

FLOW HIJACKED — EASTERN WISDOM BRANCH I

THE GRASPING MIND

Craving, Meditation, Self and the Dynamics of Psychological Capture

What happens when an internal event stops being merely an event and begins determining what the system must do next?

Complete English research lecture

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How to read this lecture

Reader orientation — This long-form lecture connects early Buddhist analysis, contemplative practice, addiction and recovery science, psychology, neuroscience, predictive processing, embodied cognition, and complex dynamical systems. It separates traditional claims, historical scholarship, empirical findings, philosophical proposals, and new Flow Hijacked hypotheses rather than treating them as interchangeable evidence.

Central proposition — A human system may contain many objectively possible futures while, in a particular state, only one or two remain experientially and behaviorally real.

Scope and safety — This work is educational and interpretive. It does not recommend a practice or replace medical, psychiatric, psychological, addiction, or emergency care.

Epistemic labels used throughout

Label	Meaning
Established evidence	Replicated or convergent evidence appropriate to the stated claim.
Strong but incomplete evidence	Substantial support with unresolved heterogeneity, boundary conditions, or mechanism.
Emerging evidence	Suggestive research that should not carry a major conclusion alone.
Plausible mechanistic interpretation	A model consistent with evidence but not uniquely established by it.
Flow Hijacked hypothesis	A new, testable synthesis proposed in this lecture.
Philosophical analogy	Conceptual illumination without a claim of empirical or historical identity.
Historical contemplative claim	What a text, practice system, or lineage maintains in its own frame.
Metaphysical claim not currently scientifically testable	A claim that present empirical methods cannot confirm or refute as stated.

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Prologue — When an Event Becomes an Instruction

GOVERNING QUESTION What happens when an internal event stops being merely an event and begins determining what the system must do next?

A craving arrives at 9:17 in the evening. At first it may be only a pressure in the chest, dryness in the mouth, a remembered taste, a picture of the route to the shop, or the sentence *I cannot carry this for another hour*. None of these is yet an action. None logically entails an action. Yet within seconds the person's world can reorganize. The children who matter, the promise made that morning, tomorrow's meeting, the accumulated losses, and the knowledge of what the next drink may cost have not vanished from objective reality. They have lost behavioral reality. One option has become near, vivid, embodied, and executable. The others remain true but cannot recruit the system strongly enough to compete.

This lecture begins there. Not with a tranquil person sitting on a cushion, and not with the claim that an ancient tradition secretly anticipated a brain scanner, but with a transition: sensation becomes demand; demand recruits attention; attention narrows prediction; prediction changes the felt future; action becomes easier to initiate; the action changes the body and environment that will shape the next demand. What requires explanation is not simply the presence of desire. Human life without desire would not be freedom. What requires explanation is the conversion of one event into a temporary monopoly over what happens next.

CORE A human system may contain many objectively possible futures while, in a particular state, only one or two of those futures remain experientially and behaviorally real.

The early Buddhist vocabulary of *taṇhā* (often “thirst” or “craving”), *upādāna* (grasping, clinging, appropriation, or “taking up”), *dukkha* (a range extending beyond ordinary pain), dependent origination, impermanence, and not-self offers an unusually sustained inquiry into how experience becomes binding. It belongs to soteriological, ethical, philosophical, and communal projects whose aims are not identical to clinical recovery or experimental psychology. Contemporary addiction science, meanwhile, studies incentive salience, learning, habits, interoception, stress, temporal discounting, and frontostriatal control. Dynamical systems science asks how feedback, history, context, amplification, and attractor structure constrain transitions. These discourses can illuminate one another, but only after refusing to collapse them.

This is therefore a four-voice lecture. The first voice asks what a tradition actually claims. The second asks what historical scholarship can responsibly say about that claim. The third asks what contemporary empirical science supports. The fourth is the Flow Hijacked synthesis: a proposed dynamical interpretation that must remain distinguishable from all three.

EPISTEMIC KEY “Established evidence” denotes replicated or convergent evidence appropriate to the claim. “Strong but incomplete” denotes substantial support with unresolved heterogeneity or mechanism. “Emerging evidence” denotes suggestive work that should not carry a major conclusion alone. “Plausible mechanistic interpretation” denotes a model

consistent with evidence but not uniquely established by it. “Flow Hijacked hypothesis” denotes a new, testable proposal. “Philosophical analogy” denotes conceptual illumination without empirical identity. “Historical contemplative claim” denotes what a text or lineage maintains. “Metaphysical claim not currently scientifically testable” is neither endorsed nor dismissed by measurement that cannot address it.

The purpose is not to advocate meditation or Eastern spirituality. It is to ask what these traditions force modern accounts of craving, self, suffering, and freedom to notice—and what modern evidence forces contemplative interpretations to qualify.

Part I — Craving Is Not One Thing

Thirst, grasping, and the construction of necessity

In the formulation of the Four Noble Truths preserved in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, craving is described in relation to renewed becoming: craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming. The formula is not a neurobiological taxonomy. It is a diagnosis embedded in a path of ethical conduct, cultivation, and insight. Nor is *dukkha* exhausted by “stress.” Depending on context it can refer to overt pain, the vulnerability of pleasant conditions to loss, and the unsatisfactoriness of building security upon processes that cannot be possessed permanently. [78, 90, 161]

The distinction between *taṇhā* and *upādāna* is especially fertile. English translations variously render *upādāna* as clinging, grasping, attachment, fuel, sustenance, or appropriation. No single English word captures every canonical use. But the dependent-origination formula places it after craving, suggesting at minimum that wanting and taking something up as organizing commitment need not be identical moments. [20, 77, 158]

HISTORICAL CONTEMPLATIVE CLAIM In early Buddhist analysis, suffering is not explained merely by the existence of unpleasant sensation. The problem concerns conditioned patterns through which feeling, craving, appropriation, becoming, and renewed vulnerability co-arise.

Flow Hijacked translates none of these terms into brain mechanisms. It asks instead what becomes visible if craving is treated as a perturbation and grasping as a reorganization. A sensation can appear without becoming the center of the field. A thought can be believed weakly, strongly, or not at all. An urge can recruit a motor plan without that plan crossing an action threshold. Grasping, on this proposed reading, is not “more sensation.” It is a change in relations: this matters above all else; this must be solved now; this is mine; this says what I am; this determines the next transition.

That difference can be seen outside addiction. Fear is an adaptive alarm. Grasping fear can mean constructing the whole future around the alarm. Sadness can register loss. Grasping sadness can turn a state into a verdict that possibility itself has ended. Shame can inform social repair. Grasping shame can transform “I did something harmful” into “harm is what I am.” Pleasure can enrich life. Grasping pleasure can make its continuation feel compulsory and its ending feel like injury.

FLOW HIJACKED PROPOSITION Craving is not merely wanting more. It may temporarily restructure the field so that fewer alternatives remain experientially and behaviorally available.

This proposition should immediately be constrained. Sometimes alternatives are not merely inaccessible; they are materially absent. Poverty, withdrawal, violence, exclusion, chronic pain, precarious housing, and lack of treatment can make a short-horizon choice tragically rational. A state-space account becomes morally evasive if it converts structural deprivation into a problem of private perception. “Accessible state space” must therefore include body, relationships, institutions, resources, and environment—not an isolated brain contemplating nominal options.

Wanting, liking, learning, and relief

Contemporary affective neuroscience provides a different set of distinctions. Incentive-sensitization theory argues that drug-associated cues can acquire excessive motivational pull: “wanting” can intensify or persist even when “liking” does not. Dopamine participates in learning, vigor, prediction-related signaling, and incentive motivation; it is not simply a chemical quantity of pleasure. This framework is influential and empirically productive, but it is not a universal account of every addiction or every episode of use. [\[13-14, 156\]](#)

The person who says, “I do not even enjoy this anymore,” is not reporting a paradox that science must explain away. The dissociation is part of the phenomenon. A cue may invigorate approach, a remembered relief may dominate valuation, and withdrawal may make non-use feel costly, even when consummatory pleasure is brief or absent. Negative reinforcement adds another trajectory: action is learned because it removes or reduces an aversive state. The substance or behavior does not need to promise ecstasy. It may promise the end of the next ten minutes.

