

SESSION 50: Endurance

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 hope. I hope you've had a chance to reflect on the role of hope in your life and how you can enhance your hope. Today, we will explore the love practice of endurance.

What is Endurance?

Let's begin by discussing the nature of endurance. Endurance is the ability to withstand hardship and adversity. It's persevering without giving up when the

SESSION 50: Endurance

going is tough. People who endure have grit. They're resilient. They hang in there despite challenges such as negative feedback or failure. They maintain hope when things seem hopeless.

Endurance also entails faith in yourself. People who endure believe in themselves and their capacity to survive and prevail. They have self-confidence in part due to a positive self-image.

Endurance is a love practice because it maintains and enhances Life. It allows us to remain true to our practice of love during difficult times.

Examples of endurance abound. I'm sure if you look at your life, you'll notice many examples of it where you kept going under difficult circumstances.

Life is often difficult. Think of people who endure violence, abuse, slavery, war, famine, poverty, crime, incarceration, torture, chronic pain, illness, loss of loved ones, failures and setbacks, and disability. Some can't endure their hardship because they become overwhelmed by grief, despair, and hopelessness. In concentration camps, for example, some endure, and some give up and die.

In addition to external hardships, many also experience internal hardships. In my world, I work every day with people who endure chronic and severe mental illnesses. Life is extremely difficult internally for many, many people, apart from their external circumstances. Some people are tortured by hallucinations, delusions, depression, severe anxiety, agitation, and the cravings of addiction, to name just a few conditions. To endure these psychiatric conditions can be heroic.

SESSION 50: Endurance

Sometimes, people escape and numb their pain through self-destructive addicting. But people who endure well embrace and manage their pain skillfully and thoughtfully rather than react impulsively or destructively. They don't harm themselves.

Endurance consists of both attitudes and behaviors. Spiritually, it consists of maintaining faith and hope, as well as keeping our commitment to our higher purpose. Psychologically, it's about maintaining our determination, confidence, and a positive attitude.

People who can endure hardships bounce back from adversity without lasting damage. Some even respond to trauma with what's called "posttraumatic growth," meaning that they grow in qualities such as wisdom and compassion after experiencing trauma. They remain confident, welcome challenges, stay in control, and maintain their commitments despite the hardships and obstacles they face. Many even welcome obstacles as opportunities.

People who endure are proactive, flexible, and adaptive. They respond to adversity with creativity. They problem-solve and "fail forward," as they learn from failures rather than give up.

Proactive coping means acting to make positive changes in life. If we lose our job, it means going out and finding a better one. If we become paralyzed in an accident, it means going to school to learn a new profession that doesn't require the use of our legs.

People who endure are survivors, not victims. They maintain a sense of accountability for their lives and well-being. While they may have experienced trauma, they don't blame others for the ultimate outcome of

SESSION 50: Endurance

their lives. They refuse to succumb to fear, anger, anxiety, helplessness, or hopelessness. They don't judge difficult or traumatic circumstances and events as "negative," but rather as just distressing and difficult. People who endure look for the benefits and humor in a difficult situation.

Resilient people who endure well are also usually social. They stay connected to loving and supportive people. Connection and support foster endurance, particularly our connections to friends and family. People who have more vital connections are generally more able to endure adversity and trauma. Healthy relationships enhance resilience and healthy coping. Relationships that foster endurance are ones characterized by trust, intimate communication, mutual obligation, and solidarity.

Benefits of Endurance

Now let's talk about the many benefits of endurance. By maintaining and sustaining our efforts despite hardship—by enduring—we maintain and advance Life. We can't continue to live, grow, and achieve our goals if we give up. Life needs us, just as we need Life. When we endure, we not only help ourselves, but we help all of those whose lives we touch. Endurance is good for the whole of Life.

When we endure, we fulfill the calling of Life, the callings of our soul, and realize our purpose. Endurance enables us to overcome the many challenges, hardships, and obstacles of life. It allows for persistence, and persistence creates progress. It enhances our degree of success and helps us maintain a positive outlook. It frees us from a victim mindset.

SESSION 50: Endurance

Barriers to Endurance

There are many barriers to endurance. Let's now review these.

One barrier is **Adversity**. Severe hardship can cripple. The more extreme the hardship, the more difficult it can be to endure.

