



Aging in Enlightened Society

A Series of Discussions on Aging in a Salon Format

Session Two

The Warriorship of Aging

Facilitator Guide



Session Overview

In our first session, “The Landscape of Aging,” we saw the challenges of aging in a society of imbalances between safety and freedom and long life versus quality of life. Too often old age is seen as a diagnosis rather than as an opportunity for human dignity and possibilities. In this session, “The Warriorship of Aging,” we will contemplate our inner world in order to feel our own worthiness as aged people in a society in which we often feel marginalized, or as they say, “old and out of the way.”

Sometimes deep despair creeps in. We may want to complain, slink away, and give up. But our work as aging human beings is to feel what we feel. When the hard feelings spread, let us practice the warriorship of aging to develop kindness and human connectivity, and celebrate the way things have turned out.

In this Session, we take our cues from Sakyong Mipham’s guidance in the section on “Feeling” in his book, *The Shambhala Principle*. We also suggest the book *Let Evening Come* by Mary Morrison as a good example, showing the process of looking inward on aging: reflecting, observing, appreciating, slowing down, and seeing with new, inquisitive eyes. She was a Quaker who spoke with a voice of vulnerability and spirit.

We will practice meditation as training in equanimity and unbiased basic goodness—a state of being fresh and alive. Equanimity is not to be confused with numbness but rather grows from knowing how we are feeling and how to be with whatever we are feeling. We can be touched by our feelings, alive even though experiencing the suffering of sickness, loss, grief, or confusion.

Bette Davis once said, “Old age is not for sissies.” But it is possible to be a sissy and then relax. Above all else, the warriorship of aging has to do with being brave, not being afraid of who we are. When we practice the warriorship of aging, we learn to go through our society’s thinly disguised



negativity and come out the other side. It is as if we raise the jewelled banner of victory. It flutters in the wind, uncovering our innate cheerfulness.

Session Two consists of five salons of one and a half hours each. Each salon is organized around the following structure:

- Opening meditation
- Introductory remarks (setting the view)
- Discussion and group exercises
- Summation
- Closing meditation

This structure is flexible to meet the needs of each salon, its participants, and the resources available. Starting each salon with an overview of the topic to guide the discussion, including a reading or poem as appropriate, is helpful.

At the beginning of the session, review best practices for listening, with reminders in each salon where relevant. Consider the following recommended guidance:

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.

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.

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If possible, communicate with registered participants prior to the first meeting to remind them of the recommended books and suggested reading for the first salon, including any tips about where to find Mary Morrison's book. Some communities may have copies in lending libraries.

Note also that the last pages of this guide, after page 21, contain handouts that can be copied or printed and distributed to participants for use with the related exercises and discussions.



Salon One: *Do We Still Belong?*

Suggested Readings

The Shambhala Principle: Chapter 7, “Life Is a Ceremony” (pages 65–71)

Opening Meditation 15 minutes

Introductory Remarks *Establishing the view*

Ask participants to introduce themselves.

As baby boomers, we grew up in a world of increasing materialism and technology and grew away from a time when people were closely woven into the fabric of society, with crops, weather, birth and death, community rituals and celebrations. With this loss, we became disconnected from ourselves, not feeling our human dignity in a world of possibilities.

The resulting lack of trust in ourselves and our intuition made us vulnerable to a media bombardment about how we should feel and think and act. But now, as aging people, we may be more receptive to being touched by our experiences. Aging presents us with the opportunity to loosen and dislodge concepts that keep us stuck and lead to fear.

As is natural with aging, the earth, water, fire, and air elements of our life force are loosening and dissolving into space. This could lead to more disconnection. Or we could show up, connect. Even in old bodies our fresh minds flutter. This is where we practice raising the jeweled banner of victory.

Raising the Jeweled Banner of Victory is an inspiring phrase as we contemplate our aging:

Raise: Reversing the “sinking” feeling of the earth element dissolving.

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Jeweled: An image of basic goodness, bodhicitta, kindness, and the awake mind within us. Things are not so solid, and we can be and see our way through.

Banner: A proclamation about humankind: fluttering in air/wind, lightness, cheerfulness, fresh mind (windhorse, movement, receptivity).