The neurocircuitry literature accordingly describes interacting phases and systems rather than one addiction center: reward and incentive processes, stress and negative affect, memory and cue learning, prefrontal valuation and control, habits, interoception, and social context all matter. Frontostriatal findings are real at the level of distributed group effects, but no scan can read a person's inevitable next choice. [\[83, 113, 190, 200\]](#)

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE Drug cues can evoke measurable subjective, physiological, and neural responses, and cue-related craving is associated with subsequent use at the group level.

LIMIT Cue response is heterogeneous, context-dependent, and probabilistic. It is not a command, a moral failure, or a sufficiently accurate individual forecast.

Cue-reactivity meta-analyses reveal distributed activity rather than a singular craving locus. Laboratory pictures, smells, paraphernalia, and imagined contexts capture only fragments of the lived cue field, which can include a particular hour, loneliness after a call, the route home, money arriving, bodily agitation, or the belief that one has already failed. [\[33-34, 60\]](#)

From action to habit to compulsion—and back

Habit language is easily abused. In reinforcement-learning models, goal-directed control represents relationships between actions and outcomes, while habitual control learns cached action tendencies from repetition. These systems can compete and cooperate. Under uncertainty, cognitive load, stress, or extensive repetition, control may shift. But addiction is not adequately described as a one-way switch that deletes choice and transfers the person to a habit module. Human substance use often remains sensitive to price, availability, social observation, competing rewards, withdrawal, and future expectations. [\[48, 54, 61\]](#)

Compulsion is also not merely high frequency. An action becomes clinically and existentially important when it persists despite conflict with longer-horizon goals, continues under mounting cost, or feels difficult to inhibit even when the person can articulate why they wish to stop. Automaticity can reduce the need for conscious deliberation, yet conscious craving can become most intense when an established sequence is blocked. Tiffany's cognitive model made this point early: highly practiced drug-use action schemas may proceed

efficiently, while urges become especially noticeable under obstruction or attempted control. ^[180]

The consequence is a plural account. Some episodes are cue-triggered and rapid. Some are deliberate responses to anticipated withdrawal. Some are socially coordinated. Some follow hours of rumination. Some are acts of despair in a future that has become unbelievable. Some are pleasure-seeking. Some are avoidance. These forms can coexist in one life. A serious theory of capture must explain how different mechanisms converge upon the same narrowing without pretending that the narrowing has one cause. ^[105, 154]

Part II — The Body Predicts a Need Before the Story Explains It

Interoception is not simply “listening to the body”

Before craving is narrated, it can be bodily. A hollow agitation, a tightening throat, heat in the face, a diffuse ache, a pressure behind the eyes, or a rapid heartbeat may be perceived as evidence that something must change. Interoception refers broadly to sensing, integrating, and interpreting signals concerning the body's internal condition. It includes multiple channels and multiple levels: afferent signaling, central representation, attention, accuracy on particular tasks, confidence, self-report, and meaning. These do not collapse into one ability. A person can attend intensely to bodily signals while interpreting them catastrophically; another can detect accurately but report low sensibility; a third may feel little until arousal is extreme. ^[74, 106]

Addiction research implicates insular and broader interoceptive systems in craving, withdrawal, and decision processes, but the slogan “the insula causes addiction” is untenable. The insula participates in salience, bodily representation, pain, affect, and control switching, among other functions. Its role depends on networks, tasks, substance histories, and body states. ^[147, 187]

STRONG BUT INCOMPLETE EVIDENCE Interoceptive processes participate in craving and psychiatric symptoms. Measures are multidimensional, and more interoceptive attention is not automatically healthier.

Predictive approaches add a useful but not uniquely proven account. The nervous system does not wait passively for pure data; it uses prior expectations and bodily regulation to anticipate what signals mean and what action is needed. Interoceptive prediction may shape whether arousal is experienced as danger, withdrawal, excitement, shame, or ordinary fluctuation. Precision, in predictive-processing language, concerns the relative weighting afforded to prediction errors or expectations. It should not be imagined as a literal dial observed directly in routine imaging. ^[8, 38, 171]

Flow Hijacked asks: when an internal signal appears, how much authority is it granted over action? A pulse of discomfort can be low-intensity yet behaviorally sovereign; intense pain can sometimes be present while a person still chooses among alternatives. Magnitude and capture are therefore different dimensions.

Allostasis, stress, and the promise of immediate regulation

Allostasis concerns regulation through change: organisms anticipate demands and mobilize resources rather than preserving every variable at a single fixed point. Repeated or chronic stress can produce allostatic load, while repeated drug exposure can alter reward, stress, and relief systems. These concepts illuminate why a person may seek a substance not to depart from ordinary equilibrium toward pleasure but to approach a new, costly baseline in which non-use feels intolerable. ^[112, 132, 175]

The word “regulation” must be handled carefully. Alcohol can regulate—briefly. Avoidance can regulate—by removing exposure. Self-attack can regulate—by creating the illusion of moral control. Compulsive checking can regulate—until uncertainty returns. A behavior's short-term regulatory effect does not establish its long-term adaptiveness. In a nonlinear system, an input can reduce one variable now while deepening the basin that makes the same input more likely tomorrow.

Consider a loop:

1. Stress increases bodily arousal and narrows attention.
2. A learned cue activates the expectation of relief.
3. Expected relief increases the salience of the substance and decreases the credibility of alternatives.
4. Use rapidly changes bodily state.
5. The speed and reliability of that change strengthen the learned transition.
6. Consequences add shame, conflict, disrupted sleep, or withdrawal.
7. Those consequences increase the probability of the next stress state.

Nothing in this loop requires a single moment of irrationality. Each local transition can make short-horizon sense while the recursive system becomes devastating. That is one meaning of nonlinearity in lived life: the consequence of an action depends on state, timing, history, and feedback, not only on the action considered in isolation.

LIVED FIELD “I knew exactly what tomorrow required. But tomorrow was an argument, and relief was in the room.”

Part III — Attention Is the Allocation of Priority

What captures the field?

Attention is often treated as a spotlight: it illuminates one object while leaving others dark. The metaphor is useful but incomplete. Attention also changes processing priority, learning, conscious access, action preparation, and the effective competition among representations. Goal-directed and stimulus-driven attention depend on interacting large-scale systems; salience-related systems help identify what warrants control or reorientation; frontoparietal systems participate in maintaining goals and adjusting behavior; the default network participates in internally oriented cognition, autobiographical memory, future simulation, and spontaneous thought. These names identify statistical and functional patterns, not little agents inside the head. [42, 136, 149, 169]

An addictive cue, a threat, a shame memory, physical pain, a notification, or an unfinished social conflict can all obtain priority. The question is not only whether the object enters consciousness. It is whether enough computational and experiential weight accumulates around it to dominate the next transition. Digital environments exploit this distinction. A notification is tiny as a sensory event but rich in learned uncertainty, social prediction, and variable reward. Repeated design choices externalize part of the capture architecture into the environment.

FLOW HIJACKED INTERPRETATION Attention is the allocation of computational and experiential priority. Capture occurs when priority becomes sufficiently concentrated that competing perceptions, goals, memories, and futures cannot organize action.

This does not mean a person can simply choose where attention goes. Salience is partly trained by evolutionary relevance, learning history, bodily state, current goals, social threat, and environmental engineering. Nor does it mean attention alone causes behavior. It means that what receives sustained priority can change which evidence is sampled, which predictions are confirmed, and which actions become easy to initiate.

Mind wandering, meta-awareness, and the moment capture becomes visible

Mind wandering is not one defective state. Spontaneous thought supports planning, creativity, autobiographical continuity, and problem solving, while also contributing to distraction or rumination when it becomes poorly constrained. Meta-awareness is the awareness of the current contents or processes of mind. One can think for several minutes without recognizing that attention has left the chosen task; then, suddenly, “I am lost in thought” becomes available. [37, 164, 176]

That moment matters dynamically. Before meta-awareness, the thought stream supplies the apparent world. After meta-awareness, the same thoughts may be represented as thoughts. Their semantic content has not necessarily changed. Their control relation has.

The difference can be lived in shame. Without meta-awareness: *Everyone can see what I am. This will never change. I should disappear.* With meta-awareness: *A shame sequence is occurring. It is painful, embodied, and persuasive. It is not yet a complete description of me or of the future.* This second stance does not refute the feeling or absolve responsibility. It changes the number of possible transitions after the feeling.