Another barrier is **Hopelessness**. Endurance requires hope and faith. If we doubt and lack faith, our ability to endure will falter. Even in seemingly hopeless situations like a terminal illness, there's always something to hope for, such as the capacity to endure hardship with serenity and acceptance.

Another barrier is **Laziness**. Endurance requires effort. If we suffer from laziness, we may lack the motivation to do what we need to survive.

Another barrier is **Prioritization of the immediate over the delayed**. Many people succumb to the lure of immediate gratification. They numb their pain with substances, such as alcohol, and fall into the trap of addiction as a solution to adversity. Endurance includes the capacity to cope with pain and hardship while working on long-term solutions.

Another barrier is **Impaired vitality**. Endurance requires stamina. If we aren't vital, it's more difficult to endure.

Another barrier is **Fear**. If we're too consumed by fear, we may not be able to act to improve our situation.

Another barrier is **Lack of a higher purpose**. If we live only for ego gratification, the lack of that gratification during difficult times can leave us

SESSION 50: Endurance

with nothing else to live for. Living for a higher purpose sustains us.

Another barrier is **Lack of support**. Loneliness and alienation are poisonous. We need each other to get by, especially during tough times.

Another barrier is **Negativity**. A negative attitude and outlook can be self-fulfilling because they trigger negative responses to difficulties, which then result in negative outcomes. Negativity entails a lack of appreciation for the sacred nature of things and a lack of gratitude for what's good in a difficult situation. Negativity can cause us to view adverse situations as being 90 percent wrong, when in fact, they are 90 percent right.

Another barrier is **Victim mentality**. Some people feel incapable of coping. They don't believe in their capacity to overcome and achieve. They lack what's called "self-efficacy," experiencing themselves as victims rather than survivors.

Another barrier is **Dependence on external circumstances**. If our happiness depends on circumstances and people being a certain way, it will be more difficult to endure. When we free ourselves of our ego attachments, we free ourselves from suffering. Then, we're more able to endure. It isn't our circumstances that determine our happiness, but our attitude toward our circumstances. If we practice an attitude of unconditional appreciation, we free ourselves from depending on our circumstances for our happiness.

Cultivating Endurance

You can cultivate your resilience and grit. The following practices will help you to endure even the most difficult of circumstances:

SESSION 50: Endurance

Reflect on your higher purpose. Your higher purpose will motivate you and sustain you during difficult times.

Get inspired. Reflect on people you admire. Think about others who have endured extreme hardships, such as concentration camp survivors. There are beautiful, amazing, wise, and loving people who have endured tremendous suffering. I'm sure you know of someone like this, so let them inspire you. You, too, can endure, prevail, and prosper, just as others have.

See that you have a choice. Nothing can control how you process and react to your experience of Reality. You can choose to attend to what's true, right, and good for you and others in this present moment. You can choose to practice an attitude of radical reverence, even when you're in great distress. You can choose to act with love, to not give up, to persevere, and to keep going in surrendered action.

Appreciate. Difficult times are just as sacred as easy times. Practice an attitude of unconditional appreciation, which will provoke positivity. That, in turn, will help you look at what's right along with what's wrong. Appreciate your gifts and resources. Rather than saying, "This is hopeless," say, "I will find a way with grit, grace, and the help of others." This will help you to take positive action. See difficulties, obstacles, challenges, and setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth. Fail forward. Part of an appreciative attitude involves valuing adversity. It's the difficult and painful times in our lives that lead to the most growth. Remind yourself that pain isn't bad. It's just pain—and a stern but powerful teacher. Value adversity for the spiritual gifts it provides.

SESSION 50: Endurance

Practice gratitude. Very close to the practice of appreciation is the practice of gratitude. Even in the direst of situations, there are abundant opportunities for gratitude. It may just be for the 10,000 blessings that you've received in the past to bring your life to this moment. Usually, there is far more right in a difficult situation than there is wrong. The glass truly is usually 90 percent full. Take stock of all that's good and right in your life. Even if you feel that your glass is 90 percent empty, be grateful for the 10 percent. Make it a daily practice to count your blessings, starting with the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the life-giving warmth of the sun.

