

## SESSION 47: Contentment

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

#### **What is contentment?**

Let's start by exploring the nature of contentment. Contentment is a practice

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of reverence for the reality of this moment just as It is, reverence for who we are just as we are, and reverence for others just as they are. When we're content, this moment is more than enough, and enough is an abundant feast.

Contentment isn't complacency. Content people still work to enhance life, reduce pain, and address evil and injustice. It's just that they accept this moment, even as they work to make the next moment better.

Contentment arises when we relinquish egoic strivings for more money, pleasure, power, comfort, security, praise, acceptance, fame, status, and appreciation. It's the ego's drive for these things that produces discontent. For the ego, nothing is ever enough. You could be in paradise, but the ego would eventually find something insufficient about the situation. With Awareness, we see the suffering induced by the ego, and we let go. Our attachments fade in the light of our awareness of the suffering they cause. Then, we're content, even as we act to improve upon a difficult situation, such as finding food to eat when we're hungry or taking a loved one who has fallen ill to the doctor.

Contentment is rooted in humble, radical acceptance of this sacred Reality, the Sacred Now, exactly as It is. It's an act of worship of Reality. If a loved one is dying, our acceptance of that reality brings contentment, even as we experience sadness and grief. It's all exactly as it must and can only be.

### **The Benefits of Contentment**

Now let's discuss the benefits of contentment. There's a paradox about contentment, because it gives us the peace of mind and positivity we need to heal, grow, and improve our life situation. We can be happy with this day and still dream of a better tomorrow. If you'd like to heal and grow, start with

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contentment. If you'd like your life to improve, start with contentment. If you'd like to help others heal and grow, start with contentment—an acceptant appreciation of yourself, others, and your life situation just as it all is.

Contentment is good for us. It fuels happiness because we can let go of painful cravings for what we don't have and the desire for things to be different from how they are. Contentment is the antidote for the poison of envy and jealousy. It enables us to savor this wonderful gift of existence without a need for more or different.

It's also good for our relationships. It helps us enjoy and appreciate our family and friends. People feel the safety and security of our contentment, and they respond with appreciation and trust. This fosters their growth and healing.

When we're content, we don't need more than we need, so it's the antidote to endless wanting and addictive craving. The abundance of the Now is more than enough. With contentment, we can distinguish wants from needs and let unnecessary wants go. So contentment helps us see that happiness and joy don't come from our possessions or even our life situation.

Contentment promotes simplicity, which reduces stress. When we can let go of unnecessary wants, we avoid burdening our lives with the complications of excessive consumption, in which our possessions begin to own us rather than the other way around. We see that less is more and that less is enough.

### **Barriers to Contentment**

Now let's discuss the barriers to contentment. The biggest barrier to

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contentment is the ego mind system. This is the restless, complaining force within us that makes us feel that this moment is never enough. It's the yearning for more—more money, pleasure, power, prestige, comfort, security, status, fame, achievements, admiration, popularity, praise, acceptance, and fun, as well as even more meaning, peace, and love. It's the yearning for This Moment to be other than It is. It's to yearn for what is not and what is not to be. It's to wish for a different Reality. This hunger for more is insatiable.

In and of itself, the ego mind system isn't bad. It just wants us to survive, be comfortable, and pass on our DNA. It wants us to feel good and not feel bad. There's nothing wrong with that. It would be more correct to say that it isn't the ego mind system that prevents contentment so much as the untamed ego. This is the ego untamed by wisdom, clarity, and Awareness. It manages us out of its ignorance while we're asleep. Awareness tames the ego, which allows for the possibility of contentment. The ego is a great servant, but a poor master. When Awareness is the master, many positive qualities come, including wisdom and compassion.

Another barrier to contentment is severe distress or brain impairment. It's difficult for anyone to be content if they're in excruciating pain. If you're being tortured, it would likely require strong enlightenment to experience contentment in the moment. If your brain is caught up in the suicidal despair of a deep depression, contentment can be almost impossible. Pain can be especially difficult to accept when it seems senseless or meaningless, such as for the families of victims of a mass murder. Contentment in the face of evil and injustice requires a larger spiritual perspective.

Envy is a particular ego barrier to contentment. The same is true for the

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cousin of envy, which is jealousy. When you're envious, you want or resent what others have. When you're jealous, you want or resent relationships others have with others. In both cases, the good things others have cause you pain.

Envy and jealousy not only prevent us from being content with our life situation, but they create animosity toward others, which prevents us from experiencing happiness for them. Envy and jealousy might even provoke us to lash out and cause harm.

Advertising poisons contentment because it's designed to manipulate us into wanting for things that we don't need. It promotes consumerism and materialism, which both poison our spirituality. If "more" becomes the purpose of our life, there will never be enough. To worship "more" is to worship a false God. Advertising lures us back into the trap of the ego, and contentment is lost. Happiness is not about more; it's about enough.

### **Cultivating Contentment.**

Now let's talk about different practices for cultivating contentment. The following are practices to help you cultivate contentment.

