



54 – The five components of selfing

Consulting the manual – the schematics of the navigator

*‘Form is like a lump of foam, feeling like a water bubble; perception is like a mirage, volitions like a plantain trunk, and consciousness like an illusion.’ ~
Gotama (the Buddha)*

*‘You are not a noun; you are a verb. You are not a thing, but a process.’ ~
Buckminster Fuller*

This is the part of the manual that helps us explore the felt sense of ‘me’ and break it down into workable pieces – so we stop turning passing states into a fixed identity, and start navigating with more freedom.

In this Training stage of our journey, we’re consulting the navigator’s handbook – the section of the workbook we call ‘remember to remember’. Having already surveyed the Five Hazards (hindrances) in Chapters 37–42, we now turn to the lived sense of being the one who steers the raft – ‘me’. The question is simple, and surprisingly practical: how is the feeling of ‘me’ being assembled right now?

Rather than treating the self as a fixed thing, the teachings point to five aspects of experience that, when we grasp them, create the felt sense of ‘I’, ‘mine’, and ‘this is me’. Across all five aspects, clinging shows up in the same move: ‘This is mine.’ ‘This is me.’ ‘This is myself.’

We’re not doing this as abstract philosophy. We’re doing it because compulsive loops depend on a fixed identity story. When experience feels like a fixed person with a fixed problem, the loop tightens. But when we learn to see experience as processes in motion – conditions arising, shifting, and passing – the spell begins to loosen. And in that loosening, choice becomes possible.

The leaky boat metaphor – the economy of the psyche

It can help to picture the habitual sense of self as a leaky boat. Nothing in

experience stays fixed, so the mind keeps trying to construct a solid owner: a stable ‘me’ to hold onto. That ongoing activity of *selfing* is exhausting: identifying with new thoughts, new roles, new worries, new achievements, and new failures, again and again throughout the day. Selfing is the mind’s habit of turning passing experience into a story about who I am. A thought appears, a feeling comes up, something goes well or badly, and the mind quickly turns it into ‘this is me’ or ‘this is mine.’ Instead of letting experience move, we build an identity out of it. Modern neuroscience often links this kind of self-referential storytelling to the brain’s Default Mode Network (DMN), the internal storyteller that replays the past, rehearses the future, and keeps the ‘me-movie’ running whenever we are not anchored in a task.

This chapter explores one way to stop endlessly bailing the leaky boat of self. We are not trying to destroy a human life or erase personality. We are learning to see what the mind is doing, so that we can stop clinging to it as me and mine, and let experience move without turning every wave into an identity. In this view, selfing promises a kind of payoff, a feeling of safety or gratification, and can also function as a recoil strategy against pain: tightening control, shrinking needs, or lashing out to regain a sense of power. We bail the boat of self with a drink, a scroll, or a purchase, just enough to keep these narratives afloat and avoid the sinking feeling of groundlessness.

Safety rail – the four dimensions of self

This chapter invites us into a gentle dismantling of the self. As the Buddhist teacher Akincano Weber points out, the goal is not to ‘kill the self’ or ‘punch a hole in the universe’ – that tends to be painful and can tip into dissociation. It helps to distinguish four dimensions of self:

1. **The ontological self (the soul):** a permanent, unchanging core. Gotama explicitly denied this exists.
2. **The developmental self (self as a skill):** the functional capacity to regulate emotions, make choices, and connect wishes to actions. This is healthy agency, and it is something we cultivate and strengthen on the journey.
3. **The reflexive pronoun:** the ordinary, harmless use of I and me for daily communication and ethical empathy.
4. **Conceit or ego (selfing):** the habitual grasping at experience as me and

mine – the dimension that actually generates suffering.

We are only dismantling the fourth dimension. We keep the skills and the language. We're deconstructing the painful grasping.

