The Bhikkhus' Rules

A Guide for Laypeople

compiled and explained by

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Introduction

The Teaching of the Buddha is concerned with more than intellectual knowledge for it needs to be experienced as truth in one's own life. The Buddha often called his Teaching the Dhamma-Vinaya and when he passed away he left these as the guide for all of us who followed. As Venerable Thiradhammo writes:

In simple terms we could say that while Dhamma represented the principles of Truth, the Vinaya represented the most efficacious lifestyle for the realization of that Truth. Or, the Vinaya was that way of life which enshrined the principles of Truth in the practicalities of living within the world." (HS Part 2)

For the bhikkhu, the Vinaya helps to highlight actions and speech, and show up their significance. It brings an awareness of how he is intervening in the world, how he is affecting other people. For better? For worse? With what intention?

Of course, such an awareness is necessary for every human being, not just Buddhist monks. This is why the Buddha bequeathed to us the Five, the Eight and the Ten Precepts[4](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n4) — as well as the bhikkhu's 227 rules of the Paatimokkha. These precepts and rules remain as pertinent today as they were 2,500 years ago for they restore the focus back to the human being, to how actions and words affect individuals and the world. While the particulars may have changed, the fundamentals remain the same.

Those who take the Buddha's Teaching seriously become ever more aware of their actions and speech, and how they match up against the Five Precepts. They then might start to realize the advantage in occasionally keeping the Eight Precepts — perhaps on the weekly Observance Day[5](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n5) — and become more interested in the bhikkhu's Rule and how its precepts come together into a whole way of life.

This compilation, therefore, is for anyone interested in bhikkhus and how to relate to them. Some might think that the *Theravaada* lineage follows an overly traditionalist[6](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n6) approach but then, it does happen to be the oldest living major tradition.[7](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n7) A slight caution therefore for anyone completely new to the ways of monasticism, for it is an approach to dealing with life that may appear radically different for this modern day and age. The best introduction, perhaps essential for a true understanding, is meeting with a practicing bhikkhu who should manifest and reflect the peaceful and joyous qualities of the bhikkhu's way of life.

Buddhist monks and nuns first received the going-forth into the Holy Life from the Buddha himself, more than two and a half thousand years ago in India. Since then, their influence has been felt over much of Asia. The countries of Sri Lanka and South East Asia have been profoundly affected by the Theravadin School of Buddhism, which looks back to the original Teachings as recorded in the Paali[8](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n8) scriptures. Buddhism was often first introduced to a new country when bhikkhus were invited to come and teach the new religion by the indigenous ruler. This process now continues throughout the world, although the invitation nowadays comes more often from local Buddhists.

Buddhism is justly admired for its appreciation of tolerance and broad-mindedness, with a history generally unblemished by heretical infighting. This has resulted in a wide spectrum of practices, from the old Theravaada to the Zen of Japan and the Vajrayana of Tibet. Even between the different Theravadin countries and Schools there are slight variations in the ways the bhikkhus understand and practice the Vinaya Rule. Such differences have sometimes confused lay devotees so this book is also an attempt to offer a clearer understanding about the responsibilities of the Theravadin bhikkhu's life and those of the lay devotee.

When the Buddha was about to finally pass away and leave his followers, rather than appoint an individual to take his place he said this:

"Whatever Dhamma and Vinaya I have pointed out and formulated for you, that will be your Teacher when I am gone." (Mahaaparinibbaana Sutta, [D.16])

More than twenty-five centuries have now gone by; empires have come and gone, great movements and ideologies have flared up and been lost. Yet on a deeper level under all of this, the Dhamma and Vinaya have been quietly guiding the communities of Buddhist monks. Why has it withstood the test of time so well? Why has it been so successful? Perhaps it is because the Lord Buddha understood the basic human condition of every time or place; he knew our predicament and failings, and he could show the way out to those of us who follow so long after him.

— I. A.

**Part One**

**Beginner's Questions**

**Q 3: "Why do monks live in the forest?"**

**A:** In India during the Lord Buddha's time much of the land was covered in forests and groves and this was where the wandering mendicants of the different orders would pursue their religious practices. The Lord Buddha spoke of the 'foot of a tree' as the basic shelter for bhikkhus, and this is usually still affirmed to every newly ordained bhikkhu. Later, monasteries were established and well-endowed, and the focus shifted to a more settled life. Mostly only the 'forest monks' now live in the forest where it is quiet and conducive to meditation. Many more monks will live in the village monastery or go to a monastery in the town to study the scriptures.

The Lord Buddha said this about the basics of shelter, whether in the forest or city:

"Properly considering the lodging, I use it: simply to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun and reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion." (OP p.46)

**Q 15: "Why do monks shave their heads?"**

**A:** When the prince who was to become the Buddha left his palace to seek a way beyond aging, sickness and death, it is said that one of the first things that he did was to "shave off his hair and beard and put on the yellow cloth." Buddhist monks always completely shave their head and beard, showing their commitment to the Holy Life *(Brahmacariya)* of one gone forth into the homeless life. (In India some ascetics tear out their hair, while others never touch it so that it becomes a tangled mass.)

A rule states that a bhikkhu should not allow his hair to grow beyond a certain length or time, so he will shave usually at least once a fortnight or month, sometimes more frequently. To do this he uses his razor, which is also one of his requisites.

