



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.

58 – Skilful Intention: setting the rudder straight

The mind's direction of travel

Aligning intention with perspective

“Whatever a person frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of the mind.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha)

“Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world; by non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an ancient and eternal law.” ~ Gotama

In this Training stage of our journey, we move from understanding where we are (Skilful Perspective) to actively steering the vessel. The second factor of the Middle Way Programme is ‘Skilful intention’ (also translated as Right Resolve, Right Thought, or Right Motivation). In plain language, it’s the direction we choose to live from, not just the situation we find ourselves in.

Skilful Perspective helps us see the landscape – what’s happening, what’s driving it, what’s likely to help. Skilful Intention sets the course ahead. In the RAFT metaphor, perspective is the chart-reading and intention is the rudder: a deliberate choice in direction that shapes how we respond when pressure hits. It’s not random mental chatter or a passing mood. It’s the quieter, steadier ‘lean’ we rehearse again and again until it becomes the mind’s default way of moving.

Skilful Intention is not the same as a mood, an impulse, or a passing wish. A mood arrives through conditions; an impulse pulls; a wish imagines a result.

Intention is different: it is the direction we choose to nourish. It is the quiet leaning of the heart before speech, action, and livelihood take shape. We may not choose every thought that appears on deck, but we can choose which ones we keep feeding, rehearsing, and steering by.

In practice, Skilful Intention shows up as three distinct rudder settings. These are not passive states we wait for, but directions we deliberately rehearse to counter compulsive pull. Each setting keeps us oriented when the weather changes.

1. **Abandoning:** We practise the intention to let go, simplify, and release what feeds craving.
2. **Goodwill:** We practise friendliness and non-ill-will – toward others and toward ourselves.
3. **Harmlessness:** We practise compassion and non-cruelty.

Self-reflections

1. When I'm under pressure, what direction does my mind naturally pull toward – letting go, getting angry, or trying to control?
2. In the last 24 hours, where did I say 'yes' to something that didn't really help me – and what would a kind 'no' have looked like?
3. What's one situation where I usually react fast (texting back, snapping, scrolling, numbing, withdrawing)? What intention do I want to bring there instead?
4. Which is hardest for me right now: letting go (abandoning), staying friendly (goodwill), or doing no harm (harmlessness)?
5. When I'm tired, hungry, lonely, or stressed, what changes in my intentions – and what support do I need before I make decisions?
6. If I could rewind one moment from this week, what intention would I choose the second time around?
7. What one short phrase would help me steer today (for example, 'simplify,' 'stay kind,' 'do no harm')?

Journaling prompts

1. **Intention-to-action diary:** Each morning, choose one simple intention (for example, ‘Today I steer by Goodwill’). In the evening, write about the moment you enacted it – what happened, what you wanted to do, what you did instead, and how it changed the next few minutes.
2. **The rudder log:** Identify three moments of drift today – toward craving, anger, avoidance, or numbing. For each: trigger + body signal + story. Then note how you steered back (even slightly). If you didn’t, write what happened next – no blame, just data.
3. **Imagining freedom:** Write a five-minute scene of a future moment where you stay free, clear, or calm. Include a few details (place, sounds, body feeling, thoughts) and end with: ‘The key move was...’
4. **Cultivating the opposite:** Pick one recurring negative loop (resentment, self-attack and so forth). Name it. Then write a short paragraph of the opposite intention (goodwill, patience, care). Note any resistance and any small softening.
5. **The renunciation list:** List three things to let go of today – one habit, one object, and one story. Next to each, write what you’re saying ‘yes’ to (peace, time, dignity). Notice how it feels to name it.
6. **The harmlessness audit:** Review one interaction. Was there a hidden urge to win, punish, or prove a point? Then write one alternative you’d like to practise next time: a sentence, a pause, or a boundary that reduces harm.
7. **Letter to the rudder:** Write a short letter to your own capacity to steer. ‘Dear Intention...’ Finish: ‘When I’m pulled toward ____, remind me to ____.’ Close with one promise you can keep for the next 24 hours.

“I will not suffer for my preferences.” ~ Vince Cullen

Remember to remember

Skilful intention is what links understanding to behaviour – it’s where the map

becomes movement. We can know what's true about craving and consequences, and still get pulled off course in the moment. Intention is the small but powerful act of setting a direction before we act: letting go rather than grasping, softening rather than hardening, protecting rather than harming. Over time, what we repeatedly think and rehearse becomes the mind's default lean. If we keep replaying resentment, the mind starts to expect conflict and steer toward it. If we repeatedly rehearse goodwill, the mind learns a different route – one that creates fewer aftershocks and more steadiness.

Remember, too, that intention isn't only something we have; it's something we can shape. One of the most practical ways is to imagine the next step – to picture the wiser move for a second before we make it. That brief pause creates choice: we notice the pull, we check the direction, and we imagine the path of harmlessness (or abandoning or goodwill) long enough for it to become reachable. Then we take one small step that matches it. Each time we do that, we're not just avoiding a mistake; we're training the rudder to set itself more naturally the next time the weather turns.

And when the rudder slips, the voyage is not over. We return. We do not need a perfect mind before we can practice; practice is how the mind is gradually trained. Each return matters: from grasping to release, from resentment to goodwill, from carelessness to carefulness. This is how Skilful Intention becomes embodied – not as a slogan, but as a direction we trust because we have practised steering by it.

“What you can do, or dream you can, begin it; boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.” ~ John Anster, after Goethe's Faust

“We learn to apply and reapply, moment to moment, with an effort that is calm and caring.” ~ Christina Feldman

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