

The Buddhist Monk's Discipline

Some Points Explained for Laypeople

by

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Preface

In the small treatise which follows, the good of both Bhikkhus (Buddhist monks) and of the lay Buddhist householders has been aimed at and the information presented, the writer believes, is available in no other book. The standards of conduct described here are those of the Vinaya well-practiced and of the layman's discipline well-applied. What use indeed is there in presenting other than the high standards laid down by Lord Buddha himself in the Vinaya, since falling away from good conduct is all too easy and may all too easily be seen, not least in Buddhist lands? For those who follow the training in Buddhist Doctrine and Discipline (Dhamma-Vinaya) only the best, surely, is good enough.

As to terminology, the writer has used the Pali word *añjali* for what is often called "placing together the palms of the hands" (*añjali-kamma*), and the "five-point-rest" (*pañcaṅga-vandana*) for what is commonly called "prostration."

This book has greatly benefited from the corrections and additions suggested by my revered *upajjhāya*, Ven. Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhana, and others.

May this work be for the practical welfare of all who strive on the Path of Saddhamma!

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Introduction

The teachings given by Lord Buddha which are preserved and practiced to the present day, are known in the ancient texts as the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Although there is a great loss of meaning when translating these two terms into English, they may be rendered as *Doctrine* and aspects of *Discipline*. Numerous books are given over to explaining aspects of Dhamma but perhaps because of its monastic meaning the Vinaya seems neglected and not given due prominence. It will be the task of this booklet to examine Vinaya from a particular point of view—that of the Buddhist layman and how a knowledge of some of its rules can be useful to him.

This term “Vinaya” has not only monastic connotations. It is true that the Vinaya-collection¹ contains at great length and in detail the training rules, prohibitions, allowances, and regulations governing a Bhikkhu’s life, but there is at least one important instance of the term being applied to the conduct of lay-people. The sub-title of the famous discourse called the “Exhortation to Sigāla,” is “Gihi-vinaya” or the “Householder’s Discipline,” a worthy name for a masterly exposition.² In a more narrow sense, the layman’s Vinaya is his Five Precepts,³ since these have the same function of “removing the unskillful” as the much greater body of training rules in the Vinaya-collection has for a Bhikkhu. This is in fact what the word “Vinaya” means: driving out, abolishing, destruction or removal—that is, of all the overt ways of behavior which obstruct progress along the Practice-path of Dhamma.

Why then were the Vinaya training rules laid down? Many times in the Vinaya-collection Lord Buddha says: “On account of (some event necessitating action), O Bhikkhus, I shall make known the training rule for Bhikkhus,” (sometimes adding), “founded upon these ten reasons:

1. For the welfare of the Sangha (community of monks),
2. For the comfort of the Sangha,
3. For the control of unsteady men,
4. For the comfort of well-behaved Bhikkhus,
5. For the restraining of the pollutions (*āsavā*) in this present life,
6. For guarding against pollutions liable to arise in a future life,
7. For the pleasing of those not yet pleased (with Dhamma),
8. For the increase of those pleased,
9. For the establishment of true Dhamma and
10. For the benefit of the Vinaya⁴

The great Teacher and Commentator, Ven. Buddhaghosa, gives the following verse-definition of the Vinaya in the *Atthasālinī*:

“This Vinaya (Discipline) is called the Vinaya
By those knowing the meaning of Vinaya.
Because it disciplines (actions of) body and speech,

¹ See [Bibliography](#).

² See “*Everyman’s Ethics*,” *The Wheel* No. 14.

³ See “*The Five Precepts*,” *The Wheel* No. 55.

⁴ In the *Anguttara Nikāya* (Book of Twos), two further reasons are found: “for sympathy with householders” (a very important consideration) and “for breaking up factions of evil-minded Bhikkhus” (stressing how the Vinaya has protected the Sangha).

(Since consisting of) various and excellent principles.”

This verse stresses the usefulness of Vinaya in disciplining the body and speech (as the Five or Eight Precepts do for lay-people) and this again drives home the support given by Vinaya to Dhamma. To have one without the other is actually inconceivable from a Buddhist point of view. For instance, a Dhamma taught without Vinaya would be a teaching in which no opening or beginning was shown of a path to be practiced. A Vinaya without Dhamma on the other hand, would be an empty formalism, a discipline bearing little fruit or advantage. Both parts of the Buddhist Dispensation (*sāsana*) go hand-in-hand whether one considers the Bhikkhu’s or the layman’s training.

A good Buddhist layman is one who makes every effort to keep pure the Five Precepts and to practice at least the Dhamma taught in the “Exhortation to Sigāla.” In the same way a good Bhikkhu strives to train himself without falling into offenses, in the 227 training rules of the Pātimokkha which at the time of his acceptance as a Bhikkhu, he has undertaken to observe. It is often said that the laymen keep five, while the Bhikkhu’s load is two hundred and twenty-seven precepts, but for the latter this is only part of the truth since he has, besides the fundamental rules in the Pātimokkha,⁵ numerous others to train in, these being found scattered throughout the Vinaya Collection.