Victory: Not win/lose but indestructible peace, equanimity, based not on a lack of feeling or reacting, but instead feeling and being with it, letting the self be touched and allowing the flow of connection to wisdom and humanity. No struggle. The all-victorious quality equals body–mind synchronization.

Another way of looking at this is that aging is a time when it seems that the mind and body are beginning to separate. Often the supports that keep us grounded, the activities of our daily lives, are hard to accomplish. An old woman said, “My mind was headed to the kitchen, but my body fell to the floor.” This feeling of the body–mind separation is further accentuated as the people we love and our friends often die or move away. Our future prospects diminish. Energy is weak and the mind may wander.

At this time our environment is very important. If our energy is weak, we need energy in the environment. This is a good time to work with meditation: short periods of sitting and doing nothing and paying attention to breathing out.

Group Exercise

Form small groups if the class is large enough, each with a notetaker who will be the group’s spokesperson during the summation. Go through the following three questions one by one: ask the question, contemplate for few minutes, and get a response from each member of the group. Then go to next question. After contemplating all three questions, have a general discussion. Make sure that each person speaks and is listened to.

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- What are you afraid of about aging?
- What is your personal experience that feeds this fear?
- What is your experience of ageism?

Summation

If the class was divided into groups, ask the group notetakers to report back to the whole group about key points of the smaller group discussions. Although you can bring out useful insights, it is important not to draw major conclusions. This is more about feeling than concept. This group work is a form of deep training.

Closing Meditation 5 minutes

Suggested Homework

Let Evening Come: Pages 1–44; particularly study pages 8–43



Salon Two: *Sinking or Contentment*

Suggested Readings

Let Evening Come: Pages 1–44; particularly study pages 8–43

Opening Meditation 15 minutes

Introductory Remarks *Establishing the view*

Why is it so hard to keep a fresh mind? Why are we so susceptible to ageism?

Our ground is shifting: the house is too big; our new designation is “widow” instead of “wife;” the store where we shopped is gone; we can’t hear what is being said; we no longer are listened to or seen. Within our discomfort, we need to develop the habit of contemplation rather than falling victim to the vicissitudes of loss, grief, and confusion.

Often we don’t trust our place in the family, in the neighborhood, or in the larger scheme of the universe. What are the shifting roles? Do we need to adjust? All these questions mean that we need to do inner work. There are different ways to go about this. The facilitator of the group could recommend these tools or encourage another form of contemplative practice. Mary Morrison’s suggestions are:

- Journaling.
- Noticing the paradoxes that aging brings with a sense of humor.
- Asking ourselves questions and, as Rilke suggests, loving the unanswerable questions and living our way into the answers.



Group Exercise

Organize the class into dyads. Choose from two or more of the following contemplations. For each contemplation, allow each person in the dyad to take a turn responding; use a timer to allow equal time.

- Contemplate your role in your family.
- Contemplate and discuss ways in which you do or don't have a role in your neighborhood or organization.
- Roles always are shifting. What roles have or need to change for you?
- Has the meaning of relationship expanded beyond the role you have played with family or with the Shambhala Center? What are the possibilities?
- Contemplate the paradox, "Loss is gain."
- Consider: What has life been? What will it be? What will death be like? How am I to respond to the growing diminishment that is coming upon me?

Summation

Bring the group together to share reflections on the exercise. After the discussion, read the poem by Mary Oliver below out loud as the summation and invite participants to reflect on its relation to the salon's topics. The second-to-last page of this handout (after page 21) has a copy of this poem that can be printed and handed out to participants if desired.

Lines Written in the Days of Growing Darkness

Every year we have been
witness to it: how the
world descends

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into a rich mash, in order that
it may resume.
And therefore
who would cry out

to the petals on the ground
to stay,
knowing, as we must,
how the vivacity of what was is married

to the vitality of what will be?
I don't say
it's easy, but
what else will do

if the love one claims to have for the world
be true?

So let us go on, cheerfully enough,
this and every crisping day,

though the sun be swinging east,
and the ponds be cold and black,
and the sweets of the year be doomed.