'Hair-of-the-head' *(kesaa)* is one of the five parts of the body mentioned in the ordination ceremony and is used to recollect the true nature of the body. The bhikkhu is also not allowed to dye or pluck out any gray hairs, for they are useful reminders of old-age and impermanence. (Just consider how much time and money is wasted by people trying to make their hair remain beautiful and young-looking.)

**FAQ 4: "It is mentioned in the Vinaya rules that a monk is not allowed to reside under the same roof with a woman. How does that apply to multistoried (condominiums, flats, apartments) and multi-compartment buildings (terrace houses), where the flats, terrace houses, share one roof?"**

**A:** This has become a complex question with various interpretations because of modern conditions. The spirit of the rule is very important — avoiding possibilities of intimacy — while the interpretation will depend on the monk and the circumstances. In countries without proper monasteries there will always have to be something of a compromise. (See [*Staying Together*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#staying) for a discussion of this.)

**FAQ 5: "The Vinaya rules disallow monks from touching or handling money. As such, in Buddhist countries monks must have a *Kappiya* [attendant] to handle money for them. However, if a monk has to travel and does not have a *Kappiya,* under such circumstances do the Vinaya rules allow him to handle money personally? This is a problem especially in non-Buddhist countries."**

**A:** While it may be a problem or inconvenience, the rules are there to protect and remind the monk about dangerous, unskillful actions. If the monk becomes increasingly involved with money there is a tendency for the whole of his bhikkhu-life to be compromised — and *that* would be a far greater problem. Soon after the Final Passing Away of the Lord Buddha this sort of question had already become a major controversy and it is now even more complex under modern conditions.

However, modern conditions also have brought their own assistance to keeping these rules. For instance, a bhikkhu can be given an air ticket and travel around the world (if need be) without having any money or attendant. He will need to be met at the airport and helped in the normal way, but that should be natural if he has been invited to come by the lay group. (He should not really be traveling otherwise.) And, of course, a monk can use postage stamps and 'telephone-cards' that add convenience to communicating — when it is appropriate. (See the section on [*Money*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#money)*,* especially the [*Me.n.daka Allowance*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#mendaka)*.)*

**FAQ 6: "Is there a Vinaya rule that states that once a person becomes a monk, he is not allowed to disrobe? If he is allowed to disrobe, is there anywhere in the Vinaya that sets the maximum number of times he is allowed to do so. If so, under what circumstances is he allowed to disrobe?"**

**A:** I know of no place in the Vinaya that states a bhikkhu cannot disrobe. If he no longer has any interest in the bhikkhu-life, the tendency will be for him to become lax and a bad example for others. His Dhamma friends therefore will try to re-fire his enthusiasm. However, if that is not possible, becoming a good layman may be better than being a bad monk. (Nevertheless, in some countries there is a cultural expectation of 'ordaining for life' and a corresponding stigma attached to disrobing.) There is a tradition (but not a rule) about a bhikkhu not re-ordaining more than seven times. (See [*Disrobing*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#disrobing)*.)*

**Part Two: Establishing a Background**

**Precepts**

The awakened mind has gone beyond greed, hatred and delusion. Yet for those of us who are still striving towards this end such unskillful tendencies have to be addressed. We need guidelines to help us become more aware of our actions and speech, so that we do not go off the Buddha's Middle Way. For a start there are the Five Precepts, then the Eight and the Ten Precepts, [see End Note [4](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n4)] and then the 227 *Paa.timokkha* Rules of the bhikkhu.

The Five Precepts are basic human ethical standards — answering the fundamental questions of 'what do I do, what should I say?' These standards are further refined by the Eight Precepts, which allow the lay person to live a life closer to that of the monk — even if temporarily.[14](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n14) This may then lead to the Ten Precepts of a novice *(saama.nera)* or of a *dasasiila mata* nun.

The Vinaya and *Paa.timokkha* rules were set down by the Buddha in response to specific incidents that occurred either within the Community of bhikkhus or through their interaction with the lay community. An explanation of the original circumstances that led to the formulation of a rule is usually included in the scriptural text as an introduction to that rule. The emphasis therefore is always on Dhamma practice with the Precepts or Vinaya as a vital guide and support.

When a bhikkhu takes up the training rules, he might find that past habits and tendencies still cause problems — especially in a non-supportive environment. Of course, staying within a suitable environment will simplify this, which is a major reason for some rules. Therefore it is important to remember that the bhikkhu never practices in isolation and always needs the support and understanding of lay Buddhists. There is the need for mutual support and encouragement between the lay and bhikkhu communities. Knowing something of the rules should enable the lay person to appreciate this.

**Bhikkhus**

Buddhism has been said to be 'deeply rooted in a country when a local young man can become a bhikkhu, learn and then recite the *Paa.timokkha* Rule in his own country.' This originally referred to Sri Lanka thousands of years ago but now that Buddhism is moving to the West such conditions are starting to appear there, too.

The Bhikkhu *Sa"ngha* or Community of monks is probably the oldest of any of the institutions that have remained faithful to their origins and spread world-wide [see End Note [note 7](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n7)]. While scholars like to track its historical development from country to country, we could also start with a particular bhikkhu and trace the thread back through preceptor after preceptor to the Buddha Himself. Its many remarkable features enable men from different classes, backgrounds and cultures to live together in harmony and fellowship. Most important, it offers ideal conditions for the individual to train and meditate, to awaken to Dhamma, which is the whole point of the Buddha's Teaching.