**1. Savor Existence.** The first practice for cultivating contentment is to simply stop and notice that you're alive and aware. How incredible to be reading these words! How amazing this gift of self-aware existence! This is something to be savored. We have a remarkable capacity for taking the everyday miraculous for granted. This is a

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spiritual practice of being fully present to the Sacred Now as the perpetual first, last, and only precious moment of existence. The practice of Attending fosters de-habituation or “un-getting-used-to things.” We develop “Beginner’s Mind,” in which we savor existence freshly moment by moment. We wake up to see that this moment is sacred. We see that the ordinary is truly extraordinary.

**2. Be Mindful of Impermanence.** Keep in mind that this gift of existence won’t last. None of us gets out of this alive. Life is resilient, yet fragile and fleeting. Knowing this enhances our contentment because awareness of our mortality enhances the preciousness of this gift of life. Best that we savor this moment, even if it isn’t exactly to our liking. Similarly, be mindful of the impermanence of everything else. Only change is permanent. If we’re in pain, we can take heart that this pain will end. If we’re joyful, we savor our joy even more, knowing that our joy will pass, and that pain, loss, and grief lie ahead.

**3. Practice Gratitude.** Mindfully count your blessings, starting with the miraculous gift of your existence. Even amid pain, grief, and loss, gratitude will help you see that your glass of life is usually 90 percent full. With the practice of gratitude, you can be appreciative even during the direst of times when your glass is truly only 10 percent full. Reflect on the faculties you have and on the millions of people who have contributed in some way over your lifetime to sustain you. Reflect on the generous, intelligent abundance of Nature that sustains us all. Reflect on the reality of grace and healing. Reflect on all that’s good in your life, starting with the air that you breathe, the sun that gives us life, and the water you drink. Then, see if you can make a list of at least 100 blessings. With gratitude, we focus on what we have rather than what we don’t have. When we’re grateful for the abundance of our lives, we

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can be happy for others without needing to compare our lives to theirs. In this way, gratitude helps to counter envy and jealousy.

**4. See that Less is More.** See clearly that after meeting basic sustenance and comfort needs, happiness doesn't come from possessions, power, prestige, or status. We need only consider the suicides of incredibly successful and gifted people to see the truth of this. One of the happiest people I've ever known was an impoverished food service worker. Seeing that happiness is largely dependent on our state of mind rather than our state of affairs also counters envy and jealousy. Cultivate contentment by letting go of the illusion that wealth, fame, status, or prestige bring happiness. "More" doesn't make us happier.

**5. Embrace simplicity.** As part of seeing that less is more, recognize that part of the practice of less is the practice of simplicity. Live as simple a life as possible. Complex lives are stressful, and people often lead complex lives out of the yearning for more. Complexity is a symptom of a lack of contentment. Beyond the basic resources needed for survival and prosperity, more is often worse, not better, as more possessions require more effort to manage and maintain.

**6. Practice Abstinence.** We cultivate contentment by abstaining from something we usually enjoy, such as food, work, sex, alcohol, TV, or social media. Religions over the ages have encouraged the cultivation of contentment through fasting rituals. Examples include Yom Kippur, Ramadan, and Lent. Abstinence is central to the process of recovery, in which we abstain from acting on destructive cravings out of love for ourselves and others. One craving management practice is to intentionally smile at our destructive compulsions and cravings, saying to ourselves, "This is the feeling of healing." We remind ourselves that not acting on destructive cravings

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enhances our life. Through abstaining, we learn to live with and resolve our cravings through the various love-based practices, such as reaching out to a friend. The practice of abstinence is a practice of letting desire be without compulsively acting on its urgings. In letting desire be, contentment arises, even amid desire. This is an incredibly freeing experience; it frees us to do the right thing—to act with love—even during urges to do otherwise.

**7. Renounce and Rejoice.** The practice of renunciation is closely related to the practice of abstinence. What do we renounce? Gratification as a source of happiness, whether through sensual pleasures or the acquisition of possessions. It's fine to enjoy these things; we just need to see gratification for what it is—just gratification—and not confuse it with true happiness, which arises through the practice of love, not the gratification of desires. Practice refraining from acting on compulsive desires. I love popcorn, for example. Going into a movie theater without popcorn is a great practice for delinking compulsive acting on desire. Other options might be to go into your favorite store and not buy anything, to go into a restaurant and not eat a meal, or to go into a bar and not order a drink (unless you have an addiction to alcohol, which means you shouldn't go into a bar at all). If you're dieting, practice limiting your food choices to what's on your diet, and stop eating when you're 70 percent full. Practice making friends with the feeling of hunger. In all of these practices, we cultivate the capacity for contentment and freedom from acting compulsively on desires.

Cultivating contentment takes the suffering out of distress, which is inevitable. Suffering, however, is optional. Without the suffering of compulsive desires, we're free to act with love to enhance both our life and the lives of others. When you find yourself experiencing discontent, envy, or jealousy, cultivate your contentment with these practices. You and everyone around you will be the better for it.



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## OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of gratitude in more depth. The intentional practice of gratitude enhances our reverence for life, even during difficulty, thereby helping to inspire and sustain our practice of love.

**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.
4. Study this lesson on contentment. How do you experience a lack of contentment? What barriers do you experience? Attend to this. Inquire as to what ego forces are fueling this feeling of "not enough?" As you look deeply

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into this, see if you can see your suffering and let go. How would you like to cultivate contentment 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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