

# 14

## (Navaka) Devatā Sutta

The (Nines) Discourse on Deities | A 9.19

Theme: The 9 steps of discipleship

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2012, 2020

### 1 Sutta summary and significance

#### 1.1 SUMMARY

The **(Navaka) Devatā Sutta** (A 9.19) records the Buddha telling the monks how, on 9 occasions, some deities (probably sense-world devas) visit him and tell him that in their previous lives as humans they have not properly honoured recluses, and now, as lowly deities, they remorsefully regret it. [§§1-8]

Only those deities who fulfill all the 9 steps of discipleship ending in **proper Dharma practice** are reborn as superior deities [§9.2]. The Buddha's purpose in relating this teaching is to remind us to cultivate our minds through meditation. [§10]

#### 1.2 STEPS OF DISCIPLESHIP

##### 1.2.1 The higher training

**1.2.1.1 The (Navaka) Devatā Sutta** (A 9.19) is a record of the Buddha's teaching in **the steps of discipleship**, on how to be a true follower of the 3 jewels: taking the Buddha as our true teacher, following the Buddha Dharma as the true teaching, to reach the path as noble disciples (that is, at least as stream-winners).

Essentially, all steps of discipleship entail **commitment** to the 3 jewels: the Buddha as our teacher, the Buddha Dharma as the teaching we follow and the noble sangha as our goal in this life itself. Going forth, **renouncing** into the monastic sangha is our commitment to emulate the Buddha in his own renunciation of the world for *attaining awakening in this life itself*.

**1.2.1.2** Ideally, **monastic renunciation** entails the 3 higher trainings (*\*adhisikkhā*), that is, those in higher moral training (*adhisīla sikkhā*), higher mental training (*adhicitta sikkhā*) to attain dhyana, or some level of deep concentration, and higher wisdom training (*adhi,paññā sikkhā*)—as stated in **the Kosambiya Sutta** (M 48,12) and **the (Tika) Samaṇa Sutta** (A 3.81a).<sup>1</sup> Monastic renunciation, then, specifically entails the 3 higher trainings, while “going for refuge” (*saraṇa,gamana*) is the practice for the lay practitioner [1.2.2]. In other words, the going for refuge is already, or should already be, an integral part of monastic renunciation.

The commentaries clearly differentiate **the 2 levels of trainings**: the 5 precepts (*pañca,sīla*) are simply “moral virtue” (*sīla*), while those of the 10 precepts (*dasa,sīla*) (of the novices) and the fourfold purity of moral virtue (*catu,parisuddhi,sīla*)<sup>2</sup> (of the monastics) is called “**higher morality**” (*adhisīla*) in the sense that they remind us to *live renunciation* as the restraint in our body and speech, and the giving up of wrong views and cultivating right view—renunciation is *not* a status of power or holiness.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Respectively: M 48,12/1:324,28 (SD 64.1); A 3.81a/1:229,1-10 (SD 24.10b = SD 47.13(1)). See also V 1:70,16; D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:230,33, 1:256,29 (qu at VbhA 229,24; Vism 246,32); Nm 143,3.

<sup>2</sup> These 4 are:

<sup>3</sup> *Tattha pañca,sīlaṃ sīlaṃ nāma, taṃ upādāya dasa,sīlaṃ adhisīlaṃ nāma, taṃ pi upādāya catu,parisuddhi,sīlaṃ adhisīlaṃ nāma.* (AA 2:345,29-346,2)

**The fourfold purity of moral virtue** comprises the following:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) the moral virtue that is the restraint of the monastic code (*pātimokkha, saṃvara, sīla*);
- (2) the restraint of the senses (*indriya saṃvara, sīla*);
- (3) the purification of livelihood (*ājīva, parisuddhi, sīla*); and
- (4) the moral virtue connected with the requisites (*paccaya, saṇṇissita, sīla*), ie, proper use of the basic supports of almsfood, robes, shelter, and medicine and health facilities.

Yet, this differentiation is *not* a technical one, but merely to emphasize the task that it entails (what a monastic should practise). These are all still *mundane* moral practice, but there is the “*supermundane* higher moral training”: that which is called the training comes from the training we should undergo (*tad eva sikkhitabbato sikkhā’ti vuccati*).<sup>5</sup> This seemingly round-about statement highlights the 3 trainings—*moral virtue, mental training* and *wisdom*—as not conferring any kind of *social or religious status* of power or holiness upon us, but as simply meaning that moral virtue is *instrumental* in supporting mental cultivation, both of which are the bases for the task of attaining the higher mind and awakening. [1.1.2.3]

**1.2.1.3** The term “**higher mind**” (*adhicitta*) appears in **the (Chakka) Udāyī Sutta** (A 6.29),<sup>6</sup> where its commentary explains it as “a mind of concentration and insight” (*samādhi, vipassana, cittaṃ*, A 3:323,6), or that of “calm and insight” (*samatha, vipassana*, AA 2:364,5), which technically refers to dhyana. Specifically, ***adhicitta*** refers to the attainment of not only the 4 dhyanas, but also the 4 formless attainments, that is, the 8 attainments<sup>7</sup> that are “insight-based.”<sup>8</sup>

