

(Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2

The Second Discourse to Mahānāma on His Destiny

[A true follower will not die in vain]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 55.22/5:371)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

The (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2 (S 55.22) is the second of two similarly named discourses on the same topic: the other discourse is **the (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1** (S 55.21).¹ Both Suttas opens identically with Mahānāma telling the Buddha that he (Mahānāma) finds difficulty keeping mindfulness, and thus worries about his spiritual destiny should he die unmindfully. [§§1-3]

In **the (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1** (S 55.21), the Buddha reassures Mahānāma by saying that since he has the fivefold noble growth (*ariya, vaddha*) [§§4-5], he should have not fear of a good rebirth [§6]. What is interesting is that only in this Sutta does the Buddha specifically tell Mahānāma that his mind “has for a long time been fully developed” on the fivefold noble growth.

In **the (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2** (S 55.22), the Buddha simply states and defines of the four limbs of a streamwinner (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*), that is, the qualities of a streamwinner of the path. The Sutta simply closes with the Buddha saying that just as a tree that leans to the east, when cut, would fall to the east, “even so, Mahānāma, the four states bends towards nirvana, slopes towards nirvana, tends towards nirvana.”

Apparently, especially since the two Suttas have identical openings, expressing the same sentiment and asking the same question, they probably formed a single sutta, but become separate in time. Alternatively, Mahānāma's meeting with the Buddha as recorded in the (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1 occurs first (where he is simply reassured that he would not die in vain), and later on he approaches the Buddha again, as recorded in the (Gati) Sutta 2 (where he is told that he would attain nirvana in due course).

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¹ S 55.21/5:369-371 = SD 23.1a.

The Second Discourse to Mahānāma on His Destiny (S 55.22/5:371)

[371]

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Nigrodha's Monastery in Sakya country.

Mahānāma is concerned about his dying

2 Then Mahānāma the Sakya approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, Mahānāma the Sakya said this to the Blessed One:

3 "Bhante, this Kapila, vatthu is wealthy and prosperous, belonging to the people, well-populated, thickly crowded [massed with troops].²

Bhante, in the evening, after visiting the Blessed One or a monk worthy of esteem, as I was entering Kapila, vatthu, I would come across an erratic elephant, an erratic horse, an erratic person (hurrying about aimlessly).³

At that time, bhante, my mindfulness towards the Blessed One is truly muddled. My mindfulness towards the Dharma is truly muddled. My mindfulness towards the Sangha is truly muddled.

The thought then occurred to me:

'If I were to die at this very moment, what would be by destination, what my future course?''⁴

4 "Fear not, Mahānāma! Fear not, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one; your passing will not be a bad one."⁵

The four limbs of a streamwinner⁶

Mahānāma, a noble disciple who is accomplished in four qualities is one who bends towards nirvana, slopes towards nirvana, tends towards nirvana.⁷ What are the four?

5 Here, Mahānāma, a noble disciple is

(1) FAITH IN THE BUDDHA:⁸ one accomplished with wise faith⁹ in the Buddha, thus:

² *Iddhañ c'eva phītañ ca bāhu, jaññañ ākiñña, manussañ sambādha, vyūhañ*: S 2:106 (with *vuddhi, vepulla-p, pattam* in place of *sambādha, vyūhañ*), 5:369, 371; Nett 133. ... *ākiñña, manussañ*: M 2:71+72; S 3:215. Cf D 2:113, 219, 3:136-138; S 2:107, 4:311, 5:262; U 64. The phrase *sambādha, vyūha* can also mean "massed with troops," meaning the city is well guarded. Comy seems to suggest that *vyūha* are major roads (*magga*), which are said to be "congested" (*sambādha*) with traffic of beings and transport (S 3:287). The phrase *sambādha, vyūha* however can also mean "massed with troops," meaning the city is well guarded.

³ *Bhantena*, from *bhamati* ("it whirls about," Dh 371: *bhamassu*). Comy glosses *bhantena* as "wandering erratically about here and there, roaming restlessly" (*ito c'ito ca paribbhamantena uddhata, cārinā*, SA 3:287).

