



Performance Enhancement, Awareness & Knowledge

Participant's Workbook and Journal



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INTRODUCTION

mPEAK (Mindful Performance Enhancement, Awareness & Knowledge) is an intensive course in mindfulness training for those who seek a more balanced way to achieve their goals, both personal and professional, as well as attain new levels of performance and success. This cutting-edge training program is built around the latest brain research related to peak performance, resilience, focus, and “flow”. The mPEAK program enhances the human capacity of mindfulness through established and empirically supported practices and exercises. Mindfulness is effective precisely because it is a way of being and relating to all aspects of life, rather than a specific technique or tool for a particular goal. As with physical training, this brain-training program is based on the understanding that optimal outcomes occur most often when participants continue to engage in the practices and exercises on a daily basis as a part of their training regimen. The foundation of this program is drawn from the highly respected and empirically-supported Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. Additionally, the program incorporates specific practices and exercises formulated to correspond to recent neuroscientific findings, competitive advances, and related research regarding optimal performance.



HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a companion to the mPEAK 3-day intensive or 8-week course. It organizes the informational material about mindfulness and performance into one resource to streamline the didactic portions of mPEAK. In the pages provided, you can also record insights and reflections on the various experiences you'll have along this journey. Your time in the mPEAK course will be distributed over the following categories:

Formal Mindfulness Meditation Practices Meditation is a specific period of practice often done in stillness and silence. Meditation training re-wires the brain through neuroplasticity to increase your capacity for presence, discernment and flow in your life, work and sport. The formal practices introduced in mPEAK are: The Body Scan, Awareness of Breath, Mental Noting, Mindful Movement and Self-Compassion.

Experiential Exercises These exercises are like a mirror to more clearly see the way you relate to various aspects of performance. By observing your own conditioned thoughts, habits and identities in the face of these challenges, you recognize what is serving your performance and what might be holding you back.

Didactic Topics Each section of this course offers just enough science and information to help you build a conceptual framework around mindfulness and ideally inspire you to practice. The emphasis of mPEAK is less on learning about mindfulness and more on actually being mindful.



Journal Exercises The workbook provides dedicated pages to reflect on your past experiences with various performance related topics. Journaling itself can be a mindfulness practice of observing and recording thoughts and feelings onto paper.

Dyads/ Triads Sharing your experience is an important part of deepening your awareness of yourself in relation to others. You are encouraged to connect with authenticity and vulnerability with as many other participants as possible. Participants often say they learn as much from the others sharing as from the course content.

Group Coaching and Discussion After each experiential exercise or formal practice, an invitation is offered for discussion and coaching around challenges or insights that may have come up. Coaching is a process of inquiry intended to deepen self-awareness and personalize strategies to integrate mindfulness into areas of life and performance. Even though only a few participants are coached after each activity, everyone can benefit from these interactions.

Operationalized Mindfulness Practices Sometimes referred to as “Informal Mindfulness Practices”, these are short, on the spot practices intended to integrate mindfulness into everyday life and performance activities. These are offered as home practices at the end of each section.





WORKING WITH PAIN AND DIFFICULTY

Difficulty is part of life, but especially so for those who take big risks and live at their edges. How you manage these difficult moments will have a significant impact not only on how well you perform but also your longevity as a performer. In this section you'll be introduced to a more mindful way of accepting and responding to these inevitable moments of difficulty. Although a good portion of this section is devoted to physical pain, the application of mindfulness is the same whether working with physical, mental or emotional difficulty. Rather than habitually repressing, distracting or struggling against the difficulty, mindfulness is the radical practice of allowing pain or "stepping into the fire". With a wide-open, curious attention, you'll learn to change your relationship to pain so that you can see it for what it really is and make a wise choice on how to best work with it.



EXERCISE: THE ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE

This exercise is designed to help you observe and compare your experiences of two different strategies for working with unpleasant sensations; distracting and mindfully monitoring. Avoidance is a common conditioned reactions to a stressor. Mammals, birds, reptiles and even amoebas are wired to move toward something pleasant and move away from something unpleasant. But does that conditioning always serve you?

In the first experiment, you will attempt to avoid the unpleasant experience by distracting yourself. In the second experiment you'll attempt to stay with your experience by mindfully observing the ever-changing nature of sensations with an attitude of acceptance and equanimity.