Here we may remark upon one difference between the precepts of a layman and those of a Bhikkhu. The former are all of a moral nature, such as are esteemed in all religions (with the possible exception of the fifth, since in some faiths abstinence from alcohol is not taught). For this reason, they fall into the class of “natural” precepts (*pakati-sīla*). But the Bhikkhu, besides having precepts of this nature, has many more which are special to his mode of life. These precepts are called “formulated” (*paññatti-sīla*). Although they have little or no application in the life of a layman, they are very important for the Bhikkhu, including all sorts of ways of restraint and good conduct proper for him. It should not be thought this latter sort of precept is less important to him than those in the group of natural morality, for this would be to apply worldly standards of judgment to a code of discipline designed to promote an unworldly way of life.

The concern among both Bhikkhus and laity, for keeping the precepts pure and for not falling into any offense, may be called scrupulousness. Many times in the Vinaya is it mentioned that “scrupulous Bhikkhus” (*kukkuccāyantā Bhikkhu*) would not accept some article until Lord Buddha had made it allowable. Again, we find constant references to “Bhikkhus of few wishes” (*appiccha Bhikkhu*) who were ashamed of the unbecoming and unscrupulous behavior of other monks. Light is thrown here upon an important connection between precepts generally and the Dhamma. In being “scrupulous” or “of few wishes” a number of skillful mental factors valuable to one’s training are present. Among these, the pair known as shame and fear of blame (*hiri-ottappa*) are actually called by Lord Buddha “the guardians of the world.” Shame is seen when one reproaches oneself for an evil done or about to be done and when one has an inward fear derived from thinking of the unpleasant results to be experienced from that sort of kamma. Fear of blame is rather the restraint imposed by fear of others’ censure or by the thought that honorable persons whom one respects, such as parents or teachers, might get to know of such evil. Being “of few wishes” is another word for contentment (*santuṭṭhi*), a very valuable quality for a Bhikkhu. The other most prominent factor in this scrupulosity and modesty, is mindfulness (*sati*), which is indeed at the root of all Buddhist training at whatever level. When there is mindfulness, however many precepts one keeps, it is likely that they will be well and carefully guarded. Mindfulness makes one careful and skillful even in mental kamma, not to mention those involving body and speech! It makes possible that all-round restraint often

⁵ See [Bibliography](#).

described by the simile of the turtle, which creature is immune from danger after having withdrawn its legs and head inside its shell. Of the Bhikkhu it is said:

Beneficial is control of eye,
Control of ear is beneficial too,
Beneficial is control of nose,
Control of tongue is beneficial too,
Bodily control is beneficial,
Control of speech is beneficial too
Beneficial is control of mind,
Everywhere restraint is beneficial.
The Bhikkhu here restrained in every way
Free utterly is he from every ill. (Dhp vv. 360–361)

All the various rules of the Vinaya might indeed be summed up in these verses. Further we have the famous exhortation of Lord Buddha to the Bhikkhus: “Be perfect in virtue (*sīla*), O Bhikkhus; be perfect in the Pātimokkha. Dwell restrained according to the Pātimokkha. Be perfect in conduct and (place of) resort *seeing danger even in the slightest faults*, and train yourselves by undertaking rightly the rules of training.” It is from such exhortations as this that the scrupulousness of a good Bhikkhu is born. He resolves to make effort to train himself thus: “I shall be perfect in virtue. I shall be perfect in the Pātimokkha. I shall dwell restrained... perfect in conduct and (place of) resort, seeing danger even in the slightest faults...”

Unscrupulousness, if we consider it in the light of these passages, will obviously indicate the presence of unrestraint and lack of mindfulness to say the least, and probably the lack of shame and fear of blame (*ahiri, anottappa*). Quite often strong currents of craving (*taṇhā*), possibly unrecognized, may be involved, pride (*mana*) may have a hand, (not wishing to submit to the whole discipline), and false views (*micchā-ditṭhi*) so often allied with pride, may tangle matters further by throwing out a smoke-screen of “reasons.”

However this may be, the rules of training are praised by Lord Buddha in words which must prevent anyone from regarding them as “mere external rules”: “Now all these rules combine together to make up the three trainings. What three? The training in supreme morality, the training in supreme collectedness, and the training in supreme wisdom. Herein are combined one and all of these rules... Thus, O Bhikkhus, one who partly fulfills these observances experiences attainment partially, while one fulfilling perfectly comes to experience the complete attainment. Not barren of results, I declare are these rules of training.” (AN 3:860)

Or, we have this verse:

“The Bhikkhu who delights in heedfulness
And looks with fear on heedlessness,
As a forest fire advances fast,
Burns up all fetters, great or small.” (Dhp v. 31)

Reason enough if a Bhikkhu has set his heart upon Nibbāna, to keep the training rules strictly! Now the path of one who has gone forth from home to homelessness and who sincerely tries to train in those rules which he has undertaken, is reckoned to lead directly to Nibbāna. It is therefore a great evil to obstruct one who has set himself upon this course, while it is great *puñña*⁶ to aid such a one.