What we experience – the five components of selfing

When we pay close attention, experience isn't one solid thing called me. It's a bundle of parts happening together: the body, the raw like or dislike signal, the mind's labelling, the push of habits and urges, and the simple knowing that all of this is occurring. The point of naming these parts isn't to get technical. It's to help us see, in real time, what's actually happening inside a moment of craving, panic, shame, longing, or relief – so we can respond with more freedom and less autopilot.

★ **Form** : Form is the physical side of life: our bodies, other bodies, and the material world. It includes the brain and nervous system, breathing, and the sense organs – eyes (seeing), ears (hearing), nose (smelling), tongue (tasting), skin (touching), and the brain as a sense base (thinking). It's the part of experience made of matter. It gets hungry, tired, tense, and sore. It heals, it changes, and it never stays perfectly stable.

Form also includes how the body behaves and is felt: solidity and cohesion, fluidity, heat, and movement – the elemental qualities we explored in Chapter 12 – as well as the textures we notice directly (heavy, light, tight, airy, dense, spacious). It's important to be clear: this is about detachment from form, not dissociation from the body. Detachment means we stop clutching the body as me or mine – a trophy to perfect or a failure to judge – and we stop fighting its natural processes. Dissociation is a turning away, a numbing out, a leaving. The practice here is the opposite: an honest investigation of our relationship to form and our lived experience of it, so we can inhabit our body more wisely.

As we explored in Chapter 11 (seeing the body clearly), physical life is better understood as a stream of changing conditions (traditionally described as earth, water, fire, and wind). Our bodies will age, sometimes get ill, and eventually wear out and die. Freedom here is straightforward: when we relate to the body as a living process rather than a personal identity project, we can care for it with steadiness – feeding it, resting it,

moving it, and protecting it – without vanity, disgust, or fear of the signs of life. We can think of this as the hull and the hardware of our raft.

★ **Feeling tone** : Feeling tone (Chapter 27) is the instant ‘I like it / I don’t like it / neither’ signal that appears the moment something is experienced. A sound, a thought, a taste, a memory, a look from someone – and immediately the system registers pleasant, unpleasant, or neither. This happens before we’ve even had time to think. It’s raw data before the story begins: the nervous system tagging experience as safe or not safe, good for me or not good for me. These signals are not a personal verdict. They are simply what nervous systems do.

And we can’t possibly track every shade of tonality all day long. The training isn’t to become hypervigilant. It’s to become attuned to the stronger tones – the ones that hook us. This is where many cravings begin: pleasant tone gets chased, unpleasant tone gets resisted, and neutral tone gets ignored as ‘boring’, which can trigger the hunt for something stronger. The twist is that the tone isn’t ‘in the object’ like a fixed property – it’s in our system’s response.

Then the mind turns tone into identity: ‘this is boring’ becomes ‘I am boring’, ‘this is painful’ becomes ‘I will always feel this pain’, ‘I feel angry’ becomes ‘I am an angry person’. Feeling tone colours mood, mood shapes perception, and perception drives action. The practice is to recognise feeling tone as information, not an instruction – and to notice how selfing forms around grasping and aversion, so we can steer away before the story solidifies. We can think of this as the compass needle or the swell of our raft.

★ **Perception – how the mind makes things seem solid**: Perception is how the mind makes sense of experience. It’s the function of recognising, identifying, and labelling: the mind sees a shape and tags it – ‘bottle’, ‘threat’, ‘opportunity’, ‘criticism’, ‘failure’. It links what’s happening now with past memories so we can orient quickly. This is not a flaw. It’s a core survival feature. The mind is a meaning-making system, and perception is one of the main ways meaning is formed – about the world, about other people, and about ourselves. Even self is, in this sense, a perception: a label the mind applies to a stream of changing experience.

But perception is never neutral. It's shaped by what has primed us: biology and temperament, personal history, trauma and learning, culture, family, and social messages. That means perception can be accurate and helpful – and it can also become skewed, especially under stress or in craving and aversion loops. When craving and aversion are active, perception can mislabel a destructive habit as 'relief', or ordinary discomfort as 'unbearable'. Once a label lands – 'relief', 'threat', 'rejection', 'not enough' – a whole story can arrive behind it, and the body starts responding as if the story is reality. Then we cling to the perception and start trying to fix what we think we see: fixing ourselves, fixing others, controlling the moment.