Predictive-processing language may describe this as a change in the relative precision of a high-level interpretation or a newly available model of the current mental process. That is a plausible mechanistic interpretation, not a direct measurement. The science is not yet able to watch “the precision of shame” rise and fall in ordinary life.

Part IV — When Tomorrow Cannot Compete

Temporal discounting is one window, not the whole horizon

Delay-discounting tasks ask how the subjective value of an outcome decreases with delay. Across studies, steeper discounting is associated with addictive behavior. Yet the measure is not a moral score, a diagnostic essence, or a complete account of future collapse. Results depend on reward domain, magnitude, task structure, deprivation, uncertainty, socioeconomic conditions, and what the person believes about whether a promised future outcome will actually arrive. ^[3, 17, 124]

The lived phenomenon is broader than choosing twenty dollars now over forty later. The future must be simulated, trusted, emotionally inhabited, and connected to present action. “My relationship will improve in six months” competes poorly if the person cannot generate a credible image of being there. “My health matters” competes poorly when withdrawal is immediate and medical harm is probabilistic. “I love my children” remains entirely true while the action system is organized around surviving the next hour.

Experimental studies show that episodic future thinking can reduce delay discounting under some conditions, with interactions among prefrontal and medial-temporal systems. These findings support the proposition that the accessibility of future scenes can alter valuation. They do not prove that imagining tomorrow will overcome addiction, depression, trauma, or structural deprivation. ^[11, 148]

FLOW HIJACKED SYNTHESIS Future compression is not the literal disappearance of future time. It is a reduction in the capacity of possible futures to exert control over present transitions.

This yields a humane reinterpretation of “poor decision making.” The person may retain factual knowledge and moral concern. What changes is the effective geometry of choice. Immediate relief is close, rehearsed, embodied, and high-confidence. Repair, trust, employment, health, and meaning are distant, uncertain, socially contingent, and costly to initiate. The comparison is asymmetrical before deliberation begins.

Three temporal disorders that must not be confused

Addiction can compress the future by making immediate relief disproportionately actionable. Depression can make future possibility feel empty, effortful, or inaccessible. Trauma can make a prior danger function as present evidence, so that the body and attention prepare for what is no longer occurring. These are not equivalent disorders. They can overlap, but their histories, symptoms, mechanisms, and treatment needs differ.

The dynamical comparison is narrower: each can alter the temporal reachability of alternatives. In addiction, the route to relief can become extraordinarily short. In depression, routes to rewarding futures may lose expected value and vigor. In PTSD, routes are organized around a threat model whose temporal index has not been adequately updated. In

OCD, the next checking or neutralizing act can become the only action that seems able to close uncertainty. In rumination, thought repeatedly returns to an unresolved explanatory basin. The common word “capture” names a relational property, not a diagnosis.

LIMIT A transdiagnostic state-space lens is useful only if it preserves disorder-specific evidence, individual histories, and material context. Similar topology does not imply identical cause.

Part V — Craving as State-Space Compression

From metaphor to a proposed construct

A state space is a representation of the possible states of a system, defined by variables chosen for a purpose. For a human system, no complete state vector exists. We can nevertheless define a task-specific vector:

FORMAL MODEL $z(t) = [\text{bodily state, affect, attention, memory, prediction, action readiness, social field, environment, temporal horizon, identity coordination}]$

The list is deliberately multilevel. A craving episode cannot be adequately located in dopamine concentration, self-report, or social setting alone. State-space construction is always a map. Its value depends on whether the chosen variables improve explanation and prediction.

Let $A(z, c, \tau)$ denote the set of trajectories that are sufficiently available to organize behavior from state z , in context c , over horizon τ . “Sufficiently available” means more than logically possible: the trajectory must be perceivable, credible, executable, and weighted strongly enough to compete. The effective size of A may be estimated through choice repertoires, response entropy, future-generation tasks, ecological sampling, action latency, and counterfactual reachability—but no accepted clinical metric currently exists.

FLOW HIJACKED HYPOTHESIS Craving as State-Space Compression is a temporary reduction in the effective set A : fewer alternatives cross the threshold from nominal possibility to behavioral reality.

Compression can occur through several paths:

- salience concentration around the cue or anticipated relief;
- bodily prediction that non-action will become intolerable;
- decreased precision or vividness of longer-horizon goals;
- habitual preparation of a familiar action sequence;
- social isolation that removes co-regulation and accountability;
- environmental proximity and low friction of the addictive option;
- shame-based identity that makes alternative futures feel undeserved;
- stress-related impairment in working memory and flexible control;
- previous failed attempts that reduce the expected credibility of change.

The construct does not say that craving always compresses. Desire for a relationship, a creative project, food, justice, or recovery can widen exploration and organize sustained action. Nor does it say that a larger number of options is always healthier. Mania can produce proliferating projects without viable regulation; fragmentation can increase variability while destroying coherence. Freedom requires structured possibility, not maximal randomness.

Craving as State-Space Compression

Flow Hijacked hypothesis map - not a validated clinical metric

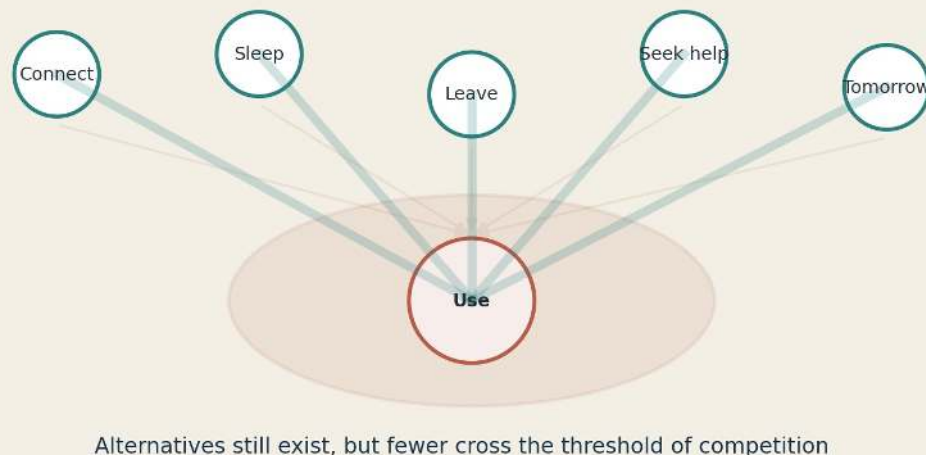


Figure 1. Craving as State-Space Compression. Alternatives can remain objectively present while losing enough priority to compete. Flow Hijacked hypothesis map; not a validated clinical metric.

Attractors, basins, and history

An attractor is a set of states toward which a system tends to evolve under specified dynamics. A basin of attraction contains starting states that converge toward that attractor. In human applications, these are models, not entities hidden inside the brain. A recurrent shame-to-isolation-to-use sequence may be treated as an attractor-like pattern if diverse perturbations reliably lead into it, dwell time is prolonged, and leaving requires disproportionate input.

Path dependence means that how the system arrived matters. Two people with the same present craving intensity may have different next-state probabilities because their learning histories, withdrawal states, relationships, resources, and identities differ. Context dependence means the same person can show different dynamics at home, at work, alone, in a meeting, after rejection, or while caring for a child. Nonlinearity means that doubling one input need not double the response. A small cue near a transition threshold can trigger a large trajectory; a large cue in a supported context may not.

Feedback deepens basins. Repetition makes action more fluent; relief confirms prediction; consequences generate states that renew the need for relief; stigma reduces social options; concealment prevents corrective learning. This does not make change impossible. It explains why information alone so often loses. Knowledge may update one variable while the basin is maintained by many others.

Transient amplification and the danger of elegant mathematics

Some linearized dynamical systems are non-normal: their interacting directions are not orthogonal, allowing a perturbation to undergo large transient amplification even when every eigenmode is asymptotically stable. Resolvent analysis asks which inputs, frequencies, and directions the system amplifies most. These ideas have genuine uses in fluid mechanics and computational neuroscience. Their application to lived craving is, at present, a Flow Hijacked research hypothesis—not established clinical science. ^[82, 92, 185]

Why consider them at all? Because not every capture episode reflects a deeper stable attractor. A person can be broadly stable and nevertheless undergo a brief, disproportionate escalation when a particular sequence aligns: poor sleep, rejection, payday, a route past a familiar place, a bodily memory, and a message from someone associated with use. The response can grow faster than equilibrium language predicts and then subside. Non-normality offers a precise question: does system structure amplify particular perturbation directions before long-term stabilization appears?

