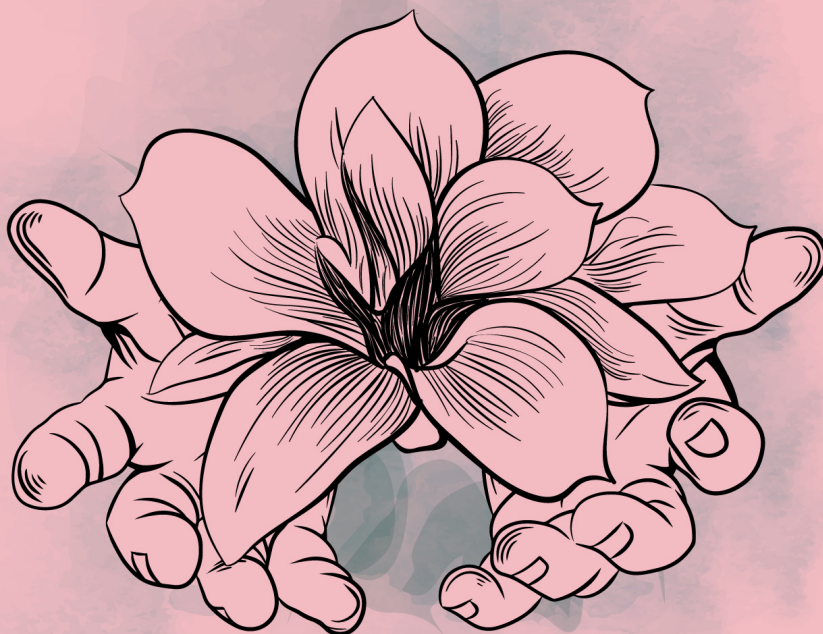


# SUMMARY

## *RADICAL COMPASSION*

TARA BRACH



# **Summary of “Radical Compassion” by Tara Brach**

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Let self-love RAIN.

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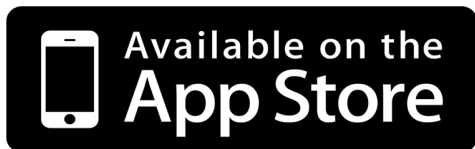


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# Introduction

If you're like most people, chances are that you're pretty much good at heart. Sure, everybody has their own flaws and weaknesses, but at the core, most people are compassionate and kind. You would help a stray kitten on the side of the road, for example. You would reach out to a friend who's struggling with mental health or show up for the people in your life who need your love and support. But how often do you practice compassion towards yourself?

This is something that many of us struggle with and it's a disparity that psychologist Tara Brach finds particularly vexing. That's why she developed the concept of RAIN: a four-step method that invites us to practice mindfulness and radical self-love through the steps: Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture. So, through the course of the next few chapters, we're going to explore Brach's theories in closer detail and learn how we can put RAIN into practice in our own lives.

## How to See the Bigger Picture

Have you ever been in a situation and desperately wished you could see how it would end? Maybe you know you're too emotionally invested to see clearly and that's exactly why you'd love to be able to take a step back and look at the big picture apart from your own feelings. But of course, that's easier said than done and most of us struggle greatly with attaining that kind of objectivity. Brach recognizes this and that's why she advocates for the value of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a form of meditation that concentrates on helping you be fully present in the moment so you can take that healthy step back and achieve the mental space necessary to see a situation objectively. And in order to practice mindfulness most effectively, Brach suggests employing the RAIN method.

So, what does that look like in practice? Let's start by breaking down each step. You'll begin, of course, with the R in RAIN, which stands for "Recognize." As is the case with any type of behavior modification, the very first step is to recognize that you have a problem and you want to change. So, whether that problem involves getting too wrapped up in your own anxiety or engaging in negative self-talk, recognizing it can help you break free. However, it's important to remember that this isn't a one-time quick fix. If you want to achieve a lasting change to your mindset, you have to continue practicing this recognition by picking up on red flags like self-doubt, anxious thoughts, or engaging in compulsive and self-destructive behavior.

Once you've started working on that, you can move on to the next letter, A, which stands for "Allow." This step is one of the core tenets of mindfulness because it focuses on giving yourself the freedom to allow your thoughts to come and go without judgment. Rather than being your own worst critic and attacking your thoughts by saying things like, "That's so stupid" or "I shouldn't even feel that way," this step of mindfulness invites you to understand that it's important to let yourself feel what you're feeling. Even if you are overly emotional in the moment or even if your feelings aren't the

most valid response to that situation, you're still feeling them and that's okay. And whether those thoughts are good or bad, you're never going to get anywhere by repressing them. So, let your thoughts flow and give yourself the opportunity to work through them openly and healthily.

