



Conscious Life presents
**TRAUMA
SUPER CONFERENCE**

Rage, race, mindfulness and trauma

Guest: Ruth King

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[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow

Hello, and welcome back to this Trauma Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am so delighted to be welcoming Ruth King. Welcome, Ruth.

Ruth King

Thank you. So wonderful to be here.

Jaia Bristow

So wonderful to have you join us. I'm really excited about today's conversation. So, Ruth King is the founder of the Mindful of Race Institute and a celebrated author, educator, and meditation teacher. And I've just finished re-reading your book, *Mindful of Race*, and what I really appreciate about it is the way that you bring together different elements that can often seem very separate.

So there's the whole mindfulness meditation, spiritual practice, which is really key in this book. You're a meditation teacher. You bring in lots of very concrete practices, which are fantastic. And then there's the element around rage and compassion, which I think a lot of people can relate to, especially in the context of trauma.

Trauma and rage is such an interesting relationship, right, because rage can be a trauma response, but trauma can also shut us down and prevent us from feeling rage. So anger and rage and the way you talk about compassion and healing that, I'd love to hear from you, Ruth, about how the mindfulness practices, how those kind of inner resources that we were talking about off camera can support working with rage and with trauma.

Ruth King

First of all, I'm so excited to be a part of the Trauma Super Conference, and I'm only imagining what goes into weaving and pulling so many aspects of information together. So I appreciate being a part of the river of information that you're making available to people. So thank you.

I think what I want to say is, I think we need a combination of understanding and practice. So inner resources is, in my mind, in some ways, a commitment to turning your attention inward and being responsible for how you respond to the world. And I often have to ask myself, a lot of this is around

inquiry, the capacity to get still and investigate our experiences. Now, everybody can't do that if they're wildly activated.

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So if you're wildly activated, you have to kind of cool those fires first. And there's a lot of different ways that happens. Right? Sometimes we have to enter through the body of getting really physical and working out, having body work and what have you. Working specifically with the energetic of trauma, if it's really charged. And my work tends to be, once you understand the pattern of activation and a lot of us do.

We know that there are some predictable frequent flyer things that piss us off. And so we know that. So we can decide not when we're activated by it, but in the in between times, in the practice times. We can commit ourselves to inviting a certain inquiry into our investigation so that we can settle the mind, greet the disturbance with a sense of stability, with a sense of groundedness, with a sense of more ease, with more curiosity, where we enter and we drop the story of our activation and drop into the sensation that is the evidence that's being lived in this moment.

That tells us we're pissed off or tells us whatever, fill in the blank. All of the things in the mind have roots in the body. The body is mind, right? So when we understand this, then I think we're in a better position to then practice with what we understand so that it's more embodied. And I think this is where mindfulness comes in so exquisitely because it provides the framework for the practice. Not a solution, as we were saying earlier, but a practice, an investigation, a curiosity, an inquiry.

Not at the time perhaps of activation, but I think it can get to that. But more and more it's these times when we decide I really want to understand that pattern a little bit more. I really get that I've caused some harm here or I really get that my way of responding to the situation is not giving me the result that I want. How is it that what I'm really wanting right now I'm actually working against or I can't tolerate allowing it to come in?

So we're asking ourselves questions and what we're really doing is the mind is asking the heart and the body these questions in a gentle, loving way, in a compassionate way. Hey, I love you. Let's be with this together. Can we soften together? And can I notice the subtle ways that the muscles in my face are softening or the shoulders are dropping or the belly is softening?

So these practices and mindfulness are really super powers, if you will, that support us in this kind of easeful, graceful, compassionate investigation and kindness toward ourselves as we unpack the protective cover of ourselves and decide we're going to be more free within our own skin to live a full life, a full bodied life.

So I know what I'm talking about is not so simple. But there is a place, I think, for this kind of inquiry and the scope of trauma work. There's a place where we're not always activated, but we can take a moment with regularity, with consistency, which is building neurons right, neural pathways and the prefrontal cortex that's allowing us to befriend; and that's the inner resource that we're really talking about, our inner capacity to be in control of our reactivity and our impact on harm or harmony.

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So that's where I think the inner resourcing and the integration and the tracking to notice how our experiences are intense and then they subside and how we are enmeshed in the content of our mind. And when we snap out of that and we can see what's happening without being ensnared in it are moments of liberation.

