

## HANDOUT: Meditation - working with RAIN

| Category           | Subcategory               | Group size          | Duration   | Language |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|------------|----------|
| <b>Mindfulness</b> | Mindfulness interventions | Individual or group | 90 minutes | English  |

### For the facilitator & Participants

#### Theory: RAIN, an introduction

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” Viktor E. Frankl

When confronted with aggression we need to take care of ourselves. We need to choose a wise response. If we do not do this the insidiousness of the aggression might be detrimental to our health and our willingness to work with aggression in the first place.

The acronym RAIN (Brach, 2012) is an easy-to-remember tool for practising mindfulness and compassion using the following four steps:

- Recognize what is going on
- Allow the experience to be there, just as it is
- Investigate with interest and care
- Nourish with self-compassion

You can take your time and explore RAIN as a standalone meditation or move through the steps whenever challenging feelings arise.

#### R: RECOGNIZE WHAT'S GOING ON

Recognizing means consciously acknowledging, in any given moment, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are affecting us. Like awakening from a dream, the first step out of the trance is simply to recognize that we are stuck and subject to painfully constricting beliefs, emotions, and physical sensations. Common signs of the trance include a critical (inner) voice, feelings of anger or fear, physical effects of anxiety, or the weight of strong emotions in the body.

Recognizing can be a simple mental whisper, noting what has come up.

## A: ALLOW THE EXPERIENCE TO BE THERE, JUST AS IT IS

Allowing means letting the thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations we have recognized simply be there, without trying to fix or avoid anything. When we're caught in (self-)judgment, letting it be there doesn't mean we agree with our conviction or that of the other person. Rather, we honestly acknowledge the arising judgment, as well as the painful feelings underneath.

Many students support their resolve to pause and let them be by silently offering an encouraging word or phrase to themselves. For instance, you might feel the grip of fear and mentally whispering, Yes, or, /t's OK, in order to acknowledge and accept the reality of your experience at this moment.

### 1: INVESTIGATE WITH INTEREST AND CARE

Once we have recognized and allowed what is arising, we can deepen our attention through investigation. To investigate, call on your natural curiosity-the desire to know the truth-and direct more focused attention to your present experience. You might ask yourself: What wants most of the attention? How am I experiencing this in my body? What am I believing? What does this vulnerable place want from me? What does it need the most? Whatever the inquiry, your investigation will be most transformational if you step away from conceptualizing and bring your primary attention to the sense of feeling in the body.

When investigating, it is essential to approach your experience in a nonjudgmental and kind way. This attitude of care helps create a sufficient sense of safety, making it possible to honestly connect with our hurts, fears, and shame.

### N: NOURISH WITH SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion begins to naturally arise in the moments where we recognize that we are suffering. It comes into fullness as we intentionally nourish our inner life with self-care. To do this, try to sense what the wounded, angry, frightened, or hurting place inside you needs the most, and then offer some gesture of active care that might address this need. Does it need a message of reassurance? Of forgiveness? Of companionship? Of love? Experiment and see which intentional gesture of kindness most helps to comfort, soften, or open your heart. It might be the mental whisper, I'm here with you. I'm sorry, and I love you. I'm listening. It's not your fault. Trust in your goodness.

In addition to a whispered message of care, many people find healing by gently placing a hand on the heart or cheek, or by envisioning being bathed in or embraced by warm, radiant light. If it feels difficult to offer yourself love, bring to mind a loving spiritual figure, family member, friend, or pet-and imagine their love and wisdom flowing into you.

When the intention to awaken self-compassion is sincere, the smallest gesture of turning towards love, of offering love-even if initially it feels awkward-will nourish your heart.

When you've completed the active steps of RAIN (Brach, 2003), it's important to just notice your own presence and rest in that wakeful, tender space of awareness. The fruit of RAIN is realizing that you are no longer imprisoned in the trance of unworthiness, or in any limiting sense of self. In other versions of RAIN, the N is not identified. Give yourself the gift of becoming familiar with the truth and natural freedom of your being. It is mysterious and precious!

## Meditation: RAIN

Before starting with the meditation, select a small problem, a somewhat intense situation, or how you are doing right now.

