

Tricycle Talks

“Revisiting Radical Acceptance”

Episode #96 with Tara Brach

January 10, 2024



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Tara Brach: Radical acceptance is the first step of love. Radical acceptance or radical accepting is the gateway to loving. You can't have love unless we are meeting the moment with awareness, with an awareness that really lets be, lets life be as it is. So that's the beginning of loving ourselves back into healing. And if we can bring accepting to that sense of a separate self, we transcend the separate self.

James Shaheen: Hello, and welcome to *Tricycle Talks*. I'm James Shaheen, and you just heard Tara Brach. Tara is the founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, and she has been practicing and teaching meditation since 1975. She recently released the twentieth anniversary edition of *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*. Using a blend of psychology and Buddhist insights, the book offers readers a path to freedom in the face of pervasive feelings of inadequacy and isolation. In my conversation with Tara, we talk about what she's learning by revisiting the book now, why she believes we're living in a collective spiritual crisis, how radical acceptance can free us from what she calls the trance of unworthiness, and how we can learn to recognize our own basic goodness. After all that, Tara will lead us in a guided meditation. So here's my conversation with Tara Brach.

James Shaheen: OK, so I'm here with meditation teacher Tara Brach. Hi Tara, it's great to be with you.

Tara Brach: Hey James, glad to have us talking again.

James Shaheen: I always enjoy talking to you. So Tara, you just published the 20th-anniversary edition of *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*. So I have a



two-part question here. Can you tell us a little bit about the book and what originally inspired you to write it, and what are you learning from revisiting it now?

Tara Brach: Yeah, thank you. Originally, I was so aware of the opposite of acceptance, of being at odds with myself and how that created conflict with others or division with others, and then as a psychologist just seeing how that core suffering of something's wrong with me. That feeling was so pervasive. So much of the early years of mindfulness and compassion was healing that, trying to bring compassion to the places that felt not good enough. I always think of the psychiatrist Menninger, who said that if patients in his institution could forgive themselves, he said 95 percent would walk out tomorrow. And it's like we are so sometimes it's not conscious but often it is. We so quickly have a reflex to think that we're not OK. So that was the beginnings of it, and then through these years It's just been so clear the tenacious grip of creating divides whether it's with ourselves or with others. And so it felt really important to me to bring back the basic teachings, but I wanted to add on to it. And what I added on to it was really how it applies to some of the deepest suffering we have the way we have these social identities. I'd say my steepest learning curve maybe in the last ten years has been waking up to what I hadn't seen about the privilege of being white and the biases that were so hard to even admit that were there. And the blessing of seeing and of radical acceptance is that that actually opens us to a larger space so there's more choice in how we move through the world.

So all that's to say that I wanted to bring that into the book and I also wanted to bring in a practice of radical acceptance and radical compassion which is RAIN. Many people have heard of it because over these years, so many people have told me “RAIN saved my life.” So it felt really important to have that in the new edition.

James Shaheen: Yeah, we'll get to RAIN, and you'll be able to say more about that, but I want to talk about something new. In the introduction of the book, the new introduction, you write that

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we're living in a collective spiritual crisis. So how do you understand this crisis? I know that will resonate with so many people now.

Tara Brach: Yeah, well, I'd say in the most basic way, we suffer because we have forgotten our belonging to one another and we've forgotten the realness of our connectedness. And that includes our belonging to our own being, to our own body, to the earth body. It's that forgetting of belonging that ends up giving rise to violence. So here we are and our earth is heating up and we know there's just multiple traumas going on, and there's so many levels of global crisis right now, James. So here we are. And the deal is that the more there's fear, the more human species goes into survival reactivity. And the way that looks like is that we demonize. When there's fear, we demonize others.

So I call it a trance, and the Buddha put it as a dream. It's that we are basically cut off from a larger truth. We are cut off from any sense of our interdependence. And it's really so interesting that when we get hijacked by fear as we are in a global way right now and it's not processed, we don't have, we have them but they are not being used. When we get hijacked, there is so much science on what goes on. We get cut off from executive functioning, which means we can't learn. We cannot take in new information, which is so interesting to me. And of course we get cut off from mindfulness, from compassion, from empathy, from perspective taking. It's just dividedness. We're divided from our own wholeness, and we're divided from each other. And I think of the way the shamans put it that when we are traumatized the soul goes into hiding. And I feel that. That's what's going on in the earth is that the sense of the sacred is missing. We have lost touch with that sense of our belonging.

