



66 – Conclusion: Living skilfully on the Safe Shore

Putting down our raft – from surviving to thriving

“The whole of this spiritual life, Ānanda, consists of good friendship, good companionship, and good comradeship.” ~ Gotama (the Buddha)

“I have shown you the Dhamma ... as being like a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto.” ~ Gotama

Our journey completed

We have now reached the end of our shared crossing through the RAFT to Freedom workbook. Together, we have drawn upon the enduring wisdom of early Buddhist psychology, enriched by insights from modern neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy. With these tools, we navigated from the Dangerous Shore – the shore of compulsion, reactivity, shame, and despair – toward the Safe Shore of steadiness, clarity, and a deepening sense of well-being.

Before we step ashore, it may help to pause and take in the ground we have covered. It is worth turning to look at the wake behind us. The journey unfolded through the four movements of the RAFT, mirroring Gotama’s four realisations.

We began with ‘Recognise’. In Chapters 01–21, we faced directly the pain, difficulties, and disappointments woven into every human life. We surveyed the terrain of the Dangerous Shore, grounded ourselves in the ethical generosity of the Five Gifts, and acknowledged the biological reality of our impulses without shame. We set our direction through the ‘Four Resolves’ and reconnected with our inner capacities through the ‘Four Creative Powers’. We learned a foundational truth: we cannot leave a shore we refuse to recognise.

We then moved into ‘Abandon’. In Chapters 22–33, we engaged the engine of the Five Defenders. Using confidence, courageous effort, healing mindfulness, a gathered mind and discernment, we bailed the water of craving and loosened the cargo of ill-will. We discovered that abandoning is not deprivation, but the relief of setting down what we no longer need to carry.

From there, we entered ‘Feel’. In Chapters 34–50, we learned to recognise the Five Hazards – and, just as importantly, to notice when they were absent and the coast was clear. We raised the sails of the Seven Supports and became familiar with moments of cessation – the quiet absence of craving, aversion, and confusion. We discovered that peace is not simply the absence of turbulence, but the living presence of liberating mindfulness, penetrating inquiry, enthusiasm, energising joy, deep calm, a unified mind, and balanced equanimity.

Finally, in the ‘Training stage’, we opened the Operating Manual of Gotama’s Middle Way Programme. We trained in skilful perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, application, mindfulness, and collectedness. The captain learned to remember. The navigator learned to read conditions. The crew learned to work as one. The vessel became seaworthy in real weather.

This workbook has offered maps, tools, practices, and companions for the crossing. But the crossing itself has always been yours. Every recognition, every restraint, every pause, every repair, every return to the next skilful step – these are not ideas on a page. They are the evidence of freedom becoming embodied.

The parable of the raft – leaving the burden behind

Now, as the keel touches the sand of the Safe Shore, we encounter the final and most subtle challenge:

Putting down the raft.

In Gotama’s talk on the Simile of the Raft, he describes a man who builds a raft to leave a dangerous shore. Through effort and ingenuity, the man reaches the safety of the far shore. Once there, he reflects, ‘This raft has served me well. Perhaps I should lift it onto my head and carry it with me wherever I go.’ Gotama asks: ‘Would this be wise? Of course not. The raft is for crossing over, not for clinging to.’

In our journey, the raft is the framework of practice itself – the workbook, the language, the structures, even the identity of being someone who is ‘working on themselves.’ At first, we needed the planks, the engine, the compass. We needed to train deliberately. But there comes a point when the qualities of mindfulness, patience, ethics, discernment, and composure are no longer external supports. They have become embodied.

We no longer need to carry the identities of ‘the struggler’ or ‘the broken one’ as our deepest names, or to see ourselves only through the lens of what we have had to heal from. These identities may have helped us make sense of the crossing, but they are not the whole of who we are. The crossing has done its work when the principles no longer feel like instructions imposed from outside, but capacities arising from within. We move from trying to get better to living with greater honesty, steadiness, kindness, and care.

We lay the raft down and we walk.

Living the path – the Safe Shore is shared ground

Liberation is not a static endpoint. The Safe Shore is not a place where storms never arise; it is a place where we no longer drown in them. Life will still bring loss, uncertainty, conflict, illness, disappointment, and change. Old currents may still pull. Old habits may still whisper. But something fundamental has shifted: we now know how to pause, how to steady, how to ask what is skilful, and how to begin again without turning a stumble into a verdict.

- ★ We continue cultivating wisdom and discernment – deepening understanding through reflection and experience. Ignorance, confusion and delusion may still arise, but we recognise them as part of an old map that no longer applies. We see them sooner. We are less ruled by them.
- ★ We continue practising ethical conduct – living with integrity, guided by harmlessness, honesty, and responsibility. Ethics is not moral perfection. It is the protection of peace. It keeps the hull of our life watertight and our relationships steady.
- ★ We continue developing mental discipline – maintaining the clarity and resilience of the mind. We apply effort consistently, but without harshness. Practice becomes a refuge rather than an obligation; a steady pleasure rather than a burden.