EPISTEMIC LIMIT No study has established a clinical “resolvent of craving.” The concept earns its place only if it yields preregistered, falsifiable predictions beyond generic arousal, autocorrelation, and symptom severity.

A Flow Hijacked research program would require densely sampled multimodal time series, clearly defined state variables, directional models, out-of-sample prediction, and comparison with simpler alternatives. Elegant mathematics must not decorate suffering. It must pay rent by explaining why a small event sometimes becomes a wave.

Part VI — Different Captures, Different Lives

Addiction: relief becomes the shortest executable path

In addiction, the narrowed repertoire may be organized around intoxication, relief from withdrawal, escape from affect, cue-evoked approach, ritualized belonging, or a learned interruption of self-consciousness. These functions are not interchangeable. The transition may be rapid and seemingly automatic, or slow and deliberative: hours of bargaining can still inhabit a narrow field if every branch eventually returns to use. The distinctive clinical reality includes pharmacology, tolerance, withdrawal, overdose risk, social consequence, and persistent use despite harm. A generic flexibility model cannot replace those specifics. ^[61, 113, 175]

Depression: the path exists but carries no felt affordance

Depression can restrict movement differently. The problem may not be that one action has excessive salience, but that many actions fail to recruit energy, expectancy, or reward. Getting out of bed remains physically possible; calling a friend remains semantically conceivable; neither appears behaviorally “real.” Rumination can recursively strengthen global conclusions—*nothing changes, I fail, the future is empty*—while withdrawal removes experiences that might update them. Dynamic models of depression explore feedback among symptoms and early-warning changes, but evidence remains sensitive to measurement frequency, person-specific structure, and model choice. ^[22, 43, 155]

PTSD: the past acquires present-tense precision

In posttraumatic stress, cues may activate a current-threat model: bodily mobilization, attention to danger, involuntary memory, avoidance, and altered beliefs reinforce one another. To say “the past behaves as present” is phenomenological and functional, not a claim that the person literally confuses calendar dates. Avoidance can prevent corrective learning; hypervigilance can sample the environment selectively; social mistrust can remove safety signals. Trauma-related dissociation, however, may involve under-engagement or discontinuity rather than high arousal. No single attractor diagram captures both.

OCD: uncertainty cannot remain open

In obsessive-compulsive disorder, intrusive thoughts are not the same as desires, and compulsions are not the same as addictive reward seeking. A thought, image, or doubt becomes linked to inflated threat, responsibility, incompleteness, or intolerable uncertainty. Checking or neutralization offers temporary closure and thereby preserves the loop. The narrowed state space consists not simply in “doing the habit,” but in the loss of permission to leave uncertainty unresolved.

Anxiety and compulsive avoidance: safety shrinks the world

Avoidance often works immediately. It reduces contact with the feared cue, which is precisely why it can be reinforced. Across time the safe zone may contract: fewer places, conversations, bodily sensations, or decisions remain reachable. The short-term decrease in fear and long-term increase in vulnerability illustrate a general systems problem—local optimization can damage global adaptability. Still, avoidance can also be wise when danger is real. Context and function matter.

Shame loops: identity becomes the basin

Shame may begin with social pain or recognition of harm, then recruit concealment, self-attack, withdrawal, substance use, and further behavior that confirms the shame narrative. Unlike guilt focused on an action, shame often globalizes: *I am the thing that happened*. When a person expects rejection, ambiguous social signals can be sampled as evidence, and withdrawal prevents disconfirmation. The loop is interpersonal even when no one else is present; remembered and predicted others inhabit the field.

CORE DISTINCTION Addiction, depression, PTSD, OCD, anxiety, rumination, avoidance, and shame may all restrict accessible state space. They are not therefore the same disorder, caused by the same mechanism, or treated in the same way.

Part VII — Freedom as Dynamic Mobility

A system is not free because it never enters fear, sadness, craving, anger, absorption, or dependence. Some states are appropriate, protective, or beautiful. Freedom concerns the relation between state and transition.

FLOW HIJACKED CONSTRUCT Freedom as Dynamic Mobility is the capacity to enter a state, remain there when useful, leave when conditions change, return when appropriate, and access viable alternatives.

Five verbs matter: enter, dwell, leave, return, and redirect. A person who cannot concentrate is not free merely because attention shifts constantly. A person who cannot stop concentrating is not free merely because performance is high. Healthy grief requires the ability to remain with loss and also to re-enter ordinary life. Recovery requires the capacity to experience craving without obligatory use and to experience pleasure without converting it into a demand for permanence.

Dynamic mobility is not raw entropy. Entropy measures differ across probability distributions, signals, and models. Higher neural or behavioral entropy can reflect repertoire, noise, disorganization, measurement artifact, or pathology. Likewise, “criticality” is a family of precise claims about systems near transitions; it should not be used as a compliment meaning optimally alive. Evidence that the brain operates near critical regimes is scientifically interesting and contested in scope. It does not establish that meditation moves people toward a universal critical point. ^[25, 76, 181]

Metastability offers a more disciplined image. A metastable system can form temporary coordination without becoming permanently locked; components partly integrate and partly retain autonomy. Psychologically, structured mobility would mean states coherent enough to guide action yet permeable enough to update. This remains a cross-level analogy unless variables and time scales are specified.

We can therefore ask measurable questions:

- How quickly does attention recover after a cue?
- How many viable actions can a person generate under stress?
- How long does a shame episode determine social withdrawal?
- Does a craving increase the conditional probability of use less after practice or treatment?
- Can a person return to a valued task after interruption?
- Does identity language become more differentiated across contexts?
- Does support change the transition threshold before an urge becomes action?

Freedom here is not independence from causes. It is an altered causal organization in which more than one future can exert influence.

Part VIII — Meditation Is a Family, Not a Substance

The research word “meditation” can conceal practices that differ as much as sprinting, physiotherapy, and dance. Focused-attention practice stabilizes an object and trains detection and return. Open monitoring emphasizes receptive awareness of changing contents without selecting one primary object. Loving-kindness and compassion practices actively cultivate affective and relational orientations. Mantra uses repeated sound or phrase. Absorption practices cultivate unusually stable unification. Some Zen, Mahāmudrā, Dzogchen, and nondual practices question the subject-object structure of attention itself. Lineages, teachers, ethical settings, and practitioner aims alter what the same label means.

[46, 122, 129, 137]

Clinical programs add further complexity. MBSR, MBCT, mindfulness-based relapse prevention, body scan, mindful movement, and brief app exercises are packages, not pure manipulations of one mental faculty. A finding from eight weeks of MBCT cannot be transferred automatically to jhāna retreat, Zazen, or a ten-minute breath recording.

METHOD RULE For every practice ask: What is trained? What captures attention? What happens after capture? What is reinforced by returning? How does sensation relate to action? What might change in salience, meta-awareness, interoception, self-reference, and emotional reactivity? Is the evidence about a temporary state, a durable trait, or neither?

Part IX — A Practice Atlas of Capture and Return

Focused attention

An object—often breath, sound, or visual form—is selected. Capture occurs when thought, sensation, or environment displaces it. The decisive event is not perfect maintenance but recognition, disengagement, and return. Each return may reinforce detecting deviation without converting deviation into failure. Mechanistic studies suggest separable moments of mind wandering, awareness, disengagement, and reorientation, but much evidence comes from small, selected samples. State effects on attention are more defensible than broad personality transformation. ^[67, 91, 122]

Open monitoring and choiceless awareness

No single content is held exclusively. The training target is awareness of arising and passing events with less automatic selection or elaboration. Capture may appear as unnoticed identification with a thought or as covert preference for particular experiences. Returning means reopening the field rather than restoring one object. Evidence supports changes in some attention and affect measures, but instructions vary greatly; “nonjudgmental” does not mean absence of discernment. ^[56, 67]

Vipassanā

Vipassanā means insight and names multiple historical and modern practice systems, not one laboratory protocol. Modern Theravāda movements often emphasize moment-to-moment observation of body, feeling, mind, and phenomena, sometimes with labeling. What is trained may include resolution of change, recognition of reactivity, and reduced appropriation. Capture is not merely distraction; it can be the unnoticed construction of permanence, ownership, or demand. Evidence usually studies modern mindfulness-derived forms, so neural claims should not be generalized to all vipassanā lineages. ^[4, 133, 172]

Samatha

Samatha refers to calming or tranquillity cultivation across Buddhist contexts. Practice can stabilize attention, reduce discursive proliferation, and support absorption. The relation between samatha and vipassanā is described differently across texts and lineages: sequential, mutually supportive, or inseparable. Capture may be agitation or dullness; return adjusts energy as well as focus. Scientific work rarely isolates classical samatha with sufficient fidelity, so claims about durable trait change remain limited.

