



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

## 41 - The Five Hazards: Anxiety and Agitation

### **Navigating choppy waters and the paradox of high-arousal**

*"Restlessness has the characteristic of disquietude, like water whipped up by the wind. Its function is to make the mind unsteady." ~ Bhikkhu Bodhi*

*"When thoughts are racing and repetitive, remember: no one can harm the practitioner as much as the untamed mind." ~ Jack Kornfield*

### **Understanding the swirl**

The fourth of the 'Five Hazards' is 'Anxiety and Agitation', traditionally known as *Restlessness and Remorse*. This hazard constitutes a surge into chaotic, high-arousal states that scatter our attention and unsettle the heart. It is two-fold: *Anxiety* is the forward-pulling restlessness often called the "*monkey mind*", while *Agitation* is the backward-pulling, sticky fixation on past missteps, worry, or guilt. Within our RAFT to Freedom framework, this hazard arises from *Delusion* – a momentary misreading of what is happening, where thoughts feel solid and urgent, and the changing nature of experience is forgotten.

In this third stage of our journey – Freedom – this hazard matters because inner agitation and restlessness prevents the mind from settling enough to recognise freedom as a lived experience rather than an idea. These stormy mental states block the ability of the mind to access 'A Gathered Mind' (Chapter 32) and Deep Calm (Chapter 48). These inner winds make it difficult for us to personally verify the presence of 'Freedom' from cravings, compulsions and aversions.

What the early texts call *restlessness and worry* now often shows up as what modern psychology calls *hurry sickness* – a driven, anxious sense of speed that feels productive but quietly erodes clarity. Over time, rushing becomes a habit, even when there is no real urgency. This constant speeding-up creates a self-reinforcing positive feedback loop: moving fast fuels agitation, and agitation then pushes us to move even faster, leaving little space for the Joy-Gladness that naturally arises when the mind is not caught in such storms.

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### Self-Reflection questions

1. What specific bodily sensations are observed when agitation first arises?
  2. What is the habitual focus of remorse—the past, the future, or both?
  3. How does observing mental scattering change the relationship to it?
  4. In what situations does *Hurry Sickness* most reliably appear, and what is the earliest signal that rushing has become automatic?
  5. What proportion of current worries fall within the Circle of Influence versus the Circle of Concern alone?
  6. What patterns of rumination are observed when anxiety is high?
  7. How does engaging the Supports of Deep Calm and A Unified Mind alter the intensity of the agitation?
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### Journaling prompts

1. **Agitation Map:** Describe a recent time mental restlessness was high. Map the sequence: trigger > scattering thoughts > calming supports applied > result.
2. **Circle of Influence Log:** List three current worries. Categorise them into "Things I can change" and "Things I cannot." Note how this affects the feeling of agitation.
3. **Deferral Experiment:** Practice the Postponement Strategy for one week. Record the worry, the agreed return time, and what happened when that time arrived.
4. **Speed Audit:** For three days, record every instance of automatic rushing, including physical hurrying and mental racing.
5. **Defusion Practice:** For one day, every time a self-reproachful thought

arises, rewrite it: *"The awareness notices the thought that..."*

6. **Stillness Log:** Describe the bodily and mental qualities of three brief moments of settled presence or quiet clarity experienced this week.
  7. **Calming plan:** List the three most reliable calming supports (for example, breath focus, nature walk, supportive communication). Plan to use one of these next time agitation arises.
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## **Remember to remember**

Remember that beneath agitation lies a stillness that never disappears. Each time awareness anchors attention and allows the waves to settle, the mind glimpses this stability. These brief clearings teach the heart that calm is not created – it is revealed when the inner winds die down.

*Anxiety and Agitation* can make the raft feel like a small, panicked vessel caught in choppy waters. In these moments, awareness itself is the most powerful stabilising force. When attention is grounded in the immediacy of the breath or the present moment, the mind is protected from the scattering winds of anxiety and the dragging undertow of self-reproach. When the choice is made to release hurrying, worrying and regretting, the heart remembers what it truly values: presence, kindness, and the capacity to meet life with an open, steady awareness.

*"Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained."* ~ Arthur Somers Roche

*"We suffer more often in imagination than in reality."* ~ Seneca

*"Suppose a person were a slave, not their own master, subject to the commands of another and unable to go where they liked. Later, they are released from that slavery, becoming their own master, independent and able to go wherever they wish. In the same way, when Anxiety and Agitation are abandoned, the mind is no longer forced to obey the erratic commands of restless thoughts, regaining its autonomy."* ~ Gotama

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