



Chapter 19 – The Resolve to Maintain

Holding the helm – keeping our raft on course

Anchoring our progress – embodying our new resolves

“They do not lament over the past, they yearn not for what is to come, they maintain themselves in the present, thus their complexion is serene.”

~ Gotama (the Buddha)

“Success is the product of daily habits – not once-in-a-lifetime transformations.” ~ James Clear

Our journey from suffering toward freedom and well-being is ongoing. Having recognised life's inherent difficulties, abandoned harmful cravings, and cultivated wholesome qualities, we arrive at the crucial fourth resolve:

Maintaining helpful states.

This final resolve is essential for ensuring that the gains we have made remain strong and resilient against our old destructive patterns. This isn't about us anxiously clinging to our progress so far, but it's about us wisely understanding that our gains need reinforcement. It addresses our crucial need to sustain, nurture, protect, consolidate, and deepen the positive qualities, healthy habits, and insights we have already developed.

This deeply connects to the **Recognise** stage of our journey – it involves an ongoing recognition of the new wholesome mental and behavioural practices we have cultivated, alongside an honest acknowledgment of the continuous effort we require to keep these stable and flourishing on our journey.

Maintaining means recognising the subtle ways old habits or complacency can creep back in if our vigilance wanes.

Within the RAFT metaphor, maintaining is akin to regularly checking our raft

for wear, reinforcing bindings (our commitments), and skilfully navigating towards the safe shore. It is an ongoing practice requiring mindful vigilance, self-compassion, and continuous care. Just as Gotama noted, "*Whatever a person frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of their mind*"; Maintaining involves consciously directing our minds towards the wholesome states and practices we've cultivated.

The importance of maintaining

Maintaining positive changes is not simply about staying still – it's about actively deepening and consolidating our healthy habits. Maintaining is not merely about holding steady; it is about actively *developing* and *perfecting* our skilful qualities, ensuring we continue to move towards deeper peace and insight, rather than settling into a plateau. Modern neuroscience highlights that our brain's neural pathways are linked to old harmful patterns, and do not vanish completely, but remain dormant and can easily re-emerge, especially when we are under stress. This phenomenon – 'Habit Entropy' – underscores the need for regular, conscious reinforcement of healthier patterns to strengthen our new neural connections. Without consistent effort, our new healthy habits can fade (*'use it or lose it'*). Our new skills and insights also need time and repetition to become deeply integrated and reliable, especially when we are under stress.

Regular mindfulness practice strengthens the brain networks responsible for our attention regulation, emotional control, and self-awareness. Consistently practicing skilful states builds our resilience, making us better equipped to handle future challenges without falling overboard. Maintaining practices such as meditation, ethical mindfulness (M.A.R.A), and resilience-building activities, consistently reduces our vulnerability to drifting off course by balancing our cortisol and dopamine levels, which can be dysregulated under stress.

Furthermore, our early gains can sometimes lead us to a false sense of security, reducing the perceived need for our ongoing practice or support. As Kevin Griffin, a Buddhist author, teacher, and leader in the mindful recovery movement suggests, "*Moving from suffering to freedom is not just about abstaining... but about living a full, meaningful, and ethical life*". Maintaining skilful states is *living* that life.

How to maintain – practical strategies

Sustaining progress involves conscious, ongoing strategies:

- ★ **Reinforcing positive changes:** Actively acknowledge and appreciate your progress. Keep a journal to record successes, insights, and moments of gratitude. Celebrate milestones appropriately to reinforce positive associations.
- ★ **Building resilience through mindfulness:** Sustain regular mindfulness practices – such as breathing meditation and body awareness – to anchor and deepen positive states. Consistency is the key.
- ★ **Consolidating healthy habits:** Make wholesome routines (exercise, nutritious eating, adequate sleep, creative outlets) non-negotiable parts of your daily life until deeply ingrained.
- ★ **Strengthening motivation:** Regularly revisit your core reasons for seeking freedom from suffering. Reflect on the benefits experienced and negative consequences avoided. Keep your ‘why’ alive.
- ★ **Practising self-compassion with setbacks:** Lapses or challenging periods happen. Respond to them with kindness and renewed resolve. Remember – ‘*progress, not perfection*’ – Gotama suggested that it is a gradual path but sudden in realisation once conditions are ripe. Like a lotus opening at dawn, liberation unfolds when the groundwork is complete.

