

SESSION 49: Hope

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 gratitude. I hope you've had a chance to reflect on your many blessings and live with more gratitude. Today, we will explore the love practice of hope.

What is Hope?

Let's start by discussing the nature of hope. People speak of different kinds of hope, including inborn, chosen, borrowed, bargainer's, unrealistic, false, and

SESSION 49: Hope

mature hope. Let's focus on mature hope, which arises from seeing the nature of things clearly. We see that in the long run, good prevails over evil.

As Martin Luther King once said, "The long arm of history bends towards justice." We see our past successes and know that we can succeed again. Hope sees that Life always finds a way.

Dark times usually give way to dawn if we but positively persist with hope. Even when facing the inevitability of loss, pain, and death, mature hope allows us to see that this Reality is sacred and perfect exactly as it is and that it can be no other way. Mature hope is based on meaning—the meaning that life is sacred and worthwhile even when there's a bad outcome. It recognizes a loving life force that flows through us, just as the sun's rays flow through the earth. It sees that there's good even in "bad" situations.

Mature hope sees a path to a better future. It's more than optimism because it's practical and realistic. It enables us to dream of a better tomorrow based on evidence from the past. It's a belief that things will eventually work out somehow. Even during disaster, it tells us we'll get through it and allows us to trust for the best.

The positive belief and expectation that all will be well no matter the outcome inspires the will and the ways to get through a difficult time. Hope inspires the will to take positive action and triggers our creativity to figure out ways to get through and endure.

Mature hope is active, not wishful thinking. It helps us recognize that difficulties can be blessings in disguise. Sometimes, painful experiences contain seeds of opportunity and growth, becoming the most transformative

SESSION 49: Hope

for us. Hope allows us to look forward during our pain, knowing that some good will come of it. In this way, hope helps us endure distress and uncertainty.

Benefits of Hope

Now let's discuss the benefits of hope. Hope is an essential practice of love, as it enhances life, not only for ourselves, but for others. It heals and promotes well-being and mental health. It counters depression and anxiety because it's one of the most important elements for recovery from trauma, addiction, and other mental illnesses.

Hopeful people survive and thrive in the face of adversity. Rather than having a victim mentality, they have a survivor mentality. They're active, optimistic, and positive, even while grieving. They know without a doubt that things will get better, even if it's just to find acceptance, peace, and meaning. They know that all things will pass.

Hope fuels success because it's self-fulfilling. Success comes not just from pursuing goals, but from overcoming the obstacles along the way. Hope provides the will and the way to overcome because it inspires creativity, endurance, and determination. Therefore, it helps us visualize goals and figure out ways to achieve them. It empowers and motivates us with a sense of agency, giving us the capacity to act. Studies show that hopeful students get higher GPAs than students who are just optimistic or who just believe that their success is in their hands.

Hopeful people learn and grow because they're willing to take on goals that require learning through practice and failure. On some level, they know that failure is success in disguise, and they don't take failure personally.

SESSION 49: Hope

Hoping enhances the chances of recovery, as hopeful people heal faster and easier from trauma and disease. This is, in part, because hope motivates healthy behaviors. Studies show that hopeful people who are ill have an improved prognosis and enhanced quality of life.

Having hope for others has a profound positive effect. In one study, having hope for patients led to longer periods of recovery from alcoholism.[1] Expecting the best for others helps them achieve the best for themselves. Think back on the people in your life who believed in you. How did it impact you? See that sincerely believing in others is one of the most loving things you can do.

We see the power of hope in the placebo effect, so hoping a treatment or medication will work promotes healing in and of itself. It's very powerful.

Hope is paradoxical, however, because hopeful people are accepting and appreciative of today, while expecting a better tomorrow. Acceptance and gratitude enable us to live into a better future.

So realistic hope determines how we deal with difficulty. With hope, we respond with effort, creativity, love, faith, and gratitude rather than despair and resignation.

Barriers to Hope

Now let's talk about some of the barriers to hope. Many factors contribute to hopelessness. One of them is negativity, including negative beliefs we have about ourselves, such as "I am a loser." Another form of negativity is negative expectations like "It doesn't matter what I do; it won't work out

SESSION 49: Hope

anyway.” Then, there are negative beliefs about other people, such as, “I can’t count on anyone.” Beliefs are incredibly powerful and can be self-fulfilling. If you believe things are hopeless, you’ll likely act in ways to make that true.

Trauma, past failures, neglect, lack of opportunity, mental illness, and exploitation can all trigger these negative beliefs and expectations. If any of these are issues for you, restoring your hope will require help and healing.