One way to describe this is that the mind keeps turning fluid experience into solid 'things' – changing a verb into a noun. Akincano explains that this often happens through three patterns:

- **Attentional patterns:** attention locks onto a feature and forgets the connected flow.
- **Perceptual patterns:** the mind packages sense data, pastes a static label on it, and treats the label as reality.
- **Linguistic patterns:** language nudges us into nouns and fixed identities, as if shifting conditions were stable objects.

Training here means learning to notice labels as labels: quick, efficient, sometimes accurate, sometimes distorted. We don't have to argue with them, and we don't have to obey the first interpretation that appears. When we can hold perception lightly, we regain a little space – enough to check, widen the view, and choose a wiser next step. We can think of this as the navigational markers on our journey.

★ **Impulses and urges:** Impulses and urges (traditionally called mental formations) are the 'do something' energy that follows feeling tone and perception. First there is contact, then a tone (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral), then a label ('relief', 'threat', 'rejection'), and then the mind starts to proliferate – building a story around the label. Out of that story comes volition: an impulse, an urge, a push.

Like perception, these responses are conditioned. They are shaped by biology, learning, trauma, culture, and repetition – which is why the same situations tend to produce the same urges, and why old habit loops can

feel so automatic. But urges are not commands. They are movements in the system – learned, primed, and often loud – and they can be trained. The key skill is recognising the urge as a conditioned response rather than an instruction, and then choosing what we feed. In the space between urge and action we get a real question: am I going to act in a harmful way, or in a wholesome way? We don't need to eliminate inclinations to be free. We need to learn how to meet them, hold them, and steer – so the same energy that once drove compulsion becomes fuel for wise action. We can think of this as the tide of habit and the act of bailing out our raft.

★ **Consciousness:** Consciousness is the basic knowing of what's present – knowing sensations in the body, knowing feeling tone, knowing the label, knowing the urge. Any conscious experience arises through the six sense doors: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking (Chapter 55). We are always conscious of something. It's the ongoing event of experiencing, moment by moment, refreshing with each new contact: a sound, a thought, an itch, a memory. It isn't a separate 'true self' hiding behind everything. It's simply the fact that experience is being known.

This is also another place where clinging can quietly build a sense of self. We can cling to consciousness as a continuous stream – past, present, future – and turn it into a story of 'me becoming', a perpetual selfing. Or we can cling to subtler identities: 'I am the thinker', 'I am the watcher', 'I am awareness', 'I am the wise one who understands all this'. In practice, it helps to ask: 'what am I sticking to here?' 'What am I invested in?' Often the self isn't in the raw knowing, but in the claim that forms around it. Wisdom and consciousness work together: we know through understanding, and understand through knowing – awareness and understanding shape each other.

There's a big difference between 'wisdom knows this' and 'I am a very wise person'. The first loosens suffering. The second can inflate a new identity.

So the practice isn't to get rid of the sense of self. It's the slower, kinder work of noticing where selfing creates tightening and pain – and releasing the clinging that causes it. As that clinging softens, the sense of self becomes lighter and more flexible, and we can meet experience with more compassion and clarity. Instead of 'Who is asking?' we start to notice

‘What is asking?’ – what mind-state is present right now: generosity, kindness, steadiness, irritation, fear, anger. Then, rather than ‘I am anxious’, it becomes ‘anxiety is present.’ Not to detach from life, but to make space – enough space for choice, care, and change. We can think of this as the clear water or the lighthouse beam on our journey.