JOURNAL: THE ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE

How would you describe the difference in experience between distraction and mindful monitoring?

What stories or emotions came up for you during each experiment?

Which would you say worked better in this instance, distraction or mindfulness? Why?

What is the potential cost of distracting from physical and emotional pain?

Give some examples of ways you avoid difficulty in your life or primary areas of performance?



TOPIC: MINDFUL DISTRACTION

Even though a percentage of mPEAK participants report that a distraction or repression technique works better than mindful monitoring, there is research showing that this can only work for so long. Mindful monitoring can indeed increase the initial discomfort of painful stimuli, but then subsides, leading to faster recovery, which indicates a far superior pain-recovery advantage over avoidant mental strategies. This suggests that avoiding pain through either distraction or suppression may serve to actually prolong the pain instead.

Using thoughts to control thoughts is a tiresome effort. One mechanism behind the failure to suppress is called “ironic process theory”, or “ironic monitoring”. According to this theory, if you want to control or repress a thought of say, a pink polar bear, first you would distract yourself by intentionally thinking about something else. Then the ironic part, your mind starts an unconscious monitoring process to check if you’re still thinking about the thing you’re not supposed to be thinking about. “Have I thought of a pink polar bear yet?” “Oops! Yep.” Trying to avoiding, physical, mental or emotional discomfort has a rebound effect that ends up coming back with a vengeance, often at the most inopportune time. According to researchers Erskine, Georgiou, and Kvavilashvili, suppression may also contribute to behavioral rebounds like bingeing after a failed dieting attempt.

But let’s not make distraction the enemy. If our mind is already wandering away from the present moment experience almost half of the time, then it’s probably wise to accept our tendency for distraction and even mindfully choose it on occasion.

One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular.
Jung



TOPIC: YOUR PAIN STORY

When touched with a feeling of pain, the ordinary uninstructed person sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical and mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows.

-The Buddha

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, Physical pain is the response of the body and the nervous system to a huge range of stimuli that are perceived as noxious, damaging, or dangerous. But he looks at pain from three different dimensions: the physical, or sensory component; the emotional, or affective component—how we feel about the sensation; and the cognitive component—the meaning we attribute to our pain. It's often said that pain is a physical sensation (tingling, sharp, burning, stinging, throbbing, tight) and suffering is the story we tell about the pain (I'll never do what I love again, my life is over).

Pain is an ambiguous, subjective perception. The same pain stimulation can be perceived from mild to unbearable depending on context, personality, emotional state, expectation and cognitive appraisal.

Take the impact of emotional state on pain perception from an Oklahoma State experiment. Participants who were made to feel anxious or depressed perceived the pain of a dull knife on their knuckles to be less tolerable than the participants who were made to feel elated. Another study showed that people were more willing to endure pain when they were motivated by money. This may be why the pain of a strenuous workout can be considered "the good kind of pain" -because it means you're getting stronger, where the same pain could be considered excruciating if it's associated with disease. The mind is more likely to endure painful sensations when it tells a story of a beneficial payoff.

Another study to support this theory (Moseley and Arntz 2007) showed that the same exact painful stimulus (cold metal rod) was perceived differently depending on whether the subject was shown a red or blue light during the experiment. When the participants saw the red light, they on average rated their pain higher and more unpleasant than when the blue light was shown. They subconsciously interpreted that the blue light meant "cold" and the red light meant "hot" proving that contextual factors and assigned meaning have significant impact on the experience of pain.

Bringing mindful attention to painful sensations begins to untangle the complex stories and emotions from the actual sensations itself.

Working With Pain and Difficulty

A Zen Master had a disciple who was perpetually unhappy and dissatisfied. One day the disciple approached the Master and said, "Master, bless me too with your wisdom and help me find happiness." The old Master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and drink it. "How does it taste?", the Master asked. "Awful", spat the young man. The Master chuckled and then asked the young man to take another handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake and when the young man swirled his handful of salt into the lake, the Master said, "Now drink from the lake." As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the Master asked, "How does it taste?" "Good!" , remarked the young man. "Do you taste the salt?", asked the Master. "No", said the young man. The Master sat beside this troubled young man, took his hands, and said, "The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the amount we taste the 'pain' depends on the container we put it into. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things. Stop being a glass. Be a lake!"