The Safe Shore is not a destination that we arrive at with a finish line. It’s not a place at all, it is an embodied way of being: a felt sense of ease, steadiness and perspective; a conscious recognition of the absence of craving, aversion and confusion. It is not a milestone to be reached. It’s a way of meeting experience as it is happening in each moment. We learn to recognise this place within ourselves, to dwell there when we can, and to return to it more readily when strong currents have carried us off course. In this sense, the Safe Shore

becomes a refuge: not perfection, but freedom available again and again in ordinary everyday life.

Crucially, we do not walk this shore alone. Good friendship sustains the crossing and stabilises the vessel. Wise companions remind us of what matters when we forget. Shared practice deepens resilience. The Safe Shore is a shared destination.

Connect with community (*Sangha*).

Having stabilised our own footing, we are now able to become stable ground for others. Safety is no longer something we are desperately seeking; it is something we can help generate. We know what it is to be in the flood. We know what it is to build a raft. That lived understanding becomes quiet authority.

The ultimate fruit of the RAFT to Freedom workbook is not only personal relief. It is the capacity to be a wise friend, a steady companion, or simply a kind presence to those still navigating turbulent waters. Sometimes this means offering guidance. Sometimes it means listening without judgement. Sometimes it means embodying calm when others feel overwhelmed. Community is not an optional extra; it is how the crossing continues beyond us.

When one raft reaches the shore, it becomes a landmark for others. When one person steadies, the waters around them steady too. In this way, freedom matures into generosity. The Safe Shore expands.

Self-reflections – looking forward

1. Am I ready, even tentatively, to loosen the identity of ‘the one who is surviving’ and begin to inhabit the identity of ‘one who is thriving’?
2. Which elements of the RAFT to freedom programme have become embodied habits – so natural that they arise without conscious effort?
3. When I look back at the dangerous shore, can I do so without aversion – perhaps even recognising the lessons it revealed?
4. Now that more energy is available, what creative, relational, or service-oriented impulse begins to surface?
5. How will I continue to inspect the hull of my ethics and recalibrate the compass of my perspective, even when there is no immediate crisis?
6. Who journeys beside me on this safe shore, and what intentional steps can I take to deepen those connections?

7. When I find myself back in rough water, do I now have the appropriate skills within me – can I find my way back to the safe shore?

Journaling prompts – continuing the voyage

1. **The vision of arriving:** Imagine your life one year from now, as you move from merely surviving towards thriving. Picture yourself living more steadily on the safe shore. What does an ordinary day look and feel like? What has become possible again – in your relationships, your interests, your work, your creativity, or your capacity for joy?
2. **The gratitude inventory:** List five specific tools, insights, or turning points from this workbook that steadied you when the waters were rough. Write a brief note of appreciation to each one. What changed because you practised it?
3. **Leaving the identity:** Reflect on the phrase: ‘I am no longer defined by my past struggles; I am defined by my present capacity for care.’ What resistance arises? What relief?
4. **The integration plan:** Choose one factor from Gotama’s Middle Way Programme – such as perspective, speech, or livelihood. Describe how this will remain active in your daily life without external prompting. What rhythms, reminders, or habits will sustain it?
5. **The letter to the past:** Write a compassionate letter to the version of yourself who began this journey. Acknowledge their fear, confusion, or determination. Tell them what has changed. Thank them for not giving up.
6. **Navigating future storms:** Imagine a future challenge (examples include, loss, change, pressure, uncertainty). Describe how you will meet it using the skills of the RAFT, not from desperation, but from steadiness. What will you remember first?
7. **The vow of friendship:** Write a simple personal commitment to be a wise and steady friend to others. How will you offer stability without rescuing? How will you share kindness without judgement? How will you protect your own balance while supporting someone still crossing?

Supporting material – why the RAFT to Freedom workbook is helpful

For those who wish to understand how the RAFT framework aligns with contemporary psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy, the following reflections outline the deeper mechanisms behind the crossing from the dangerous shore to

the safe shore.

★ Neuroscience – from alarm to integration

RAFT to Freedom has not yet been tested as a single, named neuroscience programme. However, its four movements draw together practices that are supported by a growing body of research in mindfulness, addiction science, stress regulation, learning and behaviour change.