In the Buddhist dispensation there is mutual help given by Bhikkhus to lay-people in the form of Dhamma suitable for their practice and by lay people to Bhikkhus when they offer the

⁶ *Puñña* (“u” as in “put”) is the benefit of increasing purity of mind derived from skillful actions such as generosity, virtue, helpfulness, etc. “Merit” is an inadequate rendering.

four supports: robes, food, shelter, and medical necessities. In this way householders support the community of Bhikkhus from among whom those with knowledge and experience support the laity with Dhamma. Just as no Bhikkhu worthy of the robe would cause trouble among lay people but only wish to help them, so devoted and knowledgeable householders think only to help Bhikkhus and sāmaṇeras (novices). In order to do this they must, of course, have at least some idea of what is and what is not allowable for Bhikkhus as laid down by Lord Buddha in the Vinaya.

It happens that Bhikkhus are now traveling more widely and able to visit and live in countries where formerly it was not possible for them to go. Also many people from non-Buddhist lands now travel to and stay in those countries there where is a living tradition of Dhamma, some of them becoming interested and wishing to know what should and what should not be done in respect of Bhikkhus. There is consequently a need for knowledge among lay-supporters and others of some points of Vinaya. In this small book, the only points dealt with will be those where lay-people are somehow involved, while Vinaya matters of concern to Bhikkhus alone may be investigated in more comprehensive works.⁷

⁷ See [Bibliography](#).

The Training Rules

As the Bhikkhu's life generally gives many occasions for contact with lay-people (except for the Bhikkhu engaged in meditation practice), and as erring Bhikkhus were not absent from the Sangha even in the days of Lord Buddha, so there is quite a large body of legislation relating to just these occasions. Because of the wrong conduct of various Bhikkhus, Lord Buddha had cause to lay down large numbers of training rules which, if infringed, would become offenses for the guilty Bhikkhu. It sometimes happened that a rule had to be modified, and sometimes various allowances proved necessary to qualify the range of the original rule. In this way many of the training rules were tested in the light of experience until they became perfectly practical.

All these rules fall into seven classes according to the seriousness of the offense involved when they are broken. Briefly, these seven classes with some of their characteristics are as follows:

1. *Defeat (pārājika)*. The first four training rules of the Pātimokkha, if broken, become offenses by which a Bhikkhu is defeated, no longer able to live in communion with other Bhikkhus, never able in the present life to be ordained Bhikkhu again; and being no longer "a son of the Sakya" (or the Buddha), he should disrobe immediately. These four offenses are:
 1. sexual intercourse of any description;
 2. taking what is not given with intention to steal;
 3. depriving purposely a human being of life in any way;
 4. falsely claiming superhuman states of attainment.
2. *Formal meeting (saṅghādisesa)*. Thirteen "heavy offenses," the second group in the Pātimokkha, for the commission of which there is a special disciplinary procedure designed to humble and purify the offender who must, however, first confess to being guilty (as with all other offenses). Of special interest to the laity are numbers two, three, four, and five, which concern:
 2. engaging in bodily contact with a woman with lustful intent;
 3. addressing a woman with lewd words;
 4. speaking to a woman in praise of sexual intercourse;
 1. acting as a go-between for a man or a woman.

In the more detailed considerations below, we shall return to some implications of the first and last of these.

2. *Grave offenses (thullaccaya)*. These are numerous but not found in any one part of the Vinaya. Sometimes they are the types of offense resulting from partial commissions of acts which, if completed, would entail defeat or formal meeting. They may, in common with the other classes of offenses below, be cleared up by making a confession to another Bhikkhu who has not committed the same offense.
3. *Expiation (pācittiya)*. Ninety-two in number and all found in the Pātimokkha, these training rules cover a very wide range of subjects, some of which it is useful for lay-people to know.
4. *To be confessed (pāṭidesanīya)*. Only four rules in the Pātimokkha, which find little application today.
5. *Wrong doing (dukkata)*. A very numerous category, for the avoidance of breaking which,

care is needed. The 75 trainings (*sekhiya* found in the Pātimokkha and which contain numbers of points of interest to the layman, become when broken, offenses of wrongdoing.

6. *Wrong speech (dubbhāsita)*. This includes all unprofitable speech not found in the above classes, as for instance, the use of coarse words uttered in jest. While there are numbers of cases for offenses in the above classes, there is only one here.
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The Value of Vinaya

We have already seen that Lord Buddha, in laying down the training rules for Bhikkhus, was much concerned with the well-being of the laity. He had in mind, for instance, “being in sympathy with householders,” “the pleasing of those not pleased (and) the increase of those pleased” (with Dhamma) alongside more monastic considerations. In another passage of very frequent occurrence in the Vinaya collection, Lord Buddha whenever he rebuked some erring Bhikkhu would say: “It is not, foolish man, for the pleasing of those not pleased (i.e., outsiders, those of other faiths), not for the increase of those who are pleased (by their practice of Dhamma-Vinaya, i.e., Buddhists), but, foolish man, it causes displeasure among those who are not pleased as well as in those who are pleased, and it causes wavering in some” (i.e., those who are interested in Dhamma but have not yet gone for the Refuge to the Triple Gem). The very obvious effects which bad conduct by one in robes has upon lay-people, is here very strongly emphasized.

