

# 4th Maxim (i): Opportunity Knocks

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

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I'm again looking at Dhamma links for the Six Maxims designed to fortify us for the challenge of climate change. Instead of being horrified at the thought of the inevitable hardship for humans, wildlife and environment, the fourth maxim tells us we are to look on this as a golden opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. One parallel in the Dhamma is the Upanisa Sutta which places dukkha (suffering / dissatisfaction) central to a list of conditions leading to enlightenment. The first steps show how we create dukkha by believing we can make ourselves happy in a world which is unstable, uncontrollable, inherently unsatisfying. Ironically the dukkha we feel when our plans fall apart spurs us to find a way out of the endless round of false hope, and the final links show how we can liberate ourselves from suffering. I recently attended a Tricycle online course entitled "The Spiral to Freedom". The teachers, John Peacock and Akincano Weber, stress that all the links from dukkha to liberation can be seen in ordinary daily life. This compliments the practices in previous tips which focussed on formal meditation. Let's imagine ourselves in a state of anxiety or misery because of news of another huge wildfire. The 'spiral teachings' suggest a range of responses which form entry points to the spiral of causes and conditions leading to liberation. For some, Faith is the easiest way to counter the pull into negative thinking. This could be the bright faith of the beginner, or the mature trust that grows with long practice. Every time another dark thought takes us back into the pit, we place our trust in the Dhamma to claw ourselves out. For others, news of a wildfire stimulates doubt rather than faith; we are flooded by questions like 'What is life all about?' where the only answer is 'I don't know'. If we're willing to explore the experience of "I don't know" this is Wise Investigation, a second entry point to the spiral. Although we don't have the answers, we have access to teachings that can point us in the right direction. Thus, bewilderment is the catalyst that motivates us to learn about suffering and how it can be transcended. At other times, investigation may seem irrelevant, we want to do something, anything, to relieve suffering. In this case Virtue becomes the link from dukkha to the spiral. We respond with ethical action – we might donate to a charity supporting those affected, sign a petition or write to our local council. We find some positive action aiming to minimise further harm and pain. But sometimes we can't find the energy, the goodwill needed to sign yet another petition or make that donation. Everything in us just wants to turn away from the world, forget all its horrors. This impulse contains the wisdom of Restraint, which is another entry point to the spiral. We let ourselves turn away from activity, withdraw to some quiet place, give ourselves the silence and rest we need to heal. The opposite can happen too, news of the wildfire leads to restlessness; we don't want to turn inwards, we want something to occupy us. In this case we can use the entry point of Dedication / Care. We could wash the dishes as if this were a sacred ceremony, the most important task in the world, taking care of all the little details. Although we can't fix the wildfire, we can take care of what is at hand, and this is a

very worthy response to dukkha. At other times, the thought of caring for anyone or anything seems an impossible burden. Perhaps anxiety is overwhelming us with thoughts of who to blame. In this case, Mindfulness often provides the best entry point. We don't have to follow the breath, but use phrases like "walking to the shops", "making the dinner", "driving to work" to keep us present, alert, mindful. Although news of the wildfire might still be tempting us to blame and worry, we are choosing present reality as an antidote to those dead ends, and this is a valid way to lift ourselves out of dukkha. Sometimes we can't even muster the energy to be mindful. Everything seems hopeless, the world is doomed, we might as well give up. In this case we need to look outside ourselves, let Inspiration lift us from dukkha to the spiral. Who or what will draw attention away from misery, persuade us that life is worth living? For some it's a weekend camping, others might sign up for a study course; it could be as simple as meeting a friend, listening to a dhamma talk. Next month I'll look at some of the following links in the spiral. In the meantime I hope you will try out some of the entry points, get to know your strengths, learn to play to them when dukkha is getting you down. Here we're allowed to be biased, seek out and amplify feelings and mind-states that lift us up. But we keep mindfulness in the background, noticing what works, what doesn't, when we're pushing ourselves too hard, when we need to step back, take it easy, try again when we're ready. Thus the dukkha of climate change becomes the catalyst to develop resilience, which will help us through all manner of personal sorrows as well as to the global challenge we face at this time.

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