James Shaheen: You know, you put it very succinctly when you refer to it as a disease of separation. We're all existentially at odds with each other and with everything around us. Can you say more about this disease?



Tara Brach: Yeah. It's dis-ease. It is really the core of suffering that we come into existence. It's part of the nature of things that we feel separate. I mean, all living organisms have some sense of separation: there is me here, the world out there, and I need to protect and defend and aggress and in times of collective fear, we get locked into that survival conditioning, it's like the on button is always on, and we lose access to what I was talking about before, our higher capacities.

And that's what creates the suffering. It's the forgetting of who we are. The Buddha put it so simply, that we forget the truth of who we are. Our identity shrinks. And so many are living in that shrunken identity of us-them, and then we see the violence that ensues.

James Shaheen: I also think, to some extent anyway, of our attachment to self because realizing or accepting interconnectedness may pose a real threat to our sense of a separate self, which we sometimes cherish, as in self-cherishing. It's ironic then because that is really understanding our connectedness is actually liberating, but we don't understand it that way all the time.

Tara Brach: I like the way you're putting it because even though I call it radical acceptance, I think of it as radical accepting as a verb, and it's an activity of letting life be as it is. And the very nature of a separate self identity is the activity of resisting reality.

James Shaheen: You suggest, in fact, that the practice of radical acceptance can offer us ways to respond to these crises of separation. So first, since you've used the phrase a few times, what is radical acceptance?

Tara Brach: I think of it as an activity, a verb. And because we're habitually resisting reality, radical accepting is relaxing that resistance. And when you think about it, it's so profound. It's like we're not doing something, we're undoing something. And the resistance, that selfing, which sometimes the Buddhists describe, is that clench or that tension against reality. And in a moment of radical accepting, awareness recognizes the clench and that's all it takes. In other words,



there's not anything to add on to it. I think of it like this. Imagine your fist is always clenching. It's like this unconscious clench. And then when awareness enters, when you sense awareness and you awaken to the fist, there's a natural softening and releasing, and there's an undoing of it because awareness naturally creates space.

And so in that space, the clenching can unfold, untorque, whatever language we want. And here's what, to me is so profound is that when there's less clenching, love fills that space, that the very activity of awareness is love, and so that when we're not tensioning against reality, in that space that opens up where there's not that selfing, there's a tenderness, there's a warmth. And so when accepting is full, we get the full two wings of awareness that there's both that seeing of what's happening and that caring and loving.

James Shaheen: You know, what you're describing right now is what you describe in the book, and that's a moment of radical acceptance as a moment of genuine freedom. So how does acceptance bring freedom? I think you just described it pretty well, that sort of relaxation, that unclenching. But it takes us even further than that, doesn't it?

Tara Brach: Well, I'll give you an example with fear because it's the unprocessed fear in our world that reinforces some perception of separation and keeps us violent. So when we're caught in fear, when there is that unpleasantness of fear, our habitual reaction is fight-flight-freeze, which are all ways of tensing, they are all ways of getting torqued. It's like imagining a hose where things are flowing and we get afraid and all of a sudden the hose gets torqued and the energy is no longer flowing, OK? So what radical acceptance does is that there is an awareness of the torquing and it releases it and it allows energy to flow again. And I had mentioned the shaman before, that when we're traumatized, the soul is in hiding, we're not connected to our whole being.



Well, when there is an untorquing, when fear is allowed, when we let ourselves just feel it and be with it, it naturally moves, it integrates, it becomes part of our larger system. I think of fear and all emotions as life loving life. But they get misguided because we have this perception of separation so they have this torqueness. And so what happens is when awareness, when there's an accepting of what's there, and it untorques, that life-loving-life energy rejoins the whole, and it actually increases love and increases presence. It transforms. It no longer feels like the fear that we're used to.

James Shaheen: So sometimes, in other words, that clenching can be a misdirected love.

Tara Brach: That's exactly what it is. It's a misguided form of love. Thank you. You said it so much more succinctly, James.

