



MINDFULNESS IN ARABIC (MIA) FOR REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLES

Hello!

Welcome to the Mindfulness course, a brain training for coping with stress and anxiety.

My name is Juditta Ben-David and I am a psychotherapist, lecturer, and mindfulness instructor, and I will guide you in this course.

This course was designed for you to support your everyday awareness in life, and especially to deal with challenges more easily. The course is made up of recorded sessions, readings, and meditation exercises, for an eight-week process, which we call "The Eight Steps."

Today we will begin the first week of the course with an introduction to the technique itself. We will understand the term Mindfulness, also called mindful attention, and the reasons why we warmly recommend learning and using this technique on a daily basis.

We all encounter challenges and crises in life and we can then be helped and supported by tools that will make it easier for us to cope. Some of us have encountered truly severe situations, and we would like to offer you experiences that have been shown to bring more balance and ease to walking through life after such changes.

Without the cultivation of new tools, most of our patterns for dealing with stress and crisis are not very effective. Most were learned at a very young age, and therefore use basic techniques of fight, flight or freeze. That is how our ancient (younger) brain operates when it is under threat.

We can react impulsively to intimidation in the environment or in ourselves, go into obsessive worry, or we can push over the stress and the story in a fight against sensations, feelings and thoughts that may come up with them, so that they disappear... But usually they do not disappear. We can try to avoid them one way or another, but usually this increases our inner tension even more, weakens us, and maybe even raises the environmental tension. But, there is another approach, another option that we can use.. and that is exactly what I would like to talk about in this course and invite you to practice for a few minutes every day.

“Stress and challenges are definitely part of life. In this course we will learn new ways to deal with them, and maybe even learn how to enjoy life a little bit more. “

Mindfulness is a practice of bringing genuine, curious and gentle attention to our thoughts, feelings and sensations at a given moment, for a certain time. By being with things as they are, without forcing anything on them or running away from them, we actually create a space where we allow our brain to learn a new way of reacting. We call that responding.

We may not always have control of our lives, but changing our attitude towards what happens in our lives is critical and improves our quality of life and general health. I think we all know that.

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Actually, Mindfulness is not a new technique at all and has in fact been part of human knowledge for thousands of years. It was developed and practiced mainly in Asia, until it was introduced experimentally in pain clinics in Western hospitals. Still, the effects of practicing this technique surpassed all expectations, and since then more than 2000 research studies have been done of its advantages.

Mindfulness was found to be a technique that benefits our brains, our nervous systems, our hearts, and all of our body systems. It was found that practitioners feel more calm, more concentration, their memories improve, their sleep improves, their pain threshold rises, and their ability to make judicious decisions increases. Even chronic physical ailments respond well to Mindfulness practice. For instance, patients with psoriasis and intestinal diseases recovered three times faster when the participants practiced Mindfulness via a recorded teacher. Other studies found that Mindfulness stimulates and strengthens the immune system, helps with ailments created by stress and tension, such as diabetes and blood pressure, and definitely helps anxiety and depression. In the UK, a Mindfulness course may be prescribed instead of medication for mild to medium cases of depression. After all, we all suffer from some kind of mental illness from living in the 21st century with its speed, demands, competition, violence and a flood of information that lacks boundaries.

Modern living often contains small to large threats to our existence : The world is changing, there is no sense of stability: norms change, residences change, and even security in a permanent stable job has been disrupted. This sense of instability and the basic human desire to control our life and know what the future holds can lead us to many, perhaps, unnecessary stressful situations. Because our brain is so occupied with the past, worried about the future

and the movement between them, a great deal of stress arises. We think about what was, what could have been different, and what can maybe be fixed, reconstructing pictures and stories over and over again. Does that sound familiar? We are preoccupied with the future, try to make contingency plans, worry about what will happen, trying not to repeat the same mistakes, in an attempt to protect ourselves from a future that, eventually we know nothing about. Usually we are also very judgmental of ourselves and this piles on us even more stress. Our ability to bring kind attention to a given moment, to the here and now, can be a very big relief to our nervous systems in this scenario; giving us a little peace and quiet and a lot of healing.

The ability to bring attention to present experiences with openness, curiosity, and willingness, to be with things as they are: that is actually one definition of Mindfulness.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? But because we adults are not used to that anymore, we need just a little bit of practice, and a refresher, a reminder.

We calm the brain and stabilize the heart, to get out of our fixations and automatic reactions to a behavior that is more respectful of who we are and healthier on many levels. Just like we exercise our bodies and pay attention to what we eat, so we should and can exercise our heart and brain, to experience more relaxation and flexibility. More awareness and more presence arrive, these are inherent capacities we have.

Research has shown that people who practice even just eight weeks of Mindfulness have shown changes in their brains, towards a better quality of life. The brains of practitioners remain more flexible over time and they experience more joy, more self-acceptance and compassion.

Lately we have seen that Mindfulness courses have popped up in hospitals, pain clinics, military units, classrooms, psychologists, even large law firms or hi-tech companies like Google. The desire to find a little calm in the chaos of life, feel a little bit more intimacy with oneself, listen within and understand better what I'm going through, to know what hurts and what feels good and what my needs are.... Apparently everyone shares these desires. This ability to tune into myself also helps me communicate myself better to the environment, to my partner, my children, my boss, my doctor, neighbours and so on. Children of parents who listen to themselves in this way develop better in life and have better communication skills.

Studies show that high stress levels change the brain structure and limit our range of possibilities. On the other hand, the ability to make our awareness more flexible, to practice refreshment breaks, and change the way we relate to reality can make a significant difference in helping us adapt to change. Practicing presence--clear and gentle wakefulness--a few minutes a day, helps us expand and deepen our ability to be in the here and now, to remember what really matters to us in life, and opens a window for us to new and creative choices and

solutions. This practice may help us feel self-worth, feel positive feelings, and even relax happily.

With all this, you truly do not need to be stressed or sick to take this course, it simply is a good idea to practice this knowledge at any time so that it will be available and accessible to you during challenging times. This is a knowledge that restores vitality, health, and surprisingly offers moments of freedom.

Let's begin

The practice is first experienced sitting down and then moves to regular life situations, like walking, eating, driving, etc.

I invite you to continue reading the course material and try the simple exercises of the first week with curiosity. I will be happy to see you next week to continue the journey.

**Note: In the Arabic version of this document we have a small passage explaining terminology which is used in the rest of the course. During the course we used two words as an explanation of the term "Mindfulness." The first, Elamal Elo'i, which is specifically means Mindfulness, and the second term Alikda is a more general interpretation of the meditation.*

As you may know, Mindfulness is a specific practice within the broad spectrum of meditation, it is a meditation practice that emphasizes presence at this moment.