Why deconstructing the self is helpful

Consulting the instruction manual of the five components of selfing is a cornerstone practice for the Training stage because it shows us what the mind forgets in the middle of a spiral: the self we feel so strongly is not a solid owner. It’s a construction in motion – assembled moment by moment from body sensation, feeling tone, labels, urges, and simple knowing. Deconstructing the self is helpful because compulsive loops depend on a fixed identity: ‘this is me’, ‘this is mine’, ‘I must obey this’. When we can see the moving parts, the spell weakens. The experience is still real – but it stops being a verdict about who we are.

When we learn to see form, feeling tone, perception, impulses and urges, and consciousness as changing and conditioned, clinging starts to lose its justification. This insight into the Buddhist concept of ‘not-self’ is profoundly liberating: it means that what we experience is happening; but we know that the experience is not who we are. It loosens shame, reduces the sense of personal defect, and opens a small but crucial gap between impulse and response. It frees us from fixed, painful labels while keeping responsibility intact: we can acknowledge what’s happening, choose what helps next, and repair what needs repairing without carrying a permanent label. Seeing ‘not-self’ doesn’t make us indifferent; it makes us steadier and kinder – because we’re no longer defending an identity – we’re responding to life.

How to practise – the disassembly line

When self-identity tightens, it rarely arrives as a big philosophical claim. It shows up as a few quiet assumptions that feel like facts:

‘This is me.’

‘This is mine.’

‘I must obey this.’

‘If this feeling is here, it means something about who I am.’

Rather than arguing with those assumptions, it can help to look more closely at what's actually happening in the moment. A few simple checks are often enough to loosen the spell.

★ **The control test – the direct check**

If something is genuinely self, it can feel like it should be steerable on demand. But we can't issue reliable internal commands like 'Let my body not age', 'Let my mind never feel anxious', or 'Let craving never arise again'. So when a craving, mood, or painful sensation appears, it can help to ask:

- 'Did I choose this, right now?'
- 'Can I make it stop instantly – just because I say so?'
- 'Can I make it stay – just because I want it to?'

If the honest answer is 'no', the point isn't to collapse. It's to notice something relieving: this is a process, not a possession. It's shaped by causes and conditions – sleep, stress, memory, hormones, contact, habit – not by a little owner inside. That insight is often the first crack in the identity spell. And there's an important nuance: not being able to command something instantly doesn't mean we can't influence it over time. It just means it isn't an obedient self. It's a living system.

★ **The three checks – is it stable, is it reliable, is it 'me' or 'mine'?**

This follows a simple arc. First we notice that what's here is moving. Then we notice that gripping what moves creates strain. And from there it becomes easier to see that a shifting event isn't a great place to build an identity. When a strong moment lands – craving, anxiety, shame, anger – we can listen in close, like a mechanic listening to an engine, and run it through three checks:

- **Is it stable?** Bring attention into the raw data. Is it fixed and solid, or shifting – pulsing, tightening, loosening, moving around the body, rising and falling in intensity? Don't rely on the label ('anxiety', 'craving'). Look at what it's doing.
Often what we find is simple: it's moving.
- **Is it reliable?** Notice what happens when the mind grips it – tries to control it, push it away, chase it, or make it mean something about us. Do we soften, or tighten? Do we settle, or strain?
Often what we find is equally simple: clinging makes it stressful.
- **Is it 'me' or 'mine'?** If this is shifting, stressful when clung to, and

not commandable on demand, is it really a sensible candidate for ‘this is mine’, ‘this is who I am’, ‘this is my self’?

Often something becomes clear without forcing it: this may be intensely present – but it isn’t who we are. It’s an event moving through.

★ **The refrain – a simple reset.**

Once the owner-assumption is spotted, it can help to use a short refrain – not as a chant to hypnotise ourselves – but as a reset when the mind tries to glue identity onto a passing event:

- ‘Not mine’ – this isn’t property, it’s a condition arising.
- ‘Not me’ – this isn’t identity, it’s a moment.
- ‘Not myself’ – this isn’t an inner essence, it’s a process.

