



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.

34 – Freedom

“Within us there is a silence as vast as the universe. We long for it, and once we touch it, we will never again be content to be half-alive.” ~
Veronica A. Shoffstall

“Freedom is not something you acquire. It is the absence of the compulsion to grasp or resist; it is the opening of a space where life can unfold.” ~
Stephen Batchelor

The possibility of peace

Resting in awe and wonder

Welcome to the third stage of our RAFT to Freedom journey. Having navigated the first stage of ‘Recognising’ the landscape of human suffering and engaged deeply with our second stage of ‘Abandoning’ the craving that fuels compulsion – we now arrive at a profoundly hopeful and pivotal stage.

The third stage invites us to turn towards the ‘F’ in RAFT – to actively experience ‘Freedom’. This entire stage is anchored in Gotama (the Buddha’s) third realisation that freedom from craving and compulsive patterns is possible – we can personally experience this liberation by actively recognising and familiarising ourselves with moments of clarity, peace, and non-reactivity.

After clearly recognising pain, difficulties and disappointments and that avoidable suffering arises and is intensified through craving, Gotama offered this liberating message – an end to this unnecessary distress is truly possible. This

isn't merely a philosophical idea; it is presented as an attainable reality to be personally experienced and verified in the here and now.

In this third stage of our journey, the practice shifts from the effort of 'recognising' and 'abandoning' to the gentle art of familiarising with 'freedom'. We are no longer trying to fix the mind or fight the waves, instead, we are training the attention (the Captain, Navigator, and Crew of our vessel) to notice, recognise, appreciate, and intentionally dwell in the moments when craving, aversion, compulsion and confusion are absent. We make the shift from 'doing' to 'being'.

Self-reflections:

- ★ Can you recall moments, however brief, during your journey where you felt a sense of peace, ease, or freedom from compulsion? What was that like?
 - ★ What does the idea of 'cessation of suffering' or 'freedom' truly mean to your unfolding experience? What qualities does it entail?
 - ★ What obstacles arise when trying to notice or appreciate moments of peace (for example, restlessness, disbelief, waiting for something 'bigger')?
 - ★ Which 'If-then plan' (prepared when calm) would save me most trouble this week, and where will I keep it so that I actually use it?
 - ★ What moments most lead to awe and wonder – seeing the everyday sublime – and how might I intentionally weave more of them into my day?
 - ★ When you imagine 'freedom', what do you expect it to feel like? How does this imagined ideal differ from the quiet, ordinary freedom that actually appears during practice
 - ★ What factors most hinder your sense of freedom, and what factors most reliably support it?
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Journaling Prompts

- ★ **Glimpses of 'Freedom':** Describe in detail one specific moment (recent or past) where you experienced a sense of freedom from craving, compulsion, or intense suffering. What were the circumstances? What did it feel like physically and mentally?

- ★ **If-Then review:** Recall a recent ‘If-Then plan’, reflect on how it changed events, and what edit would make it even easier to use.
- ★ **Wave note :** Describe one urge wave you surfed – where it peaked, what you felt, and how it felt when it had passed.
- ★ **Valuing the subtle:** For the next day, intentionally look for small moments of ease, neutrality, or non-craving (for example, the quiet moment after a task, a moment of simple presence). Note these down and reflect on whether you usually overlook them.
- ★ **Edges of Freedom:** Recall a time when you sensed you were near freedom – not fully free, but loosening, softening, or seeing more clearly. What stopped you from relaxing fully into that space? Explore whether the obstacle was internal (beliefs, habits, fear of change) or external (stress, environment, people). What would a ‘half-step of more freedom’ have looked like in that moment?
- ★ **When Freedom surprises you:** Reflect on an unexpected moment of steadiness, patience, or non-reactivity – something you didn’t plan for but noticed afterwards. What allowed this spontaneous freedom to appear? Was it prior practice, a change in conditions, a shift in attitude, or something else?
- ★ **Noticing the Everyday Sublime:** Today, notice or look closely at something utterly ordinary – a leaf, a cup, a patch of light, a breath of air – and pause long enough to let its quiet wonder reveal itself. Choose one moment where a simple detail felt unexpectedly vivid or beautiful, as if the world were shining through it. Describe exactly what you noticed. How did this shift the body (softening, opening, stilling)? How did the mind feel when awe arose without needing anything extraordinary to happen? Reflect on how turning toward these tiny, sublime details changes the sense of being alive in this moment.

Remember to remember

Gotama’s third realisation is the heartening assurance that the suffering amplified by our most destructive cravings, aversions and compulsions are not our final destiny. Cessation is possible; freedom is achievable. The third stage of the RAFT journey invites us to move beyond simply understanding this possibility

and to actively familiarise ourselves with the direct experience of ‘Freedom’ – peace, ease, and non-compulsion.

Remember that freedom is not gained but revealed. It appears each time grasping relaxes and nothing rushes in to replace it. By turning our attention towards these glimpses of the safe shore, we validate our efforts and begin to embody the freedom we seek.

To maintain this freedom, we must now learn to spot the coming storms (‘The Five Hazards’) and catch the rising wind (‘The Seven Supports’). And as we do, we discover the appropriate heart response to this newfound safety:

Appreciative Joy. This joy is the ‘rope’ that binds our progress, ensuring that we not only find the safe shore but learn to delight in the journey towards it.

“When we let go of the struggle, what remains is the tenderness of life itself.” ~ Jack Kornfield

“Freedom is not a destination; it’s the capacity to meet each moment without contraction.” ~ Tara Brach

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