The converse is also true, since a Bhikkhu who has been well-trained under good teachers and learned thoroughly the theory and practice of Dhamma and Vinaya is indeed a great recommendation to the excellence found in the Conqueror’s dispensation. A picture of such a Bhikkhu is awakened in the mind’s eye by this verse:

Calm in body, calm in speech,
Tranquil and composed of heart,
Whoso has spewed out worldly wants
‘Serene’ is such a Bhikkhu called. (Dhp v. 378)

The Dhamma which all Buddhists revere as most precious and which is practiced by all who are truly followers of Lord Buddha, has been preserved for the people of the present by the Sangha. This community of Bhikkhus, those who (so to speak) have specialized in Dhamma, has been preserved by close adherence to the training rules laid down in the Vinaya. That this sequence is true may be seen from several instances in history when Bhikkhus no longer paid heed to the Vinaya and so lost the respect and support of the laity. Not having this support, they drifted towards being householders themselves and having become priests with families, they could give less time to learning and practice of Dhamma. Books got lost and were not replaced and the tradition became steadily more degenerate until no teaching at all remained—only “protection-ceremonies” and the like, often performed in a language not understood even by the priest, let alone by the people. The present time, alas, could also show some “Buddhist” traditions of which these words are true.

This preservation of the Dhamma by Vinaya and hence by the Sangha to whom the Vinaya applies, finds expression in a simile in the Vinaya-introduction where it is said: “Flowers loose upon a flat piece of wood, not tied together by thread, are scattered about, destroyed by the wind. What is the cause of that? Since they were not held together by thread...” This is said to apply to the teachings of some former Buddhas who gave little of the Dhamma to their disciples and who did not lay down the Vinaya or make known the Pātimokkha. It is a cause for rejoicing that Gotama the Buddha *has* explained the Dhamma in detail, made known the Vinaya and pointed out the fundamental training rules of the Pātimokkha. “It is as if, Sāriputta, various flowers placed on a piece of wood, tied together by thread (as a garland), are not scattered, whirled about, or destroyed by the wind. What is the reason for that? They are well tied together by thread.” This means simply that the winds of impermanence cannot so easily destroy the various aspects of Dhamma when these are secured by the thread of the Vinaya.

This brings us to appreciate the reverence which the Vinaya-collection is accorded by all true

Bhikkhus as well as by knowledgeable laymen. This collection is given first place among the three collections (*piṭaka*) of Buddha word, a fact which indicates that it is the support and mainstay of the other teachings. As it was said at the First Council or Saṅgāyana: “the Vinaya is the very life of the Teaching (*Sāsana*); so long as the Vinaya endures, the Teaching endures, therefore let us rehearse the Vinaya first.”

“Reform of Vinaya”

If one appreciates that the Vinaya is indeed the mainstay, it will not be difficult for Buddhist laity, even in non-Buddhist countries, to realize that ideas of changing (sometimes called “reforming”) the Vinaya, in order as it is said, “to suit modern conditions,” find no favor with the Sangha as a whole. There are many objections to such a course of action, in which indeed there would be almost no advantages. In what follows, the writer wishes to examine these objections and to show plainly their dangers and disadvantages.

Firstly, if one reads through the Vinaya, while there are a number of points that apply specially to eastern countries, some even being limited to conditions peculiar to ancient India, none of these relate to the main principles of the Bhikkhu-life. The workings of the Vinaya in the life of the Bhikkhu of the present day is not made difficult by obsolete training rules. Those no longer having any application are very few and are really not of great importance.

All the main principles of the Bhikkhu-discipline are as valid now as they were when instituted by Lord Buddha two and a half millennia past. This is indeed a marvelous proof of the wisdom of Lord Buddha who has so well formulated these rules. Nor is the structure of the Vinaya absolutely rigid and it does therefore permit necessary adaptations which are still within the spirit of the training. The use by Bhikkhus of modern methods of transport might be taken as an example. This would not have been possible for them if Vinaya was taken as a completely rigid code.

Secondly, there are the words of Lord Buddha himself: “So long, O Bhikkhus, as you appoint no new rules, and abolish not the existing ones, but proceed according to the training rules as laid down, so long will Bhikkhus be expected to prosper, not to decline.” (AN 7:12) This statement of the Teacher is always to the fore whenever there are gatherings of senior Bhikkhus meeting to determine some Vinaya questions arising out of modern conditions. Or, there are such exhortations from sources outside the Pali canon as these words attributed to Lord Buddha: “O Bhikkhus, after my Parinibbāna you should revere and honor the precepts of the Pātimokkha. Treat them as a light which you have discovered in the dark, or as a poor man would treat a treasure he had found. You should know that they are your chief guide and there should be no difference (in your observances of them) from when I yet remained in the world” (the opening words of the “Discourse of the Teaching Bequeathed by the Buddha”⁸).