“Just as the great ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch; in the same way this journey is a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a breakthrough to wisdom only after a long stretch...” ~ Gotama
- ★ **Nurturing connection and community:** As Johann Hari notes, “*The opposite of addiction is connection*”. Actively engage in supportive communities, maintain connections with ‘wise mentors’ or ‘liberation friends’, and nurture relationships that reinforce your path to freedom.

Accountability and shared experience are vital for the ‘resolve to maintain’.

★ **Deepening understanding through ongoing learning:** Continuously explore moving from suffering to freedom – explore mindfulness, neuroscience, psychology, and Buddhist teachings to strengthen insight and skilfulness. Deeper insight strengthens resolve and skilfulness.

★ **Mindful thoughts and self-talk:** Pay attention to internal narratives. Consciously challenge outdated, negative self-perceptions related to past harmful patterns, affirming your present reality and future potential. Repeat affirmations such as, “*That’s who I was then; it’s not who I am now, nor who I will be in the future!*”. This acknowledges the truth of impermanence, that we can and do change.

Mindfulness and maintaining – the charioteer simile

In our RAFT to Freedom metaphor, maintaining is the essential ongoing work after the initial building and patching of our raft. Gotama’s ‘Simile of the Charioteer’ illustrates this beautifully. Imagine mindfulness as a skilful charioteer guiding our life’s chariot. Confidence (Faith) and Discernment (Wisdom) are the two well-matched horses, needing to work in harmony. Awareness provides balance, ensuring our journey remains ethical and beneficial. The charioteer’s vigilant presence – the Resolve to Maintain – ensures the horses remain yoked and directed, keeping the chariot on the path, and not falling asleep at the reins.

Self-reflections

Gently reflect on your experiences of maintaining positive states:

- ★ What helpful habits or skills have you successfully cultivated and maintained in your journey so far?
- ★ What helps you stay consistent with positive changes? What makes maintaining them challenging?
- ★ How do you typically respond internally when you experience a setback or lapse of a healthy habit?

- ★ How important is community or social support in helping you maintain your journey?
- ★ Do you feel your motivation for moving from suffering to freedom is steady, or does it fluctuate? What influences it?
- ★ Reflecting on the charioteer simile, where do you feel your 'guidance system' (mindfulness, confidence, wisdom) is strong, and where might it need strengthening to maintain course?

Journaling prompts

Explore and reinforce the resolve to maintain through writing:

- ★ **Maintenance plan:** Choose one important positive habit or quality you've cultivated. Write down three specific actions you can take this week to actively maintain and strengthen it.
- ★ **Handling setbacks:** Imagine a potential future setback (for example, missing meditation for a few days, feeling a strong urge). Write a compassionate, mindful plan for how you would respond, applying the resolve to maintain, with commitment, and self-kindness rather than giving up.
- ★ **The charioteer within:** Reflect on the Charioteer simile. Which 'horse' – Confidence (Faith) or Discernment (Wisdom) – feels stronger for you right now? How can you bring them into better balance? What helps your 'Mindful Charioteer' stay alert?
- ★ **Reasons for maintaining:** Revisit your core motivations for seeking freedom. List the top 3-5 reasons why maintaining your progress is important to you today. Keep this list somewhere visible.
- ★ **Connection & maintenance:** Reflect on Johann Hari's quote about connection. How does connection (or lack thereof) impact your ability to maintain your progress? What's one step you could take to strengthen healthy connections this week?