This means that the meditator uses the calm and clarity of dhyana to look into true reality. However, such an exercise is often done with one of the 4 form dhyanas rather than with any of the formless dhyanas, since their experience is profoundly subtler (we are often too absorbed in it even after the meditation) than with the form dhyanas to be of practical benefit in cultivating insight.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the “**sense-world mind**” is simply called “the mind”; the mind dependent on the form-sphere and that dependent on the formless sphere are called “the higher mind.” So, too, all worldly mind [consciousness] is simply called “the mind”; but **the supermundane mind** is called “the higher mind.” The same principle applies to wisdom. (A 2:346)<sup>10</sup>

The twin senses of “**higher**” (*adhi-*) in reference to the 3 higher trainings are very significant: it refers both to the purpose of the monastic life (to meditate, attain dhyana and arhathood, or at least the path), and to the noble path itself. Monastic life is properly speaking **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*) on 2 levels: on the *worldly* level, in terms of the Vinaya, and the *spiritual* level, in terms of the Dharma—the way to the ending of suffering, and the ending of suffering itself.

**1.2.1.4** The Commentaries define “**mind**” here as wisdom (*paññā*). The *mundane* mind or consciousness is simply called “the mind”; only the *supermundane* mind (that of the path, that is, streamwinner, etc) is called “the higher mind” (*adhipaññā*) (AA 2:346) [1.2.1.3]. Ordinary wisdom is that of understand-

<sup>4</sup> SD 10.16 (1.6.2.4).

<sup>5</sup> AA 2:346,4.

<sup>6</sup> A 6.29,1.3/3:323,6 (SD 24.8).

<sup>7</sup> On the 8 attainments—the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments—see **(Anupubba) Vihāra S 1** (A 9.32), SD 95.1; SD 8.4 (12.3).

<sup>8</sup> *Vipassana, pādakaṃ aṭṭha, samāpatti, cittaṃ pana adhicittaṃ* (NmA 1:147,11).

<sup>9</sup> On how dhyanic calm and clarity is used to cultivate insight: SD 33.8 (3).

<sup>10</sup> *Kāmvācara, cittaṃ pana cittaṃ nāma, taṃ upādāya rūpāvacaram adhicittam nāma, taṃ pi upādāya arūpāvacaram adhicittam nāma. Api ca sabbam pi lokiyam cittaṃ cittaṃ eva, lok’uttaram adhicittam. Paññāya pi es’eva nayo.* AA 2:346,4-8.

ing the teachings, preserved in the suttas and the practices of accomplished masters handed down over the ages. Rooted in the wisdom of the teachings, we cultivate the higher wisdom that is our own knowledge and vision of true reality, directly seeing into impermanence, suffering and nonself.

This is what the suttas call the “undertaking of higher wisdom” (*adhipaññā samādāna*)—as stated in **the Kosambiya Sutta** (M 48) and in **the (Tika) Samaṇa Sutta** (A 3.81a)<sup>11</sup>—or the “insight into things by way of higher wisdom” (*adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassana*)<sup>12</sup>—as in **the (Catukka) Samādhi Sutta** (A 4.92). In fact, **the (Chakka) Bhava Sutta** (A 6.105) declares the purpose of the 3 trainings—defined as those in higher moral virtue, in the higher mind, and in higher wisdom—as the abandoning of the 3 kinds of existences, that is, those of the sense-sphere, the form-sphere and the formless sphere (collectively called the “3 worlds”).

When one has completed these 3 trainings and abandoned these 3 existences, “this monk is called one who has cut off craving, destroyed the fetters, fully broken through conceit, making an end of suffering” (*ayaṃ vuccati ... bhikkhu acchecchi taṅhaṃ, vivattayi saṃyojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisamayā antam akāsi dukkhassāti*).<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2.2 Going for refuge

**1.2.2.1 Going for refuge** (*saraṇa, gamana*) is the most basic act of living the Dharma-life. This is *not* about becoming *a Buddhist*, a statistical Buddhist, but a personal decision and action in becoming Buddhist. Symbolically, we accept **the 3 jewels** (*ti, saraṇa*) as of the highest value in our life, our highest priority of personal development inspired by the Buddha, his true teaching, and the noble sangha.

**1.2.2.2** The 1<sup>st</sup> jewel in our life is **the Buddha**, our one and only true teacher. We work to understand and accept the truth that there is and needs to be only *one* Buddha in our world system and life. As **the Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7) teaches, the Buddha is the awakened one, our teacher, and we are his disciples and followers.<sup>14</sup> Although we may learn from other Dharma-inspired teachers, since they have yet to awaken, they are simply co-seekers like us, working to reach the path in this life itself. Only the Buddha is our one and only teacher, our exemplar of full awakening.