This is especially helpful when the mind does its favourite slide: ‘Because this is here, it means I am... therefore I must...’ The refrain breaks that chain. It turns identity back into information: a feeling is here; a thought is here; an urge is here. And once it’s ‘a thing happening’ rather than ‘who I am’, we can respond more wisely.

★ **Component spotting – daily life practice**

This is the practice in the wild. We’re not aiming for perfect categorisation. We’re training a single move: from a fixed story to workable parts – from ‘everything is me’ to ‘this is what’s happening’. Pick a moment – ideally a mildly tricky one – and sort it lightly:

- **Form:** warmth on the face, tightness in the chest, buzzing in the hands
- **Feeling tone:** the instant ‘ugh / ahh / meh’
- **Perception (labelling):** ‘this is dangerous’, ‘this is relief’, ‘this means I’m failing’
- **Impulses and urges:** the push – ‘do it now’, ‘escape’, ‘justify’, ‘numb’, ‘prove’, ‘attack’
- **Consciousness (knowing):** the simple fact of knowing any of the above is happening.

Two small tips make this work. Start with the body – it’s harder to argue with heat, pressure, vibration, and movement than with the mind’s dramatic headlines. And keep it short. Even 10 seconds is

enough. The point isn't to dissect the whole day – it's to puncture the trance once, then take the next sane step.

★ **Normalising lingering ego – the metaphors of Khemaka**

As we practise this, we may notice that even when we understand we are not our cravings, a subtle feeling of 'I am' still lingers. This is entirely normal. The monk Khemaka used two metaphors for that lingering sense of self.

- **The scent of the flower:** we know the scent belongs to the flower, but it's hard to separate the fragrance from the bloom.
- **The laundered cloth:** even after a cloth is washed, a faint smell of soap remains until it is aired out.

Deconstructing the self is a gradual airing out. We're not trying to force the feeling of 'I' to vanish. We're learning to recognise selfing as a conditioned activity – and to stop feeding it. Over time, the grip softens.

One safety rail – this is not dissociation, it's de-fusion : This isn't about becoming numb, blank, spaced-out, or 'above it all'. It's about not merging with passing events. The aim is more intimacy with what's true, with less automatic obedience. So if the practice starts to feel cold, floaty, unreal, or distant, we return to basics: feel the feet on the floor; take one full in-breath and one full out-breath; name what's here in ordinary language – 'tightness... unpleasant... wanting... worry'. Then we do the next small, decent thing: drink water, stand up, step outside, message someone, return to the task. That's the balance – clear seeing without tuning out.

Self-reflections

1. When a strong moment hits (craving, shame, panic, anger), can I name what's actually here – body sensation, feeling tone, label, urge, and the simple knowing of it – and what story is being added on top?
2. What is the main label running right now (for example, 'danger', 'relief', 'failure', 'not enough', 'connection'), and what changes if I treat it as a label rather than a fact?
3. If I do the control test right now – 'Did I choose this, and can I command it to stop instantly?' – what happens to blame, shame, or the sense of personal defect?

4. If I run this experience through the three checks (is it stable, is it reliable when clung to, is it 'me' or 'mine'), what becomes obvious that wasn't obvious five minutes ago?
5. What would it be like to apply the refrain gently – 'not mine, not me, not my self' – and then take one small, decent action anyway?
6. Where did the 'me-movie' get loud today (replaying the past, rehearsing the future, narrating a verdict about 'me'), and what helped the return to direct experience?
7. When I practise 'not-self', do I feel clearer and more able to respond with care – or do I start to feel cold, floaty, or unreal? What grounding step brings me back (feet, breath, naming what's here, next sane thing)?