Supporting material: neuroscience and psychology insights

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of the **Resolve to Maintain**, the following overview highlights some key connections. The need for ongoing maintenance aligns with various fields:

- ★ **Neuroscience:** Neuroscience confirms the importance of maintaining. Habit consolidation shows that while new habits can form (neuroplasticity), old pathways don't disappear entirely and can be reactivated, especially under stress. Maintaining requires ongoing reinforcement of the new pathways and active inhibition (PFC function) of the old ones. Sustained mindfulness practice continues to strengthen brain networks involved in attention regulation, emotional control, and self-awareness. Maintaining stress resilience helps prevent stress-induced drifting off course linked to cortisol and dopamine dysregulation.
- ★ **Psychology:** Psychological models, Habit Formation (James Clear), and Self-Compassion Research (Kristin Neff), emphasise ongoing vigilance, supportive environments, and gentle self-care as vital for sustained change. Self-Determination Theory suggests ongoing satisfaction of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness supports sustained motivation. The importance of social support is consistently validated for long-term maintenance on the journey to freedom.
- ★ **Philosophy:** Philosophically, maintaining aligns with Buddhist concepts like 'Heedfulness', which emphasizes continuous vigilance and effort. It also resonates with the universal ethical principles of perseverance, commitment, and discipline, essential for achieving long-term freedom and well-being. Virtue ethics sees character development as an ongoing process, not a finished state. The importance of community and friendship is stressed for sustaining practice on the path.

Remember to remember

Maintaining helpful states is an ongoing practice, not a destination easily reached and then forgotten. Regular mindful effort preserves our gains, deepens our positive qualities, and keeps our raft seaworthy, and skilfully navigated towards lasting freedom. By embracing daily habits, nurturing supportive connections, practicing self-compassion during challenges, and continually reconnecting with our purpose, we consolidate our journey and build a foundation for lasting well-being. Recognising the need for this ongoing maintenance is a key insight within the first stage of the RAFT to Freedom

journey. It prepares us for the long haul, fostering realistic expectations alongside enduring hope.

As we continue our journey, let us remember that **Preventing**, **Abandoning**, **Cultivating**, and **Maintaining** helpful states are not isolated steps, but interwoven threads of skilful effort that guide our entire path toward liberation and lasting well-being. By consciously maintaining these practices, we nurture a life of freedom, resilience, and profound well-being, steadily steering our raft towards the safe shore.

“Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare.” ~ Angela Duckworth

“Do not expect full realization; simply practice every day of your life.” ~
Milarāpa (attributed)

Sutta references

- ★ **Sammappadhana Vibhanga Sutta (SN 45.8):** Defines the Four Right Efforts, explicitly addressing maintenance as generating desire and exerting intent "for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skilful qualities that have arisen".
- ★ **Appamāda Suttas (Various, e.g., SN 3.17, Dhammapada Chapter 2):** Highlights heedfulness (appamāda) as the path to freedom, stressing the importance of ongoing vigilance and effort in maintaining skilful qualities and guarding against negligence.
- ★ **Ratha Sutta (SN 45.4 - The Chariot):** Uses the chariot simile illustrating ongoing vigilance and mindfulness, comparing the Noble Eightfold Path to a chariot, with factors like Right View as the framework, Right Effort as the energy/wheels, Mindfulness as the charioteer, and Nibbana as the destination.
- ★ **Dvedhavitakka Sutta (MN 19 - Two Kinds of Thought):** Discusses cultivating wholesome thoughts and abandoning unwholesome ones. The quote "Whatever a person frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of their mind" highlights the importance of maintaining focus on wholesome inclinations.
- ★ **Kalyāṇamitta Sutta (SN 45.2 - Noble Friendship):** Emphasizes the importance of supportive relationships for maintaining the path, stating

that noble friendship, companionship, and comradeship are the "entirety of the holy life" as they support the development and maintenance of the Noble Eightfold Path.

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