Then there is a consideration based upon the events of the First Saṅgāyana (Council). In this great gathering of Arahant s, Venerable Mahākassapa, who was its president, put forward this motion: “If it seems right to the Sangha, the Sangha should not lay down what has not been laid down, nor should it abolish what has been laid down. It should proceed in conformity with and according to the training rules which have been laid down. This is the motion. Your reverences, let the Sangha listen to me. If it seems right to the Sangha, the Sangha should not... (thrice repeated). It is pleasing to the Sangha; therefore it is silent. Thus do I understand.” All those who are accepted as (Theravada) Bhikkhus in the present day follow this tradition as laid down in the First Saṅgāyana. This is Theravada tradition; it is based upon the decision of those great elders who were ennobled with the highest nobility. Who are we indeed, to go astray from their way?

Although the Teacher before his Parinibbāna spoke thus: “After my passing Ānanda, let the Sangha if it so desires abolish the lesser and minor rules of training,” no Sangha anywhere actually ventured to do this, partly because of the uncertainty in defining “the lesser and minor

⁸ See “*The Buddha’s Last Bequest*,” The Wheel No. 112.

rules” and partly because they were constrained out of respect to preserve that which had been instituted by the great Teacher. Acariya Nāgasena explains that “the Tathāgata spoke thus testing the Bhikkhus: ‘Will my disciples on being left by me adhere to the passing, or will they repudiate them?’”⁹ There is also the consideration that those of other sects might say, “While the Teacher (Gotama) was alive, his disciples respected and honored his precepts but now that he is no more, they throw off the training.” But principally the reason was devotion arising from the successful practice of Dhamma Vinaya.

Supposing that someone proclaimed that he wished to “reform” the Vinaya, in doing this or in trying to do this, he would depart from Theravada tradition and place himself apart from others following Theravada and would in fact only start a new sect, and who is in honor of sectarianism? If he were a Bhikkhu, by his departure from the training laid down in the Vinaya he would only bring upon himself offenses, being burdened with which and failing to confess them, he would be precluded from making much progress on the practice path of Dhamma.

Again, *who* will change the Vinaya? As the Vinaya is the province of Bhikkhus, lay people obviously cannot do so. One Bhikkhu cannot effect any changes since Vinaya-decisions are arrived at after the consultation of a Sangha. A Sangha of young Bhikkhus is not qualified to do so since decisions arrived at by them might well be swayed by preferences, or be based upon both lack of learning and lack of purity of heart. A Sangha of senior Bhikkhus competent to decide upon Vinaya-questions will scarcely undertake such a task since their training has imbued them with a deep sense of respect for the Vinaya. Any decision arrived at by a meeting of less than all Bhikkhus in the world (!) would be sectarian in character and be the cause of Sangha-schism (an offense of formal meeting and therefore very serious). Even if such a gathering could be contrived, not only would respect for the traditions of the Arahant elders easily triumph, but also the dissident voices would be found to represent somewhat unbalanced individuals. Actually, *no one at all* can be found who would be competent to undertake “changing the Vinaya.” (But there is, as pointed out above, provision for decisions on the Vinaya questions by a council of senior Bhikkhus well versed in Vinaya and the Commentaries as found in Siam.)

Another point to consider is that even if changes were agreed upon by all competent authorities and the Sangha, therefore unanimous, how far are such changes to go, and when will this changing ever stop? This question, among all other considerations here, has always deterred Theravada Elders from effecting any changes. Ven. Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhana writing in Siam recently says: “The argument of the Theravada Buddhists against the revision of the Vinaya is that while it is true that towards the end of his life, the Buddha did give permission to his disciples to suspend the minor rules, the First Council was not able to reach an agreement as to what ‘minor rules’ signified.” They have thus remained in the Pātimokkha until the present time and have thus ensured that the standard of conduct and the direction of the training have remained the same (for those undertaking the training seriously) as they were in the Buddha time. Ven. Paññavaddho, in his review of the Bangkok edition of “The Pātimokkha,” has written: “It has been said by some people that in this modern day and age, some or many of the rules are archaic, restrictive, or otherwise undesirable in the greatly altered circumstances of modern civilization. But it must be remembered that the Vinaya, with the Pātimokkha as its basis, has maintained stability in the Sangha since the time of Lord Buddha.”