Breath awareness

Breath can function as attentional object, interoceptive signal, autonomic influence, or temporal scaffold. Natural breath observation differs from deliberate slow breathing. Capture may be thought, aversion to bodily sensation, or compulsive control of respiration. Returning can train renewed contact with sensation without immediate correction. Mechanistic interpretation must distinguish attentional training from changes produced by respiratory rate and depth. ^[106, 127]

Body scan

Attention moves systematically through bodily regions, often cultivating detection and an accepting stance. The practice may increase granularity and reveal that an “urge” is a changing constellation rather than a unitary command. It can also intensify distress in people with trauma, panic, pain, dissociation, or health anxiety. State evidence for bodily awareness exists; claims that body scan universally improves interoceptive accuracy are unsupported because interoception has multiple dimensions. ^[62, 74]

Walking meditation

Walking practice couples attention to rhythm, balance, contact, intention, and movement. Capture becomes visible while action continues. Returning may train continuity of awareness across transitions rather than stillness-dependent regulation. It may be more tolerable than seated practice for some restless or trauma-affected people. Direct comparative evidence is sparse; its value cannot be inferred only from studies of aerobic walking.

Mantra

Repeated syllable, phrase, or sacred formula can constrain discursive competition, entrain rhythm, carry devotional meaning, and invoke a lineage or deity. A secular cognitive account of repetition captures only part of the practice. Capture can occur as loss of rhythm or mechanical repetition without awareness; return re-establishes sound, meaning, and embodied cadence. Evidence combines heterogeneous transcendental, yogic, devotional, and clinical forms, making trait claims uncertain.

Mettā and compassion meditation

Mettā cultivates friendliness or loving-kindness; compassion practices orient toward suffering and the wish that it be relieved. They are constructive rather than merely receptive: imagery, phrases, intention, and relational categories are actively trained. Capture may be self-criticism, numbness, threat, grief, or resistance to receiving care. Returning reinforces a different relational stance. Meta-analyses suggest benefits, but controls and measures vary, and compassion can initially feel unsafe. ^[72, 94, 109]

Zazen

Zazen is not one technique. Sōtō traditions may emphasize *shikantaza*, “just sitting,” while Rinzai systems may include kōan practice. Posture, teacher relationship, monastery

schedule, ethics, and ritual are part of the training ecology. Capture is not always treated as an error to correct; the practice can expose the effort to obtain a special state. Scientific studies labeled “Zen” often flatten these differences. ^[98, 173]

Jhāna

Jhāna refers to absorptive states described in Buddhist sources and interpreted differently across traditions. Training may involve sustained unification, pleasure or equanimity, and progressive refinement of attention. Capture can be sensory desire, aversion, restlessness, dullness, or doubt within traditional maps. Neurophysiological research is early and dominated by rare experts and small samples. A remarkable state is not evidence of awakening, trait transformation, or a unique neural signature.

Mahāmudrā

Mahāmudrā traditions include progressive calm and insight practices as well as “pointing-out” approaches concerned with the nature of mind. What is trained may shift from stabilizing attention to recognizing experience without reifying an observer. Capture can include effortful fabrication of a special awareness. Scientific categories remain immature, and metaphysical or soteriological claims are not settled by changes in self-report or connectivity.

Dzogchen

Dzogchen encompasses historically specific Tibetan teachings concerning primordial knowing and spontaneous presence. It is not equivalent to generic open monitoring. Practice depends on initiation, instruction, view, and lineage. A scientific study can examine reported phenomenology, attention, or self-processing; it cannot verify primordial awareness as metaphysical fact. Treating a brief “nondual awareness” instruction as Dzogchen risks severe cultural and construct invalidity.

Nondual practices

“Nondual” is a comparative category spanning traditions that disagree about self and reality. Practices may loosen the felt division between observer and observed or challenge the search for awareness as an object. Capture may be identification with the observer, conceptual proliferation, or the attempt to reproduce a previous state. Evidence is emerging and sample-limited. No result licenses the equation nonduality = DMN suppression.

Practice as ecology

Teacher, ethical commitments, social setting, ritual, intensity, sleep, retreat conditions, and a person's psychiatric and trauma history modify every practice above. A technique is not an isolated dose. The same instruction can regulate one person, destabilize another, and do little for a third.

STATE-TRAIT RULE A temporary shift during practice is a state effect. A durable, generalized change outside practice is a trait claim. A profound state, repeated state, or compelling story is not by itself evidence of trait transformation.

Part X — Meditation as Training of Transition Dynamics

CENTRAL FLOW HIJACKED PROPOSITION Meditation may be understood not merely as training attention, but as training what happens after perturbation.

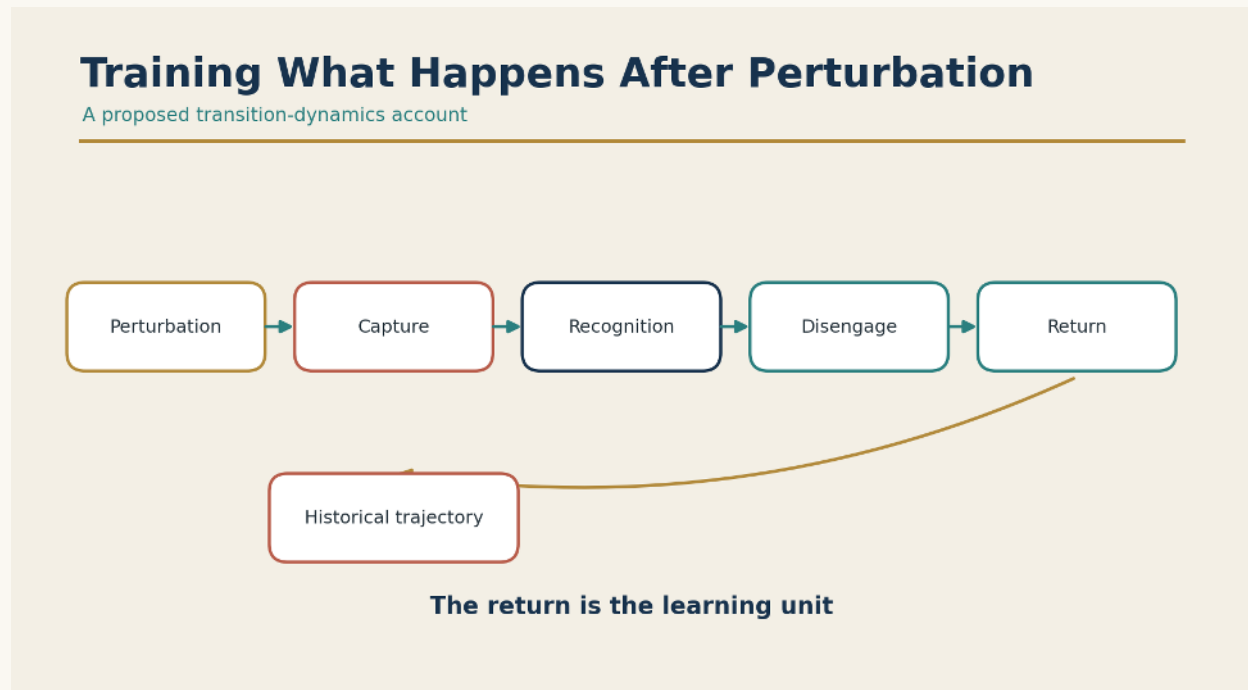


Figure 2. Meditation as training of transition dynamics. The repeated learning unit may be recognition, non-punitive disengagement, and return after capture.