And when we have more and more moments of that they're never going to be constant. It's not like we're going to get somewhere and then we're done. It's these increasing moments and momentum of mindfulness that we gather through a regular, steady, intravenous practice of awareness and turning inward and dropping down, that comfort, the distress that we're in like nothing else can. Inner resource is not something we're going to be able to get from somebody else.

And the notion of us thinking somebody else is going to comfort our activation, especially when we need it the most, and sometimes we expect this comfort from the very people that we're pissed off with, and it's just so unlikely. So it's very important that we kind of ripen this inner capacity.

So that's at the individual level and then at the group level, we need to be in community with other people, to share our stories, to be heard, to have our lives dignified and witnessed and seen through the eyes of compassion and care. And that's one of the reasons I do the racial affinity group work. So that there's a space for us over a period of time to really witness and care and embody and strengthen the truth of who we are that's deeper than the ways we've been conditioned to protect ourselves. So I think these are all rivers that support a sense of inner resourcing that I think is needed for trauma in general and racial trauma in particular.

Jaia Bristow

Definitely. And I really appreciate what you were saying about that kind of sense of responsibility and that taking a beat. And one of the ways I've heard responsibility defined is quite literally as response ability. The ability to respond rather than to react sort of instinctively. And that, as you say, mindfulness practices really helps cultivate that response ability. So I think that that's so important to have that.

And I'd love in a second for you to develop more around what in your book you talk about RAIN and the different ways that we can as an individual be with ourselves because as you say, there's the individual work and there's the group work and I think those are both really, really important. I also really value how you talk about it. It's about the journey. There's no magical cure.

I think anyone who's attended any of these trauma conferences or knows anything about trauma or about life now knows that there's no magical cure for everything. But there's the process of becoming more attuned with oneself and in so doing, becoming more attuned to our environment, the people around us and starting to cultivate a culture of care rather than of perpetuating trauma.

So I think that that's so important, that that element that you were talking about as well, of the journey. And there was one other thing that really stuck out for me, which now I'm trying to remember. I try and keep track as you were talking about the different things, but it might come back to me. Yeah and in the meantime, I love again the individual work and the group work. And I'm wondering if you could say a bit more about RAIN and about cultivating as an individual, these kind of resources.

[00:12:27] Ruth King

Yeah, absolutely. I think, as I said, there's a need for understanding and then also a need for practice. Understanding, especially if we are talking about racial trauma. It's important to know our history, to know where we come from, to know what we have inherited as a racial group. To know our people and our land and what's been lost and what's been gained along the way and what we've inherited. Right?

So there is this kind of understanding that we need, especially here in the States, understanding of slavery and racial trauma and dominance and subordination. That continues to be the fabric in which this country is founded and is functioning. For people to really understand that kind of dominant subordinated dance there is really important.

So we need a framework for understanding why matters of race are still matters of concern and what does that have to do with me? And what does that have to do with me, it has to do with how I'm digesting the truth of the air that we're breathing around this and also what I'm vibrating, what I'm offering out through my actions, knowingly or unknowingly. So these are things to practice a certain investigation of being intimate with the stimuli or the numbness that we might feel inside of ourselves.

So we need to understand and then we need to practice with some of these tools. And we practice at the individual level by having a meditation practice. And one of the tools is RAIN and that's well talked about in the book. It's an acronym. So the 'R' is for recognize. The 'A' is to allow. The 'I' is for inquiry or investigation and the 'N' is to nurture.

So if we look at the recognize, what we're really doing is being in the practice and in the habit of recognizing what's happening. What's happening right now. Right? It's a simple question but it snaps us out of just being unconscious about what's happening or enmeshed in it, to asking the question where we can become a little bit more distant. Distant isn't the right word because this is quite intimate work.

But we sit in a different seat to really ask ourselves the question of what's happening and we tap into the body. So what we're doing is we're pausing and turning our attention inward with that question. And right in that moment we're also taking a breath to just slow ourselves down. And I invite people to especially attend or ride the wave of the exhale because I find that that brings us into the body more directly, to the breathing process.

So we stop, we pause, we turn our attention inward. We ask what's happening? We slow ourselves down by being aware of the movement of the breath with the exhale and then we just give ourselves a break right there. Giving ourselves a break in that moment is the allow, can I be with it? Can I be with what's happening right now? That is the 'A' can I allow what's happening to be what's happening? Now the energetic body, especially if we're traumatized, this is going to be more challenging.

