



## WEEK FIVE

# TURNING TOWARDS DIFFICULTY

(ALLOWING/LETTING BE)

*“Bring Awareness to the Body offers us an alternative way for learning to relate differently to difficult experience.” ~ (Segal et al., 2013)*

*“Awareness is not the same as thought. It lies beyond thinking, although it makes use of thinking, honouring its value & its power.*

*Awareness is more like a vessel which can hold and contain our thinking, helping us to see & know our thoughts as thoughts rather than getting caught up in them as reality.” ~ (Kabat- Zinn, 2009)*

*“Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are in the present.”*

~ (Jon Kabat-Zinn, **Full Catastrophe Living**).

**RECAP:** In session 4 (What is Stress?) We observed that instead of automatically reacting to stress we can mindfully respond. But to be equipped to do that we firstly need to experience the stressor in the present moment exactly as it is – in short, we need to accept it & let it be!



### **Summary of Session 5: Working with Difficulty Practice**

This week we extended our formal practice to begin deliberately to turn toward & approach difficult/painful experiences with kindness. **Acceptance is not resignation** – acceptance allows us, as a vital first step, to become fully aware of difficulties, and then, if appropriate, to respond in a skilful way – rather than react, in knee-jerk fashion, by automatically running off some of our old (often unhelpful) strategies for dealing with difficulties. The basic guideline of this practice is bringing mindful awareness to whatever is foremost in our moment-by-moment experience. This attitude of letting be, of accepting is an element that can be systematically cultivated by:

- ❖ Take a gentle friendly awareness to whatever thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations the mind is repeatedly drawn towards- noticing the sense of being pulled again & again to the same place.
- ❖ Next become aware of how you are *relating* to whatever arises- Often we experience thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations yet in a reactive, non-accepting way- that is if we like them, we hold onto them, becoming attached. If we don't like them (they maybe painful, unpleasant, uncomfortable) we tense up – we often push that experience away out of fear, irritation, annoyance- these reactions are the opposite of acceptance- **Letting Be/Allowing**. So, the easiest way to relax is, first, **to stop trying to make things different**.
- ❖ Accepting means simply *allowing space for whatever is going on*. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already present. This is the way to relate to experiences that have a strong pull on our attention- if you notice that your awareness keeps being pulled away from the breath to **sensations in the body**, try to become mindfully aware of those sensations – and then move your awareness to where the sensations are strongest, as best you can. The breath provides a useful vehicle to do this – just as you practised in **the Body Scan** you can take a gentle and friendly awareness to that part of the body by **'breathing into'** that part on the in-breath, and **'breathing out'** from it, on the out breath. If the sensations are very intense it may be more skilful to breathe into the area around the sensations.
- ❖ Then say to yourself **“It's okay. Whatever it is, it's okay. Let me feel it”**. Just stay with your awareness of your body and breathe with it, accepting it, letting it be, using each out-breath to soften and open to the sensations you become aware of, as best you can. Remember -You can return to the anchor of your breathing if staying with the difficulty feels too much for you right now.

## USING THE 3-STEP BREATHING SPACE TO FACE DIFFICULTY (COPING)

From last week you have been practising the regular Breathing Space whenever you need it during your routine day. Now the suggestion is to that whenever you feel trouble in mind or body that the first step is always to take a BRATHING SPACE.

*The coping breathing space* provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot mode when reacting to difficulty, and to reconnect with the present moment and our own inner wisdom.

### 3-Step Breathing Space to Face Difficult (Coping)



A First Step in Responding to Challenging Situation & Feelings

**Step 1: AWARENESS OF THE DIFFICULTY** ~ Acknowledging: - Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting a dignified posture. Then ask: “what is going on with me at the moment?” Notice, identify and acknowledge what is happening for you. Put your experiences into words, e.g. say in your mind: “feelings of anger are arising” or “self-critical thoughts are here”. Stay with the feelings or thoughts. Watch them, but don’t get sucked in.

