AN 4.37 — Non-decline

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Text

Numbered Discourses 4.37

4. Situations

Non-decline

“Mendicants, a mendicant who possesses four qualities can’t decline, and has drawn near to extinguishment. What four? A mendicant is accomplished in ethics, guards the sense doors, eats in moderation, and is dedicated to wakefulness.

And how is a mendicant accomplished in ethics? It’s when a mendicant is ethical, restrained in the monastic code, conducting themselves well and resorting for alms in suitable places. Seeing danger in the slightest fault, they keep the rules they’ve undertaken. That’s how a mendicant is accomplished in ethics.

And how does a mendicant guard the sense doors? When a mendicant sees a sight with their eyes, they don’t get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of sight were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of sight, and achieving its restraint. Hearing a sound with their ears … Smelling an odor with their nose … Tasting a flavor with their tongue … Encountering a touch with their body … Knowing an idea with their mind, they don’t get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of mind were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of mind, and achieving its restraint. That’s how a mendicant guards the sense doors.

And how does a mendicant eat in moderation? It’s when a mendicant reflects rationally on the food that they eat: ‘Not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support spiritual practice. In this way, I shall put an end to old discomfort and not give rise to new discomfort, and I will have the means to keep going, blamelessness, and a comfortable abiding.’ That’s how a mendicant eats in moderation.

And how is a mendicant dedicated to wakefulness? It’s when a mendicant practices walking and sitting meditation by day, purifying their mind from obstacles. In the first watch of the night, they continue to practice walking and sitting meditation. In the middle watch, they lie down in the lion’s posture—on the right side, placing one foot on top of the other—mindful and aware, and focused on the time of getting up. In the last watch, they get up and continue to practice walking and sitting meditation, purifying their mind from

obstacles. This is how a mendicant is dedicated to wakefulness. A mendicant who possesses these four qualities can't decline, and has drawn near to extinguishment.

Established in ethics,

restrained in the sense faculties,

eating in moderation,

and dedicated to wakefulness;

a mendicant lives like this, with keen energy,

tireless all night and day,

developing skillful qualities,

for the sake of sanctuary from the yoke.

A mendicant who loves diligence,

seeing fear in negligence,

can't decline,

and has drawn near to extinguishment."