**1.2.2.3** Our life’s 2<sup>nd</sup> jewel is **the true Dharma**, the Buddha’s teaching and true reality that he awakened to, and which he holds above even himself, that the teaching is always above the teacher—as stated in **the Gāraṇa Sutta** (S 6.2). This Dharma is a record of the Buddha’s own struggle and awakening that he himself realizes, whose freedom is reflected in the lives and awakening of his noble disciples, the arhats.<sup>15</sup>

**1.2.2.4** In **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58), the Buddha declares that the arhat’s awakening is just the same as his own awakening. The only difference is that the Buddha is the first to arise in the world, and the arhats follow after him as his disciples.<sup>16</sup> Those aspiring to be arhats are the non-returners, once-returners and the streamwinners—all disciples of the noble path.

<sup>11</sup> Respectively: **M 48**,12/1:324,28 (SD 64.1); **A 3.81a**/1:229,5 f (SD 24.10b = SD 47.13(1)).

<sup>12</sup> A 4.92/2:92,14 f (SD 95.7).

<sup>13</sup> A 6.105/3:444,20 (SD 57.24).

<sup>14</sup> S 8.7/1:190-192 (SD 49.11).

<sup>15</sup> S 6.2/1:138-140 (SD 12.3).

<sup>16</sup> S 22.58/3:65 f (SD 49.10).

**1.2.2.5** Once again, we should be reminded that **going for refuge** is about prioritizing our life so that we keep up with **the 3 trainings** in the moral cultivation of our body and speech, which serve as the basis for our mental development (in mindfulness and concentration); and both of these are the bases for our progress in insight wisdom leading to awakening. Neither refuge-going nor the 3 trainings confer upon us any kind of status of power or holiness: they are simply means of personal and spiritual development for reaching the path of awakening in this life itself: in that sense, we empower ourselves to reach the path.

In this sense, whether we keep to **the 5 precepts** or to **the 10 precepts**, we are committed to aspiring for nirvana—they are, all the same, regarded as “higher morality” (*adhisīla*).<sup>17</sup> In short, even when we live as lay practitioners aspiring for streamwinning in this life itself, the precepts that we keep are said to be “**higher morality**,” since we are heading for the same path as the monastic renunciants. This is not a matter of *status*, but as our aspiration for the same state, that is, awakening.

### **1.2.3 Reaching the path**

**1.2.3.1** We can thus see that **the “higher training”** (\**adhi,sikkhā*) has 2 senses: that of *the monastic training*, and *the training on the path*, in reference to the progress or state of the streamwinners and other noble disciples. This does not at all mean that monastic training is the same as the path training of the noble disciples, but rather that **the purpose and goal of monastic training is to attain the path**, that is, freedom from samsara.

**1.2.3.2** Hence, although **monastic training** is often spoken of as the “higher training,” this is to emphasize the renunciant’s true and urgent task of renouncing worldliness in every way—indeed, of renouncing the 3 worlds [1.2.1.4]. In this sense, even the lay practitioner’s **going for refuge** is said to be his “higher training” [1.2.2], when he understands that he should renounce those defilements that would make him fall from his humanity (*manussatta*)<sup>18</sup> into the suffering states of a hellbeing, an animal or a preta, from which it is very difficult to free oneself to attain any spiritual development and freedom.<sup>19</sup>

**1.2.3.3** The “**higher training**,” then is not a religious status, but the inspired effort that we make to strive for the path of awakening, whether as a monastic or as a lay practitioner. Monastic renunciation is looked up to as the ideal state for expediting the higher training for attaining the noble path in this life itself. However, when a monastic fails to see this or reneges on this task, then the lay practitioner will surely progress to gain the path while the monastic will fall into a suffering state.

## **2 The discipleship pericopes**

### **2.1 THE 12-STEP DISCIPLESHIP (M 95, M 70)**

#### **2.1.1 The gradual and full discipleship**

**2.1.1.1** According to **the Kīṭā, giri Sutta** (M 70) final knowledge (*aññā*), that is, arhathood or self-awakening, arises “by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress” (*anupubba,sikkhā anupubba,kiriya anupubba,paṭipadā*). The Sutta then describes how final knowledge arises gradually in 12

<sup>17</sup> *Api ca nibbānaṃ patthayantena samādinnaṃ pañca,sīlam pi dasa,sīlam pi adhisīlam eva.* (DA 3:1003,13-15; SA 1:27,26 f)

<sup>18</sup> On *manussatta*, see SD 57.13 (1.2.3.2).