Finally, there is a consideration based upon the nature of the training and the end which it has in view. From the Buddha-time down to the present it has been found that a careful application of the Vinaya’s principles by a Bhikkhu in his life promotes his practice and understanding of Dhamma: “Vinaya leads to restraint; restraint to the absence of remorse;

⁹ Milindapañhā text, PTS p. 143.

absence of remorse leads to joy; joy to delight; delight to tranquility; tranquility leads to happiness; happiness to collectedness; collectedness to knowledge and vision of the truly existent; knowledge and vision of the truly existent to revulsion;¹⁰ revulsion to dispassion; dispassion to freedom; freedom to knowledge-and-vision of freedom; and knowledge-of-vision to freedom leads to Nibbāna free from (clinging to) substrata (for rebirth).” (Vinaya, Parivāra, 169.) When Vinaya has been so formulated as to guide a Bhikkhu to the goal of Nibbāna, who shall entertain thoughts altering it? It is we who have to change by our practice of Dhamma-Vinaya, to come up to its level and not to expect it to change for us. In this connection, there is a little fable:

At one time there was a great and flourishing tree standing as it had stood for many, many hundreds of years. It was so beautiful that men and women bringing their children would come from scores of miles about to gaze in wonder at its perfect and majestic shape. Under its mighty spread of branches multitudes could sit down enjoying its cool shade. Even animals would come and delight themselves according to their several habits, some upon the grass beneath and some sporting amid the profusion of leaves, flowers, and fruits. And such flowers of such fragrance—no one knew where else their like might be found. And such fruits as this tree bore and in such abundance! No wonder that they are called best, highest, foremost and supreme among all fruits produced by other trees. So the seasons and the years rolled by and still the mighty tree stood hardly changed, for where one branch died off, another grew to replace it. The delight of many beings, visible and invisible, was in the health and long life of this ancient tree. Then, in accordance with the change inherent in things, fashions changed and trees in their natural vigor were no longer praised but trimmed and artificially-shaped trees were thought more beautiful. Agitation began among some men for the tree to be shaped up according to modern taste. Eventually, due to debased ideas of people by that time, loppers and clippers tried their hands upon the millennial giant. Branch after branch fell loaded with flowers and bearing fruits. “Never mind,” they said, “it will look much better when we have finished.” Before long, the tree was pruned into the form of a perfect cube and this was regarded by almost everyone with satisfaction. Only a few ignorant people regretted the sawn-off limbs and bare branches with a few clusters of leaves left here and there. These ill-educated persons were heard regretting the lack of any shade. How stupid of them!

It is needless to say that the venerable tree flowered and bore fruit no more and due to shock, died shortly afterwards, leaving only its great, but dead framework which then became an object for the speculative theses of numerous men of books.

Thus it is that most Bhikkhus generally would not talk of “changing” but of “tampering with” the Vinaya. After all, when closely examined many proposals to bring about changes in the body of Vinaya are found to be based upon the roots of unskill. A simple case will illustrate this, A Bhikkhu experiences pangs of hunger in the evening (in spite of allowable drinks!), which cause him to announce that he does not believe in strictly following Vinaya in this respect, since this would be an extreme of self-torture (!); the climate is too cold; modern times demand a change; “I follow Mahāyāna” (!)—or one of a thousand such excuses. He accordingly proposes that the training rule regarding not taking food afternoon and before dawn, be abolished. “After all,” he reasons, “it is only a pacittiya offense—nothing much.” Meanwhile, he has a good supper every night; not only his belly but also his greed, that root of unskill, are thoroughly satisfied. If the former is a little distended, the latter is certainly greatly increased, while the spirit of renunciation has fled from his dwelling. And of course, where greed is increased, so automatically is aversion and dullness... and so on...

¹⁰ *Nibbidā*, a word impossible to render into English, as it encompasses meanings such as: revulsion (but without hatred or dislike); weariness (but without physical tiredness); and means literally “turning-away from.”

Anyone—whether Bhikkhu or layman—who holds such a view or reasoning concerning his training rules as the imaginary Bhikkhu above, actually makes for himself a real stumbling-block upon his own path. The mental attitude of thinking, “Oh, it does not matter; it’s only a little thing!” is one to watch, since it appears at the gate of the wide and easy path leading downwards. Such slack ways of thinking, really urged on by some hidden craving, are just the reverse of the disciplined scrupulousness upon which so much stress is laid in the Vinaya.

Slackness and strictness in regard to the Vinaya are not to be associated in any wholesale fashion with this “*yāna*” or that “*vāda*” (vehicle or way). In Theravada, as in other Buddhist traditions, there are those Bhikkhus who are strict as well as those who are slack. Wherever there is a good Teacher who is concerned with the practical application of the Dhamma, there the Vinaya will be carefully followed. But where neither such a Teacher nor a good Vinaya tradition are found, there undisciplined behavior will result, with a victory for not-Dhamma (*adhamma*).

Standards of Discipline

One important principle to remember about the Vinaya is that a life based upon its principles is very different from the ordinary life. The Vinaya guides a Bhikkhu in conducting himself so as to “go against the stream” (of craving) and his life and way of doing things is often opposed to the ways of one who “enjoys the five strands of sense-pleasures.” Take food again as an example. An ordinary person not undertaking any religious discipline may eat, his mind delighted by sense-impressions of taste, smell, color, and so forth, and probably therefore overwhelmed with greed. He may chatter with others and, if the food is delicious, overeat. Restraint and mindfulness, by contrast, are the marks of a good Bhikkhu taking his food, which he regards as medicine to keep his body going and, should greed arise, he uses the meditation upon the loathsomeness of food to dissolve it. He talks but little, has his senses under control and eats only moderately.

