

# 4th Maxim (ii): Spiral to Freedom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

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Following on last month's tip, I'm again looking at Dhamma links for the fourth of the Six Maxims designed to fortify us for the challenge of climate change. Instead of dreading what's to come, the fourth maxim asks us to see all such hardship as an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. The supporting Dhamma teaching that I've been looking at is the Upanisa Sutta, which traces the causes and conditions for liberation. The first steps show how we create dukkha (suffering, stress) by investing our hopes in a world which is inherently unsatisfying. When our hopes are dashed, disappointment, rage, despair - any shade of dukkha - becomes the catalyst for spiritual renewal, and the final links trace what has been termed 'the spiral path' from dukkha to liberation. In a recent Tricycle course, John Peacock and Akincano Weber examine the Upanisa Sutta and related teachings, stressing that all the links in the spiral path can be seen in ordinary daily life. To pull ourselves out of dukkha and into the spiral we have a number of 'Entry Points' which I looked at in last month's tip. Here are some of the following links:

**Gladness:** A moment ago, we were stuck in dukkha, now we've found a way forward. This naturally gladdens the heart. But surprisingly, gladness is easily overlooked. The 'entry point' required effort e.g. to do some good deed, to restrain angry speech. We can be so intent on these that we don't notice the change of heart. We need to be on the lookout for gladness, even if its only momentary, to deepen our faith that there is a path leading from suffering to liberation.

**Rapture:** The background mood of gladness helps us engage, be interested in whatever is happening. This is what we mean by rapture. The word suggests an over-the-top joy, but rapture can be experienced quite simply as interest. Look out for this at the start of any activity you enjoy – as you step into the shower, take the first bite of dinner, meet a friend. Sometimes it can feel a bit giddy, we're over-excited, expecting too much, sometimes mild, like a gentle uplift or refreshment.

**Tranquillity:** Rapture sets up the conditions for tranquillity. This was one I struggled with until Akincano described tranquillity as that cooling phase in every activity, when the initial fizz goes out of it. True enough, once I investigated that slight deflation when some new activity lost its sparkle, I detected an inner relaxation underlying the more obvious surface layer of dullness. I needed to bring attention to the body for this, the mood of deflation still predominated in the mind, but within the tissues of the body, particularly the limbs, I sensed a quiet peace and ease. I realised that I had become more grounded, more settled within myself. So keep an eye out for any slight 'downer' when a new activity starts to feel hum-drum. Ask whether, deep down, peace has descended. I never knew disappointment could hold such treasure! But don't go straight for tranquillity and skip over the rapture stage thinking it's silly to be getting excited by things. For tranquillity to have any depth, we need to put our heart into the activity while it still strikes us as novel and interesting. The energy of enthusiasm lifts us up, and that is the same energy which transforms to tranquillity when the novelty wears off.

**Happiness:** Tranquillity sets

up the conditions needed for happiness. Once I had detected and assured myself that tranquillity was really present, the mood of disappointment evaporated, and instead the heart softened. I realised I was content, happy. While tranquillity, for me, could be described as a bodily form of happiness, the recognition of tranquillity allowed the happiness to spread from body to mind. Unless I had looked for tranquillity within that deflationary phase when the fizz went out of an activity, the mood of disappointment would have remained. Note that nothing had changed in my circumstances to make me happy – only that I'd noticed and paid attention to the physical relaxation that happened as an activity turned from novel and exciting to hum-drum. Happiness sets the stage for concentration, samadhi, which in turn brings forth the many fruits of the spiral path, starting with insight and leading onwards to full liberation. There isn't space to discuss these here, but I encourage you to investigate the earlier steps in the spiral, trust the fruits to ripen in their own time. When dukkha brings you low, find your easiest entry point to the spiral. Notice the gladdening of heart that happens as you lift out of dukkha; notice the rapture (interest / uplift) that comes with any new activity and the tranquillity that settles in as the initial buzz dies away. Steadying your attention on tranquillity, notice the quiet happiness that it promotes. Trust this happiness to lead the mind towards stillness and hence to a deeper understanding of the dhamma. Thus all forms of dukkha, personal or due to climate change, can spur us into the spiral path to liberation.

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