

Hi everyone. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Zac and I use he and him pronouns. I'm a white 38-year-old male with long, medium brown hair, and although it's not visible on my camera, I'm seated on a gray and black manual wheelchair. I live with both genetic and acquired disabilities, although I've been disabled my whole life, I only recently started identifying as disabled.

We're facing some very challenging times. Not only is information in the news quite scary, but the fear of everyone around us is palpable. As a sensitive person, I find other's fear amplifies my own. I'd never suggest that fear is an inappropriate reaction to these times, but it's important to remember that fear can cause us to freeze and act in unwise ways. Fear can cause us to shut down, while shutting down isn't ideal. If that's where you're at, that's okay. Luckily, our practice can be very supportive in helping us navigate difficult emotions and continue living our best lives despite the chaos. In regards to our current political situation, the intention of this administration is to overwhelm us. This leaves us without the ability to respond, and instead we just react or shut down.

For those of us who are able to stay engaged. Learning to regulate stress is incredibly important. One, helpful practice for supporting ourselves through difficult emotions is known as R.A.I.N. Ultimately, R.A.I.N. is a self-compassion practice that also boosts our equanimity.

R.A.I.N. is not a teaching directly from the Buddha. It was born in the United States Insight tradition by a teacher named Michelle McDonald. More recently, it has been popularized by Tara Brach and other teachers. R.A.I.N. is an acronym that stands for Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture. This talk draws upon teachings from Tara Brach and Konda Mason. Konda says, "R.A.I.N. Is a simple way of remembering to bring a mindful and kind attention when we get caught in emotional upheaval." Let's dive into each of these steps a little deeper.

Before I start R.A.I.N., I like to start with some compassionate self touch. This involves putting my hand on my heart or hugging myself or some other form of touching myself that's supportive. This accomplishes two things. First, it soothes me and reminds me that the practice I'm doing is one of self-care. Secondly, it helps facilitate turning inward and reflecting on my internal experience. If you'd like, you can also close your eyes or you can leave them open. Whichever is most supportive to you.

In the first step, which is Recognize, we notice what's going on inside our body and our mind. By default, we function on autopilot and our brains and bodies are not very aware of our internal experience. When we're not paying attention, emotions can start brewing before we even notice. But when we are practicing mindfulness, we can recognize what we're experiencing and respond wisely.

This may not change the situation that we're struggling with, but it can prevent us from letting our emotions spill over into actions. So recognizing that we're experiencing something difficult is a very important first step, and I would argue possibly the most important of all the steps.

The next step is Allow, allowing, acknowledges that we don't have a lot of choice when we're experiencing difficult emotions. With disability and chronic illness, we don't get to choose when we're in flare or experiencing difficult symptoms. With our current political circumstances, we also don't have a lot of control over what's happening. Our default is to push away the unpleasant, but rejecting reality is one of the sources of suffering.

Rather than resisting our emotional experience, we can allow whatever it is. Allowing doesn't mean we love it, just that we understand that we can't make it go away. I sometimes try to remind myself that whatever I've discovered in the Recognized phase is okay and understandable. Action due to emotions can be unwise, but the emotion itself is fine.

I tell myself it's perfectly understandable to be upset given the circumstances. Accepting that our situation is what it is, helps us move through it. One phrase I love saying to myself in this time is, "this belongs". To me this phrase is about radical acceptance and understanding that unpleasantness isn't out of place. It's part of being alive.

Allowing is essentially what is also known as equanimity. Tara suggests that if allowing is too challenging. Because the emotion you're experiencing is so large, you can start R.A.I.N. over and focus on the feeling of being overwhelmed by the idea of allowing. The intent of allowing is not to feed our thoughts, but allowing the experience in your body.

Now that we have recognized that we are experiencing something difficult and allowed its presence, we can move to the investigation step. In this step, we are examining what an emotion feels like inside our body. We may have identified that we're angry, what does anger feel like? This can be helpful in the future to help us recognize when we've had anger activated within us more easily.

I also think another important part of investigation is to see if there could be an underlying emotion. For example, we may have identified anger initially. When we spend some time thinking about it, we realize that underneath our anger is fear. Investigation should be done with curiosity, friendliness, and without judgment.

One question that can help with investigation is, "what am I believing right now?" You may be fortune telling or thinking in absolute terms. You can also ask yourself, "what do I need right now?"

The last step is Nurture. Nurture is a great follow up to the question, "what do I need right now?" Here we are applying tender care to ourselves for whatever we're going through. This step is very similar to LovingKindness. If you haven't been using compassionate self touch, and it's accessible to you, I suggest trying during this step.

Disability and other marginalized identities have led a lot of us to believe that we don't belong. This can be a constant stressor in our lives that already leaves us feeling less worthy of tenderness. Obstacles with our worth can make us feel like we don't deserve nurturing even from ourselves. But these feelings are all the more reason it's important to resist the conditioning that these messages have brought us. It's important to be very gentle with this step. Konda says, "Self-compassion involves extreme vulnerability going into that place where the ouch lives and facing it with non-judgmental, loving, and a tender presence."

One important component of self-compassion is common humanity. Common humanity is a recognition that other people are experiencing what you're going through. This has two benefits. First, we realize that we're not alone. So often the feelings of not being good enough are isolating. We feel like we're the only ones. It's a comforting feeling to realize that we're not alone.

Secondly, when we realize that other people are going through similar experiences, we can have compassion for them even if we don't know who they are. A less talked about category of LovingKindness is all people going through a certain experience. For example, all people who are experiencing grief from loss of a loved one, or all people who are experiencing fear from political situations. So we can also send loving and kindness to all those people and know that some are sending it back to us.

There's some debate about what the N in R.A.I.N. Should stand for. Tara says, nurture and other teachers say it should be non-identification. Tara places non-identification in the category

of After the R.A.I.N. Non-identification is a separation of oneself from the emotion that we're experiencing. You might be experiencing anger or fear, but that doesn't make you an angry or fearful person. Feeling difficult emotions is perfectly natural, and it does not define you as a person.

There are two ways of looking at the structure of R.A.I.N. The first is that the structure can be very supportive to us. Tara says R.A.I.N. Is helpful "whenever we're hijacked," the concrete steps build a roadmap for when we're lost and can't unstick ourselves. It's best when you're first learning the practice to use the steps to cement them into your mind.

The second is that the steps don't have to be used rigidly. Sometimes I use RA or RI or RN or other combinations of the practice. Sometimes instead of distinct steps, I mash things together.

Leaning into difficult emotions and exploring how they feel can be really helpful. And it can also be a lot to handle sometimes, and for some people, it may not be the right thing to do. If your experience of R.A.I.N. is that it's triggering, that's completely okay. In this case, I still recommend recognizing what you're experiencing. You don't have to dwell with it, just acknowledge it.