James Shaheen: Well, you brought me to that point. It wasn't my idea. You say that radical acceptance can also help us break out of what you call the trance of unworthiness. And you mentioned it just a bit ago, a trance. Can you say more about this trance?

Tara Brach: Yeah, it's pervasive. Humans are insecure, and our existential sense is because of the negativity bias, something is going wrong. We're scanning for that. And the next step in that is something's wrong with me. We get identified with it. And so the trance of unworthiness is that small-self sense that there's deficiency here and when we're caught in it, we're not remembering the larger truth of who we are. I often tell a story of a woman in a coma who just kind of woke up out of the coma. At one point her daughter was with her and she looked at her daughter and said, “All my life I thought something was wrong with me.” And then she closed her eyes, and those were her last words. And for this woman, my friend, it was kind of a gift because it shined a light on how we can move through the decades and not realize how that sense



of “I’m not OK” is depriving us of intimacy with others, it’s depriving us of the freedom to take risks and make mistakes, it deprives us of creativity.

The sense of something’s wrong with me really gets in the way of living fully. So I call it a trance because most people when I do hand raises in groups will say, “Yeah, I judge myself too much.” But we are not so aware of how it impacts everything, how on some level if you and I are in that trance of unworthiness, it’s going to prevent a real authenticity and flow right in these moments. It’ll make us more self-conscious. We won’t be as embodied and in flow. So that’s the trance of unworthiness. And what radical acceptance does is you could say, “Well, we just need to love ourselves into healing,” which is the truth. Radical acceptance is the first step of love. Radical acceptance or radical accepting is the gateway to loving. You can’t have love unless we are meeting the moment with awareness, with an awareness that really lets be, lets life be as it is. So that’s the beginning of loving ourselves back into healing. And if we can bring accepting to that sense of a separate self, we transcend the separate self.

James Shaheen: Yeah, when I read that bit in the book about the woman whose mother wakes up and says that, immediately I thought of, wow, the amount of time I’ve spent withdrawing from the world precisely because of that sense. And it’s never too late, really. And at first I felt regret, and then I thought, no, it’s worth the wait. It’s fine. But you link unworthiness to feeling separate from ourselves and others. And as you write, if we are defective, how can we possibly belong? So how does unworthiness further isolate and disconnect us? I just mentioned withdrawing from the world. Other people might fight. There are all sorts of responses you can have to this feeling of unworthiness. So can you say something about that, how it further isolates and disconnects us?

Tara Brach: Yeah, when we feel unworthy. It’s a very scary and deep and painful experience. We are social creatures and it’s life threatening to feel that we don’t belong. So unworthiness has that sense of not belonging. And then we have all these strategies that we use to help make



ourselves feel better, just to make ourselves feel better. And so an example we are on constant worthiness projects where we're striving to achieve and prove ourselves and be good enough so that we'll deserve people's love.

And it's just chronic how many people are workaholic and just can't stop because on some level they'll question their worth if they have to stop in some way. Like I think of one friend a few days ago who was telling me about having gone through a bout of fatigue and she was very nonproductive during that time and it plunged her right into a sense of not being a good person because she just wasn't getting things done.

So that's one of the strategies is just try to get more done. And of course that keeps us racing through our lives. And I remember for myself because I know that one very, very well. After several decades of trying to be enough, and that included in the spiritual realm, I remember in my very early days that I would go to my teacher and say, “Well, what else can I do?” Because I had this idea that in like seven years I would be able to be free if I only worked hard enough. And my teacher would look at me and say, just relax. And then I go, “OK, I'm going to relax. That's my next project.” And that became my next to-do. But I realized after several decades and I'd have experiences of accomplishing something, I'd get a chapter of a book done or I'd lead a workshop and everybody would seem very happy with it and it would soothe my worthiness project for about 2.5 minutes until I started fixating on the next thing that I needed to do. And I started asking myself, What would be enough? What would really be enough? And it became clear that no doing, no accomplishing, could ever make me feel good enough. The only moments of good enough are in moments of full presence, in moments of really being awake awareness, just that. So that's one of the ways that one of our strategies is to just always try to be better. But another strategy that we have is to alter our state with getting addicted to whatever the substance is to get away from the raw feeling of not being OK.



