

# Fourth Maxim (iii): Path to Transcendence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

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Following on last month's tip, I want to look at a few more steps in the process of Transcendent Dependent Arising, a teaching showing suffering as the starting point for the path to the end of suffering. This gives a Dhamma basis for the fourth of these six maxims suggested as ethical preparation for climate catastrophe. This maxim challenges us to embrace our good fortune to be living through the crisis. There are twelve steps in Transcendent Dependent Arising, starting with dukkha (usually translated as suffering, but including even the irritation of a fly buzzing on the window pane) and ending with Enlightenment; each step lays down the conditions for the next. Last month I looked at the first three steps showing how dukkha, explored mindfully, leads to faith and then to joy. In meditation, joy refines to keen interest in moment-to-moment experience. We may still be aware of fear associated with our changing climate, but now we're willing to experience fear as sensations and feelings. This, believe it or not, is a form of rapture – often exhilarating and horrible in equal measure! Rapture is a condition for tranquillity. Notice the moments where we are attracted right into the heart of the horror to discover pleasant feelings of relaxation and ease there. Confusing! We might quickly tense up again, but curiosity will sooner or later prompt another moment's relaxation, another taste of the rich concoction of feelings we label as fear. With practice, we get more confident that it is indeed possible to relax and explore the texture of embodied fear. Amid all the unpleasant sensations which we find threatening, we learn to pick out any pleasant ones. As we sink attention into these, we grow tranquil. The mind and body feel calm, at ease. When we've fully convinced ourselves that tranquillity is indeed manifesting, it becomes possible to shift focus, explore the experience of tranquillity itself. This sets up the conditions for the heart to soften as happiness arises. This is not a happy-clappy elation, but a tender glow in the heart. We're happy to be in intimate contact with ourselves despite a fear that still lurks at the periphery of consciousness. With happiness, it becomes easier to focus attention. What usually attracts my attention is the sense of self, the 'me' who watches this show. While happiness is experienced as central, the 'me who watches' hovers around in the periphery. Within the 'me' are prickles of fear as I acknowledge the fragility of the situation, how easily happiness could be quenched. Tensions grow and the breath stops in an effort to hold onto happiness, stave off the dukkha of transience. To my dismay I realise happiness has already gone, swallowed up in my efforts to protect it. With nothing left to defend, I relax and let the breath flow freely. Tensions release and to my surprise I detect happiness again. This time no watcher looks over it or tries to protect it. The sense of 'me' as a separate agent, controlling experience has dissolved. This is the step of insight on the path of transcendent arising. Pleasant feelings associated with happiness intermingle with unpleasant ones which tell of the fragility of happiness, its conditioned nature. This is no longer interpreted as a problem, but as a demonstration of the first noble truth: there is dukkha. Paradoxically, the truth is welcome. It's a relief to

know I can stop trying to achieve the impossible. My original fears around climate change can now be included in this contemplation of dukkha. Sorrow, fear and anger circle around the body along with the happiness of being able to carry a share of the suffering being wrought by our changing climate. Though insight brings peace and joy, our habit of resisting what frightens or displeases us runs deep; soon we find ourselves back at stage 1 again, kicking and screaming. But now we know that dukkha, examined mindfully, leads to insight via faith, joy, rapture, tranquillity, happiness, and concentration. Each insight shows us the futility of resisting what life serves up; this provides the conditions for the next step in the path: disenchantment. Our passions cool; we get better at meeting adversity, intuit calm at the heart of every storm. The process doesn't stop there and just three more steps bring us to nibbana – either full liberation or a glimpse that will obliterate any doubts in the Dhamma. But that's for another day! In the meantime, let's welcome all our troubles, including our worries, anger, sorrow because of our changing climate, as doorways to transcendence.

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