<sup>19</sup> On the rarity of such a development, see **Appa,mattaka Vg**, SD 57.8.

stages by way of the steps of discipleship. Although not stated, clearly, this discipleship centres on that of monastic renunciation and *attainment of arhathood*, but may include lay discipleship [2.3.1].<sup>20</sup>

**2.1.1.2 The Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95), too, lists the 12 steps of discipleship, this time by way of how a disciple's examining (*samannesamāna*), he observes (*samanupassati*) how, by following the Dharma, he notices how the teacher is purified of delusion, and thus puts **faith** in him: this is the first step of discipleship. Then follows the 12 steps of discipleship, as in the Kīṭā,giṇi Sutta [2.1.1.1]. Both these discipleship formulas are identical: they are mainly for the monastic renunciant and encompass arhathood, or at least the attainment of the path, as suggested by step 12 (*sacchikaroti*).

**2.1.1.3** Our commitment to the Dharma-inspired life is rooted in going for **the 3 refuges**, in the Buddha, our teacher; the Dharma, his awakening and teaching, and the sangha, the community of noble disciples [1.2.2]. These 3 jewels can be laid out in practical terms as **the 12 steps of discipleship**, beginning with our faith in the 3 jewels, through our learning and practising the Buddha Dharma, and ending in awakening in spiritual freedom.

Here is the sequence of **the 12-step discipleship** as laid out in **the Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95), and which is also found in the **Kīṭā,giṇi Sutta** (M 70):<sup>21</sup>

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| (1) Out of faith, <u>he approaches</u> him.   | <i>upasaṅkamati</i>              |
| (2) Having approached, <u>he respectfully draws close [attends] to him</u> .  | <i>payirūpāsati</i>              |
| (3) Having respectfully drawn close to him, <u>he lends his ear</u> .   | <i>sotaṃ odahati</i>             |
| (4) Having lent his ear, <u>he listens to the Dharma</u> (attentively).   | <i>dhammaṃ suṇāti</i>            |
| (5) Having heard the Dharma [teachings], <u>he remembers the Dharma</u> .   | <i>dhammaṃ dhāreti</i>           |
| (6) Having remembered the Dharma, <u>he examines the meaning</u> .  | <i>atthaṃ upaparikkhati</i>      |
| (7) Having examined the meaning, <u>he reflectively accepts them</u> .  | <i>dhammā nijjhānaṃ khamanti</i> |
| (8) Having reflectively accepted them, <u>desire<sup>22</sup> for mindfulness arises</u> .  | <i>sati chando jāyati</i>        |
| (9) Having desire for mindfulness, <u>he exerts himself</u> .   | <i>ussahati</i>                  |
| (10) Exerting himself, <u>he weighs [harmonizes] it</u> .   | <i>tulayati<sup>23</sup></i>     |
| (11) Having weighed it, <u>he strives</u> .   | <i>padahati</i>                  |
| (12) With a striving mind, he realizes the ultimate truth with his own body, he sees it (true reality) by <u>penetrating it with wisdom</u> . | <i>sacchikaroti</i>              |

We can easily see how these 12 steps [Table 2.5] are rooted in the 3 jewels: **steps 1-3** begin with taking the Buddha as our teacher (or, in our own time, seeking the true teachings, especially the early suttas). **Steps 4-10** (the majority of the steps) are rooted in the study and practice of the teaching itself.

<sup>20</sup> M 70,22 f/1:479 f (SD 11.1),

<sup>21</sup> M 70,23 (SD 11.1). For nn, see **Caṅkī S** (M 95,20), SD 21.15.

<sup>22</sup> Also *will* or *will-power* in the simple psychological sense, without any philosophical connotation.

<sup>23</sup> Comy: He investigates (*tīreti*) states in terms of impermanence, etc (MA 3:426). *Tīreti* (caus of *tarati*, meaning (1) to cross over, or (2) to be in a hurry), meaning (1) to bring through, finish, execute (a business), to accomplish; (2) to measure, judge, recognize, always in formula *tuleti tīreti vibhāveti* ["Nc," says PED, but unattested] (cf J 5:48), as interpretation of *jānāti* (PED). However, if we look at the progression of the method here, what clearly follows is the balancing of the practice in terms of the faculties (*indriya*): see **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4. However, in Buddhaghosa's def of *tīraṇa, pariññā*, he says, "having known this, that is, investigating the 5 aggregates in their 42 aspects as being impermanent, suffering, a disease, etc" (*evaṃ ñataṃ katvā pañcakkhandhe tīreti aniccato dukkha-to rogato ti dvā, cattālīsāya ākārehi*) (SA 1:45), in which case, this would be "insight contemplation" (as noted by Bodhi, M:ÑB 1300 n889).

**Steps 11-12** refer to the attaining of the path, breaking through into true reality, that is, the attaining of streamwinning.