Or another approach might be that we get addicted to distraction because how many of us are addicted to our screens and to being online or to texting or to gaming? Because there's that sense when we aren't distracted that we're touching into the rawness of not OK. And then one of the biggest of all the strategies is to judge other people. When we feel insecure, and you can see this in some public figures and people and in yourself perhaps, we tend to blame. We look for where to blame. And it's much easier to puff up in anger, blame or contempt at another person than having to come face to face with our own insecurity.

James Shaheen: You know, there's a strategy that somebody mentioned to me because I gave her this book because she knew I was doing the podcast and wanted to read it. And she said the symptom of that trance of unworthiness for her is people pleasing. And so when she read the bit about the mother waking up from the coma, she said, “I wasted so much of my life people pleasing, so much so that I didn't any longer even know who I was.” So that's the separation from self that can occur. But that people pleasing, that's what immediately came to mind for her. And I understand that. I think we all do.

Tara Brach: That's now considered one of the responses to trauma is fight, flight, freeze, and appease.

James Shaheen: Oh really? I hadn't heard that. I'll remember that.

James Shaheen: This feeling of unworthiness is also tied to our fear of imperfection. And you quote the 7th-century Zen master Seng-tsan, who taught that true freedom is the state of being without anxiety of imperfection. I love that. So why are we so afraid of being imperfect? And how can we instead learn to embrace and accept it? Because that's a tough one.

Tara Brach: Yeah, well, we are perfectionists, and it causes an enormous amount of suffering, thinking we always have to live up to a certain standard. But it gets pounded into us because of



our society. Often we think of, Well, I am the way I am because of my family or whatever the immediate causes are. But I think one of the biggest causes for the trance of unworthiness is more in the societal messages we get. And if we see a certain shape of a body and we're told this is the right body to have and we're seeing a certain face and it's got a certain complexion, usually white, and it has a certain look, then that's how we're supposed to be.

And we hear about the personalities that are most popular or the kind of intelligence. I often think about our children and how much left-brain analytic intelligence is really the one that wins it in the West. And how many of our children, that's not what they lead with. They end up feeling that something's wrong with me, I'm not intelligent, that just really hits me. And then in the deepest way, James, we're in a hierarchical society. And those that are not in the dominant level of the hierarchy, and there are all sorts of intersecting identities but to the degree that our intersecting identities aren't the dominant ones, we are given messages of being less than.

And those messages, they go deep. They really add a toxicity to life. So those are just a number of different levels at which we get these messages. Make us addicted to perfection and constantly monitoring. It's like there's that inner voice saying, Well, how am I doing now? Because we have some standard in our mind of how we should feel and how we should behave. And most of the time, there's a gap between our idea and how we actually are operating. And that gap, one person described it as the invisible gas that I'm always breathing, falling short.

James Shaheen: You know, it's really helpful to look at the social causes as an example. And how that helps I've discovered is that it helps me not to blame myself for this, that I'm a part of something and I'm experiencing symptoms that everybody's experiencing. Still, there's the fact of the trance itself. There's the simple fact of it. And you suggest that when we believe something is wrong with us, we become convinced that we're in danger, and we discussed a little bit of that. But can you say more about the relationship between shame and fear, that fear that we live in?



How can both keep us trapped in habitual contraction and isolation? Because shame and fear seem to be so closely tied.

Tara Brach: Oh, they circle. They circle into each other. I mean, when we feel shame, that's the most core sense of this being is flawed. We immediately feel fear hand in hand: I'm going to be rejected. Which, of course, is life-threatening. socially and, when our brains develop these emotions physically. So, fear comes right hand in hand with shame. And when we have fear, we feel vulnerable and that something's wrong with us for the fear. And that brings shame. So, they just swing right into each other.

James Shaheen: Yeah, as we know in Buddhism, a central tenet is impermanence. So, there's nothing really we can cling to for safety. But we can take refuge. And you point out that that can offer a path through fear. So how does taking refuge cultivate an inner experience of safety and belonging?

Tara Brach: Yeah. So there are different flavors of refuge that help us. I think of the broad sense of if you trust through the ocean. You're not afraid of the waves. In other words, if we trust the wholeness that we are, if we trust the love and the awareness that's our home, if we trust our belonging with each other, we're not going to be afraid of the waves.

