



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.

51 – The Training stage of our journey – the journey to freedom

From crisis response to cultivated life

“Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, and a gradual inclination... in the same way, this Dhamma and discipline has a gradual training, a gradual performance, and a gradual progression.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha)

“If you walk the path, you will arrive; if you do not walk the path, you will not arrive. The path does not walk itself.” ~ Ajahn Chah

Opening the operating manual

Welcome to the ‘Training stage’ of our RAFT to Freedom journey. We have travelled far to reach this point:

1. **Recognise:** We faced what was happening, named the patterns, and got honest about the cost.
2. **Abandon:** We practised letting go – again and again – of the habits that fuel craving, aversion and compulsions.
3. **Freedom:** We began to taste real relief: a steadier mind, clearer choices, moments of ease that proved change is possible.

Now in this ‘Training stage’ of our journey, we move into learning what to do, day by day, when life happens. We start following a clear set of instructions – not as

rules to *be good*, but as practical guidance for becoming steadier, kinder, and freer over time. We open the ‘Operating Manual’ of Gotama's ‘Middle Way Programme’. In Gotama’s fourth realisation, he saw that Freedom can be cultivated: not a lucky accident or a one-time breakthrough, but the natural result of practising a practical, accessible programme.

In this Training stage, Mindfulness expands from *what is happening* (body, feelings, mind) to *what it means in practice*: we learn to recognise the patterns and principles that shape experience and the conditions that change it.

Gotama’s fourth realisation is that there is a path of practice that leads to the ending of suffering. Having seen the reality of suffering, understood what fuels it, and tasted that it can cease, he then recognised a method for making that cessation dependable – a trainable way of living and taming the mind (traditionally expressed as the Noble Eightfold Path). This is why it belongs at the heart of the Training stage: it turns insight into a workable programme. It says, in effect, ‘Freedom is not just something you glimpse; it’s something you can cultivate – through repeated, ordinary practices in how you see, choose, speak, act, relate, and steady the mind.’

Self reflections

1. When I practise, does it feel like paying for my past – or like strengthening for a life I actually want to live?
2. How does the word Train land in my body compared with Try or Wish – and what kind of commitment does it quietly ask for?
3. In moments of confusion or wobble, do I default to panic and self-blame – or do I look for the ‘Operating Manual’ (a principle, a practice, a next step)?
4. Do I imagine freedom as ‘doing whatever I want’ (freedom to), or as the steadier freedom of being able to choose well – even under pressure (freedom from)?
5. Where do I feel myself forcing outcomes (striving) – and where am I cultivating conditions (training), one small repetition at a time?
6. When I can’t see the far shore, am I willing to take the next right step anyway – the one that reduces harm, increases steadiness, and supports connection?

7. What changes when I shift identity from “I am broken” to “I am learning” – and how does that shift affect my dignity, patience, and courage?
-

Journaling prompts

1. **The trait log:** List three qualities you admire in others (patience, honesty, steadiness, courage and so forth). For each one, write one small, repeatable action you could practise this week to *train it* – something you could do even on a hard day.
 2. **The ‘still point’ in action:** Describe a recent moment when you stayed more balanced than usual in the middle of a conversation, conflict, or stress. What helped you hold that *still point* – and what nearly tipped you over?
 3. **Programme inventory:** Write down the core principles of the programme or path you’re following (Steps, Path Factors, wellbeing commitments, personal values). Then map each one to RAFT: does it help you ‘Recognise’, ‘Abandon’, taste ‘Freedom’, or ‘Train’?
 4. **From state to trait:** Describe a moment of freedom you tasted recently – however brief. What were the conditions that made it possible (sleep, support, honesty, boundaries, meditation, movement)? What one daily practice would most reliably recreate those conditions?
 5. **Operating Manual:** If you were writing a one-page ‘Operating manual for my life’, what would your first three navigation guidelines be? (Keep them simple, kind, and practical – more like helm commands than moral slogans.)
 6. **The crew check-in:** Imagine your inner *crew* this week: energy, confidence, attention, mood, body, motivation. Who’s doing their job? Who’s overworking? Who’s missing at their post? What would help the crew cooperate just a little better tomorrow?
 7. **Vow of practice:** Write a short aspiration for the next seven days – one or two sentences you can live with. Make it weather-proof: something you can keep even when you’re tired, triggered, or unsure. For example: “I will pause when triggered and choose an ‘Appropriate Response’ – as best as I am able”
-

Remember to remember

Gotama's fourth realisation is the map that turns a longing for Freedom into a route you can actually follow. It reminds us that liberation isn't a rare gift granted to the lucky few, but a craft that can be learned, practised, and refined by everyone. By embracing training, the Navigator shifts from simply surviving the storm to learning how to steer in all weathers. The inner posture changes: less "Why is this happening to me?" and more "What's happening here – and what helps?" That is the quiet pivot from being at the mercy of conditions to working skilfully with them. The journey stops being an inspiring idea and becomes a set of steady commitments: how we speak, how we act, how we earn, how we relate, how we attend, how we correct course when we drift.

With the Operating Manual in hand, each moment becomes usable. A rough patch is no longer proof you're failing; it's information – signals about fatigue, stress, loneliness, craving, reactivity, or the stories the mind is rehearsing. Instead of arguing with the weather, we learn the adjustments that keep us on course: simplify, pause, cool, energise, widen, investigate, reconnect. Each return to the principles is a form of strengthening. Each small choice in the direction of harmlessness builds trust, because it shows we can navigate without perfect clarity. In time, training changes what feels possible: the Safe Shore comes closer, not only as a future destination, but as a way of travelling – more often steady, more often kind, more often free.

"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." ~ James Clear

"This teaching and training has one taste: the taste of freedom." ~ Gotama

[RAFT to Freedom](#) © 2025 by Dr Cathryn Jacob and Vince Cullen

is licensed under Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International.



