(Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta
The Discourse to Mahānāma (on the accomplishments of a lay disciple) | S 55.37

Introduction

1.1 This sutta, in its conciseness, is apparently a shorter version of the more comprehensive version, the (Aṭṭhaka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 8.25), or at an earlier time, it could have formed the introductory section of the (Upāsaka) Mahānāma Sutta. The (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta defines the spiritual qualities of a true lay follower (upāsaka) as:

1. Accomplishment in moral virtue, *sīla,sampadā*
2. Accomplishment in faith, *saddhā,sampadā*
3. Accomplishment in generosity, and *cāga,sampadā*
4. Accomplishment in wisdom. *paññā,sampadā*

1.2 In the (Mahānāma) Gilayana Sutta (S 55.54), these 4 qualities are called the 4 assurances (*assāsa-niyā dhammā*), since they bring great solace to us.¹ These 4 qualities are also given in the concluding section of the Dīgha,jānu Sutta (A 8.54), but there *saddhā,sampadā* is placed first, thus: faith, moral virtue, generosity and wisdom. There they are known as “the qualities conducive to life hereafter” (*sam-parāyik’attha sam vattani ka, dhamma*).²

1.3 Mahānāma was a Sakya rajah, the son of Amit’odana, a brother of Suddh’odana (the Buddha’s father). As such, he was the Buddha’s cousin, and also Anuruddha’s older brother. He is declared by the Buddha to be “the chief of those who give choice almsfood” (A 1:26). His life is given in the Āṅguttara Commentary (AA 1:393), where he is said to have fed the order at Kapilavatthu (his hometown) for a whole year.

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[395]
1 Thus have I heard.
At one time the Blessed One was staying in Nigrodha’s Park at Kapilavatthu in Sakya country.
2 Then, Mahānāma the Sakya approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

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¹ S 55.54/5:408-410 (SD 4.10).
² A 8.54.10-15/4:284 (SD 5.10).
Qualities of a lay follower

Seated thus at one side, Mahānāma the Sakya said this to the Blessed One:

3  “Bhante, in what way is one a lay follower (upāsaka)?”
   “Mahānāma, when one has gone for refuge to the Buddha, one has gone for refuge to the Dharma, and one has gone for refuge to the Sangha, then, Mahānāma, one is a lay follower.”

4  (1) “In what way, bhante, is a lay follower accomplished in moral virtue (sīla,sampanno)?”
   “Mahānāma, when the lay follower
   (1) refrains from destroying life,
   (2) refrains from taking the not-given,
   (3) refrains from sexual misconduct,
   (4) refrains from false speech,
   (5) refrains from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness,3 —then, Mahānāma, he is accomplished in moral virtue.

5  (2) “In what way, bhante, is a lay follower accomplished in faith (saddhā,sampanno)?”
   “Here, Mahānāma, the lay follower has faith.4 He has faith in the Tathāgata’s awakening thus:
   So too, is he the Blessed One:5 for, he is arhat, the fully self-awakened one,
   accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds,
   peerless guide of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.
   Thus, Mahānāma, he is accomplished in faith.”

6  (3) “In what way, bhante, is a lay follower accomplished in charity (cāga,sampanno)?”
   “Here Mahānāma, the lay follower lives the household life
   with a mind free from the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed,
   delighting in letting go, devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing.
   Thus, Mahānāma, he is accomplished in charity.”

3 “Strong drinks ... that causes heedlessness,” sura,meraya,majja-p,pamāda-ṭ,ṭhāna, also tr as “strong drinks, distilled drinks and fermented drinks that causes heedlessness.” Comy says that there are five kinds of “strong drinks” (sūra): made from crushed seeds (piṭṭha,sūra), from cakes (piūva,sūra), from rice (odana,sūra), from fermented yeast (κιννα,pakkhita,sūra), from a mixture of ingredients (sambhāra,sam yutta,sūra) (DA 3:944; VvA 73; VbhA 381). Comy also says there are 5 kinds of “distilled drinks” (meraya = āsava): made from flowers (pupphāsava), from fruits (phalāsava), from honey (madhv-āsava), from sugar (gulāsava), and from a mixture of ingredients (sambhāra,sam yuttaāsava) (DA 3:944). Majja seems to be a general term for “drinks”. However, it is likely that majja is the weakest of the three, while surā is the strongest. On when the precept against intoxicants is not breached, see Pāc 51 (V 4:110).

4 “Has faith,” saddha hoti, or “(he) is one with faith.”

5 Alt tr: “For the following reasons, too, he is the Blessed One [the Lord] ... ” On the meaning of iti pi so, see CPD: Iti: ... kitti,sadda abbhuggato: “~ pi so bhagavā: araham sammā-sambuddho ... ” (“for the following reasons, too, he is a bhagavā: because he is araham ... ”), V 3:1,13 = D 1:49,27 = M 2:133,22 = S 1:219,31 = A 3:312,8, qu Vism 198,4 and MahVt 26,11 (VA 112,4 = DA 146,5 = Vism 198,8: so bhagavā “ pi araham “ pi sammā, sambuddho ... iminā ca iminā ca kāraneṇa ti vuttaṃ hoti). Translating iti pi so this way explains the double occurrence of Bhagavā. See L S Cousins, “Review of Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,” in Journal of Buddhist Ethics 4, 1997: 165. The Skt parallel to this opening reads: Iti hi sa bhagavāṃ tathāgato, but tathāgato here is missing from the Pali version. See Dhajagga 5 (S 11.3), SD 15.5 (2).
7 (4) “In what way, bhante, is a lay follower accomplished in wisdom (paññā, sampanno)?”

“Here, Mahānāma, the lay follower is wise, possesses wisdom directed to [noting] the rising and falling away (of phenomena)⁶ that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering. Thus, Mahānāma, he is a lay follower accomplished in wisdom.” [396]

— evaṁ —

⁶ This line, and that this Sutta is located in Sotāpatti Saṁy, clearly refers to streamwinning. On watching the rise and fall of feeling, see (Aññathatta) Ānanda S 1 (S 22.37/3:37 f), SD 33.11.