The 12-step discipleship is also structured according to **the 5 faculties** (*pañc'indriya*). [2.3.1.1]

## 2.2 THE 10-STEP DISCIPLESHIP (A 10.83)

### 2.2.1 The monastic teacher

**2.2.1.1** Note that both **the 12-step** and **the 10-step discipleships** begin with faith (*saddho*). However, in the 10-step discipleship, “(he) approaches” (*upasaṅkamati*) is missing. It is not that one does not approach the Buddha or the teacher here, but that this reflects a situation where the Buddha is absent, such as in a community separated from the Buddha by distance, or perhaps after the Buddha’s time.

**2.2.1.2** Also missing from the 10-step discipleship are steps 7-8. It is not that the disciple does not “reflectively accept” (*nijjhānaṃ khamanti*) the teachings, but this is more of a **Dharma-teacher’s discipleship**. The step, “desire for mindfulness arises” (*sati chando jāyati*), is also missing, which is because the teacher is *already* a meditator, which also explains why steps 10-11 are omitted: he has already mastered these steps or is well familiar with them as a Dharma teacher. However, he is still unawakened; hence, the omission of step 12.

### 2.2.2 The monastic practitioner

This 10-step discipleship, like the 12-step one, is mainly that for the monastic renunciant. In the case of **the 12-step discipleship**, it ends with “penetrating” (*sacchikaroti*) true reality, which refers to arhat-hood, if not, at least streamwinning. In the case of **the 10-step discipleship**, the last 3 steps—those of “practising” (*paṭipanno*), “a good speaker” (*kalyāṇa, vāk, karaṇo*) and who “instructs ...” (*samādapako* ...) also refers to a monastic renunciant who should practise the Dharma and also be an effective teacher [2.2.1]. Again, it is possible to include lay practitioners and teachers here, but in a small minority.

## 2.3 THE 9-STEP DISCIPLESHIP (A 9.19)

### 2.3.1 Lay discipleship

**The 9-step discipleship** and **the 8-step discipleship** [Table 2.5] are interesting: they reflect discipleships according to the strength of their spiritual faculty (*indriya*): the former refers to the wisdom-inclined while the latter to the faith-inclined. Faith and wisdom are complementary pairs in the set of **5 faculties** (*pañc'indriya*) of *faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, the driving force behind or underlying Dharma-based discipleship are **the 5 faculties**. Note that 3 of the 5 discipleship sets—the 12-step, the 10-step and the 8-step—begin with “faith” (*saddho*) [Table 2.5]. Steps 2-4 (draws close; lends an ear; listens to the Dharma) of **the 12-step discipleship** entail energy (*virīya*). Steps 5-8 (keeps in mind the Dharma; examines the meaning; reflectively accepts them; desire for mindfulness arises) entails mindfulness (*sati*). Steps 9-11 (exerts himself; weighs it; strives on) entails concentration (that is, meditation) (*samādhi*).

Finally, there is step 12 (penetrates it with wisdom) which entails wisdom (*paññā*). The other sets of discipleship, each only reflect aspects of the 5 faculties, that is, they each begin with the strengths of the follower to build up his discipleship.

<sup>24</sup> See *Pañc'indriya*, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).



### 2.3.2 The truth-follower

**2.3.2.1 The 9-step discipleship** (A 9.19) describes the progress of the practitioner who is **wisdom-inclined**, one in whom the faculty of wisdom is strong [2.3.1.1]. Although the practitioner here does not show *faith*, he expresses his **respect** for the Buddha and the Dharma-teacher, since he “stood up” (*pac-cuṭṭhimha*), “saluted” (*abhivādimha*), “offered a seat” (*āsanam adamha*) and “offered his share in giving” (*saṁvibhajimha*).

As a good student, he “sat up close to” (*upamisīdimha*) the teacher when he is teaching to be fully attentive, so that he properly “lent an ear” (*ohita, sotā*) to what was taught. Then, he “kept in mind the Dharma (that is taught)” (*dharayimha*), and “examined its meaning” (*attham upaparikkhimha*). Finally, he “practised” (*paṭipajjimha*) what he was well taught.

**2.3.2.2** Note that all the steps of **the 9-step discipleship** are reported in the past tense (the suffix -*imha*, such as in *paccuṭṭh-imha*, signifies the aorist or past tense). This means that all this had already happened. To understand this, we should look at how **the faith-follower** (*saddhā'nusāri*), a practitioner who is strong in his faith faculty, progresses, as described in, for example, **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), thus:

Bhikkhus, one who has faith thus, who *firmly believes* these truths<sup>25</sup> [is convinced of these truths], is called **a faith-follower**.

He has gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.<sup>26</sup> He is descending into the plane of true individuals,<sup>27</sup> descending into the certainty of rightness [the fixed course to rightness].<sup>28</sup>

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal birth, or in the preta realm.

