

# AN 4.180: Mahāpadesa Sutta

## *The Great Criteria*

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

On one occasion the Fortunate One was living at Bhoga Town, at the Ānanda Shrine. There the Fortunate One addressed the monks: “Monks!” “Venerable sir,” those monks replied to the Fortunate One. The Fortunate One said this:

“Monks, I will teach you the Four Great Criteria. Listen to this and carefully pay attention; I will speak.” “Yes, Bhante,” those monks replied to the Fortunate One. The Fortunate One said this:

“Monks, what are the Four Great Criteria?”

“Monks, if a monk says this: ‘Venerable, in the presence of the Fortunate One, this is what I heard and received, this is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher’s instructions,’ you should neither accept nor reject that monk’s statement. Without either accepting or rejecting it, you should carefully take up those words and phrases and compare them to the Suttas and the Vinaya. When you are comparing them with the Suttas and the Vinaya, if they do not accord with the Suttas and the Vinaya, then you should form this conclusion: ‘Certainly this is not the speech of the Fortunate One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One. It was wrongly held by that monk.’ Therefore, monks, you should discard it.

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“Monks, you should maintain this first Great Criterion.

“Monks, if a monk says this: ‘In that place a community lives which has elders and prominent people; from that community, this is what I heard and received, this is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher’s instructions,’ you should neither accept nor reject that monk’s statement. Without either accepting or rejecting it, you should carefully take up those words and phrases and compare them to the Suttas and the Vinaya. When you are comparing them with the Suttas and the Vinaya, if they do not accord with the Suttas and the Vinaya, then you should form this conclusion: ‘Certainly this is not the speech of the Fortunate One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One. It was wrongly held by that community.’ Therefore, monks, you should discard it.

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"Monks, you should maintain this second Great Criterion.

"Monks, if a monk says this: 'In that place many elder monks live who have learned much, who carry the scriptural tradition, who hold the Dhamma, who hold the Vinaya, who hold the Lists; in the presence of those elders, this is what I heard and received, this is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher's instructions,' you should neither accept nor reject that monk's statement. Without either accepting or rejecting it, you should carefully take up those words and phrases and compare them to the Suttas and the Vinaya. When you are comparing them with the Suttas and the Vinaya, if they do not accord with the Suttas and the Vinaya, then you should form this conclusion: 'Certainly this is not the speech of the Fortunate One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One. It was wrongly held by those elders.' Therefore, monks, you should discard it.

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"Monks, you should maintain this third Great Criterion.

"Monks, if a monk says this: 'In that place an elder monk lives who has learned much, who carries the scriptural tradition, who holds the Dhamma, who holds the Vinaya, who holds the Lists; in the presence of that elder, this is what I heard and received, this is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher's instructions,' you should neither accept nor reject that monk's statement. Without either accepting or rejecting it, you should carefully take up those words and phrases and compare them to the Suttas and the Vinaya. When you are comparing them with the Suttas and the Vinaya, if they do not accord with the Suttas and the Vinaya, then you should form this conclusion: 'Certainly this is not the speech of the Fortunate One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Awakened One. It was wrongly held by that elder.' Therefore, monks, you should discard it.

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"Monks, you should maintain this fourth Great Criterion.

"Monks, these are the Four Great Criteria."