- **Recognise** begins with a simple neuroscientific insight: the human nervous system is designed to detect threat, anticipate loss and pay close attention to uncertainty. This negativity bias is not a personal failing; it is part of our protective biology. Life will therefore sometimes feel painful, difficult or disappointing, not because we are doing it wrongly, but because change, vulnerability and loss are woven into human life.
- Recognising this does not remove pain. It can, however, reduce the additional distress created when we treat ordinary human difficulty as evidence that something is wrong with us, or struggle against experience that cannot immediately be changed.
- **Abandon** works with the learning loops that keep compulsive patterns going. Cravings and reactive habits are strengthened when they are repeatedly followed by the same behaviour and short-term relief. Mindfulness-based approaches to relapse prevention, including learning to experience an urge without acting on it, have been associated with reductions in craving, stress and substance misuse for some people. Each time we pause, ground ourselves and choose not to feed an old reactive pattern, we weaken its hold and begin to establish an alternative response.
- **Feel** turns our attention towards the freedom that becomes available when craving, aversion and confusion are not being continually reinforced. The nervous system is naturally drawn to danger, disappointment and unfinished business. Learning to notice moments of ease, safety, calm, connection, joy and non-reactivity helps counter this bias. Practices of appreciative attention and savouring can strengthen positive emotion and well-being, making these states more familiar, more believable and easier to return to. In RAFT language, we learn not only to spot the storm but also to

recognise when the coast is clear.

- **Train** reflects a basic neuroscientific principle: what we practise becomes easier to access. Repeated attention, behavioural and emotional-regulation practices can strengthen the brain networks involved in attention, self-regulation and flexible responding. Over time, returning to the body, pausing before acting, and choosing a more skilful response may make these alternatives more available under pressure.

This does not mean that practice removes pain or prevents difficult experiences. It means that, with repetition, we may become less governed by automatic alarm and more able to respond with steadiness, discernment and care. In RAFT terms, we are learning the skills of Gotama's Middle Way programme so that, when difficult weather comes, we have more ways of navigating it.

★ **Psychology – from reactivity to deliberate living**

RAFT to Freedom has not yet been tested as a single, named psychological programme. However, its four movements draw together practices that are reflected in research on acceptance, behaviour change, mindfulness, positive psychology and values-guided action.

- **Recognise** begins by acknowledging that pain, uncertainty, loss and disappointment are part of human life. Psychologically, this resembles acceptance-based approaches, which distinguish unavoidable pain from the additional suffering created by fighting, denying or personalising what cannot immediately be changed. Recognising that difficulty is universal, rather than evidence of personal defect, can help loosen shame and create a more realistic, compassionate starting point.
- **Abandon** works with the learned patterns that maintain craving, avoidance and compulsive behaviour. Behavioural psychology shows that habits are strengthened when they repeatedly bring short-term relief or reward. When we pause, refrain from acting automatically and choose a different response, we interrupt that cycle. Old patterns may not disappear at once, but they need not continue to be reinforced in the same way.
- **Feel** turns attention towards the freedom that becomes available

when craving, aversion and confusion are not being fed.

Psychological research on appreciative attention, positive emotion and savouring suggests that deliberately noticing moments of ease, calm, connection, gratitude and well-being can strengthen these experiences and make them more available in daily life. In RAFT terms, we learn not only to identify what troubles us, but also to recognise when the coast is clear.

- **Train** is the sustained practice of Gotama's Middle Way programme: developing skilful perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, application, mindfulness and collectedness in ordinary life.

Psychology supports the general principle that repeated practice, clear routines and behaviour aligned with deeply held values can make skilful responses easier to access over time. The aim is not to suppress symptoms or achieve perfection, but to build a life in which wisdom, ethical care and mental steadiness increasingly shape how we meet experience.

Psychologically, the raft moves us from survival-driven coping towards more deliberate living. It does not ask us to deny our history or manufacture a new identity. Rather, it invites a shift from self-defining statements such as, 'I am broken,' towards a more truthful and workable understanding: 'I am learning to steer.'

★ **Philosophy – from confusion to wise living**

RAFT to Freedom is rooted in the practical philosophy of Gotama's Middle Way: a way of understanding suffering, its causes, its cessation and the path of practice that makes freedom increasingly possible. Its four movements also resonate with other philosophical traditions, including Stoicism and virtue ethics, which ask how we can live wisely in the midst of uncertainty, difficulty and change.

- **Recognise** begins with seeing life as it is, rather than as we wish it to be. Early Buddhist philosophy treats pain, change, vulnerability and disappointment as universal features of human existence, not signs of personal failure. Stoic thinkers made a similar distinction between events themselves and the judgements we add to them. We may not control what happens, but we can learn to examine the meanings, assumptions and impressions through which we meet it.