When a candidate requests full admission to the Community[20](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n20) (after the *saama.nera* ordination) he does not make any 'lifetime vows' but offers himself for training and instruction under his Preceptor's guidance. At the end of the ordination ceremony, the Preceptor will immediately instruct the new bhikkhu (or arrange that he is properly taught) about the Paa.timokkha Rule and the other principles that all bhikkhus should follow and observe.[21](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n21)

**Ordination in South East Asia**

Throughout South East Asia, it is very common for young men to become bhikkhus (or novices) for a short period of their life. Traditionally this occurs during the three months of the Rains Retreat, after which they disrobe and return to lay life, hopefully knowing and appreciating much more about the bhikkhu life — and probably having friends still in the monastery whom they can visit for advice. In Thailand this means that while a small proportion of bhikkhus will spend all their life in the robe, many more Thai men will have tasted the life.

Such an ordination is also a rite of passage, for it is a family, even a village event with many people joining in to see the young man off into this new stage of his life.[25](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n25) The new monk will frequently visit his former home on his daily alms round so his ordination has a wider influence, showing the continuing possibility of living the 'Holy Life' started by the Lord Buddha so long ago.

It may also be considered a way for the young man to show his gratitude to his parents and grandparents, for they are thought to participate and share in the 'merit' he makes through his ordination. Also, some men might ordain for a time before marriage — one way for the young man to prove his maturity to his fiancée — and then again later in life after retirement.

**Disrobing**

Living the bhikkhu-life properly, following the Buddha's Teaching, requires full commitment and sustained effort. If this is lost and his Dhamma friends cannot rekindle his interest, the bhikkhu is always at liberty to return to lay life. There are no lifetime vows, so perhaps living a good lay life is better than being lax in keeping the bhikkhu's rules. Nevertheless, in some countries there is a cultural expectation of 'ordaining for life' and a corresponding stigma attached to disrobing.

"A bhikkhu who is tired of the practice of the Brahma-cariya [Holy Life] and wishes to return to the state of being a lay man may do this by taking leave of the training..." (EV,IIIp237)

Disrobing is finalized by the monk clearly proclaiming his change of status before another bhikkhu or lay person. Once the other person understands his statement, he is no longer a bhikkhu. In Thailand there is often a formal ceremony for this that ends with the former monk undertaking the Five Precepts to replace the 227 Paa.timokkha Rule.

In those countries where temporary ordinations are 'rites of passage,' some men may ordain and disrobe several times in their life — before marriage and after retirement, for example. However, there seems to be a tradition that bhikkhus do not disrobe and go forth again more than seven times, but this rarely occurs.

**Offences**

When a bhikkhu breaks his precepts or rules[30](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n30) it is called an offence *(aapatti).* Such offences are committed by action or word, although intention is (almost always) a decisive factor. Just thinking about doing something wrong is unskillful and may lead to future problems but it is not an offence. We will be examining some of these rules in the following pages.

Major Rule Groups of the Patimokkha

**A) THE FOUR *PAARAAJIKA* — THE DEFEATERS**

The new bhikkhu is told about the *Paaraajika* Offences immediately after ordination, so he fully knows that they are the most serious of all the offences and that the consequences of transgressing them causes him to be no longer a bhikkhu. The nature of the act that breaks any of these four *Paaraajika* rules clearly reveals that the bhikkhu is no longer interested in developing the subtle and refined way of Dhamma. The alternative of voluntarily disrobing is always available if he feels he can no longer keep the Rule and this is considered a much better way to handle this sort of overwhelming desire.

A monk automatically falls from being a bhikkhu[31](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n31) by committing any of these four offences of Defeat: sexual-intercourse, murder, major-theft, or falsely claiming supernormal abilities. A bhikkhu who falls into any of these four Defeater offences thereby severs himself irrevocably from the bhikkhu community and is no longer considered a bhikkhu. The text portrays it with some vivid similes showing their irreparable nature: as 'a man with his head cut off'; as 'a withered leaf fallen from its stem'; as 'a palm tree cut down'; as 'a broken stone.' For while all the other offences can be remedied, these four are terminal.

**B) THE THIRTEEN *SA"NGHAADISESA* — REQUIRING FORMAL MEETINGS OF THE COMMUNITY**

This is a very serious class of offence. However, any offending bhikkhu can be rehabilitated through confession and supervised probation. Finally, the bhikkhu needs to be reinstated by a specially convened Community (Sa"ngha) meeting of at least twenty monks.[32](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n32)

**C) THE TWO *ANIYATA* — INDEFINITE OR UNDETERMINED**

The Bhikkhu Community (together with the bhikkhu concerned) have to decide which rule, if any, has been infringed.

**D) THE 30 *NISSAGGIYA PAACITTIYA* — CONFESSION WITH FORFEITURE**

These rules are often concerned with bhikkhus being greedy and excessive in their demand for offerings, or with bhikkhus obtaining requisites through improper means. This oppresses lay donors and, classically, led them to comment: "How can these recluses... not knowing moderation ask for... ?" The rules of this category also guide bhikkhus on how they should take care of requisites and restrain the bhikkhus from obtaining items that by their very nature are inappropriate.

