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(Sotāpatti) Mahānāma Sutta
The Discourse to Mahānāma (on streamwinning) | S 55.37

or, (Upāsaka, sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta
The Mahānāma Discourse (on the accomplishments of a lay follower)
Theme: The spiritual qualities of the true lay follower
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

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 (Sotāpatti) Mahānāma Sutta defines the spiritual qualities of a true lay follower (upāsaka) as:

1. Accomplishment in moral virtue, 
2. Accomplishment in faith, 
3. Accomplishment in generosity, and 

1.2 In the (Mahānāma) Gilayana Sutta (S 55.54), these 4 qualities are called the 4 assurances (assāsāniyā dharmā), 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” (samparāyik’attha samvattanika, 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 Anguttara 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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¹ S 55.54/5:408-410 (SD 4.10).
² A 8.54.10-15/4:284 (SD 5.10).
2 Then, Mahānāma the Sakya approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he saluted the Blessed One and sat down at one side.

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 killing living beings,
(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,” —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. He has faith in the Tathāgata’s awakening thus:

So too, is he the Blessed One: for, he is arhat,

fully self-awakened,

accomplished in wisdom and conduct,

well-farer,

knower of worlds,

peerless guide of tamable persons,

teacher of gods and humans,

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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.”

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]

— evam —

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⁶ This line, and that this Sutta is located in Sotāpatti Sāra, 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.

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