He is incapable of dying without having attained the fruit of streamwinning.<sup>29</sup>

S 25.1,4 (SD 16.7)<sup>30</sup>

**2.3.2.3** The same Sutta (S 25.1) describes **the truth-follower** (*dhammānusārī*) as “one who accepts these truths after just some pondering over them with wisdom thus.”<sup>31</sup> The rest of the definition is identical as above. [2.3.2.2]

Note that most of the above passage is in the perfect tense, an action that *has* occurred and whose effect or state is still present or efficacious (and will be so, in this case). In other words, the faith-follower and the truth-follower are no more worldlings. On completing their training, they will attain streamwinning. In fact, they are surely heading in that direction.

**The 9-step discipleship**, in fact, describes *the training* that the truth-follower had gone through, and thus attained streamwinning. Interestingly, **the 8-step discipleship** for the faith-inclined (*saddhā'nusārī*)

<sup>25</sup> In this Sutta, this refers to the impermanence of each and every one of the 6 sense-faculties. All the 10 suttas of **S 25** (the Okkanta Saṁyutta) are laid out on the same template, each referring to the impermanence of the 6 internal senses (S 25.1), the 6 external senses (S 25.2), the 6 sense-consciousnesses (S 25.3), the 6 sense-contacts (S 25.4), the 6 feelings (S 25.5), the 6 perceptions (S 25.6), the 6 volitions (S 25.7), the 6 cravings (S 25.8), the 6 elements (S 25.9), and the 5 aggregates (S 25.10). See SD 16.7 (1.1.3.1).

<sup>26</sup> “Worldlings” (*puṭhujjanā*) are those still caught up in the worldliness of greed, hate and delusion. For details, see **S 25.1** ad loc, SD 16.7.

<sup>27</sup> “True individuals,” *sappurisa*, ie, the noble disciples whom the faith-follower will become.

<sup>28</sup> They are certain to reaching the path of awakening.

<sup>29</sup> See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(6).

<sup>30</sup> See the tr at SD 16.7 detailed nn.

<sup>31</sup> *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṁ paññāya mattaso nijjhānam khamanti.*

is mostly in the present tense, which means that the process is still going on. Significantly, this is the teaching that applies to us right now, if we have not yet reached the path. Our practice begins with faith, and progresses from there.

## 2.4 THE 8-STEP DISCIPLESHIP (A 8.82)

### 2.4.1 THE FAITH-FOLLOWER

**2.4.1.1 The 8-step discipleship**, the shortest of the various “steps of discipleship” applies to us who are still unawakened, and not yet even reached the path. Note the 8 steps are all described in the present tense: it is still in progress now, or should be so. This is the Buddha’s reminding us that, even when we, for any reason, do not have any deep understanding of the Dharma, we can begin with **faith** (*saddhā*), the 1<sup>st</sup> step in discipleship. This is commonsensical faith, one that is personally and clearly evident when we look around us, within ourself: everything is **impermanent**. This is the beginning of our understanding of the Buddha’s teaching.

**2.4.1.2** Then, we should make an effort to “approach” (*upasaṅkamitā*) a good sutta teacher, or study the suttas ourself. We should do this “close up” (*payirūpasita*) to the true teaching, and not be misled by any of the numerous private and worldly teachings easily found in the world. Being “close up” with the Dharma here means either **spiritual friendship** with a Dharma-inspired teacher well versed in the suttas and mindfulness practice, or our spending effective time studying and reflecting on the suttas, and practising based on that wise understanding.

**2.4.1.3** Whenever we have difficulties in our sutta study or a doubt regarding the Dharma, we should “question” (*paripucchitā*) wise and compassionate teachers, attentively “lend an ear” (*ohita,sota*) to such teachings so that we are able to “keep the Dharma in mind” (*dhammaṃ dhāreti*). Then, we go on to “examine its meaning” (*atthaṃ upaparikkhati*) to deepen our understanding and broaden our perspective of the Dharma. All this enriches and furthers “our practice” (*paṭipanna*) as we head closer to the path.

### 2.4.2 OUR OWN PRACTICE

As already noted, **the 9-step discipleship** describes the training of the truth-follower, on account of which he has thus attained streamwinning [2.3.2.3]. **The 8-step discipleship** describes the faith-inclined (*saddhā’nusārī*) mostly in *the present tense*, meaning that the process is still going on [2.3.2.2]. This is the teaching that applies to us right now, if we have not yet reached the path. Our practice begins with **faith**, and progresses from there.