**Part Three: The Patimokkha Rules**

**MURDER**

The third Defeater *(Paaraajika)* Offence deals with murder. The original story describes how some bhikkhus wrongly grasped the Buddha's meditation teaching on the loathsome aspects of the body[38](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n38) and, falling into wrong view, committed suicide or asked someone to end their lives for them. The rule can be summarized like this:

"Intentionally bringing about the untimely death of a human being, even if it is still a foetus, is [an offence of Defeat.]" (Summary Paar. 3; BMC p.78)

**º** A bhikkhu must not recommend killing, suicide or help arrange a murder.[39](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n39) Also, because in this rule a human being is defined as beginning with the human foetus, counting "from the time consciousness first arises in the womb," he must not advise or arrange an abortion.

There is no offence if death is caused accidentally or without intention.[40](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n40)

**KILLING**

The previous offence was one of Defeat for murder whereas this rule is one of Confession *(paacittiya)* for killing animals. It originally arose because Venerable Udaayin, a frequent delinquent, detested crows so much that he shot them with arrows and then displayed their cut-off heads.

"Deliberately killing an animal — or having it killed — is [an offence of Confession]."(Summary Paac. 61; BMC p.423)

'Animal' here is *paano,* literally 'having breath.' The Commentary explains that it includes living beings down to the size of a bedbug. Elsewhere the texts forbid the killing of "even an ant."

**º** One of the bhikkhu's requisites is a water filter. This is employed to prevent the killing of (visible) waterborne creatures when making use of water from a well or stream. Practically, this also leads bhikkhus to take extra care that they cover water jars or regularly change water so that mosquito larvae do not have opportunity to breed. This shows how the Vinaya Rule emphasizes care and forethought as 'preventive medicine.'

There are two rules concerned with bhikkhus and their use of water:

One of these offences was originally perpetrated by the notorious 'group-of-six' monks who used water that contained living beings. It can be summarized:

"Using water, knowing that it contains living beings that will die from one's use, is [an offence of Confession.]" (Paac. 62; BMC p.424)

In the second offence the monks of AA.lavii were doing repairs and 'sprinkled grass and clay' with water that they knew contained life. It is summarized:

"If a bhikkhu knows that water contains living beings but still pours it out onto grass or earth it is [an offence of Confession.] Also pouring — or having it poured — into such water anything that would kill the beings therein is [an offence of Confession.]" (Paac. 20; See BMC p.319)

Intention is an essential factor here. For example, if a bhikkhu only intends to sweep a path but accidentally kills ants in the process, there is no offence because it is not deliberate. However, ordering an animal to be killed (and it is) is an offence. (Also, if he suspects that that animal was killed to provide him with food, it is an offence to eat it. See [*Meat-eating*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#meat)*.)*

**DESTROYING VEGETATION**

**º** The common belief at the time of the Buddha was that plants (and even soil) were 'one-facultied life.' Today we have ecologically 'green' beliefs that are often equivalent — at least they seem to lead to much the same attitudes.[41](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n41) (In Thailand, forest monks are well known as the best protectors of the jungle.)

The eleventh Confession offence concerns destroying plant life. It originated because a bhikkhu harmed 'one-facultied life' by cutting down trees. He continued to cut down a tree even when the *tree-deva*[42](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n42) asked him to stop, so she went and complained to the Buddha. This led to lay criticism of such behavior and a rule was set down:

"Intentionally damaging or destroying a living plant is [an offence of Confession.]"(Summary Paac. 11; See BMC p.294)

Therefore destroying a living plant — for instance, felling a tree, uprooting a flower, burning grass — is a Confession offence; as is picking fruit from a tree, a flower from a bush, etc. It is an offence of wrong-doing *(dukka.ta)* to damage or destroy fertile seeds or pips, or viable seedlings. (See [*Kappiya*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#kappiya)*).*

**º** Bhikkhus who live in tropical forest monasteries constantly have to protect both the jungle and themselves. When paths are overgrown, snakes and other dangerous 'creepy-crawlies' can be trodden on — and bite back! There also may be a need for firebreaks. One way that forest monks cope with this is a daily routine of sweeping the paths. However they are not allowed to dig or clear the land.

The tenth Confession offence arose when bhikkhus dug the ground and got others to dig, and the local people criticized them because they considered the earth to be 'one-facultied life.' The rule is phrased like this:

"Should any bhikkhu dig soil or have it dug, it is [an offence of Confession.]" (Paac. 10; BMC p.292)

Digging, breaking the surface of the earth, lighting a fire on it, pounding a stake into it are all disallowed. (If such 'earth' is more gravel or sand than 'soil' — and has no living creatures in it — it may then be dug.)

**º** It is, however, allowable for monks to hint to laypeople or novices about what needs doing as long as the words or gestures fall short of a command. When bhikkhus need paths to be cleared, necessary work done on the ground, firebreaks made, etc., any lay attendant wanting to help should listen out for hints and indications: 'A post hole dug over there would be useful'; 'make this ground allowable,' etc. What is needed can then be clarified.

**º** One practical and long term effect of these rules is that they have steered bhikkhus away from involvement in agriculture and land ownership. Such a development would also have isolated bhikkhus from the lay community because they would no longer have needed to depend on alms food.