TOPIC: THE PRACTICE OF BEING MINDFUL OF PAIN

From the perspective of mindfulness, the goal isn't to resist or try to get rid of pain. The practice is instead about changing your relationship to the pain by "enlarging your sense of things" -opening up to it and paying attention to it in a new way. You "put out the welcome mat," as Jon Kabat-Zinn likes to say. You allow or accept the pain rather than struggle against it -because it's already here.

Mindfulness of pain is the ability to observe the sensations of pain without identifying with the pain. "There is pain here, but I am not the pain." When you realize you can rest in awareness, the pain may be just as severe, but you're now cultivating equanimity and a degree of wisdom. There is a question that is often posed, "is awareness of pain, in pain?" After sitting in "Open Awareness with Mental Noting" meditation, we see that the answer is "no". You may begin seeing the pain as an impermanent, ever-changing dance of sensations. "It throbs over here, now it aches a little over there. Now it's burning and sharp... oh, now it's gone. Here it is again but not as bad." There is an awareness that it is not pleasant. But the story that "the pain is killing me, or ruining my career". All the drama that is associated with the pain can be seen for what it is, rather than being believed as the truth. In that seeing, the thoughts and emotions often lose their power over you.



TOPIC: THE SCIENCE AND MINDFULNESS OF PAIN

A Wake Forest University study conducted by Fadel Zeidan used MRI scans to show that just 4 days of meditation training lead to an approximately 40 percent reduction in acute pain intensity ratings during meditation when compared with non-meditation. And even when mindfulness meditation doesn't work to decrease pain perception, such as in some chronic pain conditions, it often still works to improve quality of life along with improving your ability to cope with chronic pain. Take for example, a small research study with 63 rheumatoid arthritis patients. After two months of mindfulness training, the patients' physical symptoms did not disappear, but they reported feeling better. While pain stayed the same, scores of psychological distress dropped 30 percent.

According to the study by Zeidan, four areas of the brain involved in pain processing or emotional and behavioral regulation have been shown to have differing activity levels during and after meditation. The primary somatosensory cortex, anterior insula, anterior cingulate cortex, and prefrontal cortex all experienced altered levels of activation due to meditation.

1. The primary somatosensory cortex is the region of the brain directly involved in pain processing. If an athlete sprains her ankle, this area of the brain figures out where the pain is and registers the initial pain level.
2. Then the anterior insula, the brain region involved in perceiving and regulating the body functions such as heart rate and blood pressure, appraises the pain in the body. After the athlete's ankle has been sprained, the insula judges how painful the resulting injury is.
3. Then the anterior cingulate cortex comes in to regulate the athletes emotional response to the injury, making them feel angry, scared, or frustrated.
4. Finally, the prefrontal cortex, the executive command center of the brain, takes all the information and guides thoughts and actions, including the inhibition of inappropriate thoughts, distractions, and feelings. After beginning to feel angry, the athlete responds or reacts in some way.

The research by Zeidan showed that meditation alters these four areas of the brain associated with the perception of pain. By decreasing activity in the primary somatosensory cortex, the pain processing area, and increasing activity in the three other regions, pain is reduced. Assuming the athlete who sprained her ankle meditates, she would have a reduction in activity in the pain processing area of the brain, meaning the sprain won't hurt as much from the beginning. She would also have increased activity in the pain and emotion regulating areas of the brain. She won't judge the pain to be as strong, and she will regulate her emotional response to the pain as well as her behaviors.



FORMAL PRACTICE: OPEN AWARENESS WITH MENTAL NOTING MEDITATION

If the Awareness of Breath Meditation is analogous to a spotlight of attention on the breath to exclusion of everything else, Open Awareness Meditation is turning the lights on in the room to reveal the entire moment as a whole. The breath will always be accessible as an anchor to the present moment but in Open Awareness practice, sounds, sensations, thoughts and emotions may also become the object of attention. Instead of choosing to direct your attention to any of these experiences, you'll instead rest as awareness, curious and ready to experience whatever object happens to arise next.

