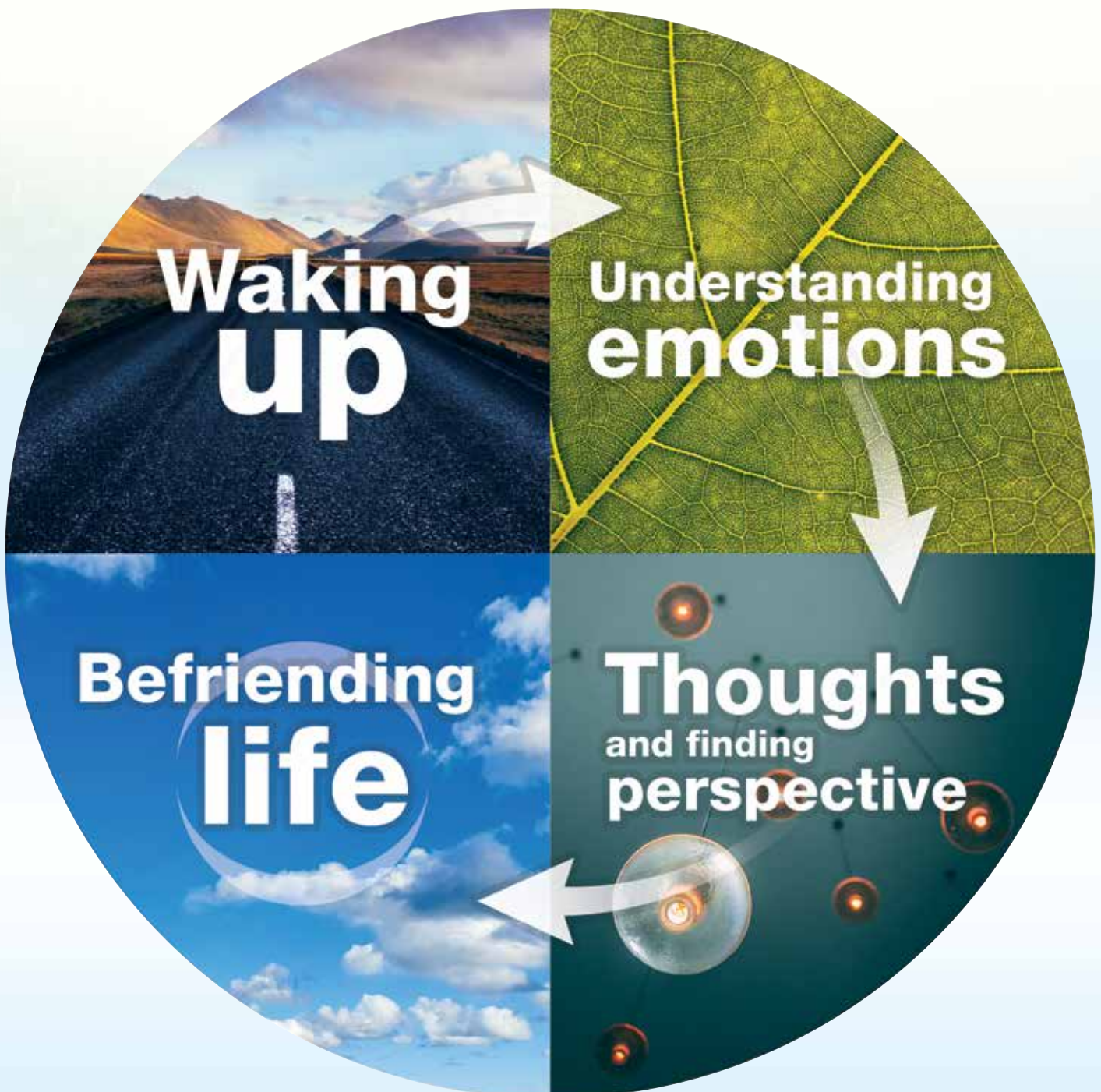


# Introduction to Mindfulness First Steps





# Introduction to Mindfulness First Steps

In this short E-Book  
you will find some information  
so you can decide if this course  
is right for you.

