

(Upāsaka) Mahānāma Sutta

The Discourse (on the Layman) to Mahānāma

[What makes a lay follower?]
 (Aṅguttara Nikāya 8.25/4:220-222)
 Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

The (Upāsaka) Mahānāma Sutta is closely related to **the (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta** (S 55.37).¹ In fact, in both suttas, Mahānāma asks the Buddha the same question, and the same answer is given in the first part, that is, a lay follower is one who goes for refuge in the Three Jewels and is accomplished in moral virtue (by keeping the five precepts).²

However, while the (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta goes on to list and define the four spiritual accomplishments of a lay follower (the accomplishments of moral virtue, of faith, of generosity, and of wisdom), the (Upāsaka) Mahānāma here only mentions the first accomplishment—that of moral virtue—in full and then goes on to apply the first two of the threefold purity (*ti.koṭi,parisuddha*) of moral action to the four accomplishments.

This threefold purity of moral action is fully demonstrated in **the Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7) according to this pattern:

Having reflected thus (on the golden rule), he himself refrains from <breaking a precept>, exhorts other to refrain from <breaking the precept>, and speaks in praise of <refraining from breaking the precept>. (S 55.7/5:353-356)

In other words, a true layman keeps the precepts and encourages others to keep the precepts. According to **the Atta,hita Sutta** (A 4.96/2:96) and **Sikkhā Sutta** (A 4.99/2:98 f), such a person is “one who lives for his own good and for the good of others. The third of the threefold purity, stated as “[He] speaks in praise of refraining from <breaking the precept>”, refers to spiritual friendship and the practice of altruistic joy (*muditā*).

This sutta here repeats in the following Jīvaka Sutta where Jīvaka is the protagonist.

— — —

¹ S 55.37/5:395 = SD 6.2.

² S 55.37.1-4 = A 8.25.1-2.

The Discourse (on the Layman) to Mahānāma

(A 8.25/4:220-222)

1 At one time the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyas in Nigrodh'ārāma [the Banyan Park] near Kapilavatthu. Then Mahānāma the Sakya went up to the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, Mahānāma the Sakya said this to the Blessed One:

“Venerable sir, **how is one a lay follower?**”

“When, Mahānāma, one has gone to the Buddha as refuge, to the Dharma as refuge, to the Sangha as refuge, then one is a lay follower.”

2 “And **how, venerable sir, is one a virtuous lay follower?**”

“When, Mahānāma, a lay follower is
 one who refrains from harming living beings;
 one who refrains from taking the not-given;
 one who refrains from sexual misconduct;
 one who refrains from false speech;
 one who refrains from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness—then one is a virtuous lay follower.

3 “And **how, venerable sir, does a lay follower live for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others?**”

“When, Mahānāma, a lay follower
 having faith³ himself but does not rouse faith in another;
 having moral virtue himself but does not rouse moral virtue in another;
 having generosity himself but does not rouse generosity in another;
 having himself the desire to see the monks but does not rouse others to see the monks;
 having himself the desire to hear the Dharma but does not rouse others to hear the Dharma;
 himself remembers the Dharma but does not rouse others to remember the Dharma;
 himself investigates the meaning of the Dharma he has remembered but does not rouse others to investigate the Dharma;
 himself understands the Dharma, understands its meaning, and practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma but **does not rouse others to practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma**;
 —then, one is a lay follower who lives for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others.

4 “And **how, venerable sir, does a lay follower live for his own welfare and for the welfare of others?**”

“When, Mahānāma, a lay follower
 having faith himself but rouses faith in another;
 having moral virtue himself and rouses moral virtue in another;
 having generosity himself and rouses generosity in another;
 having himself the desire to see the monks and rouses others to see the monks;
 having himself the desire to hear the Dharma and rouses others to hear the Dharma;
 himself remembers the Dharma and rouses others to remember the Dharma;

³ “Faith,” *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p, pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). Gethin speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith is its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases).

himself investigates the meaning of the Dharma he has remembered and rouses others to investigate the Dharma;

himself understands the Dharma, understands its meaning, and practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma and **rouses others to practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma**;

—then, one is a lay follower who lives for his own welfare and for the welfare of others.

—evaṃ—

040713; 060320; 081128a; 090930a