A sound occurs. An itch appears. A shame memory arrives. A craving forms. The system has a history of next states: orient, elaborate, suppress, act, attack, flee, or dissociate. Practice introduces repeated micro-events in which a perturbation is detected and the usual trajectory is not completed. In focused attention, the event is followed by recognition and return. In open monitoring, it may be followed by inclusion without pursuit. In compassion practice, it may be followed by a deliberately different relational response. In exposure-like aspects of body awareness, sensation may be followed by staying rather than escape.

This framing clarifies why “stopping thoughts” is a misleading criterion. The perturbation may continue to appear. What changes is the conditional transition distribution after it. If $P(\text{use} \mid \text{craving}, \text{context})$ decreases while craving remains present, freedom has increased even before craving intensity declines. If $P(\text{self-attack} \mid \text{shame})$ decreases and $P(\text{repair, disclosure, rest, or connection} \mid \text{shame})$ becomes nonzero, the accessible field has widened.

FORMAL MODEL Let $K(s' \mid s, p, c)$ denote the probability of next state s' given current state s , perturbation p , and context c . Transition training changes K ; it need not delete p .

Returning is therefore not a correction after failed meditation. It is the repetition through which new transition dynamics may be learned. The practical unit is: capture → recognition → non-punitive disengagement → reorientation. Self-attack after distraction can reinforce a

different basin: error becomes shame, shame becomes agitation, agitation increases capture. The manner of return matters.

The analogy to extinction must remain qualified. Meditation is not identical to laboratory extinction, and a breath is not a conditioned safety signal in every practice. Yet repeated contact with sensation without the historical action may permit new learning. The original association may remain and reappear in stress or context change. Thus, a return of craving need not mean practice or recovery learning has been erased.

EQUANIMITY — EMERGING FH CONSTRUCT Equanimity as Reduced Behavioral Capture by Perturbation means preserved sensitivity with less obligatory downstream action. Emotional flattening, dissociation, exhaustion, and indifference can also reduce visible reactivity; they are not equanimity.

Part XI — Networks, Precision, and the Next Transition

What brain networks can and cannot tell us

Meditation neuroimaging repeatedly reports changes involving frontoparietal control, salience and insular systems, dorsal attention, default-network regions, sensory cortices, and subcortical structures. Meta-analyses are useful precisely because single studies are flexible and underpowered; even the meta-analytic results remain heterogeneous across practice, task, expertise, and analysis. Structural differences among long-term practitioners are particularly vulnerable to self-selection and lifestyle confounds. ^[67-68, 179, 188]

The default mode network is often misrepresented as the ego network. It contributes to autobiographical memory, future simulation, social cognition, semantic construction, and internally oriented thought. Reduced activity during one meditation contrast does not imply that a self has disappeared, and increased coupling can be adaptive in another task. Likewise, salience-network engagement does not mean that salience is located in one place. Networks are dynamic coalitions described at a particular scale. ^[26, 136, 176]

Focused-attention practice plausibly recruits goal maintenance, conflict detection, and reorientation. Open monitoring may alter how spontaneous events are selected and elaborated. Compassion practice adds imagery, emotion, social cognition, and motivation. Absorption changes the task entirely. A single “meditator versus control” contrast conceals these process differences.

NEUROSCIENCE LIMIT Brain localization can constrain hypotheses about process. It cannot establish Buddhist insight, ethical maturity, freedom, or the metaphysical status of self.

Precision as priority—not a mystical volume knob

Predictive processing proposes that perception and action depend on hierarchical expectations and prediction errors weighted by estimated reliability or precision. Attention is often modeled as related to precision allocation. This offers a possible account of capture: an addictive cue, threat expectation, or shame model may dominate not because no contrary evidence exists, but because contrary evidence is given too little effective weight. ^[8, 38, 70]

Meditation might alter this relation in several nonexclusive ways: increasing detection of a perturbation before elaboration; decreasing automatic confidence in a thought; increasing sensory granularity; sustaining a goal during competition; or changing the expected cost of remaining with discomfort. These are hypotheses. Existing studies seldom measure precision directly, and predictive frameworks can become unfalsifiable if every outcome is redescribed after the fact.

FLOW HIJACKED HYPOTHESIS Contemplative practice may sometimes change not what enters consciousness, but what receives enough precision or salience to dominate the next transition.

A test would compare this hypothesis with simpler explanations such as relaxation, demand characteristics, improved working memory, exposure, respiratory change, or social expectancy. It would need to predict within-person trial-by-trial transitions, not merely correlate questionnaire scores with a network.

Part XII — Anattā and the Many Layers of Self

What the tradition claims

In the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are examined as not-self: because they are impermanent, vulnerable to affliction, and not fully commandable, they are not appropriately regarded as “mine,” “I,” or “my self.” The discourse is a liberative analysis, not a claim that people do not exist, lack moral responsibility, or possess a particular imaging pattern. Buddhist schools later developed divergent accounts of persons, continuity, cognition, Buddha-nature, and emptiness. ^[20, 78, 159]

“No-self” can mislead English readers into imagining a neuroscientific null finding. *Anattā* functions in many contexts as a strategy of non-appropriation and an analysis of phenomena rather than a request to locate an absent object. Historical scholarship also warns that modern presentations often privilege private meditative experience in ways shaped by colonial and modernist exchange. ^[133, 172]

HISTORICAL CONTEMPLATIVE CLAIM Not-self is part of a path that links insight, conduct, craving, and liberation. It is not equivalent to weak self-esteem, dissociation, ego loss, or DMN suppression.

The self is not one scientific construct

Contemporary philosophy and psychology distinguish at least eight partially overlapping levels:

- The minimal self: the immediate first-personal character of experience.
- The embodied self: body ownership, location, boundary, and sensorimotor perspective.
- The interoceptive self: bodily predictions and feelings that help constitute “how I am.”
- The agential self: the feeling and judgment that I initiated or controlled an action.
- The narrative self: an organized story connecting events, motives, and values.
- The autobiographical self: memory structures that support continuity through time.
- The social self: roles and identities sustained through recognition and group membership.
- The metacognitive self: models of what one knows, feels, intends, and can control.

The Self Is a Family of Processes

A scientific map cannot settle metaphysics

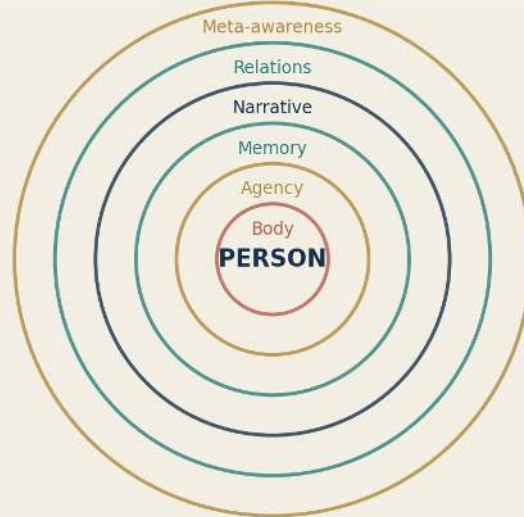


Figure 3. *The self as a family of interacting processes. The layers are scientific distinctions, not a metaphysical verdict or an exhaustive model of a person.*

None is the whole person. Neuroscience finds distributed processes associated with self-reference, ownership, memory, and agency; it has not found a metaphysical self, nor could the absence of one localized center settle the metaphysics. [18, 41, 73, 87, 143]

State is not identity; identity is not ontology

“I am anxious” can be shorthand for a present state, a recurrent vulnerability, a diagnosis, an identity claim, or a request to be understood. “I am addicted” can recognize a dangerous pattern, secure community membership, and protect against overconfidence. “I am broken” can express unbearable pain rather than a philosophical thesis. Precision requires asking what the statement is doing.

State differs from identity: a recurring state may become central to self-description but need not. Identity differs from ontology: even a durable identity is not the final substance of a person. Diagnosis differs from destiny: a category can guide care without exhausting future possibility.

FLOW HIJACKED CONSTRUCT Identity as a Metastable Coordination Pattern is a proposed view of identity as a relatively durable organization of memory, prediction, bodily expectation, social recognition, values, and action—stable enough to coordinate life, revisable enough to permit development.