Introduction to Mindfulness • First Steps  
First Edition  
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Openground originated as a group of educators and health professionals who got together in 2004 to offer Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and related programs throughout Australia in health, education, workplaces and community development.

Openground offers evidence-based, user-friendly and empowering mindfulness programs to individuals and organisations to help cultivate mental and physical health and the personal authority that leads to effectiveness and flourishing.

Openground's core purpose is about freedom—freedom to consciously choose our responses, no matter what the circumstance. Through the cultivation of skills, attitudes and knowledge, mindfulness training offers a tested approach to develop and quicken our innate human capacities for attention, awareness and wise action.

#### Our values

- Respect for each individual's uniqueness
- Provision of a collaborative, stimulating learning environment
- Integrity in terms of ethical and professional responsibilities
- Rigour and depth of training in the fields which contribute to effective mindfulness based programs.

Openground has strong professional links with the international community of senior mindfulness teachers and trainers. For more information on our courses please log in to: [www.openground.com.au](http://www.openground.com.au)

Mindfulness is a “must-have”:  
a way to keep our brains healthy,  
to support self-regulation  
and effective decision-making,  
and to protect ourselves from toxic stress.

Harvard Business Review, January 2015

# WELCOME

In the middle of this road we call our life  
I found myself in a dark wood  
With no clear path through.

Dante Alighieri

All of us struggle with something. Anxiety. Emotional eating. Smoking. Shopping. Self-judgement. Anger. Bad habits. Inability to switch off. Feeling overwhelmed. Whatever your struggle, change is possible. Some dedicated mindfulness training – coupled with the ideas that underpin the practice – can open up your self-knowledge and understanding and also give you the skills to help interrupt these not-so-helpful patterns. And therefore have the clarity to make better decisions.

Mindfulness is about present-moment awareness with acceptance. Mindfulness meditation is the practice that cultivates that awareness. Mindfulness is not just a good idea. It is like driving, or footy, or playing the guitar or Pilates: it takes practise.

This course is different to doing an app as it is guided by a dedicated, expert teacher who will go the extra mile to help you engage with your practice, in ways that are immediately satisfying and helpful. The teacher will be available to trouble-shoot and to help digest the material so that it makes sense to you and in your life. You are not alone!

Openground has been offering the evidence-based, eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program, established by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979, for over 18 years – being the first group to bring secular mindfulness to Australia. The program was originally designed for those suffering chronic and acute stress, chronic pain and illness and associated anxiety and depression. Over the years, people from all walks of life have taken up the training to transform their physical and mental health.

We hope this shorter four-week course will be a powerful doorway into the practice of mindfulness and how to embed it into your everyday life. It involves:

- four 1.5 hour classes (any less would be a real rush)
- mindfulness meditation and body awareness training
- an exploration of your own patterns and how to transform them
- good conversations about things that matter
- scientific rationale for the practice
- a weekly email and ongoing individual support from your teacher
- access to Openground audio app for practise and a 60 page course book
- a live weekly free practise group after you have finished the group

This First Steps Mindfulness course has deliberately been constructed for those who are stressed and time-poor to develop some immediate, useful skills and also to see and feel the changes that this way of living can offer. It is a bit like planting some robust seeds and watering them with care to see what grows. The course stems from the same core theory and practice as MBSR to help you cultivate an observant, accepting and compassionate stance towards your own internal experiences including thoughts, emotional states, body sensations, impulses and behaviour. In this short E-book you will find an overview of the curriculum and an intro chapter to set the scene for your learning.

We wish you well with your journey!