**(II) Relationships**

Bhikkhus cannot live in complete isolation from lay people, for the mutual support relationship is intrinsic to their way of life. However, it should never become an intimate relationship for this goes against the whole purpose of leaving the 'family life' with its endless 'enclosed' complications.[43](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n43)

The 'Holy Life' or *Brahmacariya* is one that checks the display of any form of sexual desire through the actions and speech of the bhikkhu. (In fact restraint from gross sexual misconduct is already part of the Five Precepts [see End Note [4](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n4)]. The Eight and Ten Precepts immediately refine this and then the Vinaya manages it with even greater subtlety.) One's Dhamma life can then advance towards the ending of all desire through mind development and meditation. The most potent object for such sexual desire, that which the mind is most tenaciously grasping after, is usually associated with the opposite sex, so many rules involve this relationship.[44](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n44)

**SEXUAL INTERCOURSE**

**º** The first offence of all the 227 listed rules of the Paa.timokkha concerns a bhikkhu engaging in sexual intercourse. It remains a hot issue, perhaps even more so today, going by the number of sexual scandals that rock the Buddhist religious world in both the East and the West. As Venerable Thiradhammo writes:

"While some of the guidelines may seem somewhat rigid or prudish, it is important to reflect upon the volatility and durability of rumour, even if untrue. The incessant sex-scandals in religious circles may provide a sufficient incentive to encourage the greatest measure of prevention and discretion." (HS ch.13)

The rule was originally laid down because of Venerable Sudinna. He was the son of a rich merchant, who left home to become a bhikkhu only after great opposition from his family. He went away to practice Dhamma and when he came back to visit sometime later, his parents were overjoyed to see him and plotted to lure him back into the lay life again. They invited him for a meal and then laid out their wealth in front of him, piled up in two huge heaps of gold, while the wife he had left behind dressed herself in her most irresistibly alluring way. Venerable Sudinna remained unmoved by all of this. After telling them to throw the gold away in the river, he called his former wife, "Sister." Nevertheless, when his elderly mother pleaded with him at least to give them an heir, he foolishly gave in and had sexual intercourse with his former wife.

This First Defeater Offence is summarized:

"A bhikkhu who engages in any form of sexual intercourse is Defeated." (Paar. 1; See BMC p.45)

Every form and variety of sexual intercourse with sexual penetration — whether genital, oral or anal, whether with woman, man or animal — is forbidden. The penalty is the heaviest one of [*Paaraajika* or Defeat](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#paaraajika).

**INTIMACY — TOUCHING**

**º** The modern West has stories of sexual harassment, so the ways that the Buddha dealt with such matters should not seem so very strange.

If a bhikkhu touches a woman in a sexual way, he commits a very serious offence requiring formal meetings of the Community and probation *(*[*Sa"nghaadisesa*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#sanghadisesa)*).* The scrupulous bhikkhu wants to remain above suspicion so, if he can, he will avoid all physical contact. (Hence his attitude to shaking hands. This also explains why in Thailand a receiving cloth is used to receive offerings from women. (See *EN 85)*

The rule was first set down by the Buddha after a brahman and his wife had gone to inspect Ven. Udaayin's fine dwelling. As Ven. Udaayin was showing them around, he came up behind the lady and "rubbed up against her limb by limb." After they had left, the husband praised Ven. Udaayin but the wife was critical and explained what had happened. The brahman then complained, "Isn't it even possible to take one's wife to a monastery without her being molested?" This rule was then set down:

"Should any bhikkhu, overcome by lust, with altered mind, engage in bodily contact with a woman, or in holding her hand, holding a lock of her hair, or caressing any of her limbs, it entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community."(Sa"ngh. 2; BMC p.100)

To be at fault, the bhikkhu must usually do some action to bring contact with a woman while lust overcomes his mind.[45](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n45) If he accidentally stumbles and bumps into a woman or vice-versa, or if he is accosted by a woman, as long as there is no intention to come into lustful contact there is no offence. However, the average bhikkhu's mind tends to be so quick and unruly — he is, after all, still in training and therefore unenlightened — that he may prefer to be super-cautious about such situations.

If a bhikkhu touches his mother out of affection, then this is still an offence but the lesser one of wrong-doing *(dukka.ta).* [46](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n46) While gratitude to parents was strongly emphasized by the Buddha, the bhikkhu having left the home-life and his family should not cling to worldly relationships. The only true way for him to fulfill his filial obligations is by gaining insight into Dhamma and then teaching his parents.

If a bhikkhu is acting with lustful intentions, he incurs a grave *(thullaccaaya)* offence for making bodily contact with a *pa.n.daka* ('sex- aberrant') and an offence of wrong-doing for contact with a male. (See *BMC p.103)*

**º** The previous rules dealt with the bhikkhu's physical actions, the next two rules are offences — again of the very serious category — that concern his wrong speech towards women.

**FLIRTING**

This rule came into being when many women visitors came together to look over Ven. Udaayin's dwelling. He spoke to them in a lewd, flirtatious way so that some of them said, "It is improper. Even from our husbands we wouldn't like to hear this sort of thing." Therefore, the Buddha laid down this rule:

"Should any bhikkhu, overcome by lust, with altered mind, address lewd words to a woman in the manner of young men to a young woman alluding to sexual intercourse, it entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community." (Sa"ngh. 3; BMC p.110)

**PROPOSITIONING**

**º** The following rule is very relevant today when some misguidedly believe that submitting to sex with spiritual teachers can help in their spiritual development.