Sometimes we can't be with it and we can recognize that we can't be with it and then maybe work with a release around that energy in a more active way or we acknowledge that I can be with it for a second and then I titrate and maybe can come out of it. Sometimes we're able to allow what's happening by noticing we're truly activated but find another place in the body that isn't so activated. Or again working with the breath can help us here. So cooling, surrendering and resting in the present moment, even if it's a little bit, can be very powerful for us.

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The 'I' is an inquiry or an investigation of what's happening inside of the body, the movement of what's happening in the body. And with investigation this is where I think noting, the practice of noting can be really powerful. Of naming what's happening as it's moving and as it's changing. There's a lot to this practice that I think won't work with this call. But it's the investigation and I have a number of questions around racial investigation of how does this stimuli and what is it wanting and where does it live in the body and is it a throb or is it numb?

So we begin to investigate the experiences we're having instead of the story we have about it. So that's the beauty of the investigation. And then with the 'N' the nurture we're really inviting the question. We're asking the heart to help us figure out in this moment what would comfort the distress that we might be experiencing or what are we needing right now in this moment that would support ease and less restriction. And sometimes we need to ask ourselves nurturing is more like an affirmation of I see you, may we see the world with quiet eyes.

Let's breathe here together. Sometimes I call on the elements for nurture. I see myself leaning up against a strong mountain or a strong tree trunk to ground. Or maybe I need more flow so I'll imagine myself at a river, a rushing river or a big body of water. Or maybe I need more fire where I can imagine myself being on fire and allowing the aliveness to have its full span. Or maybe I need more air, I need to put a bit more space around the tightness of my thoughts or the tightness in my body and allow warmth to come through.

So these are some of the ways to nurture. Sometimes people can use quotes that they love and they want to carry around and remind themselves of depending on what aspect of their journey they're working with. Sometimes I can hear my mother, an ancestor, saying something sitting right on my shoulder that really just absolutely cracks my heart wide open and allows me a bit more space to rest in.

So RAIN is a beautiful framework. It was established to address emotional distress. I think it's just right on target for racial distress, for trauma. So that's what we need. At the individual level, we need practices, stillness practices, introspective practices. At the group level, we need each other. And for racial trauma, we really need our people. We need to develop a connection with our people, with our people, our race, and begin to share our stories and connect intimately with our stories.

I find for white folks, racial affinity group work is important because so many white people are socialized at the individual level, not the group level. So they know themselves maybe as good people, but they don't always understand the group level of whiteness or whatever it might be. People of color, we tend to know group identity strongly because our survival has been dependent upon it.

But the distinction of who we are as individuals, especially when we get together, is kind of a shadow. So racial affinity group supports a certain light on the distinction of our journeys and that we're not all the same. And in any racial affinity group we're in, we're going to see the diversity within the group. But I think it's important that that's witnessed, held, honored, strengthened within community with our own people.

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The Buddha talked about the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, right? So the Buddha is our individual nature. We all have an individual Buddha nature. The Dharma are the teachings. And that speaks to the aspect of this, where we understand our history and where our people come from and what traumatize them and what we've inherited.

And then the Sangha are the racial affinity groups where we really are challenged with how we become more membered and fortified. And then we're able to walk out into the world in the relational world in ways that help us understand what belonging really means instead of it just being a concept.

Jaia Bristow

Incredible. Thank you for sharing all of that. I think it's so important, as you say, to have both the understanding and the practices. As I mentioned, I have an online course that I run across six modules, and the first three are understanding the sort of power and privilege dynamics on a systemic level, a personal and relational level, and an internal level. So it's sort of like power, privilege, and prejudice.

And then the next three modules are all about practices to support the sort of shift in those dynamics, both in an internal level, a relational level, and a systemic level. And I really found that in your book. I see a lot of that as well. Right? And so here you've offered some incredible resources which I think will be really helpful for people listening.

And I also really encourage people to read your book because there's so many more practices in there. There's a journey and the importance of the individual work and the group work. And it doesn't matter which race someone belongs to. It's not about, so often, as you talk about in the book, so often people hear race and they think, oh, that's for people of color. That's not for me if I'm white, for example.

