

SESSION 46: Discipline

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 courage. I hope you've had a chance to reflect on where you need to practice courage in your life and have taken steps to live a more courageous life. Today, we will explore the love practice of discipline.

What is discipline?

So let's start by discussing the nature of discipline. Discipline is the capacity to do what is right regardless of urges to do otherwise, even when doing what's right is painful or requires effort. It's a form of love because we act to

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help ourselves and others rather than do things that may feel comfortable but don't benefit us long-term. So, we go for a run even though we feel like sleeping in. We have one bite of pie rather than eating the whole piece. We work on the taxes that are due instead of watching TV.

Discipline requires effort. It's work, yet it's well worth it when we experience the rewards and ease the pain of a lack of discipline.

Life is challenging with problems to solve. Discipline helps us master problems rather than avoid them. While it can require effort, discipline reduces our suffering and enhances our vitality. Any meaningful achievement requires disciplined effort to achieve. //

Over time, discipline leads to the development of key positive life habits:

- Facing and resolving pain and problems head on
- Delaying gratification until the work is done
- Persistence
- Structured routines combined with adaptive flexibility
- Organization
- Goal-setting
- Self-care
- Saving money
- Trying new things, learning, and growing
- Loving service to others
- Loving service to others
- Engaging in a spiritual practice (prayer, meditation)
- Integrity and honesty
- Open attending to the reality of things, including to our own motives and behaviors

Together, these habits bring us peace of mind, vitality, and joy.

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The Benefits of Discipline.

Now let's discuss the benefits of discipline. A lack of discipline is harmful to both ourselves and those around us. Acting on impulses or urges with a disregard for what's right results in long-term failure, poor health, disorganization, stress, and lack of growth. Similarly, failing to do what must be done to enhance life is also harmful.

Discipline, on the other hand, is good for everyone. Self-discipline leads to success, joy, fulfillment, health, happiness, satisfaction, and peace. When we're disciplined, we're loving because we're doing the right thing even if we don't happen to feel like it.

It's through discipline that we reach our goals and create a better life. Because of the rewards it brings, disciplined people are happier.

As with any things, too much discipline can be too much of a good thing. An example would be the military father who takes military discipline into the household. Excessive discipline can rob us of joy and spontaneity. As with most things, discipline is most loving when exercised in balance with flexibility, spontaneity, and honoring our needs for rest and fun.

Barriers to Discipline.

Now let's discuss the barriers to discipline.

A Lack of inspiration is a barrier to discipline. It's hard to do what we don't feel like doing if we're not inspired to achieve a higher purpose or goal. Some people suffer from apathy or a lack of reverence for themselves. They just don't care enough about achieving a greater good to put in the work.

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Doubt is a barrier to discipline. We're less likely to put in the effort if we don't believe we'll get results. Then, the effort of discipline doesn't seem worth it. Some people don't put in the work because they feel hopeless. Disciplined people have confidence that their efforts will eventually pay off.

Laziness is a barrier to discipline. Laziness is not expending the effort to do something beneficial. It's a lack of motivation to do what's right because it requires effort and can be painful, with no immediate reward. The lack of motivation of laziness may be because our brains are biased toward immediate gratification. It feels better right now to sleep in rather than get up and go to the gym.

Lack of clarity is a barrier to discipline. Discipline requires clarity about what will result in the greatest good in the long run. Since we're all vulnerable to "now appeal," we may choose what feels good in the moment rather than what's good in the long run. Lack of clarity can lead to good-now/bad-later behaviors such as overeating, watching too much TV, or procrastinating.

Fear is a barrier to discipline. For people who fear failure, it may be easier to give up before trying. For people who fear success, the thought of the success that discipline brings may result in self-sabotage.

Cultivating Discipline

Now let's talk about how to cultivate discipline. You can learn to be disciplined! It's simply a set of mental exercises that strengthen the mind with intentional practice. The following practices will help you realize the benefits of discipline.

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To begin, take accountability for your life. See that your success or failure depends solely upon you. You're responsible not only for your actions, but also for the consequences of your actions, even if they're painful. When you take accountability for your life, you'll see that it's up to you to decide to do the next right thing, even if it's difficult or painful. You have the freedom to choose how to respond to life's difficulties. You have the power and control to live a joyful and fulfilling life, in part through your practice of discipline.

Get motivated to be disciplined. Think through the positive consequences of discipline, and see that realizing your life goals through delayed gratification is far more fulfilling than short-term gratification. Recognize that life is precious. Commit to discipline, knowing that you'll hurt less and savor life more. Discipline ultimately brings joy and the satisfaction of living life to the fullest rather than wasting this brief gift of existence in temporary gratification, distraction, and procrastination. Make a list of all the benefits of discipline for you. Get very clear on the reasons you're making the effort to do the right thing and resist impulses to do otherwise.

Define what you want. Get clear about the "why" of your efforts. What will bring you joy and fulfillment? What do you want to achieve? Is it a long, healthy life? Is it adventure? Loving relationships? Creating something new? Being of service to others? What is your higher purpose? What gives your life meaning? Let the rewards you'll realize inspire your efforts and help you maintain your commitment during the inevitable difficulties you'll encounter. Be careful not to "should" on yourself. Don't set goals that you think you "should" have, but don't truly want. Be true to yourself, setting goals that fulfill your authentic higher meaning and purpose. Every human benefits from living for something greater than themselves.

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Don't wait for it to feel right. When you adopt a new positive habit, it will feel uncomfortable until you've repeated it 30-60 times. Don't wait to do the right thing until you feel like doing it—that feeling may never come. Act on your convictions of what you know is best.

