benefits. Cultivate your awakening so that your life agenda shifts to living a life of love. When you awaken, you free yourself from yourself so that a greater loving force can flow through you. The attitude of love will inspire you to live with integrity. Love will cause you to never want to harm the One Life that sustains you for the sake of narrow self-gain. When you wake up, you see that the ultimate self-concern is a concern for all. When you experience your interdependence and interconnectedness with everything and everyone, you will naturally want to do the next right thing.

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You will also see the law of karma at work, knowing that your actions have consequences. You'll note that good begets good, while bad begets bad. You'll realize that causing harm harms you, and integrity shapes your destiny.

You'll also see the fulfillment and peace of mind that come with acting with integrity. Integrity prevents guilt, regrets, and remorse, leaving you with an untroubled conscience.

Look closely and see the negative consequences of corruption. What are the fruits of evil? Anger, guilt, retaliation, judgment, rejection, humiliation, unemployment, incarceration, homelessness, physical and mental illnesses, and suffering. Corruption gives us short-term gain for long-term pain.

Spur your awakening by dedicating your life to a life of integrity. Make it a non-negotiable bottom line, devoting yourself and surrendering your life to goodness. Live by the Golden Rule, or better yet, the Platinum rule. Make an intention at the start of each day to do the next right thing, moment by moment.

Abstain when you feel urges to do the wrong thing. Pause and process before taking action, thinking it through thoroughly. The next right thing isn't always clear, so talk about ethical dilemmas with wise people. There's a classic story about villagers hiding in a basement during a war. A baby starts crying, so the soldiers might find the villagers and kill them all. What's the right thing to do? Suffocate the baby to save the village, or risk the soldiers finding the villagers? Act in accordance with your values, keeping love as your guiding star.

Practice presence to develop clarity. Get still, look, and listen. Experience

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truth before thought. Listen to the whispers of your conscience so that you won't have to later hear the screams of regret.

Renounce hiding, manipulating, deceiving, or exploiting, as you refrain from evil. Don't go along with corrupt peer or social pressures. There's no such thing as an inconsequential lie or action. This takes courage, so cultivate your courage as discussed in the lesson on courage.

Don't shield yourself from the just painful consequences of your unskillful actions. This also takes courage as you commit to being accountable for your actions.

Practice meticulous but skillful honesty. Be cautious and mindful of your speech. Speak the truth with an intention to benefit others, when necessary, and to improve upon the situation. Keep in mind that truth spoken without compassion is a weapon. Integrity doesn't entail ruthless honesty.

Integrity is manifested in your actions. Speak up for what's true, right, and good. Walk your talk, and be reliable, trustworthy, and consistent. As you hold yourself accountable, also hold yourself with forgiveness when you fall short. Remember that integrity, as with all the love practices, is an ideal to guide our imperfect actions. None of us manages our ego forces perfectly all the time. We're all vulnerable to deception, delusion, and corruption. Each moment is the moment to start anew, again and again. Progress requires practice. So, when you fail, forgive yourself, get up, recommit, and persevere.

OUR NEXT SESSION

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

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relationships are inherently unstable and we're all imperfect, we all must make repairs from time to time to keep our relationships harmonious and vital.

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 this lesson on integrity. Reflect on the benefits of integrity and on any barriers to integrity that you experience. Are there any opportunities that you see to enhance your practice of integrity? 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!

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