Again, it was originally a lustful Ven. Udaayin who was the cause of this offence. This time, he suggested to a beautiful and devout woman follower that she make a 'special offering' to him, that of sexual intercourse. The Buddha then set forth this rule:

"Telling a woman that she would benefit from having sexual intercourse with oneself is [an offence requiring initial and subsequent meetings of the Community.]" (Summary[47](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n47) Sa"ngh. 4; BMC p.117)

**ALONE WITH A WOMAN**

**º** A bhikkhu not only has to be impeccable but also must be seen to be so. He sets an example for everyone and therefore must be beyond reproach. Any doubtful situations have to be clarified, which is how the next rules came about. Some knowledge of these rules may also help to explain the sometimes seemingly antisocial attitude of some bhikkhus. (When bhikkhus are reluctant to enter into too private a conversation, it may reflect the unsuitability of the time and place for such a meeting.)

There are two aspects to these particular rules: physical closeness and private conversation (see below [*Talking Privately*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#talking)*).* If a woman sees a monk who is sitting alone and she wants to sit close to him, or she wants to have a one-to-one conversation with him, the following rules have to be taken into account.

First, the rules dealing with intimate proximity:

The Two *Aniyata,* Indefinite or Undetermined Cases, were formulated after Ven. Udaayin went to visit a recently married young woman. He sat privately with her, in a secluded place, just the two of them, talking about worldly affairs. The respected female lay-follower, Visaakhaa, saw them sitting there and said to Ven. Udaayin, "This is improper, Ven. Sir, and unsuitable, that the master should sit in private like this. Although, Ven. Sir, the master may have no desire for sexual intercourse, there are unbelieving people who are difficult to convince."

The Buddha therefore set this down:

"Should any bhikkhu sit in private, alone with a woman in a seat secluded enough to lend itself (to the sexual act), so that a female lay follower whose word can be trusted,[49](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n49) having seen (them), might describe it as constituting any of the three cases — involving either Defeat, [Community Meetings], or [Confession] — then the bhikkhu, acknowledging having sat (there), may be dealt with for any of the three cases... or he may be dealt with for whichever case the female lay follower described. This case is undetermined."(Aniyata 1; BMC p.157)

The Second Indefinite Offence is similar to the first, except that the place is less secluded and therefore not suitable for sexual intercourse although it could still be grounds for the other sexual offences, such as "addressing a woman with lewd words."

**º** When a bhikkhu intentionally sits alone with a woman in a secluded or private place (as in the above two rules) it can lead on to more intimate behavior or at least to misunderstandings from unexpected onlookers. To preclude such problems a bhikkhu needs a companion or 'chaperone.'[50](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n50)

A 'secluded place' is where a monk and women can sit (or lie down) on a seat together in a place that is hidden from view and out of earshot, for example, a private room or behind a wall or hedge. In such circumstances, a man or boy old enough to understand what is inappropriate conduct must be also present as chaperone. Therefore, if a woman — or women, for according to this particular rule *(Aniyata* 1) it does not matter how many there are — sees a bhikkhu sitting alone in such a very secluded place, she should remember about this rule and not go and sit with him but await a more suitable time or find a male to act as chaperone.

A less secluded but still 'private place' *(Aniyata* 2) would be, for example, a bench in a deserted park or a glassed-in porch or any other place that is private but not secluded enough for sexual intercourse. *(BMC p.389)* In this case, the Commentary allows the chaperone to be either male or female but they must be someone who knows 'what is and what is not lewd' and they must be 'within sight.' However if the monk and woman talk together the chaperone must be male because of the relevant rule about that. (See [*Talking Privately*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#talking) below.)

**º** The following 'Confession Rules' connect with the above 'Indefinite Rules.' (See explanations above for definitions of a 'secluded' and a 'private place.')

The forty-fourth Confession Offence originated when the husband of a woman denounced Ven. Upananda for sitting alone in a 'secluded place' with his wife. The ruling:

"Sitting or lying down with a woman or women in a private, secluded place with no other man present is [an offence of Confession.]"(Summarized Paac. 44; BMC p.385)

The next Confession Offence follows on with Ven. Upananda, this time, being caught sitting alone with the man's wife in a 'private place.' This time the ruling is:

"Should any bhikkhu sit in private, alone with a woman,[51](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n51) it is [an offence of Confession.]"(Paac. 45; BMC p.389)

Therefore as with the *Indefinite Offences* above there needs to be a chaperone present.

**THE FOUR REQUISITES: WHAT DOES A BHIKKHU NEED?**

The Buddha said that there were four necessities of life — clothing, food, lodging and medicine — and that they have to be treated properly:

"Properly considering the robe, I use it: simply to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, simply for the purpose of covering the parts of the body that cause shame.

"Properly considering almsfood, I use it: not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on weight, nor for beautification; but simply for the survival and continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the chaste life, (thinking) I will destroy old feelings (of hunger) and not create new feelings (from overeating). Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, and live in comfort.

"Properly considering the lodging, I use it: simply to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun and reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion.