Then you can move on to the third step, "I," where you'll Investigate. This is the step that cultivates your self-awareness by asking yourself to explore what you're feeling and why you're feeling that way. By practicing this step, you can ask yourself questions that will help you probe beneath the surface like, "Why am I feeling this way?" and "What would reassure me or help me to move on?" Once you develop answers to these questions, you'll be on the path to a healthy cycle of processing and recovery. And last but not least, it's time for the final step: Nurturing. This is the part where you bring your mindfulness session to a gentle close with a message of affirmation for yourself. As you return from a state of meditation, begin relaxing your body while telling yourself something positive you need to hear like, "You are loved, "You can do this" or "Everything's going to be okay."

On the surface, these steps might seem almost laughably small and easy, especially because they can take place in the span of a few minutes. But to indulge in an old cliché, don't knock it till you've tried it! These steps might be small but they can bring about life-changing results.

## Kill Them With Kindness

Buddhist lore tells the story of the Buddha's journey across India on his quest to spread kindness and inner peace. But in keeping with the old proverb that "no good deed goes unpunished," he was neither alone nor free of burdens on his travels because the god Mara-- who might be considered the Buddha's evil archnemesis because of his specialization in anger and violence-- hounded him the entire way. It would be perfectly understandable if Buddha got fed up with such an unwanted traveling companion, but according to the story, he-- remarkably-- never responded in anger. Instead, he would say simply, "I see you, Mara. Come have tea with me." In so doing, Brach asserts that Buddha was practicing two of the primary steps of RAIN: Recognizing and Allowing.

This offers us a powerful lesson through the reminder that, as tempting as it is, we don't have to fight our negative emotions with anger. Neither should we try to run from them or pretend they're not there. Instead, we should learn to ask ourselves what our "Mara" is in life and how we can alter our responses so that we recognize and allow it. This will then help us to acknowledge that those negative emotions are present and process them in a mature and healthy way. So if, for example, you're a survivor of abuse and you struggle with triggers or feelings of confusion, hurt, and anger about what happened to you, you can use RAIN to help.

Start by recognizing what happened and that it's okay to be angry about it. From there, you can allow your feelings to come without judgment or repression, but don't stay stuck in that cycle for too long. It's easy to fixate on anger for years, but you don't want to be trapped there. Instead, allow yourself to acknowledge the validity of your feelings and then move on to the next step so you can complete the cycle. And with that said, remember that this process should be a habit. Rather than attempting a form of "drive-through meditation" where you assume you can be healed with one fix, concentrate on incorporating mindfulness into your life and making RAIN part of your daily thought patterns.



# What's Holding You Back?

Whether we recognize them or not, many of us have inner barriers that prevent us from developing or experiencing emotions in the healthiest or most positive ways. However, that doesn't mean that these barriers are always intrinsically bad. In fact, they often form as a result of hardships we experience through the course of our lives. As these events scar and wound us, we form emotional barriers to protect ourselves from future pain and that's wholly understandable. But unfortunately, these barriers can also insulate us against positive experiences like forming new relationships or processing our feelings and that's a significant roadblock to achieving progress in our lives.

That's why Brach devotes this chapter to exploring the last two steps of the RAIN process: investigating and nurturing. Because according to Brach, we can only reach inside and access our wealth of love and compassion if we first learn to investigate the source of our negative emotions and nurture ourselves through the pain. One helpful strategy for putting this into practice is to think about your future self. You can start this journey of mental exploration by relaxing your body-- in much the same way as you would when practicing mindfulness-- and thinking about yourself in 20 years.

Who do you want to be in that time? What traits do you want to strengthen? What emotions and tendencies do you want your future self to be free from? Visualizing your happier, more evolved future self is a great way to relinquish the issues you struggle with right now because, of course, you'll never reach that place in 20 years if you don't do the work right now. So, think about how happy your future self is and what they would say about where you are now. If they know you can do better and achieve a higher quality of life (and you definitely can!) then listen to them and start working on it now!

# Relinquish Toxic Thoughts

Were you ever on the receiving end of hurtful nicknames as a kid? Did your parents or teachers ever tell you that you were stupid, lazy, or unlovable? Many of us have had these experiences and, tragically, they often stay with us well into adulthood, coloring our opinions of ourselves and affecting the way we see the world. That's because at some point along the way, we internalize that toxicity, incorporating it into our worldview and personal narrative until-- almost without thinking-- we believe it's really true. But Brach wants you to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that it isn't. Rather, the pervasive nature of these negative thoughts is simply the result of an evolutionary defense mechanism which helped us remember painful things more strongly in order to protect us from danger.

But that feature has long since served its purpose and it's time to let it go. So, if we want to truly progress and practice radical compassion, relinquishing those toxic thoughts we hold onto is one of the most important first steps. Brach posits that each of the steps in RAIN can help with this transformation, so let's take a closer look at how that functions in practical application. As we've discussed in the previous chapters, the first key step is to recognize harmful thought patterns as they occur. So, the next time you start thinking something like, "I'm worthless" or "What happened to me was all my fault," take the first plunge and call out that thought by reminding yourself that it is both negative and false.

