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Who is Near to Nibbána?

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Let us this morning ask ourselves the question:

“Who is near to Nibbána?”

The Buddha has answered this question in the fourth section of the Aòguttara Nikáya where he has referred to four qualities possessed of which a Bhikkhu is incapable of falling away from the religious life he has taken to and is therefore near to Nibbána.

The **first quality** is perfection in **sila** or virtue. He should be perfect in the practice of right conduct. He should be one who sees danger in the slightest of faults.

On many an occasion the Buddha has stressed the fundamental importance of sila and also the importance of being able to see danger in the commission of very slight faults. This perfection of sila is the best guarantee that one is incapable of falling away from the religious life and in this sense he is near to Nibbána.

The **second quality** is the ability on the part of a Bhikkhu to **guard well the doors of his sense-faculties**. For instance, if with his eye he sees any object, his mind should not be swept away by the general features of that object, or by any details of that object. Otherwise unprofitable and unwholesome states of mind like anger, hatred or passionate desire may arise. He should calmly and dispassionately view the object and leave it at that.

This should be so in regard to all the other sense-faculties. This

therefore is what is meant in the advice the Buddha gave to Bahiya who was anxious to become an Arahat.

This is the advice:-

“In the seen there shall be to you only the seen. In the heard there shall be to you only the heard. In the sensed (as smelt, tasted or touched) there shall be to you just the sensed. In the thought, there shall be to you just the thought.”

For one who is thus guarded in regard to his sense-faculties, falling away from the religious life is not possible and he is therefore near to Nibbána.

The **third quality is moderation in eating**. The greed to eat is incompatible with high aspirations. A Bhikkhu should take his food thoughtfully and prudently, not for the mere pleasure of it nor for mere indulgence, but just enough for the maintenance of his body to enable him to lead the religious life.

He does not live to eat, but he eats to live.

He will therefore not be a slave of desire.

In all things, he will practise moderation. To such a one falling away from the religious life is not possible and therefore Nibbána is near to him.

The **fourth quality is constant watchfulness**, that is, watchfulness **over the mind**.

During the day while walking up and down, and also when he is seated, such a Bhikkhu should always have a watch over his mind

and see that no evil states arise in it.

In the first watch of the night he should do the same as he did during the day.

In the second watch of the night he should calmly and collectedly retire to sleep fixing his thoughts of rising up again,

In the last watch of the night, that is at break of dawn, he should again commence his watchfulness as at the first watch of the night.

This eternal watchfulness secures the great purpose of preventing evil and unwholesome states of mind from arising. To such a person also Nibbána is near as there is no danger of his falling away from the religious life.

Possessed of these four qualities a Bhikkhu is said to be