But how do you walk into that refuge? How do you open to that refuge is the inquiry. And one of the key pathways that we teach with Buddhist meditation and that is at the heart of this book is that we Enter the refuge of a larger truth by learning to radically accept what's right here. And there is a beautiful story of a sage.

People would bring to that person their fears and their pain and so on and all the traumas of their life and losses. And the sage would swear them to silence and say, “OK, I'm going to give you one question, but keep it a secret.” And the question was, “What are you unwilling to feel?” So

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the trainings that we have, they really are the medicine for true refuge, which is the trainings that allow us to get intimate with the fear that we've been running from and the grief.

And we need to bear witness to that. And we need to be able to also bear witness to it in each other. It's not a solo journey, it's something that we do together which is so crucial in these times that we don't think of it as an individual path, it's like we discover refuge in our togetherness in it.

Afterwards, I got very caught, and this was in a kind of reactivity towards the sense of what was our country's just rolling into war with Iraq. It was very upsetting to me because I felt like if we went to war with Iraq, it would only create more violence and suffering for everybody.

So I felt a lot of anger. And I was really caught in that anger. It was very unprocessed anger. And to step back I have deep trust in the teachings of Martin Luther King and many others. And it's in the Buddhist tradition: “Hatred never ceases by hatred but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law.” So that's very deep in me. And I watched my own anger and said, Wait a minute, this is more of the hatred. So I paused, and I decided to do a practice of radical accepting. And I started with anger because we start exactly with what's up. Accepting reality and not resisting reality means we start with whatever is presenting.

And I would open to that anger and feel it, feel it in my body, relax the resistance to it and just let it be what it was and it would unfold because everything unfolds when there is presence and it would unfold into really profound fear, like fear for our world, it was very in my body, radically accepting that, opening to the fear, feeling it, feeling it, and it unfolded into grief. I would be sobbing and then let that be there, accepting, accepting, and embedded in the grief was caring. And I share this with you because I had to go through that processing of anger and fear to be able



to get to the caring. I think of Jane Hirshfield who says, “Never feeling rage without feeling equally tenderness and kinship.”

And just to give you the end of that story is that by radically accepting And going through what was inside me, processing what was there, I then could act. I share it again because radical accepting of life just as it is in this moment actually creates the grounds for wise and compassionate action. It's not passive. Many people are afraid that if there is a radical accepting of how I am now that I'll never change. Our radical accepting of what's going on in the world and the feelings that are coming up in me, I won't act. But it's not the truth. Carl Rogers put it this way, he said, it wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was that I was free to change. It's the first step to opening into love and the grounds of wise action.

James Shaheen: I think you just answered this question, but I'll ask it anyway. How can taking refuge support us right now in navigating a world in crisis?

Tara Brach: Yeah, It's the question, first of all, that I'm asking myself the most. And I don't have an answer on the lines of, here's a strategy for the kind of, navigating to peace that has to happen outwardly. But what I can respond to is what is the state of heart and mind that would be the grounds for that. We have to evolve consciousness in this world. I mean, that's the true answer is that unless we evolve consciousness, unless we have more and more beings that are in touch with their sense of connection with others and able to collaborate and able to talk, we won't be able to move forward, and human evolution has shown that when we hit crisis we have the capacity to adapt.

And this is the adaptation. We need to accelerate our capacity for loving. And that means we need to get together and be together and open to those of difference. I think so often of Ruby Sales, a civil rights icon and elder who I really admire, and she said the shift in her social



activism was when she began to look at others, especially others of difference, and ask “Where does it hurt?”

Where does it hurt? If we can start waking up our consciousness so that we look at each other and we sense, oh, OK, a vulnerable human just like me, then we can begin to sense what are our shared values, how can we work together to create the world that we believe in. And I'll add to this, because this is just so interesting to me, was that I heard about, just very recently this story about this ancient rabbinical text and it describes how people would do sacred pilgrimage to a holy site and they'd arrive and they'd ascend the steps to the temple and they'd go through the arch entry and then they'd turn right and circle around the perimeter of the courtyard and then they'd exit where they entered and this was at the end of this very meaningful pilgrimage except if they were on a pilgrimage because of a broken heart.