And I think I see that on this conference as well if I put racial trauma in the title of a talk, then the people who watch that talk often aren't white people and yet we all have race. Racial dynamics need to be addressed by everyone. And that's what I love about your work and what you talk about racial affinity groups for white people as well, and specifically the work white people can do around that and the work POC can do around that. Thank you for bringing in those different elements...

Ruth King

Yeah, I think white people especially need to be in racial affinity groups to strengthen the racial group identity that they are and oftentimes are unaware of. If I've gotten any feedback from my book, especially from white people, it's that that understanding has been profound. Understanding that they're part of a racial group that has impact and that collectively has dominance over the well-being of other people.

And waking up to that is not so much about what you can do as an individual, but it really strengthens an understanding of how you can begin to educate other white people or have different kinds of conversations with other white people. Especially the ones dear to you and your family, with your children, that supports an inner harmony. Again, an understanding and practice

that supports us connecting more broadly because a lot of people want to know, well, why can't we just get in a room and work it all out?

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We're intelligent, we're smart. And you have to ask why, if it was that simple, then why hasn't that been done? And in fact, it's been attempted a million times and it's not like it hasn't made any difference. It's that until the inner work is transformed, we're talking about people, until people deeply understand their conditioning, their reactivity, and their collective group impact on other races. Until that's understood, we're just kind of moving the chairs around on the Titanic.

A lot of individuals can change, but the systems don't change. And then we have policies that change, but hearts don't change. So that's kind of half-ass done, right? You have people that are, we got these policies, but then you got to pay somebody to make sure they're implemented. The heart's not in it. The heart has to be in it for this to really be an uprooting and a liberatory exercise for the various countries we live in and communities we serve and families we love.

Jaia Bristow

A hundred percent. And that's why this work needs to be done on an individual, collective and systemic level, right? And also trauma. Not to bring it all back to trauma all the time, but this is a Trauma Super Conference. And when you say, why can't we all just get in a room and hash it out? One word answer is trauma.

Like, if we're all in a room hashing it out, we're all just going to start activating each other. That's why these racial affinity groups or the opportunity to sit, that's also why so often people of color want a therapist who looks like them. Because there is a shared and a mirroring of experience that creates a certain safety that allows us to open up and to do work without being retraumatized or without being activated or triggered.

And it's just as true for white people. Again, they'll be activated by the responses of the POC and the group, and the POC will be activated by white people and the different groups. POC is such an umbrella term. There are so many experiences and different racial groups within that umbrella term. And then within each group we have all of the individual humans and all the individual experiences and different cultures.

Like the black American experience is different to the black British experience. And within black Britain or within the US, each person has their own experience. So it's important and I hope that people listening really take this on board to start doing the inner work as well as the outer work. And I really appreciate that in the work you offer in your book about finding and doing it across all these different levels.

Ruth King

Yeah. Go ahead.

Jaia Bristow

No, go ahead. You go ahead.

[00:29:59] Ruth King

I was just thinking about how you just reminded me when you say that all back and it's like, I know I've written about this quite a bit, but it's kind of like when we all get in a room together and think we can just hash it out. The activation, the trauma that gets bounced all over the walls. People leave bruised and beat up and they don't want to return or it feels hopeless.

Part of that dynamic is understanding that most white people enter into that engagement as good, well meaning individuals. And so they're individuals, they're at that individual level. They're oftentimes oblivious to themselves as a racial group and all that that represents historically, generationally, communally, politically, right? They're entering as good individuals.

When people of color, when we get in a room, we're bringing our collective racial group identity and the shared experiences of oppression, that's what BIPOC folks share. We share the common denominator of being oppressed. So we bring a group understanding and harm sensitivity to these groups. And we're representing group even though we might be speaking at the individual level. The intensity that gets activated is group. It's chronic, it's historic.

And so what happens when we're then trying to talk about it, with color folks really talking about this history and collective pain and white people being good individuals that oftentimes are just now waking up around this. It's no wonder this becomes activating and retraumatizing for the people that are present. All of us, everybody in the room gets retraumatized. White people are saying, boy I was trying and what did I do? And why are you so angry?

People of color can't figure out why white people never quite get it. This is the chronic dense of harm that is the result of us not being able to ground within our own skin, ground with our people and understand and own and take responsibility for how we show up and the impact we have. Hopefully that's rooted in an intention of belonging.

