



Introduction

This 8-week course is based on the fact that the brain has a property of neuroplasticity. Both the brain and the nervous system can change structurally and functionally under the influence of the signals from the environment. Learning and memory are examples of plasticity. Implicitly it follows, that meditators are able to change some of the neural paths in the brain through meditation, and this can result in a dramatic change in your outlook on life events. This profound result of sustained practice, known for many centuries to meditation practitioners, has been confirmed by scientific studies in the last two decades.

In this session

In this session we have covered:

1. Introduced each other – found out our past experience with mindfulness and meditation, and what we'd like to get out of this course
2. Meditation – two broad types: either a narrow focus on concentration (e.g. using a mantra, image), or a broader focus on insight/investigation leading to a clear seeing of how things really are.
3. Mindfulness means paying attention, being aware. This can be with an external focus, e.g. on an activity such as flower arrangement or Japanese tea ceremony, or an inward focus e.g. on sensations of the body.
4. The Zen approach: meditation is a simple and natural activity/skill; there is nothing special to believe in. The Rinzai Zen tradition extends back 2500 years and has a tradition of teaching meditation for wellbeing (Bompu Zen) both in and outside of the monastic setting – to boost your health, vitality, energy, and level of being.
5. Bodyscan meditation: moving awareness through the body in a sequence from top to bottom. Main aspects are: awareness, allowing, non-judgment.

Commitment

Committing to 20-30 minutes of practice every day for the duration of this course, including still meditation, writing a meditation diary, movement practices, and daily mindfulness exercises.



Homework

Practice body scan meditation once a day and note down your experiences in your meditation diary.

Body scan meditation reminder

Practice lying down, on your back or on your side, spine long and straight. Centre your awareness on the breathing in your belly. Bring your attention to the crown of your head; just becoming aware of any feelings or sensations there, without judgment about what you find, and without trying to change anything or do anything.

Move your awareness down your body in the following order: face, head, neck, shoulders, upper torso, upper arms, lower torso & abdomen, lower arms, hips and pelvis, hands, upper legs, knees, lower legs, ankles, feet. Then return your awareness to the top of your head and let your attention sweep down through your body faster and more easily.

Now allow your awareness to be generalised through your whole body, particularly being aware of any places that feel uncomfortable, tense, stressed, or anything that's not quite 100%. Allow these areas to be held in your gentle, curious presence.