



HANDOUT 1: SESSION 01

Stepping out of automatic pilot

People often do things while being unaware of what they are doing. Have you ever driven to work and encountered construction activity along your usual route to work? You then decide, in your mind, to take a different route the next day, only to find yourself on the same construction route the next day before you catch yourself. This may even go on for another couple days before you can catch yourself and take a different route from the start.

How often do you meet someone and they tell you their name and immediately afterward, you forget what their name is? Is this a problem with memory, or what exactly is happening?

Most of us live our lives operating on automatic pilot, not being fully aware of what it is we are doing from moment to moment. How do we break out of this?

In our first session, we discuss the concept of “automatic pilot”. Automatic pilot is our tendency to act and react to what is happening around us, without full awareness. We explore and discuss automatic pilot and relapse by considering how it is connected with triggers, cravings and urges to gamble.

Our exploration of mindfulness begins with the experiential exercises of the raisin exercise and the body scan. In these exercises, we have the opportunity to fully bring our attention to what is happening in the present moment, through mindful eating in the raisin exercise and being grounded in our bodies in the body scan.

The raisin exercise is an introduction to mindfulness, which is a different way of being and doing things, mindfully and with presence. It is about cultivating presence in your everyday life while maintaining a non-judgemental attitude of acceptance for whatever is happening.

What is mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, “mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994).

Mindfulness is essentially an awareness and acceptance of your moment-to-moment experience, including thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. It does not mean suppression of thoughts, emotions, or body sensations. It is non-judgemental awareness, and involves a sense of detachment from thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. That is, you are aware of the content of your thoughts, but do not identify with them, or feel that you have to act upon them. You can let them slide in and out of

awareness. You cannot will yourself to stop thinking about something. In fact the opposite happens; trying not to think about something makes it more difficult to unhook from the thought. Rather than trying to suppress unwanted thoughts, the mindful person brings awareness to those thoughts and lets them be. This process is one of the key principles taught in a mindfulness class.

→ **HOME PRACTICE** (week following Session 01)

- 1 **Body scan.** For this first week, practice the body scan at least once a day for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- 2 **Mindfulness of a daily activity.** Choose an activity that you do on a daily basis (e.g., brushing your teeth, drinking tea, washing dishes, taking a shower, eating, etc.) and do it mindfully. For example, when taking a shower, notice the sensations of the water on your skin, and the feeling of the soap and lather. Notice where your thoughts are. Are you thinking about what you will be doing next or is your awareness actually in the shower and what is happening?

Whatever you are doing in the moment, just do that and nothing else.

When you are eating, just eat, without reading the newspaper or watching television, and notice the tastes and sensations of the food as you are chewing and swallowing.

Be fully present to whatever you are doing.

When in conversation with someone, let them be like the raisin and be open, curious and non-judgemental to the experience.