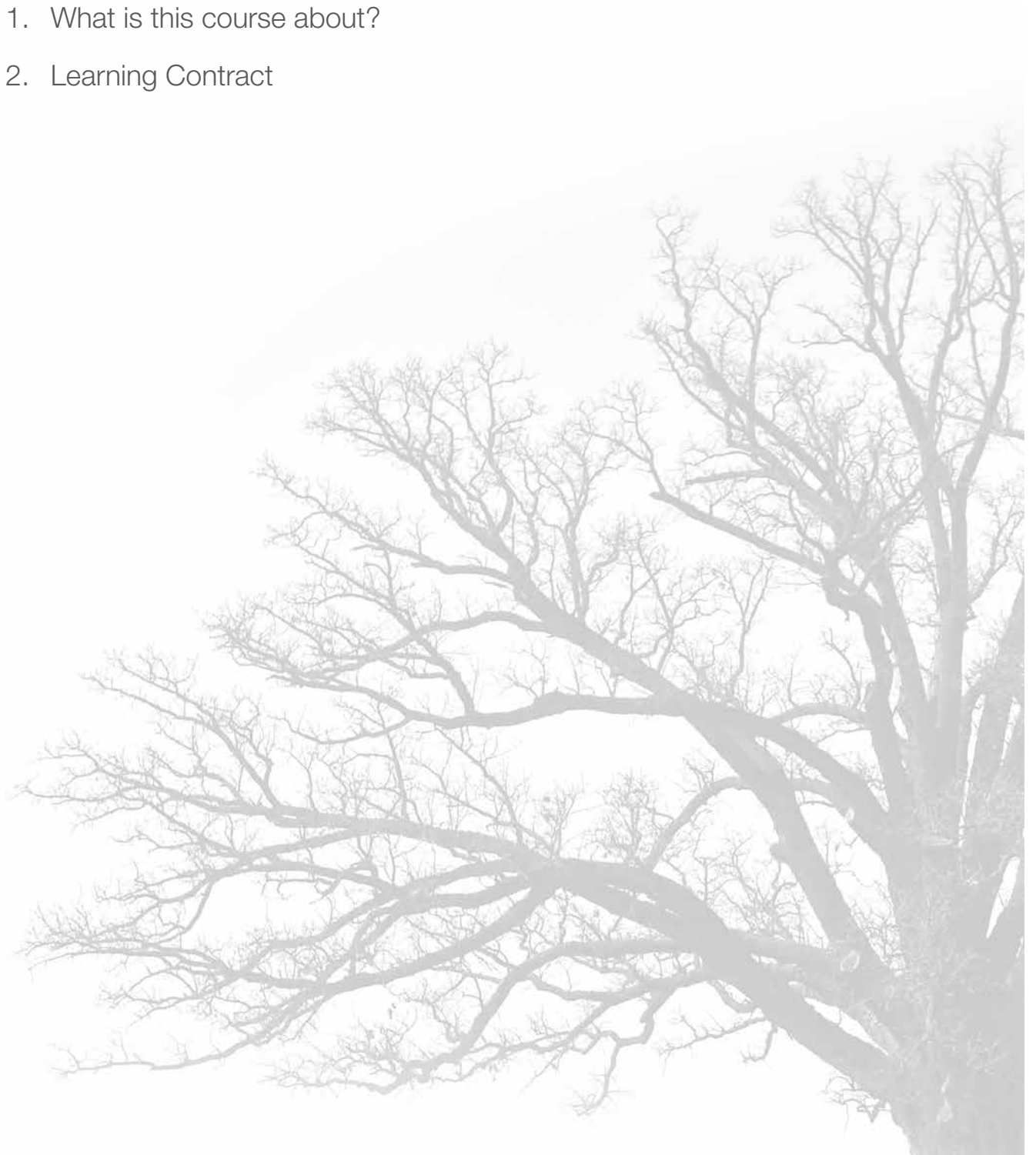
# INTRO

## SETTING THE SCENE FOR YOUR LEARNING

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In this section you will explore:

1. What is this course about?
2. Learning Contract



# What is this course about?

## Mindfulness meditation is the practice that cultivates mindfulness

For many of us, when we first hear the words mindfulness or meditation, we might conjure an image of someone sitting very quietly, looking very serious and peaceful.

