

Movement, Meditation *and Conversations on Aging*

About the Workshop

“We have to nourish our insight into impermanence every day.

If we do, we will live more deeply, suffer less, and enjoy life much more.”

~ Thich Nhat Hanh ~

I created this workshop as the culminating project for my master’s in hatha yoga and contemplative practices at DePaul University’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies. During that time, I was diagnosed with osteoporosis, and it set me on a journey of exploring the drivers of optimal aging and whether yoga and meditation could contribute to healthy aging. This workshop offers a curriculum that incorporates my passion for yoga, meditation, and evidenced-based, action-oriented learning around the topic of healthy aging to empower you to be more intentional about your goals as you age and more aware of your choices and their potential impacts.

This workshop has five sessions. Each session we will focus on a different topic related to healthy aging and each topic draws on evidence-based sources. In the first week we will explore how in the blink of an evolutionary eye, human life expectancy has increased dramatically. In week two, we will focus on the Rowe and Kahn model on healthy aging and consider modifications we can make now to increase the likelihood of staying healthy during those added years of our life. During the third week, we will

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consider the importance of staying intellectually and socially engaged as we age. In week four, we will explore age discrimination as well as the new reality of saving for retirement. Finally, in week five I'll invite you to share some elements of your final project with the group (sharing is optional but strongly encouraged!).

Prior to each session, I will email you a PDF file that includes the chapter or summary of the topics we will discuss in the upcoming live session. Each chapter includes links to a variety of videos and articles for you to engage with before our live meetings to deepen your understanding of the topics.

Starting in session two, you will have a project each week to complete prior to the coming session; let's call it "homework lite." These projects are all intended to support the final project which is to develop your plan for optimal aging based on the Rowe and Kahn model we will learn about during the workshop. This is action-oriented learning: your final Plan for Healthy Aging will help you put into action what you glean from the workshop.

We will start each two-hour session with a 30-45-minute gentle yoga practice, followed by a group discussion of the session topic, and close with a guided meditation drawing from the theme of the session. During this workshop, I will invite you to practice using your breath and body through our gentle yoga practice. Movement and exercise are an essential ingredient of staying healthy in our older adult years and we will model that during our time together. The beauty of yoga is that it is adaptable to all ages and physical abilities.

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We will also use guided, reflective meditations that draw from our past experiences to gain insights about what might bring meaning to our older adult years. Mark Nepo, an author I enjoy, offers this comment about reflective meditation:

I think of reflective pauses as small gifts, like worn shells washed up from the sea. Each found and polished and set in your path so you might hold it to your ear and your heart, and listen – to what they have to say of life, to what voices they stir within your own depths.

I hope our reflective meditations stir voices within your depths so that you might listen and learn.

This workshop is intended to be a discussion-based learning experience rather than a lecture-based learning experience. The expectation is that you will review and study the chapter and videos prior to class so that when we come together in person you will be prepared to engage in rich peer-to-peer conversations with your workshop colleagues. Consider this a unique opportunity to explore personal aging-related topics in a supportive group setting - topics that do not often get airtime in the forum of public debate. Author Brené Brown says: “Daring greatly means having the courage to be vulnerable, it means showing up and being seen, to ask for what you need, to talk about how you’re feeling, to have the hard conversations.” May we all have the courage to dare greatly, to peel back layers of ourselves that might not otherwise see the light of day, share, learn and gain insights that will move us toward the lives we aspire to live as older adults. May we also strike a balance between daring and deciding what our personal boundaries are and honoring them in ourselves and others.

During our time together, we’ll draw from a variety of philosophies and faith traditions. I hope you will feel inspired to connect with whatever spiritual tradition you draw from. In the video assigned for session one, Lewis Richmond notes the last third of our lives is often a time of spiritual inquiry and

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spiritual work. I encourage you to embrace that work during this workshop. While every faith tradition has its own language and frame of reference, most lead to the same destination – exploring the spiritual dimension of our human experience.

As you prepare for the coming workshop sessions by reading the course materials and viewing the videos, take some time to develop an organizational system to help you keep track of the things that inspire you, that you want to remember, and that could help you shape your vision for how you want to live your older adult years and what actions you can take now to support optimal aging. Maybe it is as simple as a notebook dedicated to this workshop or setting up a document on your computer and bringing your laptop to each workshop. Whatever works for you, please have a strategy to organize information over the course of the workshop.

As I worked on developing the curriculum for this workshop – I placed a simple hand-written sign by my workspace that says, “Bless this work.” I wanted to have something within eye range to remind me every day to be open to the potential for a spiritual element to infuse this work. What can you do, to open the window for the same in your work?

Finally, in the opening quote by Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, we are reminded of our impermanence. Challenge yourself to acknowledge up front that no matter how much we practice yoga and meditation, eat a healthy diet, stay connected to friends and family, tap into our spirituality, make all the right choices – none of these change our impermanence. Over time, our health will surely

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decline, and ultimately, we will all take our final breath. During this workshop, let that be a knowing we all hold in our hearts so that we all might “live more deeply, suffer less, and enjoy life much more.”

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References

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3. Nhat Hanh, T. (1998). *The Heart of Buddha's Teachings: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation: The Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path; and other Buddhist's Teaching*. Harmony Books. NY, NY.
4. Richmond, L. (2011). *Aging as a Spiritual Practice*. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOINtk7oqo4&ab_channel=LewisRichmond

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