The word metastable matters. If identity changed with every mood, commitments would disintegrate. If it never changed, learning and recovery would be impossible. Healthy identity does not mean infinite malleability; it means structured continuity capable of revision.

Part XIII — Recovery Identity as Scaffold, Not Prison

A recovery identity can be life-saving. It can transform isolated failure into a shared pattern, provide scripts for high-risk moments, connect the person to others, and make future action legible. Saying “I am in recovery” can protect a commitment when immediate preference shifts. Social identity research and recovery-capital frameworks support the importance of belonging, models, resources, and group norms, although pathways and preferences vary. ^[30, 39]

The same identity can become restrictive if it permits no further differentiation. A person may come to believe that every pleasure is dangerous, every mistake proves total collapse, every relationship must be filtered through the diagnosis, or every future self must remain organized around the period of greatest capture. Communities can stabilize recovery and also police identity. Both are possible.

FLOW HIJACKED PRINCIPLE Recovery Identity as Scaffold, Not Prison.

A scaffold supports construction and can later change its function. The question is not whether a person should keep or abandon a recovery identity. It is whether the identity increases durable agency, connection, honesty, and future possibility—or reduces them. Early recovery may require strong categorical boundaries. Later development may require greater bandwidth: parent, worker, friend, athlete, artist, citizen, scholar, partner, and person in recovery can coexist.

Not-self contributes a question, not an answer: which identity components are being treated as permanent, fully owned, or finally defining? Psychology contributes another: what function does this identity serve now? Dynamical systems contributes a third: does the coordination pattern stabilize valued behavior while allowing adaptive transitions? No tradition answers all three alone.

Part XIV — Impermanence Beyond “Everything Changes”

Anicca, impermanence, is often reduced to a consoling slogan. In early Buddhist practice it is more demanding: conditioned phenomena cannot supply permanent ownership or reliable satisfaction because they arise and cease in dependence on conditions. Observing change is tied to loosening appropriation, not merely appreciating novelty. ^[77, 159]

Modern dynamics adds distinctions. A system can change constantly while remaining trapped: rumination varies in sentence content yet returns to the same basin. A person can look behaviorally still while maintaining flexible internal readiness. Variability is not mobility; novelty is not liberation.

Metastability describes temporary coordination that can dissolve and re-form. Neural variability can relate to adaptive capacity in some tasks and to noise or pathology in others. Entropy can quantify uncertainty or diversity in a defined distribution; it is not a spiritual virtue. Criticality may support dynamic range in some models, but evidence does not justify declaring a universal contemplative optimum. ^[25, 76, 181]

FLOW HIJACKED SYNTHESIS A healthy system is neither frozen nor chaotic. It possesses structured mobility: enough stability to sustain values and relationships, enough flexibility to update, disengage, and recover.

Impermanence becomes clinically relevant when a person learns that the present state is not an ontological verdict. Craving changes. Panic changes. Pleasure changes. Shame changes. Their changing does not guarantee safety or make endurance easy. It prevents the state from having automatic jurisdiction over the definition of the person and the whole future.

Part XV — Compassion Changes the Field of Prediction

Karuṇā and mettā are not sentimental decoration

In Buddhist contexts, *karuṇā* and *mettā* belong to ethical and contemplative systems. They involve dispositions, intentions, practices, and relationships, not simply a warm feeling. Modern compassion interventions vary widely, combining imagery, phrases, psychoeducation, attention, and behavioral commitments. Meta-analyses suggest average benefits for distress and self-criticism, but studies often rely on self-report, passive controls, and enthusiastic developers. ^[63, 72, 109]

Compassion can also be threatening. For a person whose care was followed by betrayal, warmth may predict danger. For someone organized by shame, receiving kindness can intensify the discrepancy between how they are treated and how they believe they deserve to be treated. A humane practice does not force soothing; it titrates contact, consent, and safety.

Shame predicts a hostile self

Shame is not only a thought about the past. It can become a predictive field. The person anticipates rejection, detects ambiguous expressions as contempt, withdraws before contact, and then experiences the absence of support as confirmation. Self-attack may function as pre-emptive control: if I punish myself first, no external judgment can surprise me. Substance use may offer temporary escape from the predicted self, then generate events that deepen the prediction.

Self-compassion is associated with lower psychopathology, and compassion-focused interventions show promising effects, but causal pathways remain incomplete. A trial targeting shame in substance-use treatment illustrates potential clinical relevance without establishing a universal mechanism. ^[121, 123]

FLOW HIJACKED PROPOSITION Compassion may alter the field in which the self is predicted.

This can mean several things: reducing the expected punishment attached to honest disclosure; making bodily distress less diagnostic of defect; increasing the credibility of repair after harm; providing social signals that widen the next action; or allowing responsibility without global self-erasure. Compassion does not mean removing consequences, denying injury, or protecting a person from every boundary. It changes the conditions under which accountability can lead to repair rather than renewed capture.

Family response matters here. Rejection can increase shame and isolation; unbounded rescue can protect the addictive loop from consequence; contempt can make use more likely; stable boundaries with continued human recognition can preserve both safety and future possibility. There is no single family script, especially where violence, coercion, or child safety is involved. Compassion is not the suspension of discernment.

Compassion Can Alter the Predictive Field

Flow Hijacked hypothesis - not an established mechanism



Sensitivity remains; another trajectory becomes viable

Figure 4. Compassion may alter the field in which the self is predicted by changing the expected consequences of disclosure, accountability, and connection. Proposed mechanism, not established fact.

Part XVI — What the Evidence Does Not Permit Us to Say

Meditation research has improved, but recurring problems remain: small samples, variable definitions, inadequate active controls, self-selection among long-term practitioners, retrospective practice estimates, teacher and allegiance effects, expectancy, attrition, multiple analytic choices, underpowered neuroimaging, publication bias, and weak adverse-event monitoring. The strongest reviews support modest benefits for selected outcomes, not transformation of every person or disorder. ^[47, 81, 85, 188]

Evidence about addiction-specific programs is promising but mixed. Mindfulness-based relapse prevention and related interventions can help some participants and may alter stress, craving, or coping processes. They are packages delivered within treatment ecologies, not tests of “meditation alone.” Effects vary by comparator, substance, adherence, severity, support, and outcome. A non-replication of self-reported mindfulness as a mediator is especially instructive: an intervention can have effects without the favored questionnaire mechanism explaining them.

Adverse experiences include anxiety, dysphoria, traumatic material, altered self-experience, depersonalization, dissociation, insomnia, functional impairment, and, in vulnerable people, manic or psychotic phenomena. Incidence is uncertain because studies define and solicit events differently. Retreat intensity, sleep loss, prior history, teacher response, and explanatory culture can matter. ^[27, 62, 118, 163]

SAFETY Meditation is not emergency care, detoxification, trauma treatment, or a substitute for individualized clinical assessment. Abrupt withdrawal from alcohol or sedatives can be medically dangerous. Severe insomnia, mania, psychosis, suicidal intent, overdose risk, or escalating dissociation requires timely human and professional support.

Cultural translation adds another limit. Removing ritual, ethics, community, teacher authority, cosmology, and liberation aims may make a practice accessible and clinically testable; it may also change what the practice is. Conversely, invoking tradition does not immunize institutions against abuse, hierarchy, dogmatism, or harm. Respect requires critical symmetry: neither romanticize the ancient nor assume the modern laboratory owns the meaning of experience.

Part XVII — Return to the Person at 9:17

The person still knows what matters tomorrow. Love has not disappeared. Intelligence has not disappeared. The memory of loss has not disappeared. Yet immediate relief is the only behaviorally real option.

Incentive salience helps explain why the cue pulls. Habit learning helps explain why the sequence is fluent. Allostasis and stress explain why non-use may feel bodily costly. Interoception explains how a state is sensed and interpreted. Temporal discounting and future simulation explain why later outcomes recruit weakly. Salience and attention explain why the field becomes selective. Identity explains why the episode can confirm a global story. Social ecology explains why another person's presence, a locked door, money, a meeting, stigma, or a safe place changes the transition. No single layer is sufficient.

FLOW HIJACKED SYNTHESIS The problem is not necessarily that alternatives objectively do not exist. The problem is that, under particular system states, those alternatives may cease to be experientially accessible enough to compete.