**Step 2: REDIRECTING ATTENTION** ~ Gathering: -Gently REDIRECT your full attention to the breath. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out. Try noting ‘breathing in ...breathing out’ – or try counting ‘one in, one out – two in, two out’ and so on.<sup>[1]</sup> The breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

**Step 3. EXPANDING ATTENTION** ~ Allowing: - Allowing your attention to expand into the whole body – and especially to any sense of discomfort, tension or resistance. If there are strong sensations then move your awareness there and breathe into them on the in- breath. Then breathe out from these sensations, softening and opening on the out-breath. Say to yourself ‘it’s ok to feel this way, it’s ok whatever it is, it is ok, let me feel it’. As best you can bring this expanded awareness into the next few moments of your day. **Carry on holding any difficult experiences in a wider awareness – rather than the mind being in battle with them.** (Centre for Mindfulness Research & Practice, Bangor)

## The RAIN Process



The following is a description taken from Tara Brach's article- 'Finding True Refuge.' It differs from Session 4's the Coping 3-Step Breathing Space as it goes beyond a pause and brings a gently investigation into what is happening inside (difficulties).

**R** **Recognize what is happening:** - You can awaken recognition simply by asking yourself "What is happening inside me right now?" Call on your natural curiosity as you focus inward. Try to let go of any preconceived ideas and instead listen in a kind, receptive way to your body and heard, and bring awareness to whatever thoughts, emotions, feelings or sensations are arising right here and now.

**A** **Allow life to be just as it is:** - Allowing means "letting be" the thoughts, emotions, feelings or sensations you discover. You may feel a natural sense of aversion, of wishing that unpleasant feelings would go away, but as you become more willing to be present with "what is", a different quality of attention will emerge. Allowing is intrinsic to healing & realizing this can give rise to a conscious intention to "let be."

**I** **Investigate inner experience with kindness:** - Investigation means calling on your natural interest - the desire to know the truth - and directing a more focused attention to your present experience. Simply pausing to ask, "What is happening inside me?" might initiate recognition, but with investigation you engage in a more active and pointed kind of inquiry. You might as yourself, "What most wants attention?", "How am I experiencing this in my body?", "What am I believing?" or "What does this feeling want from me?" We need to offer a gentle welcome to whatever surfaces.

**N** **Natural Awareness (or Non-identification):** - The first three steps of RAIN require some intentional activity. In contrast, the N of RAIN expresses the result: a liberating realization of your natural awareness. There's nothing to do for this last part of RAIN- the realization arises spontaneously, on its own. We simply rest in natural awareness.

## ***THE GUEST HOUSE***

This being human is a guest-house

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,

some momentary awareness comes

as an unexpected visitor

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,

who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture.

Still, treat each guest honourably.

He may be clearing you out

For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.

meet them at the door laughing.

and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond

**By Rumi (12<sup>th</sup> Century Poet)**

## HOME PRACTICE FOR WEEK 5

1. Sitting Practice, alternate with Movement or Body Scan (6 out of 7 days)
2. Three-step BREATHING SPACE-(REGULAR): practice three times a day. Either practice it when you think of it, or connect it to 3 regular activities you do or places you are, everyday (e.g. on waking up and going to bed, before a programme you regularly watch, before eating after washing your hands, on first sitting down in your car or on the bus or at your desk)
3. THE BREATHING SPACE – (COPING) : If you choose, practice whenever you notice unpleasant feelings, thoughts, sensations arising.
4. Fill in the Difficult Communication Calendar- The intention behind this exercise is to assist us in bringing mindfulness to our relationships and to our ways of relating.



## Difficult Communications Calendar

Describe the communication. With Whom? Subject?	How did the difficulty come about?	What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?	What did the other person(s) want? What did they actually get?	How did you feel then? And how do you feel as you write this?
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				
SUNDAY				

Record on the Home Practice Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
		