## 2.5 COMPARISON OF THE STEPS OF DISCIPLESHIP SETS

	12-step (M 95 + 70)		10-step (A 10.83)	9-step (A 9.19)	8-step (A 8.82)
	has faith	<i>saddho</i>	1 <i>saddho</i>		1 <i>saddho</i>
				1 <i>paccuṭṭhimha</i> , “stood up”	
				2 <i>abhivādimha</i> , “saluted”	
				3 <i>āsanam adamha</i> , “offered a seat”	
				4 <i>saṁvibhajimha</i> , “offered his share in giving”	
1	Approaches	<i>upasaṅkamati</i>			2 <i>upasaṅkamitā</i>
2	draws close (attends)	<i>payirūpāsati</i>	2 <i>payirūpāsitā</i>	5 <i>upanisīdimha</i> “sat up close to”	3 <i>payirūpāsita</i>
			3 <i>paripucchitā</i> , “questions”		4 <i>paripucchitā</i>
3	lends an ear	<i>sotam odahati</i>	4 <i>ohita,sotā</i> “lends an ear”	6 <i>ohita,sotā</i>	5 <i>ohita,soto</i>
4	listens to the Dharma	<i>dhammam suṇāti</i>	5 <i>dhammam suṇāti</i>		
5	keeps in mind the Dharma	<i>dhammam dhāreti</i>	6 <i>dhammam dhāreti</i>	7 <i>dhammam dharayimha</i>	6 <i>dhammam dhāreti</i>
6	examines the meaning	<i>attham upaparikkhati</i>	7 <i>attham upaparikkhati</i>	8 <i>attham upaparikkhimha</i>	7 <i>attham upaparikkhati</i>
7	reflectively accepts them	<i>nijjhānam khamanti</i>			
8	desire for mindfulness arises	<i>sati chando jāyati</i>			
9	exerts himself	<i>ussahati</i>	8 <i>paṭipanno</i> , “practises”	9 <i>paṭipajjimha</i> , “practised”	8 <i>paṭipanno</i> , “practises”
			9 <i>kalyāṇa,vāk,karaṇo</i> , “good speaker”		
			10 <i>samādapako</i> , “instructs”		
10	weighs it	<i>tulayati</i>			
11	strives on	<i>padahati</i>			
12	penetrates it with wisdom	<i>sacchikaroti</i>			

Table 2.5. Comparative table of the sets of steps of discipleship

### 3 Related suttas

**The Devatā Sutta** (A 9.19) contains what we can conveniently call the “**9-step discipleship**” pericope [1.2.3]. This pericope forms part of the longer stock formulas, that is, those of the 12-step discipleship [1.2.1], the 10-step discipleship [1.2.2] and the 8-step discipleship [1.2.4]. The related suttas in this connection are as follows:

The 12-step discipleship	<b>Kīṭā, giri Sutta</b>	M 70,23	SD 11.1
The 12-step discipleship	<b>Caṅkī Sutta</b>	M 95,20	SD 21.15
The 10-step discipleship	<b>(Dasaka) Puṇṇiya Sutta</b>	A 10.83	SD 57.23
The 9-step discipleship	<b>(Navaka) Devatā Sutta</b>	A 9.19	SD 57.14
The 8-step discipleship	<b>(Aṭṭhaka) Puṇṇiya Sutta</b>	A 8/82	SD 57.22

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## (Navaka) Devatā Sutta The (Nines) Discourse on Deities

A 9.19

1<sup>32</sup> “Bhikshus, last night, when it was far advanced, some deities of exceeding beauty, lighting up the whole of Jeta’s grove, approached me.<sup>33</sup> Having approached, they saluted me, and then stood at one side.

(1) Those deities then said:

‘In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

We rose up before them but *did not salute them*.<sup>34</sup>

1.3 Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host (of deities).<sup>35</sup> **[391]**

2 Some other deities approached me and said:

‘In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

We rose up before them and  
**saluted them,**<sup>36</sup>

but did not offer them seats.

<sup>32</sup> PTS numbering is inconsistent and has not been followed.

<sup>33</sup> *Imaṅ ca [only Ce imam] bhikkhave rattim sambahulā devatā abhikkantāya rattiyā abhikkant, vaṇṇā kevala, -kappaṃ jetavanam obhāsetvā yenāham ten’upasaṅkamimsu.*

<sup>34</sup> *Tā [only Be te] mayam bhante paccuṭṭhimha, no ca kho abhivādimha.* In this case, since the monastics were standing, their standing up was a gesture of respect. But they did not greet the monks with lotus-palms.

<sup>35</sup> *Tā mayam bhante aparipuṇṇa, kammantā vipphaṇṇāniyo pacchānutāpiniyo [only Be paccā-] hīnam kāyam upa-pannāti.* Comy glosses *kāya* as “celestial world” (*deva, loka*) (AA 478,14), ie, prob, in the heaven of the 4 great kings, the lowest of the 6 sense-world heavens: [§9.2].

<sup>36</sup> “Saluted” (them), *abhivādimha*, aor of *abhivādeti*.

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**3** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*paid homage to them, and*

**offered them seats,**<sup>37</sup>

*but we did not offer our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength.*

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**4** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*paid homage to them,*

*offered them seats, and*

**offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength,**<sup>38</sup>

*but we did not sit up close to listen to the Dhamma.*

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**5** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*saluted them,*

*offered them seats,*

*offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength, and*

**sat up close to listen to the Dharma,**<sup>39</sup>

*but we did not listen to it with attentive ears.*

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**6** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*saluted them,*

*offered them seats,*

*offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength,*

*sat up close to listen to the Dharma, and*

**we listened to it with attentive ears,**<sup>40</sup>

*but, having heard it, we did not keep the Dharma in mind.*

<sup>37</sup> "Offered them seats," *tesaṃ āsanaṃ adamha*.