"Properly considering medicinal requisites for curing the sick, I use them: simply to ward off any pains of illness that have arisen and for the maximum freedom from disease." [OP pp.46-47; (Pali: M. I, 10; A. III, 387)]

Clothing, food, shelter and medicine are necessary whether one is a lay person or a bhikkhu. The bhikkhu, however, should take a completely balanced stance towards these fundamentals. Advertising and the latest fashion should not draw him, for he should be solely concerned with simplicity and lack of attachment towards things.[57](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n57) It seems that the original requisites were 'basics' that wandering bhikkhus could conveniently carry around, for example, an alms bowl, three robes, a sitting cloth, a needle-case, and a waist band. However, extra allowances were gradually given as the need arose, for instance, a water filter, a razor and its sheath, the stone and strop for sharpening it and then articles such as an umbrella and sandals. Later the commentaries allowed other similar items.

**FOOD AND WHETHER A BHIKKHU BEGS**

The Buddha made it clear that bhikkhus should avoid begging if possible. (In times of great need a bhikkhu is allowed to ask for his basic requisites, for example, if his robes are stolen he may ask any lay person for one replacement robe.) He gave this story about 'begging':

A bhikkhu came to the Lord Buddha and complained about a great flock of noisy birds that came to roost at night in the forest surrounding his abode. The Buddha suggested that if he wanted them to go away he should go, many times throughout the night, and beg a feather from each bird. The birds, thinking, *'that monk wants a feather, and another, and another...,'* left the forest and never returned. The Buddha then explained that begging and hinting were unpleasant even to common animals, how much more so to human beings.

A bhikkhu who is constantly begging for things displays his greedy state of mind. No one likes to see this, and lay supporters may start by criticizing him and then turn to blaming his Community or even the Buddha's Teaching. The Buddha, therefore, set down many rules to guide the bhikkhus about what is proper conduct.

The question of monks' eating meat is an old one that was originally raised by the 'renegade monk' Ven. Devadatta. He asked the Buddha to prohibit bhikkhus from eating fish and flesh in what seems was a ploy to take over the leadership of the Sangha. (The 'stricter ascetic' tactic.) The Buddha had already made a strict rule for both bhikkhus and lay people about not taking life (see [*Killing*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#killing)*.)* so He did not agree to Ven. Devadatta's new formulation.

The Buddha did allow bhikkhus to eat meat and fish[88](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n88) except under the following circumstances:

If a bhikkhu sees, hears or suspects that it has been killed for him, he may not eat it.[89](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n89) (M.I,369)

If a bhikkhu is given meat on alms round and he has no knowledge about how the animal died[90](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n90) he has to 'receive it with attentiveness.' (See the [*Sekhiya Trainings*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#sekhiya)*.)* He should be grateful and recollect that the food he is given is what enables him to continue to live the bhikkhu life, and that as a mendicant he is not in a position to choose what he gets. If he later comes to know the family and they ask him about Dhamma, he will be able to explain the precept about not killing. This may cause them to reflect on their attitude to meat eating.

An individual lay person can choose whether to be a vegetarian. Problems usually arise only when vegetarians want to impose their choice on others, and as meal times are normally a family or shared affair this can create tensions and misunderstandings.

An individual bhikkhu who lives on alms food cannot make such choices. Often the donors are unknown — perhaps not even Buddhist, or just starting to find out about Dhamma — and to refuse their generosity may so offend them that they never have anything to do with Dhamma again.

Finally it comes down to the lay people who go to the market to buy food to give to the bhikkhus. If they are vegetarian themselves or like to give vegetarian food, then the bhikkhu should receive that food with 'appreciation' — especially if it means that fewer animals are being slaughtered. Nevertheless, it should not become a political issue where other people are attacked for their behavior.

**DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

Finally, we turn to those 'substances of abuse' that are entirely prohibited. The fifth of the Five Precepts [see End Note [4](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n4)] for all Buddhists is restraint from drinking alcohol and similar substances that destroy mindfulness, and are thereby a frequent cause of unskillful actions and speech. The equivalent rule for bhikkhus is the fifty-first Confession Rule:

"The drinking of alcohol or fermented liquors is [an offence of Confession.]" (Paac. 51; BMC p.402)

The origin-story concerns Ven. Saagata who conquered a fierce *naaga* — a type of serpent with magical powers — by his meditation-developed psychic powers. The townspeople heard about this feat and wanted to make some sort of offering to him, upon which the 'group-of-six' bhikkhus impudently suggested that they all should give him alcohol. When he arrived on his almsround every household offered alcohol and he finally collapsed, drunk, at the town gate and had to be carried back to the monastery. He was laid down in a stupor with his head towards the Buddha but in his drunkenness he turned around so that his feet pointed at the Buddha.[97](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n97) The Buddha called attention to his changed behavior, remarking that he certainly could not oppose "even a salamander" in such a state.

The Buddha also said:

"Bhikkhus,... there are these four stains because of which samanas and brahmans glow not, shine not, blaze not. What are these four? Drinking alcoholic beverages... indulging in sexual intercourse... accepting gold and money... obtaining requisites through a wrong mode of livelihood." (A.II,53) (AB)

**º** The Four Great Standards may be further used[98](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n98) to argue that using narcotics[99](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n99) — which also destroy mindfulness and lead to heedlessness — would also be an offence of Confession. Then there is the general principle of respecting the 'law of the land' (when it accords with Dhamma) so such illegal drugs would be disallowed anyway.

**MONEY**

The rule about a bhikkhu not accepting money came to be made when Ven. Upananda went to visit his regular supporters on alms round. The meat that had been set aside for him that morning had instead been given to the family's hungry son. The householder wished to give something else to make up for it and asked what he could offer to the value of a *kahaapana* coin. Ven. Upananda inquired if he was making a gift of a *kahaapana* coin to him, and then took the money away. Lay people were disgusted with this, saying, "Just as we lay people accept money, so too do these Buddhist monks!."