Develop your plan of action. List the specific actions you need to take to enhance your life and realize your key life goals. What is the sequence of actions? What resources will you need? What are the obstacles you need to overcome? What kind of person will you need to become to realize your ideal life? What are your core values? How must you live your life to live by these values? Let your clear vision of your ideal life determine what you must do and not do moment to moment and day to day.

Visualize acting to create your ideal life. Enhance your discipline by visualizing yourself taking the necessary actions to realize your ideal life. Do this every morning and throughout the day. When you picture yourself taking the necessary steps to achieve your goals, you mentally practice the daily life habits you need to develop. This enhances your commitment and capacity to execute on these actions.

Set intentions. Every morning, look at yourself in the mirror and recite your intentions for the day. You may say, "Today, I will eat 1500 calories of unprocessed foods." Or you might say, "Today, I'm going to call and check up on one friend." Make a list of 5-10 specific daily intentions that you'll act upon each day to achieve your key life goals. Then, commit to acting on these intentions with all your heart.

Take small steps. Break your action plan down into small, doable steps. Chip away at large projects a bit at a time. As they say, Rome wasn't built in a day.

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If you have a book to read, start by reading a few pages a day. If you need to work on your exercise routine, start by scheduling ten minutes a day. Carve out small blocks of time for self-care and self-improvement, and give yourself breaks in between. Pace yourself, and work in intervals.

Similarly, restructure your life one positive habit at a time. You should first work on not hurting yourself in any way. Couple this with nurturing and soothing yourself. Then, you might work on (one at a time) a regular sleep routine, getting up early, eating a healthy diet, exercising daily, or starting a morning meditation practice. Multiple sequential small changes may be more achievable than an entire life makeover all at once.

Schedule your life. Success requires consistency. Schedule your key life priorities into regular routines, including blocks of time to work on projects and chores, time with loved ones, time for exercise, time for sleep, and time to relax and have fun.

Reward yourself. Reward yourself with fun breaks and small treats for tasks accomplished. For example, give yourself a massage for every week you work out at the gym, or enjoy a piece of fruit after you go through the mail and pay bills.

Get comfortable with discomfort. This can be difficult, as we live in a distress-intolerant culture addicted to immediate gratification. Smile at your distress, knowing that it's often good and even essential.

For example, we can smile at the distress of getting up early to exercise, of not acting on compulsive cravings to self-gratify in harmful ways, of paying our bills, of cleaning up around the house, of doing something difficult

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we've never done before, or of preparing a tedious report for work. When we practice being comfortable with discomfort, we free ourselves to do the next right thing, and our lives flourish. We see that we don't have to act on impulses to alleviate distress when we make friends with distress and let it be.

Meditation and mindfulness help us develop the capacity to abstain from acting on impulses. Comfortable in our discomfort, we mindfully ask ourselves, moment-by-moment, "What is this?" and "What does this moment call for?" Asking "What is this?" deepens our understanding and wisdom. Enabled by our clarity, we can then do the next right thing while lovingly holding our discomfort, reassured that we're cultivating our happiness by acting with love.

The disciplined practice of honesty and openness can be painful. We must learn to embrace this distress. As we learn new ways of being, seeing, and doing, we give up our old ways. We become aware of what doesn't work for us anymore and see the truth of things more deeply. Growth involves both death and rebirth. Changing our ways or even our entire life is difficult. Given this, practice an attitude of humble—even reverent—appreciation for the distress of growth and change.

Failure is one specific discomfort we need to embrace. Learning and growth require we do things we've never done before. Failures are successes in disguise, for they teach us how to succeed. Expect failure at times, and embrace your disappointment as an opportunity to learn and grow. Forgive yourself, get up, brush yourself off, and move on! Those who persist prevail.

New behaviors can feel uncomfortable for up to 30-60 days before they become habits. Expect to feel uncomfortable and to need to make a strong effort to persist until your new discipline habits become just that—habits.

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Make yourself accountable to someone else. Foster your discipline by recruiting accountability partners. If you commit to a morning ritual of meditation, exercise, affirmations and intentions, to working out at the gym five times a week, to losing weight or quitting smoking, make your commitment public to people you can be accountable to and who will support you in your efforts.

Get support and guidance. Look for role models, teachers, consultants, coaches, and mentors. You may want to work with a trainer if you need help developing an exercise routine, for example. Many people benefit from a life coach. Some people use Master Mind groups to help them stay on track. If you're having difficulty, ask for help.

Reduce temptations. If you're dieting, toss the junk food. If you're working on a project, firewall by shutting off your phone and email. If you're trying to get up early, put your alarm in another room, and make your bed right after you get up. Make it as difficult as possible to act on unhelpful, destructive, and distracting impulses.

Forgive yourself. No one is 100 percent disciplined 100 percent of the time. Forgive yourself when you falter. Beating yourself up will not help.

Persevere. Successful living requires practice, patience, and perseverance. Becoming a master at anything requires about 10,000 hours of practice. That includes becoming a master of life. Commit to a lifetime of practice. It's worth it! Be kind and patient with yourself in the process, and never give up!

You won't achieve your goals or solve all of your problems instantly. It takes time. Patiently take the time needed to inquire, observe, investigate, understand, and experiment.

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Self-discipline gets a bad rap, as if we are supposed to be miserable. Nothing is farther from the truth. Instead, while it does require effort, skillful discipline brings us joy. Disciplined people are happy people. To enhance our lives, we need to change our behaviors. Follow these discipline steps to realize a successful, long, and joyful life.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of contentment. Contentment is being happy with what we have and with who others are. It is a key love practice that enhances our well-being. It is a powerful antidote to negativity and the painful feeling that we are not enough and do not have enough.

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 see and let go of negative judgments as they arise.

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4. Study this lesson on discipline. How are you disciplined in your life? How would you like to be more disciplined? What practices can you begin to cultivate your discipline?

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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