

# Al-Yusra: Stress and Motivation

We all know that as we progress in life, examinations get harder and harder. From school to college to Uni to further studies. And then of course the life exams we have, some of us more than others.

We all suffer from anxiety and stress when it comes to examinations, whether it be educational exams or general tests we experience in life. And we often find that the inner peace we lack, quite often is contented when we serve others. Which brings me onto intention.

## **Intention**

Firstly, intention - the main and most important concept behind your education is your intention. Ask yourself who are you studying for? What is your purpose? All of us here will have different intentions and varying goals.

Yes we study for our success, some for money, some to make their parents proud and the list goes on. But one thing I've learnt in this whole learning process is - just like I mentioned before - is that much of our inner peace and contentment comes from serving others, we need to remember our ummah when we study and in fact study TO help the ummah. Remember any intention we make for the sake of Allah turns our act into an act of worship- which becomes a means of reward for us and in shaa Allah a means of Jannah. Think about the needy, the people who NEED our help and if you truly sit down and think around this, it will motivate you to do better. Because yes YOU, can make a change in the world. It takes ONE person to get up and make a change. BE that one person.

Success doesn't happen by accident, neither does it fall upon you one day, in fact it comes with days and nights of hard work and sacrifice.

I remember in one of the previous talks we did I spoke about the difference between this dunya and our deen. How we're judged based on our end result in this dunya and our efforts are given minimal attention to. Yet Allah judges us based on our efforts rather than the final result. Although it may seem a little irrelevant now as I'm assuming most of you are here to hear those A\* tips. I want all of you here who struggle to achieve those high grades to realise that every grade counts. It's okay to not get an A\*, it doesn't predict your success. Yes, the harder you work, the greater you'll achieve, however don't carry this belief around that ONLY an A or an A\* predicts your success.

The moment you fail isn't the moment you achieve a low grade but it is the moment you give up. Keep going, promise yourself you WON'T ever give up no matter what. A thousand obstacles may surround you but until you yourself don't quit, there's no question of failure.

There are many people out there who are deprived from this education, the resources, the financial means. Subhan'Allah although there may be many of us who struggle, truly Allah has blessed us. We have education on our plates, something that people around the world yearn for. Despite knowing this, why do we take this blessing for granted?

## **Procrastination**

I don't believe in the word procrastination. You may call yourself a procrastinator but let's say tomorrow I called you and said be at so and so place at 3pm. I'll give you £500. Guess who's going to be there? Yes you. It's all about priorities. It's all about what you deem more or less important. Until you don't make education one of your priorities, the reality is you won't

succeed. Once you make education your priority. You will be the earliest one up, you'll be the first one there.

### **Taking breaks**

Give yourself a break, when you're stressed, sometimes you need to distance yourself from the stressor, this doesn't mean your avoiding it, you're just simply taking a break. Because there's three routes, you either let the stress control you, you either realise that you CAN'T control the stress and in turn take advantage of it and use it as a means to help you, or you just temporarily distance yourself from the stressor and practise techniques that will help you in the long run. It's okay to take a break, you're human, you need some time away where you can relax and breath. It has psychologically been proven that even a 20-minute walk, run or swim etc can give you immediate relief that can last for hours on end.

Many people refuse to take a break because they say they don't have the time and it'll affect their results. Not even that well deserved and much needed 20 mins... Which is quite ironic because then they fall ill...and now they can't study for the next few says. Well maybe if you had taken that small break, you wouldn't be in this position you've put yourself in.

### **Mindfulness**

I could be here all day informing you about the thousands of techniques that exist to manage stress but obviously we can't do that! So, I'll speak about one of my favourite techniques for stress, a technique that may appear as quite obvious and easy yet many of us don't do. Mindfulness -Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment. Mindfulness can help you see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness.

Mindfulness linguistically is defined as "the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something," by watching closely how we think and feel, we gain the ability to alter our conceptual frameworks, or thought patterns, for our own benefit. When we are in a state of stress of the future and past, we react to thoughts and emotions in a hasty manner and let them lead us wherever they wish. By contrast, cultivating a state of mindfulness gives us the ability to follow or not follow our thoughts as we choose.

Breathe whenever you can. Breathing is a key **mindfulness practice** because it is something we always do out of necessity, and it's also a good way to bring our awareness back to the here and now. Taking a few deep breaths can really help you focus and calm down. Give special attention to your senses, the sights, sounds and smells you're experiencing in the present moment; from the water that touches your skin when you wash your face to the way your body rests in the chair you're sitting in. Recognise and value your emotions and thoughts, you experience them for a reason. Yes, you don't allow the negative emotions to consume you but at least recognise them and then let them go.

Nature – admire nature.

Prayer and recitation of Qur'an themselves can fall under practising mindfulness. Recite the Qur'an - nothing can empower and motivate you more than the words of Allah. Think about it, Allah is literally speaking to you as you read. These absolutely amazing personalities that have been mentioned in the Qur'an from Nabi صلى الله عليه وسلم to Yusuf AS and Maryam AS all went through hardships to get where they got in the end.

In the Islamic context, mindfulness is the virtue of muraqabah, a word which is derived from the root meaning "to watch, observe, regard attentively."

A Muslim in a state of muraqabah has full knowledge that Allah is Aware of him or her both inwardly and outwardly. It is a complete and pure state of self-awareness in one's

relationship with Allah in heart, mind, and body. The basis of muraqabah is our knowledge that Allah is always watching us at all times and, as a consequence, we develop greater attention and care for our own actions, thoughts, feelings, and inner states of being.

Mindfulness is not complicated. Nor is it about 'success' or 'failure'. Even when mindfulness feels difficult, you'll have learned something valuable about the workings of the mind and thus have benefited psychologically.

### **Conclusion**

When you're really stressed, count and write the names of all the blessings you have in your life. You will probably go on for a while and this will make you feel a lot better about the things you are stressed about. From my own personal experience – mind maps, figure everything out in baby steps. Take it slow.

Me standing here speaking about the prophets is quite easy right? When we go out to seek knowledge from books in which we study seerah, these all aren't just stories. They're real life examples that HAPPENED. They experienced pain, blood sweat and tears literally to get our ummah to where it is today. Yet we treat it more as fantasy to time pass and enjoy ourselves subhan'Allah.

I just want everyone to close their eyes for a minute. Just imagine Nabi صلى الله عليه وسلم was in front of you right now, the most excelling person to walk this earth, how would you answer him regarding your contribution towards the ummah's excellence and progress? Would you say you've given up or would you strive to work even harder.