Whilst this might look appealing, mindfulness is not a state, or an experience that we have to *attain*. Mindfulness is simply about paying attention. It is an attention *training*; a way of cultivating attention in a particular way. Or as Jon Kabat-Zinn says - paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, without judging what is happening. So, mindfulness is not about trying to make something happen, like feeling calm, blissed out or focused. What a relief! Mindfulness is simply about listening and watching our experience inside and out with curiosity, openness and some generosity of heart.

### Why train your attention?

Today, we find ourselves living in a world where various information and communication technologies are embedded in our everyday lives and demand our attention at a rate and degree that humans have never encountered before. In this context, our attention is a vital and highly valuable resource. Numerous theorists now suggest we are living in an 'attention economy'. At the same time, the nature of attention itself has been changing, with recent studies finding that the average human attention span has decreased significantly over the last twenty years.

Most of us spend our lives with our attention jumping – often without us noticing - to and from whatever is the loudest thing going on. Our attention is often at the mercy of our changing emotional reactions, thoughts, fears or demands from the outside world. We then get caught up in all sorts of invisible knots and tricks and an inner battle can be the result.

We find ourselves telling ourselves we'd be a better person if we were a little more x, wishing we hadn't said y, working our darndest to attain or prevent z. This all chews up a huge amount of our energy and attention and yet often, no matter how hard we try, we may never reach our goal!

Often, we don't realise that training our attention is central in navigating our lives – for example - being able to focus on something important, to deal with difficult emotions as they arise rather than avoiding them, or listening to all the different parts of ourselves so we can make wise choices and move effectively towards our goals.

In this course we will be learning how:

- to cultivate a clear *intention in the moment*,
- to keep returning our *attention* where we choose it to be, and
- to bring an *attitude* of acceptance and curiosity to our experience.



Attention is the purest and rarest form of generosity.

Simone Weil

Being aware of what is happening now

In the practice, we start with paying attention to our immediate experience. Mindfulness is about dropping in to the reality that whatever's unfolding now: *this is it*. It doesn't mean that the past and the future are irrelevant. But when we look closely, "past" and "future" are composed of thoughts, memories, plans and comparisons that only ever exist now, in the present.

Mindfulness training helps us to meet all experience just as it is: coming and going.

To actually practise this requires us getting curious, realising that we are encountering each moment, each breath, each interaction for the very first time. We are so used to rushing from one thing to the next, in a way, that we miss out on actually experiencing our life. Mindfulness involves an active and receptive connecting to life, right as it is being experienced. And life... has a life of its own! Connecting deliberately to our experience is something we can practise both formally and informally.



## Formal practice

In this course, we will be practising formal mindfulness meditation for about 15 - 20 mins a day and you will be listening to the tracks on the Openground app. The practice will change as we move through the different topics each week.

In formal mindfulness meditation, we usually choose a particular focus for our attention. We might direct attention towards the breath, sensations in the body, sounds, to our emotions or thoughts or even more openly towards the nature of attention itself. However, whatever object we choose, there will very naturally be lots of other things arising and passing, which is all part of it too! For example, if we direct our attention to the breath, we might feel sensations of expansion and contraction inside our chest, the touch of air at our nostrils; but usually before long our attention jumps to a thought, or a memory, a painful feeling in our knee or a feeling of boredom. This is very normal. The instruction is just to notice whatever happens and return attention back to the breath. We do this knowing that there is no problem, we are simply watching and experiencing the true nature of our passing experience. In fact, every time we return our attention, we are quite literally building connections in our brains, just as we would train a muscle. In this way we build our capacity to be more intentional with attention, rather than have it flit around willy-nilly.