Once you've recognized that thought for what it is, it's safe to allow yourself to experience the negative emotions associated with that thought. In keeping with the core tenets of mindfulness, concentrate on breathing in and out as your thoughts flow and pay attention to the feelings you experience in your body as the thought is allowed to circulate freely. For example, are your fears connected to a tight knot that suddenly develops in your stomach when you think about them? Do the things that anger you leave you with clenched fists and red cheeks? Make a mental note of all of this.

From there, you can move on to investigating the thought. Start by asking yourself practical, solvable questions that you can answer with a simple “yes” or “no” like, “Is this true?” If, for example, you’re dwelling on a past mistake that makes you feel angry, embarrassed, or ashamed, you could respond to this question by acknowledging, “Yes, it’s true that I did that thing. But I can forgive myself and I no longer have to be held back by it.” Likewise, if the thought in your head is, “I’m worthless,” you can address this thought by asking, “Is this true?” and answering with a resounding, “No!” If you find yourself being forced to admit the truth and logic of your answers, then this can help you to acknowledge that your fears and negative self-talk have no place in reality and therefore, have no place in your mind.

And lastly, you can nurture yourself through this process of discovery by asking yourself an important question: “What will happen if I let this thought go?” Although we often develop a love-hate relationship with our fears which motivates us to hold onto them, the most likely answer we’ll come up with is that our lives will be better as a result. It might be uncomfortable at first, especially if you’re relinquishing a long-held assumption or pet negative thought, but ultimately, you’ll be so much happier and the space left by that toxicity will give you room to grow.

# Control Your Anxiety, Don't Let it Control You

In our turbulent world, most of us are not strangers to anxiety. We worry about everything from that upcoming meeting with our boss and the next presidential election to minor things like whether we just said something awkward. With so many things to worry about each day, it's no surprise that we're often overwhelmed by feelings of stress and nervousness.

However, as hard as it can be to keep in this mind, it's important that we acknowledge that our fears are only as strong as we allow them to be.

Because often, as soon as we face them, we find that we've removed their hold over us and they're no longer able to leave us paralyzed with terror.

In this chapter, Brach reminds readers that we can use RAIN to cope with fear and anxiety as well. Because if we start by first recognizing our fear, that's the first step to breaking its hold over us. From there, we can allow ourselves to truly feel the sensations that are associated with our anxiety and begin investigating their deeper origin. For example, if you're terrified of public speaking and find yourself on the verge of almost debilitating panic attacks every time you have to deliver a presentation in class, the "I" step of RAIN can help you.

With a little deeper exploration, you might find that perhaps you're ultimately afraid of being laughed at or looking stupid in public and that's what's holding you back. But once you've acknowledged that, you can nurture yourself with positive affirmations like, "You've got this!" or "If I practice my speech and take deep, calming breaths, I will be okay" and "Even if people laugh at me, it doesn't define my self-worth." However, a fear of public speaking looks like a relatively mild fear when compared to pervasive anxiety caused by something tragic like childhood sexual abuse. So, when it comes to massive, deep-seated fears that are often too much to bear on our own, you can start by practicing RAIN but ultimately take it one step farther.

For this next step, start by getting comfortable and relaxed in a space where you feel safe. If you can find a place outside that makes you feel at peace and connected to nature, that's even better! Once you're relaxed, close your eyes and try to visualize an entity that you love and trust. For some people that might be Buddha or Jesus or even a real person like your parent or partner. But whatever form that entity takes for you, try to imagine yourself picking up your fears and handing them over to that person. As you visualize them reaching out to accept your burden with love, you should feel as though the weight of carrying your pain all on your own has been lifted from your shoulders and you can walk away with the knowledge that you don't have to fight your battle alone.

## Final Summary

Although most of us are good, kind, and compassionate people who want the best for others, we often struggle to treat ourselves with that same kindness. That's why Brach advocates for a form of self-love that she calls radical compassion and it all centers on the practice of RAIN. By practicing the four-step method of RAIN and remembering to Recognize, Allow, Investigate, and Nurture, you can help yourself relinquish negative emotions and break down emotional barriers.

Whether you're struggling with anxiety, trauma, or the general self-doubt that can plague us all, RAIN can help you overcome it. All you have to do is begin by opening yourself to the process and understanding that it's okay to acknowledge your problems without judging them. However, it's also important to remember that RAIN is not a form of "drive-through" therapy; you can't practice it once and expect it to change your life. Instead, you need to concentrate on forming a RAIN habit so that this process is embedded in your daily thought patterns.



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