Journaling prompts

1. **Deconstructing the urge:** Choose a recent craving or desire and take it apart into the five components. What was happening in the body (form)? What was the pleasant/unpleasant/neutral tone (feeling tone)? What label got stamped on it (perception)? What urges or justifications appeared (inclinations)? What was it like to simply know all of this (consciousness)?
2. **The control experiment:** Record one moment today when the body or mind did something you didn't ask for (tiredness, anxiety, irritation, distraction). Describe what happened, then write three lines: 'I did not order this.' 'This is not my servant.' 'This is not me.'
3. **The freedom of zero:** Describe a moment recently when you 'forgot yourself' – absorbed in something simple (walking, making tea, gardening, helping someone, music). What was different? Did the absence of 'me' feel unsettling, neutral, or quietly freeing?
4. **The ship of Theseus:** Write about how you've changed over time. Compare 'me ten years ago' with 'me now', what has been replaced – body, moods, beliefs, habits, preferences, fears? What, if anything, stays consistent, and what does that suggest about a fixed self?
5. **Perception audit:** List three labels you regularly apply to yourself (for example, 'too much', 'not enough', 'lazy', 'broken', 'successful'). For each: 'When did I learn it?', 'What does it make me do?', and 'What would be a more accurate, kinder re-label for today?'
6. **Weather and sky:** Describe a difficult moment as weather passing through (sensations, tones, thoughts, urges). Then describe what it's like to be the simple knowing of it – not as a special 'true self', but as the capacity to

notice without being swallowed.

7. **The ‘not mine’ log:** Write three things you usually claim as ‘mine’ (my anxiety, my past, my body, my craving, my reputation). Next to each, describe it as a process with causes and conditions – changing, influenced, and not fully controllable – and finish with: ‘This is happening, but it is not who I am.’

Supporting material – scientific and philosophical perspectives

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of the five components of selfing, the following overview highlights some key connections.

★ **Neuroscience:** Neuroscience often describes the ‘self’ less as a little person inside the head and more as a set of brain processes that keep generating an inner narrative: remembering, imagining, evaluating, rehearsing. One network repeatedly linked with this kind of internal mentation is the Default Mode Network (DMN), which is often active when attention turns inward – towards autobiographical memory, self-referential thought, and imagining the future.

From a practice point of view, this matters because rumination and craving both thrive on an endlessly running ‘me’ commentary. Brain-imaging studies and reviews often report that meditation is associated with reduced DMN activity during meditation, and that experienced meditators show differences in DMN connectivity consistent with less mind-wandering. This isn’t a magic switch and it isn’t identical for everyone – but it offers one scientific framing for why coming back to direct experience can weaken the grip of self-story.

A second science model comes from Lisa Feldman Barrett’s theory of constructed emotion. In this view, the brain is an active prediction system: it uses past learning to interpret body signals and sensory input, constructing a best-guess experience of what’s happening and what it means. Understanding this helps in practice: when the mind says ‘danger’ or ‘I need relief’, we can treat that as a prediction – sometimes useful, sometimes outdated – rather than a command we must obey *now*.

★ **Psychology:** In modern psychology terms, the skill being trained here is defusion: noticing thoughts, labels, and urges as events in the mind rather than as facts that must be followed. In ACT, this is called cognitive defusion, and it is supported by self-as-context – the observing stance

that can notice experience without being defined by it. In practice, that's exactly what the components method does: instead of 'I am anxious' or 'I am failing', we learn to recognise pressure in the chest, unpleasant feeling tone, a label ('danger'), an urge ('escape'), and the simple knowing of it. Once we can see the parts, the story loosens, because we're no longer fused with the conclusion the mind is trying to sell us.

More 'logical' therapies make a similar move with different tools. CBT uses cognitive restructuring: identifying an upsetting thought, checking it for accuracy and usefulness, and developing a more balanced alternative. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) expresses the same principle through Ellis's ABC model: it's not only the activating event (A) that drives how we feel and act (C), but the belief or interpretation (B) we bring to it – and those beliefs can be questioned and revised. This fits neatly with perception audit and label spotting: we catch the belief ('this is intolerable', 'I must have relief', 'this proves I'm hopeless'), challenge it, and choose a response that is steadier and kinder.