## Informal practice

Informal mindfulness practice involves giving our attention fully to whatever is happening, as it's happening in our daily lives. It's about really 'dropping in' with whatever activity we're engaged in - whether it's walking, driving, having a conversation with someone or washing the dishes. It's about letting whatever is happening right now - whether we think it's mind-blowing or completely mundane - be the most important thing in the world. Your friends, children, family and work-mates will come to appreciate you being more present in this simple way.

## How it helps

When we practise regularly in these ways, we tend to see some changes. Practising mindfulness helps to regulate our nervous system and supports the mind to be more disciplined through the development of a greater attentional 'muscle'. It also enables us to develop a different relationship with our experience, simply by supporting us to take a closer look. Just like when you're a kid and the dark scary shape behind your bedroom door transforms back into an old coat when you turn the light on; when we can see things more accurately for what they are, they tend to become far less troubling. When this happens, our need to resist or run away from what's uncomfortable lessens, building much greater resilience and overall stability within our whole system. We also get to see our thoughts as simply thoughts, beliefs and ideas rather than the truth of our situation.

## *How we pay attention*

We start off practising with our attention, resting it over and over again on our chosen object. But just as important as where we place our attention, is how we place our attention. You will probably have the experience in the practice sometime of sitting there gritting your teeth, trying to get it right, striving to "be mindful" and criticising yourself for not doing it perfectly. In these moments, it is important to recognise this pattern of being effortful. It is not a problem. But you may want to then bring some gentleness to this pattern, and see if you can re-engage with the practice with a sense of warmth, kindness and some patience. In this course, we begin by really cultivating "being-with" our experience rather than striving for things to be a certain way, analysing or trying to control things.

Mindfulness is about cultivating a gentleness and openheartedness towards ourselves; recognising that we are living, breathing, feeling humans, usually trying our best and quite naturally stumbling along a bit as we make our way through the world.

You might still be asking yourself, *why engage in this?* You might already have your own ideas about an answer. Our invitation is to let the whole thing be an experiment. To sit with that very question and see what your own experience teaches you over the weeks.

## ○ Learning contract

In a similar way to when we decide to take up jogging or learn to play piano, in order to notice any difference with mindfulness, it's important to practise regularly.

It is, after all, a *training* - the practice of building a new 'muscle'. This is why it is so important to explore the home practices each day in your own time. It's your responsibility to create the time and space for this. If you practise regularly, you will begin to build your own relationship with awareness, getting to know it on your own terms. Like a good friend, it can become somewhere trustworthy you can return to.

Finding the motivation to give our time and energy to activities that require attention and perseverance is a challenge for all of us. It can be helpful not to have unrealistic expectations or be preoccupied with results.

For example, not expecting a period of rigorous exercise to feel brilliant all the time. Equally, not expecting our thoughts and feelings to be calm and still while we practise mindfulness. (If they're not still at other times, why would they be then?). Take some time to reflect on what brought you to this course, and what it is that really matters to you in this one life you have. What would you like to have happen in this mindfulness course over the next few weeks:

- in your body?
- In your emotional life?
- In your mind?

## ○ Journalling

If you wish, take some time to write down your responses to these questions.

If you decide to join the course, then it may be a good idea to get a note book to capture your insights and experience.

Spacious

Dear you,

Who always have so many things to do,  
So many places to be  
your mind spinning like fan blades  
each moment always a blur because you are never still.

