



Mindfulness and Refugees

Hello again

So, you have already experienced one meditation and Inshalla it felt inviting and intriguing to continue on with the course. We're glad. In that case, we would like to say a few words about the thought behind the MiA course, and why we have designed a Mindfulness course specifically for refugees.

Juditta and Jumana, members of our founding team, have both worked with refugees, especially Arabic speaking refugees, as aid workers. Juditta was also a trauma and resiliency trainer for CRM SE and MBSE in Turkey and Greece. As Mindfulness practitioners, both saw the benefit in offering Mindfulness to refugees and their counsellors in their own language. This was boosted by feedback and requests for such a course from students, refugees and Arabic speaking communities around the world.

As you know, along a refugee's migratory path, he or she may experience torture, trauma and/or the loss of family members, in conflict areas or along the way. Fleeing war-torn countries, escaping life-threatening persecution, experiencing hardship and animosity, and sensing overwhelming strong emotions while moving between multiple displacements in the process; all of these contribute to a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty which may brew high levels of stress...

All of these experiences increase one's risk of developing health problems, and also have a cumulative effect when they are reactivated again and again. Below is a list of possible symptoms--as you go on, please notice how it feels to read this list, as it might be sad or bring up hard memories. Symptoms might be: nightmares, disproportionate fears, hypervigilance, strong reactive anger, shyness and avoidance, a sense of isolation and distrust, being unable to concentrate, difficulties in making choices, impatience, and a myriad of physical symptoms (headaches, heartaches, stomach-aches, and shortness of breath are all common signs) that might not alleviate.

We recommend now trying to take a big breath in and a long breath out.

Sadly, trauma is a common and normal part of human life. Trauma is a specific type of stress that reflects exposure to extreme events that are emotionally painful, intense and distressing. The truth is that our Mind-Body is naturally hard wired to cope with it; most of the time we heal from trauma on our own. But when it is too overwhelming, when our ability to respond adequately to a perceived threat is thwarted or confused, that can affect our Body-Mind system and produce symptoms like those listed above.

This is what we want to address and provide relief for. The aim of Mindfulness in Arabic (MiA) is to provide a skillful and safe space over a period of time to learn and practice skills that may reduce these symptoms and their intensity. MiA is based not only on professional teaching of Mindfulness but also on a wide knowledge of trauma and how to bring these practices together in order to build resilience. MiA is a friendly act of sharing tools and practices that may help relieve stress and that can create

pauses between experiences, feelings, thoughts and behaviours, assisting in untangling the overwhelm.

Through pausing we may see how to retrieve the self who regulates emotions, capacities and choice; we may see how we can actually expand the sense of relative safety in the midst of chaos and transit, even finding islands of calm and clarity inside ourselves. Through these practices we want to remember what we love, how we love, and how to take back the reins of our personal experience.

Throughout this Mindfulness in Arabic course, we will provide short segments about the nature and impact of stress and trauma on individuals and communities. We have learnt that such information can help one in understanding his/her situation, providing order, reason, and motivation for taking care of oneself and others. This information also will help you decide the rhythm and pace you will want to walk the steps of this course, and how to share with your dear ones.

We have designed this course specifically with refugees and the refugee experience in mind, and are still checking this with our students across the Middle East and Europe. Our approach is gentle, respecting the Arab culture, and takes into consideration the family obligations you may have or limited free time to meditate when on the road. Nonetheless, it might not fit everyone, and is not a therapy for severe trauma.

We would love to hear from you, so that we can make it even better. Please feel free to send any kind of inquires, for this we have a question and answer form at the end of each week.

On a positive note: Our nervous system can be flexible and has the ability to heal itself. Mindfulness has been shown to help it do exactly that.

It is said that stress and trauma rob us of the present. We shall speak about that in more detail in the next weeks. Healing, clarity, and a sense of dignity, stem from our ability to become more present. Mindfulness is an art of coming back to the here and the now, the ability to be present.

By the way, we know that Mindfulness practice can help with the process of resettling, communication, and bridging across different cultural differences. But more on that in another time...