That person would go through the entry and turn left and then every person passing them would stop and ask, what happened to you? And then the person would say, “I'm brokenhearted,” “I just lost my partner of fifty years,” or “I'm afraid for my child who's addicted,” or “I found a lump,” or whatever it was.

And the people who are walking from right to left have to stop and offer a blessing before they can continue on their pilgrimage. And it captures this truth that when we're suffering, when we're hurting, we need to be seen by other people. And we need someone to say, tell me about your pain, help me to understand what's going on for you.

We need that. We need ways, we need spaces now, where people of all kinds, people of difference, can grieve together. And of course, the pain continues, but there's a wisdom in spiritual healing, there's a wisdom that we need spaces that can hold the ocean of tears, that's what connects us with refuge, and when I've talked to some of the people who've had the greatest



suffering, they've told me that their refuge is feeling held by others, and that's One of the great refuges. It's learning to trust for the ocean and knowing we can handle the waves.

James Shaheen: You describe very beautifully how people can care for one another: What happened to you? Where does it hurt? And seeing the other. And yet often we are in what you describe as a trance of the unreal other. When we're so caught in our own stories, the people around us can become less real or across the globe we can't really feel empathy maybe. How can we work with this trance of the other and how can we instead learn to hold others in their suffering and grieve together as you described?

Tara Brach: Beautiful question. Thank you. There are times that we can't. And that's part of trauma. And it's natural. We can wish it away but that's just how it is right now. But here's the thing. There are many of us that are not in the immediate grip of trauma that can keep holding the space open. That feels compassion for everybody. That's up to us. That's what we can do right now. It doesn't mean we don't have our opinions on what could've or should've happened, but if we can hold open our hearts To have that sense of shared humanity, we're creating a heart space that makes possible peace in the future.

James Shaheen: In the wake of violence, it's easy to see the roots of othering. What about me in my everyday life, when even the person at the local market might be other? What is the root of that othering, because in my everyday life, sometimes I don't see others myself, and they don't see me.

Tara Brach: So this is the trance of the separate self. This is what the separate self does. And the more fear and stress, the more we other without noticing it. But here's the thing. We have this blessing of heart practices and trainings. And so that's why we train ourselves. We have the capacity, the built in wiring, to see past the othering, for me to look into your eyes and sense the



sentence that's looking back at me and to feel energetically a heart space because we like each other and it's not that hard to do that with each other.

We can do that everywhere, but it takes training. So this is the pitch for actively cultivating compassion. It needs to be cultivated. We are not going to evolve consciousness unless more and more people, on purpose, cultivate compassion. And the training is actually quite simple. It's to pause more. We just need that sacred act of pausing because, yeah, our default is going to be to other so we need to pause.

And what will signal us to pause is any sense of suffering. I mean, the purpose of suffering. Suffering is a signal that we're not at home, that we're not at home in our wholeness. So when suffering arises of any sort, if we can pause, we can bridge the dividedness within our own selves. Let awareness sense where the clenches are, offer kindness inwardly, I'm putting my hand on my heart, it's such a fast way. Sri Nisargadatta says the mind creates the abyss, the heart crosses it.

In a moment that we bring kindness to whatever is going on inside us, there is an enlarging, we're inhabiting a larger space of beingness. So we bridge the inner divide in that pause and then we look more deeply. So if I'm feeling disconnected from you, if I'm othering you, bridge the inner divide and then from that place of wholeness then I can start saying, well, where does it hurt?

How might you be feeling vulnerable? And that's one side of the heart training. The other side is to look to see the goodness. to see how other beings want to know truth. Other beings want to love and be loved. Other beings want to feel at home, feel connected.



It may be very veiled out of fear, but it's there. So if we can start seeing the gold, as I put it, seeing the goodness, it draws it out of people. When you see the goodness in someone else, it draws it forward.

James Shaheen: I'm really glad you mentioned training because, to paraphrase Suzuki Roshi, you're fine as you are. Yet there's work to be done. You know, the goodness that is possible, I like to think of it that way because it just pretty much answers my own question. In the world today, you can look around and say, basic goodness, what are you talking about? But when you pair it with training, the possibility is there. So I appreciate that. So another aspect of radical acceptance is learning to forgive ourselves and others. Can you say more about how we can recognize our own basic goodness, and the goodness of everyone around us?

