



# *Aging in Enlightened Society*

A Series of Discussions on Aging in a Salon Format

## **Facilitator Guide Introduction**



## Intention

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These salons encourage discussions about aging to help participants open up to their own wisdom and find their own views of aging, dying, and death. Because these subjects can be great teachers, it is important to facilitate these discussions and get people sharing.

## Content

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People who come to this material want liberation, but experience confusion about what freedom is.

Those of us in our sangha who grew up in the West often view freedom as being able to live without anyone telling us what to do. That was our conditioning. When Janis Joplin came on the scene in the 1960s, she called out the line, “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” And the teachers told us, “Don’t take loss or gain to heart.” As Shambhalian, we who are aging wonder how to conduct ourselves. We often find that freedom actually comes from realizing our basic goodness and working to create enlightened society.

The North Star and the ground for these salons is the book by Sakyong Mipham, *The Shambhala Principle*, a series of dialogues between Sakyong Mipham and his father Chögyam Trungpa in which they explore the principle of basic goodness as a way to address the personal and societal challenges that we face. The basic message is that as we age, we can find a meaningful life of basic goodness and help others as well as ourselves. On a deeper level, it is a book that suggests humanity is at a crossroads. This is a transformative view that offers the potential for deep learning.



## Format

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The salons are grouped into multiple sessions (currently three, although we hope to develop more). A session consists of five salons lasting one and a half hours each. The format of the salons is based on discussion around questions and sharing of stories.

### Sessions

Each session employs readings from *The Shambhala Principle* and an additional book selected to inform our dialogues. These dialogues are a spark to the embodiment of the basic goodness that lies within our hearts. Each session has its own Facilitator Guide.

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Session One: The Landscape of Aging	<i>Being Mortal</i> , Atul Gawande
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Session Two: The Warriorship of Aging	<i>Let Evening Come</i> , Mary Morrison
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Session Three: Creating a Caring Culture of Kindness	<i>Circles of Care</i> , Ann Cason
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### Salons

Each salon follows a five-part structure that helps create a supportive container for the discussions. This structure can vary as needed to best present the content of a particular salon.

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Opening meditation	15 minutes
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Introductory remarks (establishing the view)	The facilitator gives an overview of the topic, employing a reading or poem as appropriate, to guide the discussion.
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## (Salons)

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Discussion and group exercises	For exercises, working in smaller groups of six to eight leads to greater long-term cohesion of the larger group. Occasional dyads and triads also can perk up meetings.
Summation	Notetakers or facilitators share stories and reflections from the discussions and exercises with the whole group.
Closing meditation	5 minutes

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## Using the Facilitator Guides

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Each session has a dedicated Facilitator Guide that contains an outline for how to present the topics of the salons, based on suggested readings and using the format above. In the “Introductory Remarks” sections, it has explanations of ideas to think about in preparing for each salon. These descriptions can be read aloud where appropriate, but facilitators are not limited to what is written in the guide.

In addition, there are suggestions for how to conduct discussions and group exercises in each salon. These instructions can be adapted to the number of participants, the contributions they bring to the group, and the resources available.

### Listening

Sharing good listening guidance with participants is helpful to foster a group dynamic in which everyone can contribute and be heard. At the beginning of a session, review best practices for listening, with reminders in each salon when relevant. Consider the following recommended guidance for group listening:

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Please keep in mind the following agreements for thoughtful and inclusive discussion:

- Practice respectful listening without interrupting.
- Allow for space between speakers.
- If you've already spoken, be mindful of leaving an opening for others to speak; be fully present to them.

We wish to support participants in opening up and sharing their personal experiences. To create a space in which everyone can feel comfortable participating, please refrain from offering advice or taking on the role of a teacher.

Session Three, Salon One describes four phases through which listening skills progress:

1. Excited: you already know what that's about.
2. You want to interrupt and say your own thing.
3. Finally you can sit with the person and listen to them; be fully present to them.
4. You listen people into their wisdom.

Consider also these instructions from Session One, Salon Two, which might be useful in other group discussion contexts:

The person leading the discussion should let each participant speak before the group responds. Each person can share their wisdom with a sense that there is no right or wrong answer. Help each member of the group feel meditative, feel uplifted, feel their equanimity. When everyone is finished, take turns letting people respond and discuss.



## Aspiration

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May the prajna/knowledge from our salons purify our obscurations and draw into our sphere all who are interested in auspicious longevity and how to serve aging beings in this world and the next.

## Acknowledgements

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One day in the summer of 2015, Jenny Warwick, retired from her role as Acharya, called. We had been talking about books to read on aging and society. Jenny told me that she was going to start leading a salon/class on Aging in Enlightened Society based on the best selling book, *Being Mortal*, by Atul Gawande. She showed me her syllabus and I immediately connected to the material. “I would like to teach one, too,” I told her. So Jenny taught on Sunday evening at the Shambhala Center in Bellingham, Washington and I taught on Monday morning at our Shambhala Center in Portland, Oregon.

We thought of this as a test drive of a way we could offer a salon/discussion group to other interested centers. Nearly a year, 15 salons, and several books later, we, along with Jan Rogerson who literally put this manual together, offer this *Aging in Enlightened Society Facilitator Guide* to all of the centers in Shambhala that would like to offer this type of salon.

Thanks to John David Smith, our Aging Hub consultant. He was very supportive of this guide and encouraged us to make the guide a centerpiece of our offerings. And one of John’s many contributions was finding Laura Byrd, who volunteered her time to make the guide look attractive and printable. Thank you Laura.

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Many thanks to Jan Rogerson and Willa Rabinovitch for coordinating the salons in Portland, and to Jay Stewart and Annie Popkin for facilitating the discussion groups. Many many thanks to all of the participants who have shared their ideas and experiences and graceful aging with each other.

May these salons be of benefit!

Ann Cason  
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