Then, while sitting quietly, close your eyes and breathe in and out deeply a few times. Imagine a recent situation in which you felt stuck; one that provoked a difficult response such as anger or fear, shame, or hopelessness. It can be a conflict with another person, a chronic illness, a failure at work, the pain of an addiction, or a conversation you now regret. Take the time to enter the experience - visualise the place or situation, remember what was said, feel the most painful moments again. Making contact with the charged essence of the story is the best starting point for investigating the healing presence of RAIN.

### **R: Realize what is happening**

As you think about this situation, ask yourself, "What is happening inside of me right now?"  
What sensations are you most aware of? Which emotions? Is your head full of grinding thoughts?

Take a moment to feel conscious of the situation as a whole. Do you feel how the experience lives in your heart and body, just like in your head?

### **A: Accept life as it is**

Send a message to your heart to leave the entire experience for what it is. Try to find within yourself the willingness to pause and accept that it is "as it is" in those moments. You can experiment with words whispered in your head like "yes," "I agree," or "let it be."

You may find yourself saying 'yes' to a huge inner 'no', to a body and mind that are painfully contracted by resistance. You say yes to a part of you that says "I hate this!" That is a very natural part of the process. At this point from RAIN.

Simply notice what is true and decide not to judge, push away, or control what you find.

### **I: Inner investigation with loving, gentle attention**

Now begin to examine more accurately what you experience and involve your natural interest and curiosity about your inner life. You could ask yourself: "What does require my attention?" or "What wants my acceptance?" Ask your questions friendly, with your inner voice friendly and inviting.

Note where you feel the experience most clearly in your body. Do you feel any heat, tightness, pressure, pain, pinching? When you have found the most intense part of your physical experience, bring it to your attention. Let the expression on your face reflect the experience and even exaggerate what you feel in your body. What emotions do you notice when you do this? Fear? Rage? Sadness? Shame?

As you continue to investigate, you may find it helpful to ask, "What am I convinced of?" When that question leads to a lot of thoughts, you drop it. But a very clear conviction may arise as soon as you ask. Do you believe that you are failing in one way or another? Someone will reject you?

That you will not be able to deal with what is around the corner? That you really are no good? That you will never be happy? How has this conviction fixed itself in your body? What kind of sensations does it give? Tightness? Pain? Burning sensation? A feeling of emptiness?

Just as you did before, send the message "yes," "I agree," or "allow it to be," and allow yourself to fully sense the fullness or intensity of the difficult experience. Now that you make contact with what is happening and allow it to happen, what do you notice? Do your body and heart soften? Are you aware of more space or openness? Or does the intention to allow it create more tension, judgments, and fear? Does it strengthen or change what you feel? Now ask the hardest question: 'What do you want from me? Or: "What do you need from me?"



Does this part of you that hurts so much want recognition? Acceptance? Forgiveness? Love? What is your natural reaction, now that you feel what is needed? Maybe you give yourself a wise message, or an energetic, tender embrace. Maybe you gently put your hand on your heart. Feel free to experiment with ways to become friends with your inner life - whether through words or by touch, images, or energy. Find out how your attention can become more intimate and loving.

**Do not identify: find peace in natural awareness**

Now that you offer this unconditional, gentle presence to your inner life, you feel the ability to relax and feel that awareness again. Feel yourself just like the gentle-courageous, vigilant openness that encompasses the emergence and passing of sensations, emotions, and thoughts, just like the ocean with waves on the surface. Can you feel that how you are is not determined by or hooked to a specific feeling of fear or anger or pain? Can you feel how the waves on the surface belong to your experience, cannot injure, or change the immeasurable depth and width of your being? Take as long as you need the time to simply rest in this expanded and gentle awareness, and let everything that comes up in your body or mind freely come and go. Know that this natural awareness is the deepest truth about who you are.

**Reflection:**

This exercise follows the guided practice "The RAIN of Self-Compassion." Reflect and journal on these questions:

**How was this meditation helpful?**

- In particular, what inquiry questions helped you mindfully contact and investigate a place of pain or vulnerability?

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- What phrases, self-messages, or other expressions of care helped you deepen your self-compassion?

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**What was challenging about this process?**

- What questions do you have as you continue to explore deepening applied mindfulness and self-compassion?

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- What might help sustain self-compassion in your life? In others' lives?

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- Finally, in a group of four, share your reflections on the above questions.

### Bibliography

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