⁴ *Imehi cāhañ samāye kālañ kareyyaṃ kā mamassa gati, ko abhisamparāyo' ti?*

⁵ At this time, Mahānāma is at least a streamwinner, probably a once-returner, hence the Buddha reassures that his death would not be in vain.

⁶ *Sotāpannassa aṅgāni* (D 33.1.11(14)/3:227), ie the qualities of one who has attained streamwinning. Cf (1) *sotāpatti-y-aṅga* above. For a shorter statement on the limbs of a streamwinner, see **Ogadha S** (S 55.2/5:343 f). For the streamwinner's practice, see (**Agata, phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.40/3:284-288) = SD 15.3. On the faith of the streamwinner, see Gethin 2001:116.

⁷ "One who bends...tends towards nirvana," *nibbāna, ninno hoti nibbāna, poṇo nibbāna, pabbhāro*. This phrasing is a way of stressing the fact that streamwinning surely ends in arhathood in due course. In fact, the very notion of a "stream" (*sota*) is to show that the journey of awakening has begun before we become fully awakened at the journey's end.

⁸ For detailed analysis of terms here, see **Buddhānussati** = SD 15.7.

⁹ "Wise faith," *avecca-p, pasāda*. This is a syntactical cpd with *avecca* (Sky *avetya*) absolutive of **aveti*, "he undergoes, knows, experiences." [On syntactical cpds, see KR Norman, 1991a:3.] 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). "Wise faith" is syn with (2). *Amūlaka*

‘The Blessed One is
 an arhat,
 the fully self-awakened one,
 accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
 well-farer,
 knower of worlds,
 peerless guide of tamable people,
 teacher of gods and humans,
 awakened,
 blessed.’

(2) FAITH IN THE DHARMA:¹⁰ One is accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma, thus:
 ‘Well-taught is the True Teaching of the Blessed One,
 visible here and now,
 immediate [having nothing to do with time],
 inviting one to come and see,
 accessible [to bring oneself up to it],
 to be personally known by the wise.’

(3) FAITH IN THE SANGHA:¹¹ One is accomplished with wise faith in the Sangha, thus:
 ‘The Blessed One’s community of holy disciples keeps to the good way;
 the Blessed One’s community of holy disciples keeps to the straight way;
 the Blessed One’s community of holy disciples keeps to the right way;
 the Blessed One’s community of holy disciples keeps to the proper way.’

These four pairs of persons, the eight individuals: *this* Blessed One’s [70] community of holy disciples is

worthy of offerings,
 worthy of hospitality,
 worthy of gifts,
 worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
 a supreme field of merit for the world.’

(4) NOBLE MORAL VIRTUE: One is accomplished in moral virtue dear to the noble ones,¹²
 unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.¹³

6 Mahānāma, just as a tree that bends towards the east, slopes towards the east, tends towards the east, even so when it is cut down, in what direction would it fall?”

“Bhante, in whichever direction that it bends, that it slopes, that it tends.”

= “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 in 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). The stream-inner’s faith is defined in **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47) as “his faith is strong, supported by reasons, rooted in vision” (*ākāra, vatī saddhā dassana, mūlikā dalhā*, M 47.16/1:320).

¹⁰ For detailed analysis of terms here, see **Dhammānussati** = SD 15.9.

¹¹ For detailed analysis of terms here, see **Aṭṭha, puggala S** (A 8.59) = SD 15.10a.

¹² “Moral virtue dear to the noble ones,” *ariya, kantāni sīlāni*. The noble one’s moral virtue is explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the five precepts; hence, this moral virtue is dear to them (SA 2:74).

¹³ “Unbroken, ...giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññū-pasaṭṭhehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi, samvattanaikhehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143 ff/51-58.

“Even so, Mahānāma, the four states bends towards nirvana, slopes towards nirvana, tends towards nirvana.”

— evaṃ —

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