Believe in yourself. Part of positivity is maintaining faith in yourself. You are a survivor, not a victim. You can succeed, even and especially if you've failed many times before. Bolster your confidence in your capacity to endure and prevail. You can do this with perseverance, faith, positivity, and the help of others.

Accept. Things are as they must and can only be in this moment. Respect Reality. Acceptance empowers you to make positive changes to make the next moment better, if possible. If not possible, acceptance will bring you peace. Don't add to your pain with negative judgments. Acceptance takes the suffering out of distress and helps us endure.

Act. Don't be passive. Do what you can to help yourself and others. Make a persistent and consistent effort. Make plans, brainstorm, and problem-solve. Improvise and adapt. Look for the ways through and the ways around. Engage in surrendered action, hoping for, but not demanding, a certain outcome. As you act, follow the dictum, "what would love do?" Do the next right thing, moment-to-moment, even if it's difficult, uncomfortable, or requires great effort. This is acting with love and integrity. As you act, live by your convictions as to what you know to be true, right, and good. Don't let yourself

SESSION 50: Endurance

be swayed by feelings like fear, doubt, or anger. Respect and honor your feelings, but keep in mind that they don't always tell the truth.

Keep perspective. In the end, even our lives are a small but sacred part of the whole of a grand life process spanning billions of years in a tiny speck of this vast Universe. When you see this, you'll feel both gratitude and humility. See that Life isn't about you; it's about the whole of Life of which you are but a tiny part. Remind yourself that everything is impermanent. When you really see this, compassion will arise for yourself and everyone else caught up in the drama of life.

Hope. There's a Quaker saying that "way will come." Things almost always work out one way or the other. A generous and loving web of life sustains us. While there are no guarantees, the Universe is rigged in our favor. There's always something to hope for, even in seemingly hopeless situations and even if it's just for the "peace that passeth understanding." Have faith in the power of grace that infuses everything.

Take good care. Exercise, eat well, rest, and spend time in stillness. Have fun if you can. Maximize your vitality by taking very good care of yourself. This includes not harming yourself or others. Abstain from acting on destructive impulses, such as the desire to numb pain with addictive substances. Avoid good-now, bad-later behaviors that only make things worse.

Get help and support. Remember that life is a team sport. We've survived and thrived as a species due in part to our capacity to collaborate. Get help from mentors, advisors, coaches, or therapists. Surround yourself with wise, healthy, loving people. Seek these people out and ask for their help, even if it's just to provide you emotional support and encouragement.

SESSION 50: Endurance

Prepare. Prepare for challenges, crises, and emergencies. Save up a financial cushion for hard times. Consider getting life and disability insurance. If you're going on a trip, bring a first aid kit. Look ahead and anticipate the potential risks and difficulties. Then, prepare accordingly. Be proactive. It really is true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Manage stress. Life is stressful, so manage and minimize your stress as best you can. Say “no” to extra projects or tasks. Simplify your life, and live with balance, folding as much love and play into your days as possible. Relax, release, and reset with quiet time, meditation, yoga, or exercise. Long walks in Nature help to reduce stress, as well as taking time to look at the stars at night, which puts everything into perspective.

Love. Sometimes, the best we can do to endure is to focus on the love practices. Act to enhance the well-being of someone else. Help, give, or be kind to someone. Loving is the most powerful way we can sustain our spirit in hard times.

Patiently persevere. When the night is darkest, dawn is just over the horizon. Sometimes, what's needed is to just put one foot in front of the other. Keep breathing, one breath at a time. If you keep doing the next right thing—all that you're capable of—you will maximize your chances of making it.

Have humor. Humor is good for you, as long as it doesn't involve putting yourself or others down. Look for chances to joke or find something funny when you're in a difficult situation. Humor decreases stress and helps us cope. It creates bonds between us and others, softening our brittle hearts.

SESSION 50: Endurance

Allow yourself to feel your pain, while also noticing that when you smile, you automatically feel better. Laugh at yourself, be playful, and take yourself lightly.

You can and will enhance your capacity to endure through these practices. They will help you to not only survive but thrive.

OUR NEXT SESSION

In our next session, we'll discuss the love practice of devotion. Love calls for us to maintain our devotion to ourselves, to others, and to the practice of love, even and especially 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.

SESSION 50: Endurance

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?

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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