Tara Brach: Yeah, well, forgiveness is sometimes not well received as a word, so it could be forgiveness or compassion. But our habit is, when we're struggling or suffering, is to make ourselves wrong for it: I shouldn't feel this way, others have it worse, whatever it is, it's my fault that I'm experiencing this. So the alchemy of bringing compassion to ourselves is to get more real with what's actually going on inside us. Maybe asking the questions like, well, what am I really feeling? And where do I feel and what does that part need? And this is where I would speak about RAIN, if I might.

James Shaheen: Yeah, we didn't get there, so I'm glad you brought it up. You can explain what that is.

Tara Brach: Yeah. So when we're hijacked by saying, “I'm unworthy, I don't deserve this, I'm bad,” whatever the trance of separation is producing in the moment when we're hijacked, those are the times we most need mindfulness, the awareness that conceive what's going on, and those are the times we have the least access.



Tara Brach: So the acronym RAIN is a four-step practice of mindfulness and compassion that helps us to remember how to arrive back here and. The letters stand for recognize, allow, investigate, and nurture. And if we walk through those four steps then It loosens that clench we were talking about earlier, it creates the space that love can fill.

And we discover, as Sri Nisargadatta put it, love tells me I'm everything, wisdom tells me I'm nothing, between the two my life flows. It reveals that we're not the identity of self we thought we were. We are everything and we're nothing. So that's the gift of the acronym RAIN. If we apply it to your question when you're caught in that unforgiving down-on-self place, I think of myself when I spiraled down in illness some years back for about five years. I was really sick and I didn't know why and I stopped being able to do a lot of the things that I love doing.

And not only was I sick, I really started turning on myself, and subsequently I've talked to many people who have struggled with illness and found that it's very easy to in some way blame ourselves or feel ashamed or bad for our illness but that was what was going on. And I remember at one point being really struck by how caught I was in feeling bad about myself and pausing to do RAIN.

And the way it went was I would recognize, “OK, down on self, shame, judgment.” That's recognizing. And with recognizing, it really helps to mentally whisper it. In terms of your brain it starts activating the prefrontal cortex and starts actually hooking things up again because when we're hijacked we're disconnected. So mentally whisper “Recognizing shame, self-judgment.”

The A is allow. And that brings us into the fullness of radical accepting and lets it be there, not to add judgment to what's there, not to try to fix it, not to try to make it go away, just allow.

And then the I is investigate. I ask myself, Well, what am I believing? And there was this belief that in some way I was really failing. I wasn't a good patient. If I was really a spiritual person, I'd



be a better patient, I wouldn't be so irritable and so this and so that. So I was believing the core belief in the trance of unworthiness. Then with investigating the most key thing this is what makes investigating work is feeling it somatically.

And I could feel the twist in my heart and these kind of the aching, empty thing in my belly, and I put my hands on my heart and my belly because that's the beginning of nurturing, and I said, OK, what does this part that's feeling failures need? and it needed to trust my goodness just as you were speaking of but it needed to trust that beyond all my irritability and impatience and everything else coming up that there was a pure heart.

And so I just started sending that message, just trust your goodness. And I imagined and sensed all the light and love in the universe kind of pouring through me giving me the same message, it helps me when I broaden things out that way. And in a bit of time I started sensing that that vast luminous space was what I was.

In other words, this is what I call after the RAIN. I had gone through the steps of coming into presence and that had unclenched and freed me to inhabit, to really rest in and as awareness itself. So there was a much larger space. Now I want to say I had to do a number of rounds. This is not a one shot where I went, “OK, got that one.”

But this is what's true with everything. That practice builds our strength in whatever we're doing. And if we are training ourselves to love ourselves into healing, the more we practice recognizing, allowing, investigating, nurturing, the more quickly and spontaneously we'll sense suffering and dissolve it with love.



It just happens more and more quickly. And what the gift of that is and this is again the after the rain piece is we start trusting that that open, caring presence is more the truth of who we are than any of the narratives, any of the passing emotions.

And that is the freedom that the Buddha talks about, that we're not caught in a identity as a small self, that we're realizing and inhabiting a very vast, very tender, very awake awareness.

James Shaheen: Tara, I wonder, would you be willing to guide us through a short RAIN meditation to close?