The reason for this difference of attitude is not hard to see. One who is blown about by the winds of craving throughout his life, not understanding kamma and its fruits, and therefore not grasping the meaning of dukkha, is set on no sure course and wins little advantage in his or her life as a human being. One who wishes to become a Bhikkhu, on the other hand, has determined upon a definite course of action which is given guidance by the Vinaya and his practice of it, after his acceptance (*upasampada*). The Dhammapada emphasizes this:

One is the way to worldly gain,
Another to Nibbāna leads.
Clearly comprehending this
The Bhikkhu-follower of the Buddha
Should not delight in honor and gain
But devote himself to solitude. (v. 75)

It may be that some of the training rules to be dealt with below will seem strange and complicated—even unnecessary. They *are* unnecessary for a layman, but they have a definite part in the life of a Bhikkhu and help him generally in developing that scrupulousness which is so essential to Bhikkhu-life. For this reason, lay-people who are so fortunate as to be able to invite a good Bhikkhu to their towns, should be truly pleased to help him keep the Vinaya. Those who do this, which is the doing of what is a little difficult and therefore requires effort but bears splendid fruit, are themselves undertaking the training rightly. A Bhikkhu such as the verses below depict is really worthy of help and support:

For a Bhikkhu wise who practices this Sāsana,
Control of senses and contentment too.
And by the Pātimokkha well-restrained,
And company of keen and noble friends
Who follow purity of livelihood—
Such things as these being the holy life.
The Bhikkhu who has in the Buddhasāsana
Serenist joy and faith that satisfies,
Surely he can reach unto the State of Peace,
The bliss of pacifying all conditioned things. (Dhp vv. 375, 381)

Some Aspects of the Vinaya

In the following Vinaya information useful to laymen, most emphasis will be upon the offenses incurred in certain situations by Bhikkhus and how laypeople can help them avoid these, together with remarks upon the customary conduct of laypeople in the presence of a Bhikkhu. As, in Buddhist countries, the laypeople's code of manners and conduct is much influenced by the seventy-five trainings, a group of rules kept by both Bhikkhus and sāmaṇeras, it seems appropriate to include this matter here. The writer has, for the sake of easy reference, gathered the various points, some suggested through the kindness of others, under five headings: Greetings, Living-quarters, Food and Drink, Travel and General Conduct. In the Conclusion are set out some observations upon the way Bhikkhus are regarded by the laypeople of Siam at the present time.

Greetings

It is generally felt in Buddhist countries that the common western form of greeting, the handshake, is unsuitable when greeting Bhikkhus. The point here is that a Bhikkhu must avoid all body contact with women. Since if lust arose in him, he could be embroiled in a heavy offense, entailing formal meeting. For these reasons it is obvious that the handshake is not a suitable greeting and, in the case of a Bhikkhu, if one has invited him knowing that he has knowledge and experience of Dhamma which is not one's own, then greeting by handshake will not express one's willingness to learn, as well as do the traditional gestures.

In a public place, a Bhikkhu is traditionally welcomed and parted by "action of *añjali*," inclining the head and sometimes the body. This position of the hands is associated in theistic religions with prayer (one thinks of Dürer's famous "Praying Hands") but its use and meaning in Buddhist tradition is rather different.

Here, given space, one might elaborate a little upon relationships of mentality (*nāma*) with materiality (*rūpa*) and the reverse. Suffice it to say that there are certain gestures and positions of the body which lead to the arising, maintenance, or increase of skillful and concentrated mental states. We are concerned here with two of them: "action of *añjali*" and what is usually called "prostration," but which we prefer to call the "five-point-rest" or "lowering" the body.¹¹ Of these, "action of *añjali*" is commonly seen when laypeople greet Bhikkhus at stations, in the streets, within a hall, or other public place. The amount of respect thus accorded to a particular Bhikkhu tends to be expressed by the height at which the hands are held (from the heart up to the forehead) and the angle at which the head and body are inclined. However, any exaggerated form of *añjali* is disliked and not encouraged, since it usually expresses some mental strain in

¹¹ See [Preface](#).

the mind of the persons making it (such as flattery, stupidity, conceit, etc.). What has been said here also applies to all novices and junior Bhikkhus when respecting their seniors in the Sangha. It is also widely used by Buddhist lay people when greeting each other.

Another point which should be mentioned and which applies both to “action of *añjali*” and “five-point rest” (see below), is that the action of respecting one who knows Dhamma by one who wishes to learn, *is for the benefit of the latter*. Through associations with prayer which will be present on many western minds, it is often assumed that these actions when performed by Buddhists, are acts of propitiation or are somehow for the benefit of whoever is “on the receiving end” (i.e., a Buddha image, or a Bhikkhu)! This is indeed very far from the truth, since even when Lord Buddha was teaching, he said: “But also, Bhikkhus, if others should speak in praise of me, in praise of the Dhamma, or in praise of the Sangha, you should not on that account be filled with pleasure and gladness, or be lifted up in mind... (for if that happened) that also would become a danger to your own selves.” (DN 1, ¶ 6)