Meditation may matter here, when it does, not because it abolishes craving. It may increase the functional distance between craving and the transition that historically follows it. That distance can be only seconds: sensation, recognition, breath, naming, contact, delay, leaving the environment, calling someone, eating, sleeping, or remembering a future. Seconds can be a new branch.

The practice is not heroic self-control by an isolated will. The branch may depend on treatment, medication, housing, money management, community, family boundaries, reduced access, sleep, and a body no longer in withdrawal. The “inner” distance is partly built outside the person.

LIVED FIELD Craving occurs without immediate action. Fear occurs without constructing the whole future around it. Shame is felt without becoming identity. Sadness occurs without proving that possibility has disappeared. Pleasure occurs without needing to be preserved. Discomfort occurs without immediate escape.

Part XVIII — A Flow Hijacked Theory of Psychological Freedom

PROPOSED SYNTHESIS Psychological freedom does not necessarily mean the disappearance of craving, fear, pain, desire, or difficult thoughts. It may instead mean that these states possess less monopoly over what happens next.

The theory has eight linked constructs:

1. **Craving as State-Space Compression** — an urge can reduce the effective availability of competing trajectories.
2. **Freedom as Dynamic Mobility** — the capacity to enter, dwell, leave, return, and redirect as conditions change.
3. **Freedom as Accessible State Space** — more viable futures remain able to organize action under perturbation.
4. **Meditation as Training of Transition Dynamics** — practice can rehearse what follows capture, not merely prevent capture.
5. **Equanimity as Reduced Behavioral Capture by Perturbation** — sensitivity remains while obligatory coupling decreases.
6. **Identity as a Metastable Coordination Pattern** — continuity supports action without becoming ontological imprisonment.
7. **Recovery as Re-Expansion of Possibility** — futures, roles, relationships, and actions regain functional reachability.
8. **Liberation as Reduced Obligatory Coupling Between Internal State and Behavior** — an internal event no longer determines the next action by itself.

These are emerging Flow Hijacked concepts. They are not established scientific terminology. Their value depends on operationalization and failure conditions.

Candidate measurements

A rigorous research program could combine ecological momentary assessment, passive sensing with consent, behavioral tasks, qualitative interviews, social-context mapping, and dynamical modeling. Candidate outcomes include:

- conditional probability of use after craving at matched intensity;
- latency from perturbation to habitual action;
- number and viability of generated alternative actions;
- future-event specificity and emotional credibility;
- dwell time in rumination, shame, or threat states;
- recovery time after attentional capture;
- context-sensitive transition entropy, distinguished from noise;
- flexibility of identity language without loss of commitment;

- change in transition probability when support enters the field;
- ability to tolerate interoceptive arousal while preserving valued action.

The constructs should be compared against simpler predictors: craving intensity, symptoms, executive function, delay discounting, income, treatment access, and social support. If they add no explanatory or predictive value, they should be revised or abandoned.

What freedom is not

Freedom is not maximal choice at every moment. It is not the inability to commit. It is not emotional blunting. It is not permanent calm. It is not immunity to biology or history. It is not private serenity purchased by ignoring injustice. It is not a peak state. It is not proof of metaphysics.

Freedom is structured mobility in a real ecology. A person can be constrained and still gain agency; agency can grow and still require help. A system can learn that an urge is important without treating it as sovereign.

Part XIX — Assimilation into the Flow Hijacked Knowledge Architecture

The Eastern terminology should enter the wider architecture only when it improves discrimination or generates a better question.

Ask Flow Hijacked

Add a response layer that distinguishes internal event, capture, identity claim, and next-state options. A useful answer should ask, “What has become difficult to access right now?” rather than merely rate urge intensity. Incorporate clear safety routing and never prescribe meditation as a universal response.

Addiction and Recovery

Assimilate Craving as State-Space Compression, relief as a short executable path, and Meditation as Training of Transition Dynamics. Preserve pharmacology, withdrawal, treatment, harm reduction, and structural context. Recovery becomes re-expansion of possibility, not proof that craving has ended.

Psychotherapy

Map therapies by how they alter transitions: exposure and inhibitory learning, behavioral activation, metacognitive recognition, acceptance, compassion, relational repair, environmental restructuring, and identity reconstruction. Do not relabel therapies with Buddhist terms when the original vocabulary is clearer.

Depression, PTSD, OCD, and ADHD

Use dynamic restriction only as a comparison dimension. Depression: future affordance and low-vigor basins. PTSD: past threat with present control. OCD: obligatory uncertainty-reduction loops. ADHD: context-sensitive regulation, salience, task initiation, and switching. Preserve distinct diagnostic evidence.

Psychiatric Drugs and Brain Dynamics

Medication can alter thresholds, dwell times, salience, arousal, and learning opportunities, but the same drug does not impose one trajectory on every system. Avoid using contemplative language to encourage medication discontinuation or to moralize pharmacological support.

Consciousness and Decision Making

Add the distinction between content entering consciousness and content acquiring control. Connect conscious access, meta-awareness, agency, and future simulation without claiming that awareness outside a self has been scientifically demonstrated.

Recovery Identity and Social Ecology

Make Scaffold, Not Prison a central identity principle. Model communities and relationships as regulatory participants that can widen or narrow state space. Add compassion as a potential modifier of predicted selfhood, with boundaries and accountability intact.

Brain Atlas

Avoid a “craving center.” Show distributed interactions among salience, interoception, memory, reward learning, stress, attention, and control. Each atlas view should state that a circuit map is one scale of explanation, not the person.

Coda — The Beginning of Freedom

A sound can be only a sound. An itch can be only an itch. A craving can be powerful, embodied, learned, dangerous—and still not be an instruction that completes itself.

The deepest contribution of contemplative traditions may not be a catalog of unusual states. It may be their refusal to grant every arising event ownership, permanence, and command. The deepest contribution of modern science may be to show how difficult that refusal can become when learning, stress, drugs, body, memory, social context, and future valuation align. The deepest contribution of dynamical thinking may be to replace a moral snapshot with a trajectory: how did the field narrow, what sustains it, what amplifies it, and which inputs reopen movement?

FINAL DESTINATION Freedom may begin when the appearance of a state no longer determines, by itself, what the system must become next.

Research Method, Epistemic Audit, and Reading Guide

The evidence acquisition for this lecture closed on 10 September 2026. The reference architecture combines primary Buddhist texts in authoritative translations; Buddhist and religious-studies scholarship; systematic reviews and meta-analyses of meditation, addiction, cue reactivity, delay discounting, compassion, and adverse events; major reviews of learning, interoception, attention, self, and brain dynamics; selected longitudinal and mechanistic studies; and mathematical sources used only for explicitly labeled Flow Hijacked hypotheses.

The 201-source bibliography is not a claim that all sources have equal weight. Primary texts establish what a tradition says, not whether its metaphysics is scientifically true. Historical works establish context and disagreement, not clinical efficacy. Meta-analyses summarize literatures but inherit weaknesses in the studies they aggregate. Small expert-neuroimaging studies can generate mechanisms but do not establish traits or population effects. Mathematical texts justify the formal vocabulary, not its clinical application.

Readers should therefore interpret every claim through its nearest epistemic label and citation. Where a Flow Hijacked construct appears, it is a proposed synthesis awaiting independent validation. Where a practice is discussed, no individual recommendation is implied.

Numbered Research Registry

The numbered registry contains every source in the research architecture. Sources cited in the lecture are listed first. The extended corpus supplied historical range, negative evidence, methodological boundaries, and adjacent mechanisms. Evidence tags describe the job a source can perform; they do not make all sources equal.

Research corpus at a glance

Evidence family	Sources
Review synthesis or conceptual analysis	85
Meta-analysis	49
Model theory or monograph	18
Controlled or randomized study	15
Systematic review	13
Historical philological or anthropological scholarship	8
Observational longitudinal or measurement study	6
Human neuroscience or consciousness study	5
Primary text or scholarly translation	2

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Evidence: Meta-analysis · Domain: Temporal Discounting

[4] Anālayo, Bh. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Windhorse Publications, 2003.

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[8] Barrett, L. F., & Simmons, W. K. Interoceptive predictions in the brain. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16, 419-429, 2015. doi:10.1038/nrn3950. [Source link](#)

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