The mental noting component of this practice refers to the mental label that is given to each object that appears. As you're meditating, you may feel an itch on your knee and internally whisper to yourself, "feeling". A few moments later an airplane might fly by and you would note, "hearing". Immediately after you may think, "wow that's loud. Oh ya, the air force base is close to hear." Once you've noticed, you'd note, "thinking". At some point you'll realize your mind has been wandering for some time, in which case you can note, "returning".

There is a saying, "If you can name it, you can tame it." Naming or noting thoughts in this way during meditation may help cultivate the ability to note aspects of inner self talk such as stress or fear, performance story, or "Inner Critical Coach" during a performance event or in everyday life.



JOURNAL: OPEN AWARENESS AND MENTAL NOTING

How was this different than the other meditation practices we've done so far?

What was your experience like with "Open Awareness"?

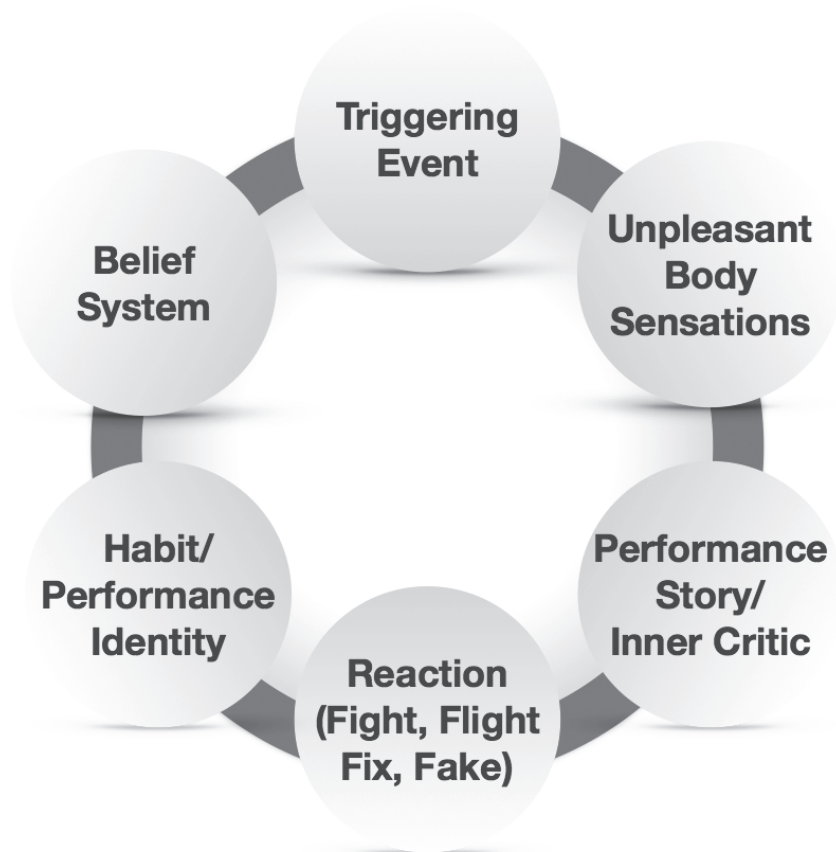
What kinds of experiences did you note?

How do you imagine this practice could benefit your performance?



TOPIC: RESPONDING VS. REACTING TO PAIN AND DIFFICULTY

This is a visual model that puts together the lessons from previous sections on how we get caught up in a cycle of conditioned reactions to stressors. This graphic shows the mechanism of how a triggering event leads to sensations, thoughts, actions, habits and a solidified performance identity.



Working With Pain and Difficulty

Triggering Event This is any situation that causes you stress or triggers the “stress reaction”.

- Social: Someone says something you didn't like, does something you didn't want, doesn't do something you wanted or looks at you a certain way.
- Emotional: Feeling something you don't understand or can't “be with”.
- Mental: Ruminating on something unpleasant or unwanted. Expectations, unmet needs, inner criticism etc.
- Physical: Pain, illness, fatigue, hunger, fullness, too hot or too cold.
- Environmental: External conditions that feel stressful for any reason.
- Existential: Lack of purpose or meaning.
- Time: Inability to finish all of what needs to get done, when it needs to get done.
- Role: Expectations to hold up a certain identity for others.