— *MARY OLIVER*

From *A Thousand Mornings* © The Penguin Press, 2012

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Closing Meditation

5 minutes

Suggested Homework

The Shambhala Principle: Chapter 8, “Life Is a Ceremony”
(pages 73–84)

Let Evening Come: Pages 45–129; especially study pages 84–96



Salon Three: *Isolating or Connecting*

Suggested Readings

The Shambhala Principle: Chapter 8, “Life as a Ceremony”
(pages 73–84)

Let Evening Come: Pages 45–129; especially study pages 84–96

Opening Meditation 15 minutes

Introductory Remarks *Establishing the view*

Continuing with our discussion of trying to find ground for fresh mind, we will talk about Mary Morrison’s questions for which there are no immediate answers:

- Does solitude grow from loneliness?
- Is there a time when we quiet ourselves and receive the embodiment or magic of basic goodness?

Most of our lives we have been governed by chronos time, which is clock and calendar time. Now it is kairos time, “the right time, the appropriate time guided by the rhythm of life itself” (*Let Evening Come*, page 94). There is a time to be born and live and die. But in addition, the Sakyong speaks of slowing down and feeling our worthiness and connection to the environment.

As elders we have a special connectivity or openness to knowing in our hearts that we, as human beings, belong to this earth. We deserve to be here, but we have to know it. Others may not see it, for they may still be seeing with eyes that are not fresh but rather speeding along with concepts about how older people are. There is a universality about this wisdom that we have the opportunity to practice now.



Group Exercises

Exercise one: Consider the following questions as one group, or in smaller groups, each with a group notetaker who will be spokesperson during the summation. Choose from two to four contemplations.

- Should elders find ways of living together or with other generations? Or not? Mary Morrison talks about the advantages of being with people who can move at our own pace (skateboard vs. walker); who share our understanding and values, knowing when something feels right.
- The often-asked question is about how much to indulge our need for rest. We feel guilty, like we are just being lazy. As we get older, do we defer to our bodies more rather than our heads?
- We could exercise the skill of being open with an awake heart and curious about the lives of those younger than us. We could exercise our need to be unselfish.
- Do we want to move into a “home” so we’re not a burden to our children and where we may find a place to make new friends?

Exercise two: Divide into smaller groups or use dyads to discuss the following questions. Consider these questions from the point of view of Chapter 8 of *The Shambhala Principle*, “Life Is a Ceremony.” If desired, read out loud the section on pages 78 to 81 as we consider how we can practice the warriorship of aging while we arrange and live our lives.

- Do you want to live with family or friends, at home or in assisted living?
- What is the importance of living with people with the same or different values?
- How do we raise the victory banner? What does it mean in terms of being involved in the group’s decisions?

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- How do we look at issues such as finances?
- What does it mean to make the best out of what is?
- What conditions might be needed to create opportunities for cultivation of an inner life?

Summation

Ask the notetakers from small groups to report back to everyone about key points of the small group discussions. Invite participants to share their reflections from the general discussion or dyads.

Closing Meditation 5 minutes

Suggested Homework none



Salon Four: *Growing More Tender*

No readings

Opening Meditation 15 minutes

Introductory Remarks *Establishing the view*

We have been talking about aging in terms of fresh mind, but often what we feel is stale: been there, done that, heard it, tasted it. Bah humbug. My back hurts, nothing lasts, what does the future hold. My memory is slipping and my mother is locked into a memory ward. I just want to pull the plug.

Slogan practice is a gift from ancient teachers brought into the modern world. It helps us very directly work with our minds in a different way than we do in sitting meditation. With sitting, we take our posture, breathe out and in. When we space out we come back. We don't judge our thoughts, we just let them flow through, or label thinking without calling it good or bad, just thoughts. With sending and taking practice, we take unwanted emotions such as anger or pain and breathe them in and breathe out loving kindness.

With slogan practice, we memorize slogans. Throughout our lives and relationships, as painful or unwanted situations arise, a slogan arises to counter the situation. It is like having a cosmic coach saying, "You can do it. You can stay sane." It is like having basic goodness in your hip pocket. It is like having a horsehair brush tickling your heart and making you more tender than tough.

