AN 10.55 — Decline

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Text

Numbered Discourses 10.55

6. Your Own Mind

Decline

There Sāriputta addressed the mendicants: “Reverends, mendicants!”

“Reverend,” they replied. Sāriputta said this:

“Reverends, they speak of an individual liable to decline, and one not liable to decline. But how did the Buddha define an individual liable to decline, and one not liable to decline?”

“Reverend, we would travel a long way to learn the meaning of this statement in the presence of Venerable Sāriputta. May Venerable Sāriputta himself please clarify the meaning of this. The mendicants will listen and remember it.”

“Then listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.”

“Yes, reverend,” they replied. Sāriputta said this:

“How did the Buddha define an individual liable to decline? It’s when a mendicant doesn’t get to hear a teaching they haven’t heard before. They forget those teachings they have heard. They don’t keep exercising the teachings with which they are already familiar. And they don’t come to understand what they haven’t understood before. That’s how the Buddha defined an individual liable to decline.

And how did the Buddha define an individual not liable to decline? It’s when a mendicant gets to hear a teaching they haven’t heard before. They remember those teachings they have heard. They keep exercising the teachings with which they are already familiar. And they come to understand what they haven’t understood before. That’s how the Buddha defined an individual not liable to decline.

If a mendicant isn’t skilled in encompassing another’s mind, then they should train themselves: ‘I will be skilled in encompassing my own mind.’

And how is a mendicant skilled in encompassing their own mind? Suppose there was a woman or man who was young, youthful, and fond of adornments, and they check their own reflection in a clean bright mirror or a clear bowl of water. If they see any dirt or blemish there, they’d try to remove it. But if they don’t see any dirt or blemish there, they’re happy with that, as they’ve got all they wished for: ‘How fortunate that I’m clean!’

In the same way, checking is very helpful for a mendicant's skillful qualities. 'Is contentment often found in me or not? Is good will often found in me or not? Is freedom from dullness and drowsiness often found in me or not? Is calm often found in me or not? Is confidence often found in me or not? Is love often found in me or not? Is purity of mind often found in me or not? Is internal joy with the teaching found in me or not? Is internal serenity of heart found in me or not? Is the higher wisdom of discernment of principles found in me or not?'

Suppose a mendicant, while checking, doesn't see any of these skillful qualities in themselves. In order to get them 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, they should apply extraordinary enthusiasm to get those skillful qualities …

Suppose a mendicant, while checking, sees some of these skillful qualities in themselves, but doesn't see others. Grounded on the skillful qualities they see, they should apply extraordinary enthusiasm, effort, zeal, vigor, perseverance, mindfulness, and situational awareness in order to get the skillful qualities they don't see. 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, grounded on the skillful qualities they see, they should apply extraordinary enthusiasm to get those skillful qualities they don't see.

But suppose a mendicant, while checking, sees all of these skillful qualities in themselves. Grounded on all these skillful qualities they should practice meditation further to end the defilements."