Tara Brach: It would be my pleasure. The invitation for all who are listening is to first take a moment to become still and in the stillness let your attention go inward. And then perhaps take a few long deep breaths to collect your attention so you can be right here, right now. You might scan your life and sense if there's any situation where you are caught in a reactivity that separates you from your own wholeness, from who you know, you really can be a situation where you get caught in anger, fear, hurt, where you react in ways that create divides, perhaps with others. A situation where you know you are divided from yourself.

As you bring one to mind, it could be with another person or at work or something to do with your health, whatever you bring it to mind, as if you are watching a movie, go to the frame where it feels most like you are really most in touch with the reactivity, you are most caught. And sense the worst part about this and begin RAIN by simply recognizing, Well, what's the most predominant feelings going on? Name them. Mentally whisper whatever you are aware of: hurt, anger, judgment, fear. Let your intention be to allow that radical accepting of truly letting be.

I sometimes say to myself, “This belongs, just like a wave in the ocean. It belongs, just a wave.” And then begin to investigate and you might ask yourself, “What am I believing?” Maybe you are believing that you are failing or that someone else couldn't love you or they wouldn't act that



way, that you can't trust someone, that you are not lovable, that you're not worthy. Just notice if there's a belief. But whatever belief is there, feel under it to how it is in your body. You might sense your throat, your chest, your belly. And sense where the vulnerability really lives. And it can help if you let your body, the posture even, express that feeling. That will help you get in touch with it somatically and you can even let the expression on your face express the feeling, the vulnerability.

This is a way, especially since we are so dissociated, to contact the feeling and feel where it is, feel where it is inside you and perhaps put your hand on your heart or your belly and begin to bring a more intimate presence with whatever you are feeling. Sense what it needs. What's the message or reminder? What's the truth? What's the flavor of loving? Maybe it's forgiveness or accepting. Maybe it's understanding or companionship, compassion. And take some moments from your spiritual heart to your human heart to offer care, to felt sense of caring. Your sense in this moment will serve.

You might even imagine that caring coming through touch, that gentle touch, into you. And if it helps to sense a larger source of care, a friend or a spiritual figure, the natural world, a dog, an ancestor, just to sense a larger source and let that loving flow through you. Also bringing a deep sense of care to the part of you that feels vulnerable, loving ourselves into healing. This vulnerability, even if you've done this thousands of times. Notice this time that you can just have a prayer to let in love and let it really move through and nourish this part of you. You might notice how loving crosses the abyss. It actually helps unclench, it helps open, soften, so that if you widen your attention you can begin to sense the quality of presence that's here. Just a sense of spaciousness, tenderness, wakefulness, resting in and as this awake tender awareness, knowing it as more the truth than whatever state of mind you've been caught in, whatever narrative, sensing how accepting, how loving crosses the divide, it crosses the divide inwardly,

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and it allows us then from that larger space of being to be part of the movement in this world that can bridge divides with others.

I'll close with the words of an indigenous prayer that was sung at one of the vigils I attended.

“There will be a day and the children of all genders, colors, and faiths will follow the path of the heart. They will speak the language of the earth and understand the language of heaven. They will live as part of the great circle of life. And then peace will come. There will be a day and the children of all genders and colors and faiths will follow the path of heart. Their hearts will walk in trust. They will sanctify all forms of living beings and plants. Together they will pray to the infinite, connected to the source of life. And then peace will come.”

James Shaheen: Tara Brach, thanks so much for the conversation and the meditation. It's been a great pleasure, as always.

Tara Brach: Thank you. This was really a delight to be with you.

James Shaheen: For our listeners, be sure to pick up a copy of *Radical Acceptance*, available now. It's the 20th anniversary issue. It includes a new introduction by Tara and a brief foreword by Jack Kornfield. So thanks again, Tara. Wonderful to see you.

Tara Brach: Thank you, James. Good to be with you.

James Shaheen: You've been listening to *Tricycle Talks* with Tara Brach. Tricycle is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available, and we are pleased to offer our podcasts freely. If you would like to support the podcast, please consider subscribing to Tricycle or making a donation at tricycle.org. We'd love to hear your thoughts about the podcast, so write us at feedback@tricycle.org to let us know what you think. If you enjoyed this episode, please consider leaving a review on Apple Podcasts. To keep up with

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