



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.

57 – Skilful Perspective: reading reality's currents

The first factor of the Middle Way programme

The lens that steadies the helm

"I believe if you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." ~ Wayne Dyer

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." ~ Philip K. Dick

In this Training stage of our journey, we begin our active practice of our 'RAFT Middle Way Programme' with the first factor: Skilful Perspective (traditionally Right View or Appropriate View). Skilful Perspective means learning to see our situation more accurately – so that we can respond wisely instead of reacting automatically. Before we can change the direction of our raft, we need to understand what's happening, what's driving it, and what reliably helps.

In the grip of compulsion, we often suffer from what we might call existential dissonance – the strain that arises when our inner map clashes with reality. An inner map might insist, 'I need this substance to be happy,' or 'I shouldn't have to feel this pain,' while life keeps showing us, 'This is causing harm,' and 'Everything changes, including this pain.' Our exhaustion comes not only from the facts themselves, but from our constant fight with them. Skilful Perspective is the decision to stop fighting against reality and to start working with it – aligning the

mind with the basic pattern of things (the Dhamma), so that our choices become more skilful and less self-defeating.

Skilful perspective has three parts, and we need all three:

1. **Responsibility: actions have consequences:**
 2. **Pattern: conditions shape experience:**
 3. **Freedom: suffering can ease:A secular dharma perspective**
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Self-reflections

1. Where do I currently feel a conflict between what I *want* reality to be and what it *actually is*? (cognitive dissonance)
 2. How does the view 'I am the owner of my actions' differ from 'I am to blame for everything'? (responsibility versus shame).
 3. When I look at my journey of cultivation, do I see it as a ladder I must climb perfectly, or a landscape I must navigate wisely?
 4. Can I recall a time when changing my perspective on a situation immediately changed my suffering, even though the situation itself didn't change?
 5. How does understanding the basic pattern of impermanence help me ride out an urge?
 6. Do I hold any fixed views about myself (for example, 'I am a hopeless case') that contradict the truth of everything changes, including me?
 7. How does Skilful Perspective act as the forerunner for the rest of the programme? (For example, can I have Skilful Effort if my view is distorted?)
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Journaling prompts

1. **From verdict to condition:** Describe a recent mistake. First, write the 'verdict' your inner critic gave (for example, 'You're stupid'). Then, rewrite it using Skilful Perspective, listing the specific conditions that led to the mistake.

2. **The karma log:** Trace a positive outcome you are experiencing now back to a specific skilful choice you made in the past. Validate your power to shape your life.
3. **Map correction:** Identify one belief you used to hold that led you onto the rocks (for example, 'Intoxication makes me charming'). Write down the updated chart reflecting the reality of that belief (for example, 'Intoxication makes me confused and regretful').
4. **The view of others:** Think of a difficult person. Try to view them not as a villain, but as a being subject to causes, conditions, and their own suffering. How does this shift your feelings?
5. **The four realities re-write:** Choose one current difficulty and describe it through the four realities: What is the stress? What is feeding it? What would easing look like? What small, skilful step points in that direction?
6. **Spectrum check:** Where am I on the spectrum between 'nothing matters' (nihilism) and 'everything is fixed' (eternalism)? How does Gotama's Middle Way find a footing between them?
7. **Message from the navigator:** Write a letter from your inner navigator to your crew, explaining why following the basic pattern of things is safer than following impulses.

Remember to remember

Skilful Perspective comes first in the Middle Way Programme because we cannot steer wisely while misreading the sea. It is the simple but powerful recognition that much of our suffering is intensified by friction with reality: our insistence that life should be different, our demand that discomfort should not be here, our belief that craving will save us, or our fear that a painful mood defines who we are. When perspective becomes more realistic, the whole system steadies. We stop feeding stories that intensify pain, and we start recognising the conditions that can reduce it.

Remember: we do not have to like the map, but we do have to read it honestly. The map says that everything changes, that actions have consequences, that craving adds suffering, and that freedom becomes possible when we stop feeding the causes of distress. So when we feel pulled into certainty, despair, or

old reactions, we return to conditions. We name what is present, take one breath, and ask: ‘What is feeding this? What can I influence today?’ Then we do the next small, skilful thing – because direction is built from the next honest adjustment, not from perfect certainty.

“We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.” ~ Anaïs Nin

“Dharma is something to do, not merely something to believe.” ~ Stephen Batchelor

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