★ **Philosophy:** When philosophers look for a solid 'self', a surprising number report finding process rather than owner. David Hume, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, historian, and essayist, famously said that when he looked inward he never caught a self, only a passing perception – heat, cold, love, hatred, pain, pleasure – a stream with no separate controller behind it. Ancient thinkers pushed in a similar direction: Heraclitus used the river image to show how things persist as patterns while contents keep changing – you can return, but not to the same waters. Taken together, these views suggest that what we call 'me' may be less like a fixed core and more like continuously updating bundles or processes.

Modern philosophy restates this in contemporary terms. Derek Parfit argues that what matters over time isn't a further 'ego fact', but psychological continuity and connectedness – overlapping chains of mental and bodily events. Daniel Dennett describes the self as a 'center of narrative gravity': a useful organising story rather than an inner object. Thomas Metzinger goes further, arguing that the 'self' is a transparent model we look through, not a thing we can find. The practical implication is hopeful: if 'the identity label' isn't an essence at the centre of us, but a pattern in a bundle of habits, interpretations, and urges, then it isn't a life sentence – it's something that can be understood, loosened, and retrained.

Remember to remember

Consulting the instruction manual about the five components of selfing is a cornerstone practice for the Training stage because it shows us, again and again, what the mind keeps forgetting: the ‘self’ we feel so strongly is not a solid owner at the centre of experience. It’s an activity – assembled moment by moment from what the body is doing, what the system registers as pleasant or unpleasant, what the mind labels, what the habit-energy pushes towards, and the simple knowing of all of this. When we look closely, we don’t find a fixed ‘me’ in charge; we find a living process unfolding according to causes and conditions. And that matters, because compulsion feeds on solidity: it needs the sense that ‘this is who I am’ and ‘this is what I must do’ to keep the loop running.

When we learn to see these components as changing and conditioned, selfing starts to lose its justification. This is the practical meaning of ‘not-self’: not a bleak idea, but a release from the extra suffering created by a fixed identity. It loosens labels like ‘the victim’ or ‘the failure’ without erasing responsibility; we can still own our actions, repair what needs repairing, and choose the next right step – we just don’t have to wear a permanent verdict while we do it. In RAFT terms, this is what helps the navigator steer wisely: we begin to respond to what’s actually happening, rather than protecting a story of who we are. And far from making us indifferent, this freedom makes care easier – because we’re no longer defending an identity; we’re simply meeting life with steadiness, honesty, and kindness.

‘It is remarkable how liberating it feels... to see that your thoughts are just thoughts and that they are not ‘you’ or ‘reality’.’ ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

‘Neuroscientists like to say that your day-to-day experience is a carefully controlled hallucination, constrained by the world and your body but ultimately constructed by your brain.’ ~ Lisa Feldman Barrett

Sutta references

★ **Anattalakkhaṇa sutta (sn 22.59) – the characteristic of not-self**

- Summary: The Buddha analyses each of the five aggregates using the sequence: ‘Is this permanent or impermanent?’ (impermanent). ‘Is what is impermanent pleasant or painful?’ (painful). ‘Is it fit to be regarded as ‘This is mine, this is I, this is my self’?’ (no). This analysis

leads to liberation.

★ **Pheṇapiṇḍūpama sutta (sn 22.95) – the lump of foam**

- Summary: Provides classic similes for the aggregates (form = foam; feeling = bubble; perception = mirage; formations = plantain trunk; consciousness = illusion) to illustrate their lack of solidity. It encourages careful inspection to see their hollow nature.

★ **Ambalaṭṭhika-rāhulovāda sutta (MN 61) – developmental self (self as skill)**

- Summary: Gotama teaches Rāhula reflection before, during, and after action, showing the training builds ethical competence and functional agency.

★ **Arahanta sutta (SN 1.25) – reflexive pronoun**

- Summary: An awakened person may still use ‘I’ and ‘mine’ as conventional speech (vohāra) without underlying conceit.

★ **Khemaka sutta (SN 22.89) – normalising lingering ego**

- Summary: Source for Khemaka’s metaphors of the laundered cloth and the scent of the flower.

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

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