- **Abandon** concerns the freedom that becomes possible when we do not automatically assent to every urge, fear, resentment or story the mind produces. In Buddhist thought, craving, aversion and confusion are not fixed features of a self; they are conditioned processes that arise and can cease when their supporting conditions are no longer fed. Stoicism likewise emphasises pausing before giving full authority to an initial impression. In both traditions, restraint is not repression. It is the cultivation of room to choose what is skilful rather than simply doing what is immediate.
- **Feel** turns towards the direct experience of freedom when craving, aversion and confusion have fallen quiet. In the Buddhist tradition, this is not merely the absence of distress, but the presence of clarity, calm, joy and equanimity. It invites us to recognise that well-being need not depend entirely on getting what we want, avoiding what we dislike or controlling the conditions around us. In RAFT language, we learn to notice not only the storm, but also the open water and the clear horizon.
- **Train** reflects the philosophical understanding that a good life is formed through practice. Aristotle argued that character develops through repeated action, while Gotama's Middle Way programme offers a practical training in perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, application, mindfulness and collectedness. Wisdom is therefore not simply something we think about or agree with. It becomes visible in how we speak, act, relate, make a living and respond when conditions are difficult.

Philosophically, the raft moves us away from the idea that we are permanently defined by our thoughts, impulses or past actions. We are shaped by causes and conditions, but we are also capable of participating in those conditions through attention, ethical choice and repeated practice.

Integration – the crossing as coherence

Across neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy, one theme repeats: behaviour arises from conditions, perception shapes response, and disciplined awareness creates freedom. The dangerous shore represents a system organised around threat and misperception. The safe shore represents a system organised around regulation, coherence, and value-guided action. The RAFT to Freedom workbook

does not remove storms; it reorganises how the system meets them.

What psychology calls resilience, neuroscience calls integration, and philosophy calls wisdom. RAFT calls it freedom. The crossing is developmental rather than dramatic – a gradual reorganisation of perception, emotion, and behaviour into steadiness. And once steadiness is embodied, the raft can be set down with gratitude, because its work has been fulfilled.

Remember to remember

As we close this workbook, we pause not in triumph, but in recognition. This journey has asked for courage. It has asked for honesty. It has asked us to look at what we once avoided and to practise what once felt unnatural. We have learned to recognise the currents, to abandon what sinks us, to feel the resulting freedom, and to train with steadiness. That work matters. It deserves acknowledgement – not as achievement, but as evidence of our willingness and capacity to grow.

We remember that the safe shore is not a place without weather. It is a way of standing in weather without being blown away. Storms will still pass through. Old habits may still whisper. Difficult emotions will still arise. But we now know how to pause. We know how to breathe. We know how to check the hull and recalibrate the compass. We know that freedom is not perfection; it is responsiveness.

We remember that we are not defined by the dangerous shore. We are shaped by what we practise. The skills we have cultivated are no longer external instructions. They are capacities within us. They can be forgotten, but they cannot be lost.

We remember that beginning again is always available. If we drift, we can regather. If we run aground, we can repair. If we are pulled under briefly, we know how to surface. The crossing has taught us something deeper than technique – it has taught us trust.

And so we continue:

We continue choosing clarity over confusion.

We continue choosing care over retaliation.

We continue choosing steadiness over panic.

We continue choosing truth over self-deception.
We continue choosing the next skilful step.

Keeping these aspirations in mind:

May we trust the freedom already growing within us.

May we live fully on this shared shore.

May we meet life as it is – with courage, humility, tenderness, and quiet strength.

May we remember that peace is not possessed, but practised.

May we remember that no sincere beginning is ever wasted.

May we remember that we can begin again.

May we walk the shore together.

“In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.”
~ Albert Camus

“Suppose I were to haul the raft onto the dry land or set it adrift in the water, and then go wherever I want.” ~ Gotama

Sutta references

★ Alagaddupama Sutta (MN 22) – The Simile of the Snake/Raft

- *Summary:* This is the definitive teaching for the conclusion. It teaches that the Dhamma is a vehicle for crossing over, not an object to be grasped. It warns against dogmatic clinging to the teachings once their purpose (liberation) has been fulfilled.

★ Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16) – The Great Passing

- *Summary:* In his final days, the Buddha told his attendant Ānanda, *‘Be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge.’* This reinforces the goal of the workbook: to internalise the raft so that the practitioner becomes their own source of safety.

★ Upaḍḍha Sutta (SN 45.2) – Half the Holy Life

- *Summary:* When Ānanda suggests that good friendship is half of the holy life, the Buddha corrects him: *‘Not so, Ānanda! Good friendship is the whole of the holy life.’* This reminds us that the Safe Shore is inhabited by a community of peers, and our freedom is

interdependent.

★ **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) – Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion**

- *Summary:* The foundational teaching outlining the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Way. It provides the essential map for the entire journey from the first recognition of suffering to the final liberation.

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