I know you're tired

I also know that it is not your fault  
The constant brain buzz is like a swarm of bees  
threatening to sting  
if you close your eyes

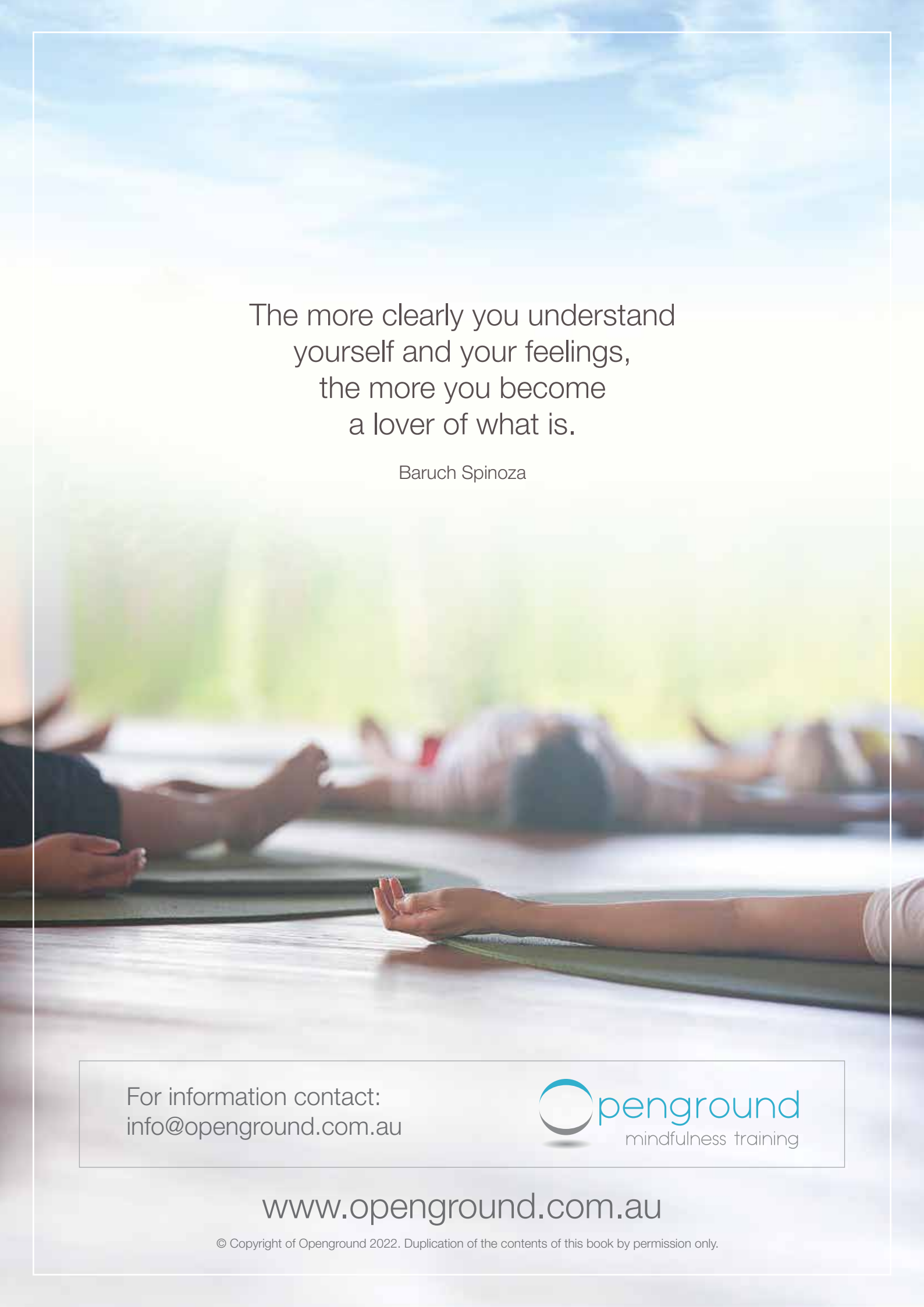
You've forgotten something again  
You need to prepare for this or that  
You should have done that differently.

What if you closed your eyes?

Would the world fall apart  
without you?

Or would your mind become the open sky  
flock of thoughts  
flying across the sunrise  
As you just watched and smiled.

Kaveri Patel



The more clearly you understand  
yourself and your feelings,  
the more you become  
a lover of what is.

Baruch Spinoza

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