

Conscious Aging: Mindfully Embracing the Journey
Course Syllabus - Fall 2022 - Tuesdays 1:00-3:00pm
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Course Description

Many people view growing older as a process of diminishment and loss. What if we were to approach it, as mindfulness teacher James Baraz proposes, with “a spirit of adventure, opening to the next chapter of our life with celebration and discovery?” What kinds of support would we need to step into this adventure with curiosity and a sense of purpose and joy? In this class, we will engage in a variety of mindfulness practices to harvest the gifts of the journey we’ve been on up to this point and explore intentions for conscious aging in the next phase of our lives. This exploration will be guided by questions, such as “What is the calling of my heart now? What brings me joy?”

Book: *Winter’s Graces: The Surprising Gifts of Later Life.* Susan Avery Stewart
Please bring it with you to each class.

Overview.

In this class, we will be weaving together the gifts described in each of the chapters of *Winter’s Graces* with mindfulness practices that support our exploration of these gifts. The stories (folktales) in each chapter will be our starting point for unpacking each gift. Stewart suggests, “One way to understand folktales is to imagine that each character is an aspect of ourselves” (p. 227).

Mindfulness practices will offer opportunities to dive deeper into each of the gifts described. We will consider the ways they already manifest in our lives and how they might do so more fully in the next phase of our lives.

The book treats each of the eleven winter’s graces separately. This is just the author’s device for organizing the material. It is clear that these graces are inter-related, something that will become increasingly evident as we move through the chapters.

Stewart notes (p. 17), “This book is intended as a celebration of late life and of the older woman in particular.” She continues, “I hope that men ... will find value here as well.” While most in our class have identified as women, we are fortunate to have men in the class as well. This being so, we can anticipate rich discussions of the winter’s graces and consider how they manifest across gender.

Keeping a Journal. It will be helpful to keep a journal of your experiences in this class. Please bring it (or something to write on and with) to each class.

Facilitating Class Discussions: There will be opportunities to facilitate class discussions of each of winter’s graces. You are invited to do so either solo or with a partner. Each chapter includes discussion questions to guide you. Please consider whether this is something you would enjoy doing. This is not a requirement. There will be a sign up sheet available for individual chapters with accompanying dates (see Weekly Calendar/Topics below).

Weekly Calendar/Topics

Week 1: September 13th -

Introductions and Orientation to the Course

Elders Who Inspire Us

Ch 1. The Grace of Authenticity - *The Little Old Woman Who Went to the North Wind*

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Authenticity

Week 2: September 20th

Ch. 2: The Grace of Self-Transcending Generosity

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Self-Transcending Generosity

No class September 27 - Optional Forest Bathing (details to follow)

Week 3: October 4th

Ch. 3: The Grace of Courage

Ch. 4: The Grace of Creativity

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Courage and Creativity

Week 4: October 11th

Reflections on the Journey: Weaving and Integration

The Way Forward

Week 5: October 18th

Ch. 5: The Grace of Contentment

Ch. 6: The Grace of Compassion

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Contentment and Compassion

Week 6: October 25th

Ch. 7: The Grace of Necessary Fierceness

Ch. 8: The Grace of Simplicity

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Necessary Fierceness and Simplicity

Week 7: November 1st

Reflections on the Journey: Weaving and Integration

The Way Forward

Week 8: November 8th

Ch. 9: The Grace of Remembrance

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Remembrance

Week 9: November 15th

Ch. 10: The Grace of Agelessness

Mindfulness Practice: Cultivating Agelessness

Week 10: November 22nd

Ch. 11: The Grace of Wisdom

Weaving and Integration, Blessings and Allies

The Way Forward