



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.

Chapter 33: Discernment as a defence

The Navigator's Insight

‘Just as a surgeon uses a sharp knife to remove a poisoned arrow, so too wisdom cuts away ignorance.’ ~ adapted Gotama (the Buddha)

‘The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.’ ~ Albert Einstein

The wisdom that frees

Discernment is the intuitive understanding that arises from this stable, mindful attention, allowing us to see things as they truly are and cut through the delusions that fuel our harmful patterns and suffering.

In the ‘RAFT to Freedom’ metaphor, Discernment is the wisdom of the Navigator. The Navigator interprets the 'charts' (the teachings), reads the actual conditions of the sea (direct experience), and decides the correct direction to steer the raft, ensuring the journey proceeds toward the safe shore of freedom.

This wisdom is not merely intellectual knowledge; it is direct, experiential insight. It is the direct antidote to ignorance and delusion, the root causes of our harmful compulsions. Craving thrives on illusion: the illusion that urges will last forever, that acting on them will bring lasting satisfaction, or that a fixed 'I' must obey their commands. Discernment dismantles these illusions by clearly seeing three characteristics of being:

★ Impermanence:

★ **Unsatisfactoriness:**

★ **Not-Self:**

- ★ Discernment is the force that allows us to abandon cravings and aversions, not through brute force, but through a profound and liberating
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★ **Self-reflections**

- ★ What are some core beliefs held about a compulsive habit that have since been seen as inaccurate or unhelpful?
 - ★ How does contemplating impermanence – knowing that this urge *will* pass – affect the response to it?
 - ★ What does ‘not-self’ mean in this lived experience? Does it feel liberating, confusing, or both?
 - ★ Can a moment of sudden clarity or an "Aha!" moment be recalled that shifted perspective or behaviour? What led to it?
 - ★ When making choices, how much are they guided by clear understanding versus habit, fear, or impulse?
 - ★ What conditions – inner or outer – best support the arising of Discernment?
 - ★ How do the other four Defenders (Confidence, Courageous Effort, Healing Mindfulness and a Gathered Mind) create the stability needed for Discernment to arise?
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Journaling prompts

- ★ **Applying the three characteristics of being:** Choose one specific aspect of a recurring pattern (for example, a particular craving or aversion, a thought, a sensation). Reflect and write about it through the lens of ‘Impermanence’ (Is it permanent?) ‘Pain, difficulty and disappointment’ (Is it truly satisfying?), and ‘Not Self’ (Is it ‘me’ or ‘mine’?).
- ★ **Deconstructing a justification:** Identify one common thought that arises with an urge (for example, "I deserve it," "It helps me cope"). Write it

down, then challenge it with wise investigation. What are the hidden assumptions? What are the real consequences?.

- ★ **Cause and effect log:** For a day, pay close attention to the link between specific actions and the resulting mental/emotional states. Note these connections. What patterns emerge?
- ★ **Defining wisdom:** What does 'wisdom' mean to you on this journey?. Write about someone you consider wise – what qualities do they embody and how could those be cultivated?
- ★ **A moment of clarity:** Describe a time you saw through an illusion about a compulsive behaviour. How did that insight feel in the body and mind? How did it shift your actions?
- ★ **The navigator's log:** Journal about a time when Discernment acted as your navigator, guiding you through a storm of craving, aversion or a difficult emotion. What 'charts' (teachings) or 'weather conditions' (direct feelings) did it use?
- ★ **Compassion and discernment:** Reflect on how being kind to yourself affects your ability to see clearly. What does it feel like to see a mistake without the cloud of self-judgement?

Remember to remember

Discernment (*paññā*), cultivated into the strength of wisdom, is the fifth and culminating Defender. It is the clear seeing that cuts through the illusions sustaining craving and aversion, liberating us not by force but by understanding. This liberating insight illuminates *why* letting go leads to freedom, arising from a foundation of Confidence, energised by Courageous Effort, observed by Healing Mindfulness, and stabilised by a Gathered Mind. As the Navigator, Discernment uses the wisdom gained from the journey to guide our raft accurately and safely to the far shore.

Remember that wisdom is not just found in grand, transformative insights, but is present in small, daily acts of clarity. Each time you pause to ask, "What leads away from harm?" and follow that wise answer, you are cultivating Discernment. In the surgeon's simile, Healing Mindfulness is the probe that finds the splinter,

Discernment is the sharp knife that removes it, Courageous Effort is the steady hand, a Gathered Mind stabilises the body, and Confidence the trust that healing is possible. It is this clear-seeing wisdom that finally sets us free.

“Wisdom begins in wonder.” ~ Socrates

“Discernment is not about knowing everything, but about knowing what matters most.” ~ Howard Thurman

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