This Rule has been variously translated:

"Should any bhikkhu take gold and silver, or have it taken, or consent to its being deposited (near him), it is to be forfeited and confessed."(Nis. Paac. 18; BMC p.214)

"Should any bhikkhu pick up, or cause to be picked up or consent to the deposit of gold or silver, this entails Confession with Forfeiture." (Nis. Paac. 18; Paat. 1966 Ed. p.42)

"A monk, who accepts gold or money or gets another to accept for him, or acquiesces in its being put near him, commits [an offence requiring Confession with Forfeiture.]" (Nis. Paac. 18; BBC p.116)

"If a bhikkhu himself receives gold and silver (money) or gets someone else to receive it, or if he is glad about money that is being kept for him, it is [an offence of Confession with Forfeiture.]"(Nis. Paac. 18; Nv p.11)

**º** Note that there are some subtle differences in the way that the rule is translated, especially in the last example.

According to the Commentary, there is 'no consent' if a bhikkhu refuses to accept the money: by word — telling the donor that it is not proper to receive money; by deed — gesturing to that effect; by thought — thinking that this is not proper. There may be a problem in communicating this to the donors without causing them offence and without the bhikkhu falling into offence himself.[103](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n103)

Many of the rules concerning money, etc., are those of *Confession with Forfeiture* *(Nissaggiya Paacittiya).* This means that the money or articles that are wrongly acquired have to be forfeited. Furthermore, it is specified that they cannot be forfeited to a single monk but must be given up to the Community — who must then follow a strict procedure for disposing of those gains.

"For Laypeople: A lay-person should never offer money directly to a bhikkhu... even if it is placed inside an envelope or together with other requisites. They should either deposit the money with the monastery steward, put it in a donation-box or into the monastery bank account. They may then state their invitation to the bhikkhu(s) regarding the kind or amount of requisite(s). In Thailand, for example, knowledgeable lay-people would deposit money with the steward and offer to the bhikkhu(s) an invitation note mentioning the details of the offering." (HS ch.14)

**WRONG LIVELIHOOD**

Wrong livelihood for a bhikkhu is divided into two:

One category concerns a bhikkhu searching for a living in a way that is also considered wrong by worldly norms. For example, robbing or deceiving others by claiming to be enlightened and receiving gifts and support because of people's belief. (See [*Robbery by False Pretences*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#robbery) above)

The second category involves making a living that is wrong according to the Vinaya. For example: begging or asking from an unsuitable person or at an unsuitable time (see [*Invitation*](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#invitation)*);* thinking to gain something by giving a little but hoping for much in return; investing to gain interest; making a living by trade, for instance, giving medical treatment for reward.[115](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html#n115)

Also to seek reward from:

"the ceremony for [chanting] paritta (verses of protection), that is, making holy water and the sacred thread, the blowing of a charmed formula onto a person by a bhikkhu is also prohibited... It is allowed only to recite the paritta [protection verses], but this also occurs later and is not found in the Paali [texts]... [This is wrong livelihood and a] bhikkhu who seeks his living in this way is called alajjii, 'one who has no shame.'" (EV,II,p.129)

**Appendix: Lay Precepts**

Anyone, of any religion or none, can appreciate these fundamental, practical guidelines about actions and speech suggested by the Buddha. When we are mindful enough to realize that we have a choice about our actions and speech, these Precepts are there to help answer questions of, "What should I do, what should I say?" They are practical and down to earth without requiring one to promise first to believe in anything supernatural. Like the lane markings on the highway, they help speed one on one's journey without colliding with any other travelers or going completely off the road. The Precepts mark the straightforward way of living that harms or hurts no one, while offering one the choice to transform one's life through growing mindfulness into perfect virtue, wisdom and compassion.

**THE FIVE PRECEPTS**

The Five Precepts form one of the essential elements of following the Lord Buddha's Way. Undertaking these Precepts (and 'Going for Refuge') are often the first formal affirmation of a new Buddhist. This is normally done by repeating after a monk these phrases (in Paali):

"I undertake the training precept:

1) to abstain from taking life. 2) to abstain from taking what is not given. 3) to abstain from sexual misconduct. 4) to abstain from false speech. 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness."

**THE EIGHT PRECEPTS**

The Five can then be refined into the Eight Precepts:

"I undertake the training precept:

1) to abstain from taking life. 2) to abstain from taking what is not given. 3) to abstain from unchastity. 4) to abstain from false speech. 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness. 6)to abstain from untimely eating. 7) to abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows, from wearing garlands, smartening with scents, and beautifying with perfumes. 8) to abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches."

**THE TEN PRECEPTS**

The novice *(saama.nera)* has Ten Precepts, as does the *dasasiila mata* nun. These are the same Eight as above, however the seventh precept is split into two and an extra tenth precept is added. Thus:

1) to abstain from taking life.

2) to abstain from taking what is not given.

3) to abstain from unchastity.

4) to abstain from false speech.

5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness.

6) to abstain from untimely eating.

7) to abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows.

8) to abstain from wearing garlands, smartening with scents, and beautifying with perfumes.

9) to abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches.

10) to abstain from accepting gold and silver (money).