These slogans and slogan practice teach us how to keep a fresh mind throughout all of the challenges we face as we try to live through the hard questions we discussed last week. They are to be used when contemplating our own aging and also when working with aging people. Chögyam Trungpa gave them to Ann Cason and Victoria Howard in the 1970s to use



in their work at Dana Home Care¹. They are tried and tested as a practice for going against the grain by providing support and a sense of humor. The slogans can be used as a kindness to oneself and others; they radiate compassion. They can be used as a profound practice, going against our habits and turning our minds toward freshness.

Note: The last page of this guide lists these slogans in a form that can be printed or copied and handed out to participants if desired.

The Slogans

1. **All situations are passing memory.** When you die, it is said that your life flashes before your eyes. Sometimes with intensive meditation practice, life flashes before the eyes like a moving picture show. We see that all things change and we don't have to take it so seriously.
2. **No escape, no problem.** Mary Morrison talks about the shock of seeing herself in a photograph. The shock... Ah! What is our level of acceptance or resistance?
3. **Take the blame yourself.** Chögyam Trungpa would say: "Why don't you take the blame?" He said he did it all the time! It is the best way to ease the tension of a battle. Ann Cason tells this story: "I once told him about engaging in a struggle with an older woman who accused me of not filling the hummingbird feeder. 'Why don't you take the blame?' he asked. 'But I didn't do it,' I answered. But the next time, when she accused me of not closing the refrigerator door, I said, 'Oh, I'm sorry.' And the tension left like hot air from a balloon."
4. **Be grateful to everyone.** It is hard to be grateful to those who push our buttons. This slogan is helpful in letting us see where we are, whether we are stuck or triggered. Ann recounts this personal experience: "I was at the Shambhala Center one night about 10 years

¹ Dana Home Care was a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping old people remain in their homes. It was founded and directed by Victoria Howard and Ann Cason in Boulder, Colorado, where they were students of Chögyam Trungpa.



ago. An old time member, whom I hadn't seen for a long time, came over to me and said, 'What has happened to you? You look old.' Could I be grateful for this? I froze and walked away. And every time I thought of him, I froze until a couple of years later when I heard he died. I had missed the opportunity to practice gratitude."

5. **Be steady, don't go up and down.** Feedback? Opinions? Bio-rhythms? If we're too high, bring it down and if too low, bring it up. Those of us who are aging may notice how changeable our energy is. We have our high days and low. This slogan helps us to make friends with or become familiar with an ordinary, not-much-happening state of mind that runs like a river through our lives.
6. **Rely on a cheerful frame of mind.** Don't take things too seriously. Let things pass through. The bigger picture is: no problem. Appreciate the stream of life.

Group Exercise

There is no particular exercise. The discussion could be as one group or in small groups. Participants could contemplate their own situations to share that reflect one of the slogans. Or students could act out scenarios in skits in order to prompt good discussion.

Summation

Invite participants to share their reflections on the exercise. Remind them that the slogan practice is magical. If we memorize the slogans and contemplate them, they will arise in the midst of daily life.

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Closing Meditation

5 minutes

Suggested Homework

The Shambhala Principle: Chapter 9, “Just You and Me” (pages 85–95); especially study pages 87–91



Salon Five: Celebrating Aloneness

Suggested Readings

The Shambhala Principle: Chapter 9, “Just You and Me” (pages 85–95); especially study pages 87–91

Opening Meditation 15 minutes

Introductory Remarks *Establishing the view*

In this course, we have been working on the subjects so important to aging: fresh mind and connectivity. Fresh mind is mind not driven totally by habitual patterns and concepts about being a good old person. Connectivity is the opposite of the enemy of old age: isolation, which leads to depression. The Sakyong says that our problems with aging have to do with not knowing how to be. The dilemma of not knowing how to be comes from a lack of trust in basic goodness. Instead of fresh mind, we end up with excessive attachment to concepts.

