AN 8.74 — Mindfulness of Death (2nd)

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Source: https://suttacentral.net/an8.74/en/sujato
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Text

Numbered Discourses 8.74

8. Pairs

Mindfulness of Death (2nd)

At one time the Buddha was staying at Ñātika in the brick house. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants: “Mendicants, when mindfulness of death is developed and cultivated it’s very fruitful and beneficial. It has freedom from death as its objective and culmination.

And how is mindfulness of death developed and cultivated to be very fruitful and beneficial, with freedom from death as its objective and culmination? As day passes by and night draws close, a mendicant reflects: ‘I might die of many causes. A snake might bite me, or a scorpion or centipede might sting me. And if I died from that it would be an obstacle to my progress. Or I might stumble off a cliff, or get food poisoning, or suffer a disturbance of bile, phlegm, or piercing winds. Or I might be attacked by humans or non-humans. And if I died from that it would be an obstacle to my progress.’ That mendicant should reflect: ‘Are there any bad, unskillful qualities that I haven’t given up, which might be an obstacle to my progress if I die tonight?’

Suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that there are such bad, unskillful qualities. Then in order to give them up they should apply extraordinary enthusiasm, effort, zeal, vigor, perseverance, mindfulness, and situational awareness.

Suppose your clothes or head were on fire. In order to extinguish it, you’d apply extraordinary enthusiasm, effort, zeal, vigor, perseverance, mindfulness, and situational awareness. In the same way, in order to give up those bad, unskillful qualities, that mendicant should apply extraordinary enthusiasm …

But suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that there are no such bad, unskillful qualities. Then that mendicant should meditate with rapture and joy, training day and night in skillful qualities.

Or else, as night passes by and day draws close, a mendicant reflects: ‘I might die of many causes. A snake might bite me, or a scorpion or centipede might sting me. And if I died from that it would be an obstacle to my progress. Or I might stumble off a cliff, or get food poisoning, or suffer a disturbance of bile, phlegm, or piercing winds. Or I might be attacked by humans or non-humans. And if I died from that it would be an obstacle to my progress.’ That mendicant should reflect: ‘Are there any bad, unskillful qualities that I

haven’t given up, which might be an obstacle to my progress if I die today?’

Suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that there are such bad, unskillful qualities. Then in order to give them up they should apply extraordinary enthusiasm, effort, zeal, vigor, perseverance, mindfulness, and situational awareness.

Suppose your clothes or head were on fire. In order to extinguish it, you’d apply extraordinary enthusiasm, effort, zeal, vigor, perseverance, mindfulness, and situational awareness. In the same way, in order to give up those bad, unskillful qualities, that mendicant should apply extraordinary enthusiasm …

But suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that there are no such bad, unskillful qualities. Then that mendicant should meditate with rapture and joy, training day and night in skillful qualities. Mindfulness of death, when developed and cultivated in this way, is very fruitful and beneficial. It has freedom from death as its objective and culmination.”