



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

Abandoning harmful cravings and compulsions: understanding Gotama's second realisation

"You can never get enough of what you don't really need to make you happy." ~ Eric Hoffer

"Craving is like a thief in your house. If you do not recognise it, it will steal your peace." ~ Ajahn Chah

Recognising the currents that pull us back

By observing craving not as *my craving* but simply as *craving arising*, we create a space for mindful awareness that is less entangled with personal identity and blame, and more aligned with the universal nature of all experience. This change of tack will help us to loosen the grip of 'self-identity' and help us to relate to experiences with more freedom and perspective.

Having clearly recognised life's inherent pains, difficulties, and disappointments during the first part of our journey to freedom – which we might see as surveying the 'dangerous shore' – we now move to the crucial task of the second stage of our journey to 'the far shore of liberation': *Abandoning harmful cravings and compulsions*. This second leg of our journey, directly addresses Gotama (the Buddha's) second realisation, that suffering arises and that suffering intensifies through craving.

In his foundational teaching, Gotama stated:

"...the craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight now here, now there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for non-existence".

This craving that Gotama described, is a deeper, often unconscious, *demanding thirst* or *clinging*. It's the relentless 'I need,' 'I must have,' or 'I can't stand this' energy that fuels our dissatisfaction and drives compulsive behaviour.

While the first part of this journey helped us to recognise the unavoidable difficulties of life (the 'dangerous shore' itself), Gotama's second realisation points to how our reaction to life, driven by craving, amplifies these inherent pains, difficulties and disappointments, and creates vast amounts of unnecessary, *avoidable suffering*. Our human struggle with craving and avoidance, often manifesting as what is commonly called addiction, is a powerful manifestation of craving.

Self-reflections

Consider how craving manifests in experience:

- ★ Which of the three types of craving (sensual pleasure, existence, non-existence) feels most prominent or powerful in relation to observed patterns?
- ★ What sensations are felt in the body when craving arises? Where are sensations of craving noticed in the body?
- ★ What kinds of thoughts typically accompany the strongest cravings?
- ★ How does the idea that pain, difficulties, and disappointments arise and the suffering intensifies through *craving* resonate with you?
- ★ Bring to mind something that is craved. Is there an underlying belief that getting it will bring lasting happiness, or is there an awareness of its temporary nature?
- ★ What is the felt difference between the desire for freedom on this path and the demanding pull of a familiar craving? Does one feel expansive while the other feels constricting?
- ★ Consider the last time you felt a strong craving. Did this urge feel connected to a deeper need to **protect** (seek safety), **promote** (feel

important), or **satisfy** (find pleasure or escape pain)?

- ★ How is aversion showing up at this moment? Is there a subtle pushing away of a feeling, a thought, or a sound?
-

Journaling prompts

Use writing to investigate craving:

- ★ **Craving inventory:** For a day or two, consciously note down instances of craving as they arise. What was the object? What type of craving was it (protect, promote, satisfy)? What triggered it? What sensations and thoughts were present? Was there an action on it? What happened next?
 - ★ **The amplification effect:** Think of a recent difficult experience (a disappointment, physical pain, conflict). How did craving (for example, craving for it to be different, for escape, or for comfort) potentially add to the suffering of that initial difficulty?
 - ★ **Questioning assumptions:** Challenge beliefs related to cravings (for example, ‘*This is needed to cope*’, ‘*This feeling is unbearable*’).
 - ★ **Learning from setbacks:** Analyse a recent setback compassionately. What contributed to it? How can it be approached differently next time?
 - ★ **Wholesome desire versus craving:** Clarify wholesome desires (*chanda*) and how they differ from harmful cravings (*taṇhā*).
-

Remember to remember

This second stage of our RAFT to freedom journey – *Abandoning harmful cravings and compulsions* – is fundamental to our liberation. Gotama's second realisation – that suffering arises and that suffering intensifies through craving – offers profound insight: the primary engine driving suffering, including what is known as addiction, is *craving* in its various forms. It helps distinguish between the unavoidable difficulties of life and the vast, *avoidable suffering* generated by craving. Recognising this allows us to shift from battling symptoms or blaming ourselves to addressing the root cause with wisdom and skill. This crucial abandonment is guided by the ‘Four Resolves’ – especially the *resolve* to abandon unwholesome states and *cultivate* wholesome ones – which direct our

effort with precision.

We learn to observe rather than obey cravings, replacing harmful compulsions with skillful, beneficial habits. This abandonment is not about suppression but about mindful awareness and wise choice, creating lasting freedom from destructive cycles. By courageously examining and compassionately responding to cravings, we build resilience and pave the way toward genuine peace and liberation.

Before we delve into the specific strategies for abandoning, however, it is essential to cultivate the *appropriate response* for this challenging work. The next chapter will introduce *Befriending* as the vital attitude of friendliness and self-compassion needed to meet our cravings and ourselves with the kindness that facilitates true letting go.

"Letting go gives us freedom, and freedom is the only condition for happiness." ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

RAFT to Freedom © 2025 by Dr Cathryn Jacob and Vince Cullen

is licensed under Creative Commons

Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