Unpleasant Body Sensations

- Interoceptive body sensations like pain can be a triggering event themselves but are also a result of a triggering event.
- Stress releases a cascade of chemicals, cortisol, adrenaline, norepinephrine, catecholamines that lead to tension and anxiety in the body.
- Each individual has their own “Stress Signature” that may feel like butterflies in the stomach, indigestion, heart palpitations, dry mouth, tight throat or constricted voice, clamping hands, sweating or a flare up of an old injury.

Performance Story

- Making meaning of the entire situation by projecting subconscious fears, desires, beliefs and expectations in the form of an inner narration. (See module 3)
- The meaning you make of the pain will very much impact the experience of the pain.



Working With Pain and Difficulty

Reactions Finally it's time to mobilize action in the form of the 5 F's. Without awareness, this is done subconsciously and automatically.

1. Fight: Blame, criticism, judgment or even violence. This can be turned inward towards oneself or outward toward another.
2. Flight: Escaping the situation by physically leaving the room, job, relationship or hometown. Emotionally avoiding through repression. Mentally escaping by zoning out or distracting oneself in addictions such as drugs and alcohol, workaholicism, gambling, shopping television, video games etc.
3. Freeze: There is a saying, "Paralysis by analysis". The freeze reaction comes along with a feeling of being stuck, unable to make a choice or move forward out of fear.
4. Fix: An intense resolve to improve oneself or conditions that comes from a sense of personal unworthiness or not being good enough. Example: "If only I could lose 30 pounds, then I'd be lovable." "If only I got a second PhD, then people would know I'm smart".
5. Fake: An aversion to vulnerability and a desire to believe or to have others believe that everything is or under control, when really it's not. This is also sometimes referred to as "Spiritual Bypassing".

***Note: There is a time and place for all of the above. These reactions are meant to keep us safe from danger. The problem occurs when they are over used consistently as a habitual way to avoid ones life.*

Habit Performance/Identity After repeating this cycle many times over years, it is hardwired into you not only a conditioned pattern but an identity.

- "I'm not a come from behind athlete".
- "I'm a late person." Or "I'm someone who's always on time."
- "I'm bad with conflict."
- "I'm a hot head."
- "I'm a drinker and a workaholic".

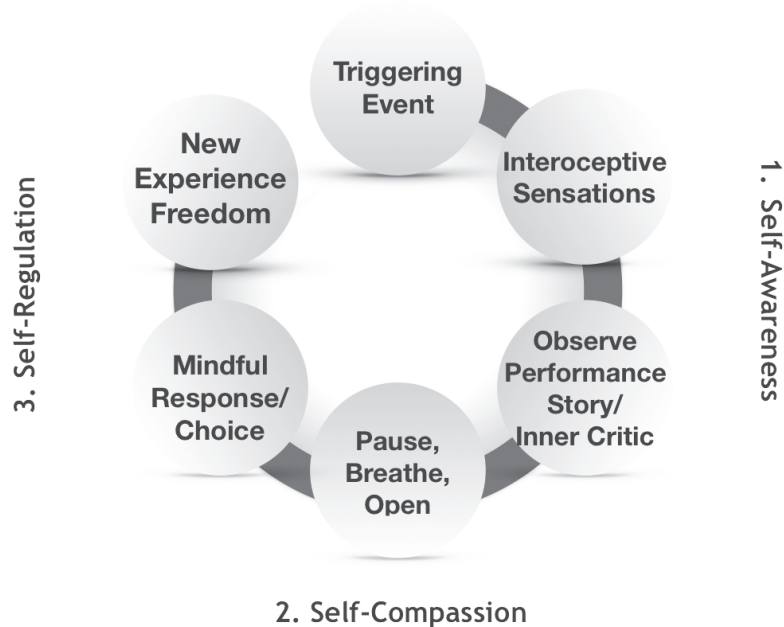
Belief System The entire cycle reinforces the original beliefs that started the cycle in the first place. Most "limiting beliefs" were taken on at an early age. "I'm not good enough." "The world isn't a safe place." "I don't fit in." It's often these beliefs and not a legitimate threat that makes the triggering event "triggering" in the first place. Without the belief, the event is often neutral. Without the belief that "people don't like me" or "I don't fit it", a weird facial expression from across the room can be interpreted as "oh, that person looks uncomfortable" versus, "that person must not like me".