<sup>38</sup> *Yathā,satti yathā,balaṃ saṃvibhajimha*. On "delighting in having a share of giving" (*saṃvibhāga,rata*): SD 54.12 (1.2.2.9).

<sup>39</sup> "Sat up close to listen to the Dharma," *upanisīdimha dhammassavanāya*.

<sup>40</sup> "Listened to it [the Dharma] with attentive ears," *ohita,sotā dhammaṃ suṇimha*.

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**7** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*saluted them,*

*offered them seats,*

*offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength,*

*sat up close to listen to the Dharma,*

*listened to it with attentive ears, and*

*having listened to it, **we kept the Dharma in mind,***<sup>41</sup>

but we did not examine the meaning of the teaching.

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**8** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*saluted them,*

*offered them seats,*

*offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength,*

*sat up close to listen to the Dharma,*

*listened to it with attentive ears, and*

*having listened to the Dharma,*

*keeping it in mind, **we examined the meaning of the teaching,***<sup>42</sup>

but we neither understood the Dharma nor the meaning, nor practised in accordance with the Dharma,

*Not having fulfilled our duty, full of regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in an inferior host of deities.'*

**9** Some other deities approached me and said:

'In the past, bhante, when we were humans, monks came to our homes.

*We rose up before them,*

*saluted them,*

*offered them seats,*

*offered our share of giving in accordance with our ability and strength,*

*sat up close to listen to the Dharma,*

*listened to it with attentive ears, and*

*having listened to it, we kept the Dharma in mind,*

*keeping it in mind, having examined the meaning of the teaching,*

and **we understood both the Dharma and its meaning, and practised in keeping with the Dharma,**<sup>43</sup>

9.2 Having fulfilled our duty, free from regret and remorse after that, we were reborn in a superior host of deities.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> "We kept the Dharma in mind," *dhammaṃ dhārayimha.*

<sup>42</sup> "We examined the meaning of the teaching," *dhammānaṃ atthaṃ upaparikkhimha.*

<sup>43</sup> *Attham-aññāya dhammam-aññāya dhammānudhammaṃ paṭipajjimha.*

10 These, bhikshus, are the foot of trees;<sup>45</sup> these are empty abodes.<sup>46</sup>  
**Meditate**,<sup>47</sup> bhikshus, do not be heedless. Regret not later, like those deities before.”<sup>48</sup>

— evaṃ —

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<sup>44</sup> *Tā mayāṃ bhante paripuṇṇa, kammantā avippaṭṭisāriniyo apacchā’nutāpiniyo* [Be *pacchā-*] *paṇītaṃ kāyaṃ upa-pannāti*. Cf §1.3; it is likely here that, on account of their deeds of merit, arose amongst one of the 5 sense-world heavens, other than the heaven of the 4 great kings. On this difference, see SD 57.10 (1.5.2).

<sup>45</sup> “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkha, mūlāni*. “Foot” here is an adv; hence, singular, like “bottom.”

<sup>46</sup> Sometimes rendered as “empty place”.

<sup>47</sup> “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate dhyana” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāvetha* (2<sup>nd</sup> pl), “cultivate!” See **Buddha Discovers Dhyana**, SD 33.1b (3.3.2).

<sup>48</sup> In the stock passage, the phrase, “like those deities before” is replaced by “This is our instruction to you” (*ayaṃ vo amhākaṃ anusāsanīti*): **Sallekha S** (M 8,18/1:46), SD 51.8; **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,27/1:118), SD 61.1; **Āneñja, sappāya S** (M 106,15/2:266 f), SD 85.13; **Indriya, bhāvanā S** (M 152,18/3:302), SD 17.13; (**Nava Purāṇa**) **Kamma S** (S 35.146/4:133), SD 4.12; **Kāya S** (S 43.1/4:359), SD 12.21(1); & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Sa-yutta** (S 43.2-44/-4:360-373); **Bhikkhuṇ’upassaya S** (S 47.10/5:157), SD 24.2; **Dhamma, vihārī S 1** (A 5.73/3:87), SD 44.4; **Dhamma, vihārī S 2** (A 5.74/3:89), SD 44.5; **Araka S** (A 7.70,4/4:139), SD 16.17; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). The sentence “**regret not later**” (*mā pacchā vippaṭṭisārino ahuvattha*), in the second para, also occurs at **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.19+20/ 2:147, 16,6.5/2:155 ×3, the Buddha’s last words) = **Kusinārā S** (A 4.76/2:79 f); **Devatā S** (A 9.19/4:392), SD 57.14 (see n here); cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). For comy, see MA 1:195 f; SA 3:111 f, 266 f.