

**(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**

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 Aṅguttara Commentary (AA 1:393), where he is said to have fed the Order at Kapilavatthu (his home town) for a whole year.

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

**The Discourse (on the Layman) to Mahānāma**

**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 faith<sup>1</sup> 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;

<sup>1</sup> "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 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).

[Set: "The Five Precepts"]

On the conventions (abbreviations, bibliography, etc) used here, please refer to [www.dharma.per.sg](http://www.dharma.per.sg) under /Buddhist Articles /Buddhism, A Virtual History /Technical Conventions or "Sutta Discovery" vol 2.

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 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;  
 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.

—evam—