

# Becoming A Wise Aging Facilitator in 2019

**“Old age is not a defeat, but a victory, not a punishment but a privilege. The test of a people is how it behaves toward the old . . . man’s potential for change and growth is much greater than we are willing to admit and old age (can) be regarded not as the age of stagnation but as the age of opportunities for inner growth.”**

– Abraham Joshua Heschel

## Introduction

There are 1.9 million Jewish adults ages 55+ in the U.S. In a society that does not support us as we age, our Jewish communities are just beginning to address the issues and opportunities of paying attention to the needs of this demographic.

There is no set of instructions for getting older—for the shifts in our social and support networks, the feeling of invisibility, the angst of dealing with aging parents, the mixed signals of entering retirement, or the surprising turns in our relationships with ourselves, our partners, friends, and colleagues. On the other hand, those of us currently in this stage can count ourselves as part of an extraordinary, history-making generation—pioneers in understanding and making the most of this “third chapter” of life. Many of us will be blessed with an unprecedented number of years ahead, full of potential for learning and growth.

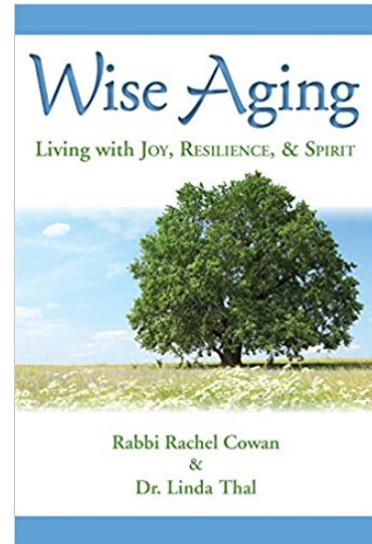
The Wise Aging Program was developed to engage Jewish adults aged fifty-five and older: to give us a meaningful place in the Jewish community, to open up conversations about what it means to get older, to create new understandings about life so we can live with spirit, resilience and joy, and to continue to contribute to the future of Judaism.

## History of the Wise Aging Program

The Wise Aging Program began in the fall of 2014 as a program of The Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS). Wise Aging trainers went out to Jewish communities across the United States to train facilitators to lead Wise Aging peer groups in synagogues, JCCs, and other institutions. Over the past four years, 450 facilitators have been trained in the United States and Canada. They facilitate new and ongoing groups—communities of learners who explore questions, insights, longings, and conundrums regarding the aging process. Several thousand Jewish adults have created new connections in Jewish communities from Vancouver to San Francisco to Chicago and Kansas City to Washington D.C. and beyond.

## Overview of the Wise Aging Program

The Wise Aging Program is based upon the book *Wise Aging, Living with Joy, Resilience and Spirit*, co-written by Rabbi Rachel Cowan z"l, the founding Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, and Dr. Linda Thal, a pioneer in transforming synagogue life to include spirituality and spiritual development. The book serves as a guide for Wise Aging groups that have been and continue to be formed around North America. Grounded in mindfulness and contemplative practices such as meditation, listening, text study, journaling, and gentle movement, from Judaism and other faith traditions, the Wise Aging program offers social, emotional and spiritual insights in a small group setting. The practices and group interactions help participants navigate these years with a sustaining spirit.



***Wise Aging* is the only program of its kind  
that considers mindfulness and contemplative practices  
to be foundational to aging wisely**

## Structure and Content of the Wise Aging Program

The Program consists of a facilitated peer group of 10 – 12 people meeting on a regular basis for 6 – 9 sessions of 2 hours each. Many of these groups choose to extend their meetings, often over several years. Trained by Wise Aging faculty, facilitators go through a series of steps to get ready to lead groups. Each group session centers on a different topic, including (but not limited to): “Exploring This Stage of Life”, “I Am My Body, I Am Not My Body”, “Cultivating Nourishing Relationships”, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Cultivating Spiritual Qualities for Well-being”, and “Living with Loss and Finding Light: Conscious Dying; Legacy and Stewardship.” Topics are explored using the contemplative practices of the Wise Aging Program to deepen the inner and outer journeys of participants.

## How to Become a Wise Aging Facilitator

Participation in a Wise Aging Facilitator Training begins with an application process. Once an applicant is approved by the Training Coordinator and registers for the training, there are four steps of the Facilitator Training program:

1. Attending one or more Online Orientation Sessions that introduce the program and cover core concepts of Wise Aging, including Judaism and mindfulness. (It is possible

that trainees will have access to the IJS online course in the Fundamentals of Jewish Mindfulness at a discounted rate.)

2. Participating in a 2 and one-half day in-person Wise Aging Introductory Training course.
3. Participating in an 8-10 session virtual Peer Practice group facilitated periodically by one of our Wise Aging trainers.
4. Participating in 1-2 additional online meetings/webinars before the end of 2019.

### **The Investment in Becoming a Wise Aging Facilitator**

Being a Wise Aging facilitator is personally satisfying and enriching. Current facilitators are inspired by the content of the Wise Aging curriculum, the contemplative practices and the insights of group participants as they help a whole generation re-imagine aging. They are excited to be part of a coast to coast community of Wise aging facilitators who are making a contribution to the Jewish present and future. For some this is a volunteer commitment, while for others it's a way to earn extra income.

**I loved the training ... and invested time, study, and passion into preparing for the "real" sessions. The rewards have been profoundly satisfying—enthusiastic responses from our groups, plus my own personal growth and deepened spirituality. There have been some bonuses for our congregation as well. Both the content of the program and the bonding of the groups have motivated WA participants to become more active Temple members.**

*-Training Participant*

### **Information on Upcoming Introductory Wise Aging Facilitator Trainings**

There are two trainings scheduled for the spring/summer of 2019, one on the U.S. east coast and one on the west coast:

#### **1. East Coast:**

Location: Washington Hebrew Congregation/Washington, D.C.

Dates: March 31, 4:30 - 8:30 p.m.

April 1, 9:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

April 2, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

#### **2. West Coast:**

Location: Portland, Oregon

Dates: June 2, 4:30 - 8:30 p.m.

June 3, 9:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

June 4, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

The cost for all four steps of the training is \$899\*, which breaks down as follows:

- \$100 for online modules
- \$559 for a 2 and one-half day in-person training;
- \$240 for 8-10 peer practice sessions with periodic supervision from a Wise Aging trainer.

**\*This fee is exclusive of room and board for anyone coming from a distance to attend the 2 and one-half day in-person training.**

### **Cancellation Policy**

Our cancellation policy for Wise Aging Trainings is a full refund minus a \$100 cancellation fee if you cancel more than 7 days prior to the start of the training. Although our standard cancellation policy does not allow for refunds within 7 days of the start of the training, refund requests within the 7 days will be considered on a case by case basis.

We reserve the right to cancel the training if a minimum number of registrants is not met. If a training is cancelled due to lack of participants, anyone who has already registered will receive a full refund. **Please check in with us before making your travel plans to be sure we have adequate registration for the training to take place.**

To learn more about becoming a Wise Aging Facilitator, upcoming Facilitator Trainings, or how to sponsor a Training in your community, please email Dr. Linda Thal at [lindathalnyc@gmail.com](mailto:lindathalnyc@gmail.com); Karen Frank at [karenkfrank@verizon.net](mailto:karenkfrank@verizon.net); Batya Perman, Ph.D. at [batyaperman@gmail.com](mailto:batyaperman@gmail.com).