People who lack hope have a victim mentality. When adversity hits, they’re pessimistic, passive, despairing, and resigned. Faced with failure, they quit rather than get up and persevere. Their lack of hope is self-fulfilling, and they avoid growth opportunities out of the belief that failure is final. They set their sights low and fail to grow.

A victim mentality robs us of hope because the belief is that there’s nothing we can do about our situation. If you feel like a victim, you stop taking accountability for coping with tough situations as best you can. Victims need help to switch from a victim to a survivor mindset.

Hope is also hindered by an inability to see past obstacles. A recent patient of mine felt trapped with her parents, unable to afford a car to drive to her part-time job, and unable to afford to live on her own. She couldn’t find a way out. However, with some brainstorming, she was able to see that she could get a room within walking distance of her work.

We benefit from the support of others when dealing with difficulties. When we’re alone and disconnected, we can be sapped of hope. If we can’t borrow the hope of others, it’s often harder to generate hope within ourselves.

SESSION 49: Hope

Even worse than lack of support is the poisonous negativity of others. When people in our lives give us the message that we're hopeless or our life prospects are hopeless, we can easily buy into their beliefs. People may unconsciously attempt to limit us out of envy or feeling threatened by our attempts to improve our lot in life. So we need to guard the flame of hope to prevent other people from blowing it out.

Cultivating Hope

Now let's discuss hope we can cultivate hope. The following practices can help you cultivate hope within yourself and hope in others:

- Foster your faith by seeing your many successes clearly. If you're reading this, I know you've succeeded in innumerable ways. Faith is a fact. Just look carefully, and see reality as it is.
- Practice hoping. Anticipate the best for yourself and others, knowing that it matters what you believe. Recognize that your expectations are often self-fulfilling.
- Foster your hope by taking 100 percent responsibility for your success in life. It's all in your hands with the help that's available, if you just ask for it.
- Borrow the hope of others by surrounding yourself with hopeful, loving people. Open yourself to the abundance of love that's around you. Intentionally surround yourself with people who have hope for you, and humbly ask for their support.

SESSION 49: Hope

- Identify your negative beliefs and expectations, and use a journal to write them down. Practice mindfulness, noting (without judgment) when negativity comes into your mind. Counter these negative thoughts, beliefs, and expectations with more realistic ones. Find a wise, supportive friend or therapist to help you with this work of positive reprogramming.
- Envision a positive future for yourself and those around you. Start every day visualizing the life you want and the life you want for others. You will attract what you dwell upon, and you'll be much more likely to take action to make your hopeful vision a reality.
- Create a set of hopeful affirmations. Say them out loud every morning to affirm the truth of the best self that you're growing into. Say them like you mean them (even if you don't believe them at first), and they'll inspire self-fulfilling actions.
- Express gratitude every day for your many blessings, even in the most difficult of times. Gratitude inspires hope.
- Protect yourself from negative people who limit, harm, or belittle you. Set limits on these people or eliminate them entirely from your life if you must. Never let anyone dampen your hope.
- Practice surrendered action by detaching from a given outcome. Hope instead to do your best and accept the rest. Hope that you can endure, finding peace and grace even during calamity.
- When things don't work out right away, persist. Remember that big shots start out as little shots who keep on shooting. Don't take setbacks personally. Instead, harness failures as opportunities for learning and growth.

SESSION 49: Hope

- Think of someone from your past who believed in you, and become them for yourself now. Be your own ideal, hopeful parent, hoping for yourself the way others have hoped for you.
- Know that change is possible for yourself and others. All it requires is hope, practice, patience, effort, and persistence. Look around you and notice that many people who were far worse off than you have prevailed. This certainly means you can do it! Keep a lookout for stories of triumph over tribulation, and let those successes inspire you.
- Hope for others. Believe in them to help them believe in themselves. Help them develop a vision of a way forward, not by disagreeing or cheer leading, but by helping them tap into their own inner vision and creativity. Affirm them that they might then affirm themselves.
- When you hit an obstacle, brainstorm and problem-solve. Ask for other people's ideas. Think of as many ways as possible to achieve a goal, breaking down big problems into small, doable steps. Maintain the mindset that nearly every problem has a solution that you just need to discover.
- Do whatever it takes to succeed, remembering that effort fuels hope. As you do so, enjoy the process. Remember it's about the journey, so keep it light and positive.

Remember that hope is powerful, transformative, and self-fulfilling. So use these practices to grow your hope over time.

SESSION 49: Hope

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of endurance. Love calls for us to endure in times of adversity.

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 throughout 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 hope. What are the barriers to hope in your life? What are you hopeful for? How would you like to cultivate hope in your life?

SESSION 49: Hope

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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