As we slow down and connect more with kairos time and with things as they are, our connectivity expands. We open more; we meet different people; we rest more with solitude that does not become restless boredom. We feel more that we belong. It is like when we plug in a computer: when it connects, a whole world opens up. All of our lives we have had people pulling our plugs, flipping our switches, igniting our triggers. This may still be true. But by self-reflecting, contemplating, and slowing down we open to more possibilities of simplicity.

We can practice our skillful means by working more in community. Working with people and learning to communicate leads to practicing over and over. We might learn to let our anger wake us up so that we can stop ourselves from being too harsh. We might learn to put our fork down before taking a bite of something that will cause a stomach ache. We might



remember, when a young person visits, not to complain, but rather to inquire, “How is your school going?” or “Do you have a girlfriend?” It is a way of giving a little bow when you enter a room to acknowledge the change of energy.

We can further find this fresh mind by using slogan practice that takes the challenges of aging and opens us to fresh mind. We can't bypass the pain of the gradual loss of our body, the loss of our relationships, and the softening of our mind. Instead of struggling against the river's flow, we can see and let go. In that way a pain becomes a propeller into cheer and the sad joy of being human. The softer we are, the more plugs can spark us.

Group Exercises

Exercise One: Contemplate this quote for five minutes as a group and compare it to Mary Morrison's discussions of communication between the generations:

“ Good human society comes about through strength in our interchanges with others.

The Shambhala Principle, page 86

Exercise Two: Divide into dyads and discuss these questions:

- How does the practice of dinner parties or potlucks and co-hosting and conversation provide the basis for a caring culture?
- With what kinds of activities and in what way do you understand how to practice the warriorship of aging?
- How does the warriorship of aging show itself in *Let Evening Come*?

After the dyads, come together in one group. Ask for reports and lead a discussion.



Summation

Encourage participants to look at all of their relationships. One of the Dana Home Care slogans that we didn't discuss is: "Notice Everything, Respect Everything" (*Circles of Care*, page 113). One result of these salons should be more excitement and interest in looking at our ordinary activities with others and seeing how we can turn these engagements into opportunities for growth.

Overview of Session Three: Creating A Caring Culture of Kindness

In Session Three, we will examine taking care or letting others care for us, using readings from *Circles of Care* by Ann Cason in addition to Sakyong Mipham's *The Shambhala Principle*.

No one should have the burden of care alone. We should share the opportunities and possibilities and work together for a light and spacious way of being true. Rejoicing is a state of appreciation and of great dignity in the midst of how it turned out.

“ Human happiness is based not just upon individual gratification; the happiness of humans is directly associated with the ability to share.... The reason we enjoy sharing and exchanging is their intimate connection to kindness and friendship.... Enlightened society is like a communal heart than pulsates with kindness in order to keep us all connected.

The Shambhala Principle, pages 67–68

Note: If your Center has already scheduled Session Three, share the dates and times with the participants and direct them to where they can find more information and register. If possible, let them know where they can obtain copies of Ann Cason's book. Some communities may have copies in lending libraries.

Closing Meditation

5 minutes



Lines Written in the Days of Growing Darkness

Every year we have been
witness to it: how the
world descends

into a rich mash, in order that
it may resume.
And therefore
who would cry out

to the petals on the ground
to stay,
knowing, as we must,
how the vivacity of what was is married

to the vitality of what will be?
I don't say
it's easy, but
what else will do

if the love one claims to have for the world
be true?
So let us go on

though the sun be swinging east,
and the ponds be cold and black,
and the sweets of the year be doomed.

— *MARY OLIVER*



Dana Home Care Slogans

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3. **Take the blame yourself.** Chögyam Trungpa would say: "Why don't you take the blame?" He said he did it all the time! It is the best way to ease the tension of a battle. Ann Cason tells this story: "I once told him about engaging in a struggle with an older woman who accused me of not filling the hummingbird feeder. 'Why don't you take the blame?' he asked. 'But I didn't do it,' I answered. But the next time, when she accused me of not closing the refrigerator door, I said, 'Oh, I'm sorry.' And the tension left like hot air from a balloon."
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6. **Rely on a cheerful frame of mind.** Don't take things too seriously. Let things pass through. The bigger picture is: no problem. Appreciate the stream of life.