Sometimes our intentions are not in a direction of belonging. They're in a direction of being right, of being heard or being cared for. There's a whole lot of things right. So these are the things that I want people to understand and actually prepare for through both understanding and practices that fortify our capacity to be with racial harmony. Yeah.

Jaia Bristow

I think that's so important and I think that reminding people to question their own intention in those moments and in those discussions, what is the intention? Is it to listen, to learn, to be heard, to share? Or is it just to connect? Or is it just to be right? And there's not anything wrong with wanting to be right. But it's recognizing if that's the intention, it's going to bring a different energy.

It's also recognizing with trauma that with anything that if we're in that kind of space, in that kind of interaction, it will lead to everyone shutting down. And when we're shut down, we can't engage and connect with other people. And it doesn't matter again, what your racial identity is here. If you shut down, it doesn't matter if you're talking collectively or individually that it's just not going to work.

And that's, I think, a huge issue when people from dominant and subordinate groups, whether it's racial groups or others, try and interact, it's that there's immediately something. Once one person

gets activated or one group or one trauma gets activated, there's an immediate defense and that activates someone else and then everyone's shutting down and activated and there's no longer...

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And so again, the mindfulness practices, the practices you offer in your book, the practices we've talked about today, they allow us to take that beat to connect with ourselves, to open up rather than shut down, to understand, to connect with ourselves and in so doing, connect with others. And the last thing I really want to say for people who haven't read the book is that when we're talking about racial affinity groups and we're talking about not just throwing everyone in a room to hash out together, we're not saying people can't have conversations across racial groups.

It's not reinforcing segregation or division it's saying, let's start. The first step is just taking a moment with oneself, right, and applying, like you say, the individual work. The second step is group work with people who have shared experiences and shared identities so that we can reflect and again, we can open up rather than shut down. We can grow our capacity to connect, to be human.

And then once we develop those capacities, then the next step is to start engaging with people from different racial identities in a way that we have more understanding of the trauma context of our own experience and identity of our group and collective identities, as well as our individual identities of our group and collective traumas. As well as our individual traumas.

Ruth King

I love it. And I think what I would add is that I think all three of those levels are actually happening oftentimes at the same time. Definitely we can be in any one of those contexts at the same time. What happens though is we either find ourselves at the collective level trying to engage before we've done the individual work. And so they have to kind of be co-happening at the same time.

And I just want to acknowledge one more piece because I know our time is getting close, and that is when we talk about dominant and subordinated group, racial group dynamics. We're not just talking about US white and people of color dynamics. When you understand dominant racial groups and subordinated racial groups, even if you're in a country where most of the people are white, there is still that dynamic claim.

And I'm sure it happens in Europe. I saw it when I was there teaching at the Gaia House. The class dynamic, the class hierarchy of dominance and subordination, the subtleties of Israel and Palestine. I mean, there's all of these ways that we can begin to see the skeletal shape of dominance and subordination and how it plays. The dynamic of it is the same. I don't care where you live, it just happens to be strongly black and white here in the US. For the obvious reasons.

Jaia Bristow

100% and we see that, you know, I was born in India and I've spent time there and the majority are brown and yet there's still a caste system for example. Like you say, classism in the UK is huge and also very interlinked with racism. But that's a whole topic for a different time.

Ruth, how can people find out more about you and your work? What's alive in your work right now that you would like to share? And how can people find out about it?

[00:37:46] Ruth King

Thank you, this has been so divine. I really enjoyed this. So you can find me at ruthking.net. What I encourage is for people to look at the online academy offerings that are there; there is work both at the individual level and especially at the group level.

A lot of what I'm doing is trying to fortify racial group identity. So you'll see Brave Space, the racial affinity group development program, which is a year long deep dive inquiry and compassionate community where we begin to take a look at how we've been conditioned towards harm and harmony. And we do that together in a racial affinity group so that's a real strong piece. And, yeah, I just get on the mailing list I have some free offerings of guided meditations to support our kind of practice of being with ourselves it's there. I'd love to keep you posted on what's coming up.

Jaia Bristow

Fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today. I really enjoyed this conversation. I feel we can speak for another 3 hours, but unfortunately we're out of time.

Ruth King

Yes. Thank you so much for having me. This has been precious.