TOPIC: THE CYCLE OF MINDFUL RESPONDING

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

This model ties together practices from previous sections on Interoceptive Awareness and Performance Story and shows how being mindful helps us to transform in the midst of stressful moments.



Mindfulness can be practiced at any and all steps of the process. The first opportunity to “wake up” is feeling stress in the body. Mindfulness builds the capacity for Interoceptive Awareness, which increases the likelihood of catching stress early before doing any harm or disrupting performance. The next opportunity is to observe and label an Off Peak Performance Story. Once the mental and physical reactions are observed, there is an opportunity to pause, relax and breath. This has broken the reaction cycle and offers an opportunity for an intervention. Making a new choice is not a guarantee at this phase. “Some habits die hard.” Sometimes the cycle has to be observed many times to finally build the motivation to do something different. Each time the pattern is observed a little bit more clearly, and each time it loses some of it’s power. Eventually a triggering event becomes just another event.

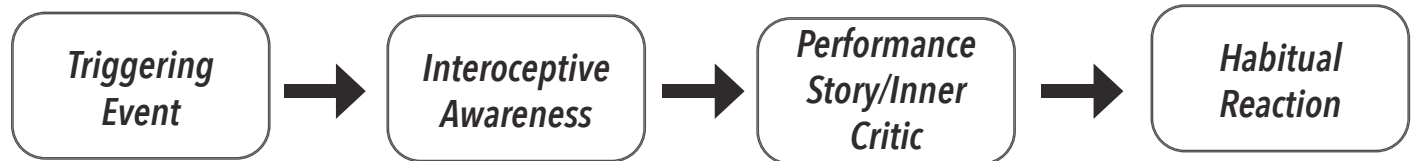
EXERCISE: STRESS REACTIVITY



What typical situations/people trigger stress and sabotage performance? How you do “react” in a way that worsens the situation?

Triggering Event	Stress Reaction
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

EXERCISE: STRESS RESILIENCE CALENDAR



At the end of every weekday, recap and record one triggering event along with your associated physical and mental experience. How did you react or mindfully responded in the situation?

	Triggering Event	Body Sensations	Performance Story	Reaction or Response
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

EXERCISE: R.A.I.N.

R–Recognize What’s Going On: Recognizing is an in-the-moment awareness of the thoughts, stories, emotions and behaviors that are adversely impacting performance and wellbeing. Common signs to watch for and “mentally note” include a critical inner voice, feelings of shame, doubt, fear, anxiety or pain in the body.

A–Allowing: Taking a Life-Giving Pause: Allowing means letting the thoughts, stories, emotions, or sensations we have recognized simply be there. Typically when we have an unpleasant experience, we react in one of five ways: by “fighting” (anger and criticism); by “fleeing” (zoning out, distracting or numbing our feelings); “fixing” (desperately improving, bolstering, strategizing) or “faking” (pretending to have it together when we don’t). Instead of resisting or reacting to difficulty, the practice is accepting it, because it’s already here.

I–Investigating with Kindness: Investigating means calling on our natural curiosity—the desire to know truth—and directing a more focused attention to our present experience. Simply pausing to ask, what is happening inside me?, can initiate recognition, but investigation adds a more active and pointed kind of inquiry. You might ask yourself: What most wants attention? How am I experiencing this in my body? Or What am I believing? What does this feeling want from me? You might notice self-doubt, inner criticism or fear. Unless you bring these into awareness, your unconscious beliefs and emotions will control your experience and perpetuate your identification with a limited, small self.

N–Natural Awareness (or “Non-Identify”): Natural loving awareness occurs when identification with the ego is loosened. This practice of non-identification means that our sense of who we are is not fused with any limiting emotions, sensations, or stories. We begin to naturally live from open, balanced, compassionate awareness.

Though the first three steps of RAIN require some intentional activity, the N “spontaneously arises”. There’s nothing to do for this last part of RAIN but to simply rest in natural, unconditioned awareness.

The RAIN practice is not a one-shot meditation, Each time you are willing to slow down and recognize, your fear, stress, judgment and pain, you slowly de-condition the old habits and limiting self-beliefs that hold you back from your full potential.