This is certainly true of good Bhikkhus of the present who will know that to have a mind that is stuck in the desire of praise and honor, which is one of the eight worldly conditions, is also one of the marks of an ignorant, worldly person and far from the ideal of the Noble Disciple (*ariyasāvaka*) to which he aspires. Thus a Bhikkhu does not teach the advantages of “the action of *añjali*” and “five-point rest,” because he wants to be honored but because these things are skillful ways of conduct and increase the *puñña* of those performing them. According to a famous verse, this *puñña* increases in four ways:

He of respectful nature who
Ever the elders honoring,
Four qualities for him increase:
Long-life and beauty, happiness, and strength. (v. 109)

Just as a Bhikkhu will “honor the feet” by the five-point lowering before his preceptor, teacher, or any elder Bhikkhu, or at shrines and in temples where there are Buddha-images, so do lay people lower themselves to their Bhikkhu-teacher of Dhamma. This they generally do in a relatively quiet and enclosed space such as temple, Bhikkhu’s lodging, or in their own houses where they may have invited Bhikkhus for teaching, chanting, or for making *puñña* by giving gifts. At the time when they respect a Buddha-image, their Teacher, or other Bhikkhus in either of these ways, they encourage their children to do likewise, thus early inculcating a sense of respect which is bound to bear good fruits in the future. Happiness and peace characterize the faces of those who perform these acts of reverence with care. After all, is not happiness associated with an absence of mental strains?

Some laypeople, however, do these things carelessly, so that they become unmindful of their meaning and benefits; but those who really aspire to make progress on the Path never do so unmindfully, however often they have cause to greet with the *añjali* or lower the body in the five-point rest.

In the West, where these customs are not established among Buddhists and where Bhikkhus are in any case, very few in number, carelessness is not likely to be a hindrance, although there is another one which deserves a little attention. Among some people one finds what amounts to a strong aversion to the practice of lowering the body. It may be that they hold some wrong view, perhaps an unconscious trait persisting from Protestant Christianity (idolatry, the bowing down to idols, etc.). Perhaps it may be connected with the idea dealt with above, that the other requires or expects to be worshipped; or perhaps compounded with some “view” which is like a smokescreen put out to conceal the true cause for objection—which is *pride*. It is the head which contains the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, many touch organs, and that agglomeration of nerve tissue called the brain, a circumstance which powerfully reinforces the idea of ego. That this topmost

and splendid piece of apparatus should be lowered to the ground at the feet of another will naturally cause the mental strain of pride to object and perhaps to put out a smokescreen: "It's not part of our culture," "It's only an eastern custom," etc.

The modern world manages most successfully to stimulate all the mental stains in man. Among them, the mental stain of pride is fostered by such notions as, "I'm as good as any man." As far as the training in Dhamma-Vinaya is concerned, such ideas do not apply and it is the humble man who goes forward, not he who is stiff with pride and therefore has no chance to learn. A Tibetan work, "Trees and Water" puts it like this: "Just as the branch adorned with good fruits is bent down beneath their weight; so a wise man's mind adorned with all qualities is bent downwards with humility and calm and knows no pride. (But) just as the fruitless branch of a tree has the nature to grow aloft, so the head of the haughty man is always held high for his heart is not humble."¹²

The traditional position of lowering the body cannot be excelled for encouraging humility. It is known as the five-point lowering (*pañcaṅga-vandanā*) since in making it, five points are on the ground: (1) the forehead, (2-3) the two forearms, (4-5) the two knees.

It is common for Bhikkhus to acknowledge respectful salutation in either of these ways by saying (in Ceylon) "*sukhi hotu*" ("may you be happy") and in Siam often "*Āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ*" ("Long-life, beauty, happiness, and strength"). In English, "May you be happy" seems very suitable since all Dhamma practices undoubtedly bring happiness.

What has been written here has only been set down with a view that laypeople should understand, as Bhikkhus and *sāmaṇeras* have been taught to understand, what is truly beneficial. Neither Lord Buddha, nor any teacher in Buddhist tradition has ever prescribed that this or that sort of greeting for Bhikkhus *must* be made. There is actually no rigid formality about this at all and much the same course of individual conduct applies in a Buddhist country like Siam, as commonly applied in the days of Lord Buddha: "Having approached (Lord Buddha) some lowered themselves before the Lord and sat down to one side: some greeted the Lord politely and, having conversed in a friendly and courteous way, sat down to one side; some by their 'action of *añjali*' to the Lord, sat down to one side; some proclaimed their name and clan and sat down; while others without saying anything just sat down likewise." The commentary upon this frequently recurring passage in the Suttas makes it quite clear, however, that those who greeted him with humility reaped ample fruits, while those who "just sat down" were people with minds beset by pride, false views and the rest.

The information gathered here and elsewhere in this book is, the writer believes, very difficult to come by in other works. Yet this is standard practice in the East where it never has to be explained since people are in contact with living tradition. As and when readers also make contact with a living Buddhist tradition, it will also be useful for them.

Living-quarters

In a Buddhist country, when a Bhikkhu has cause to go to some place where there is no *vihara* (monastic dwelling), he will probably stay in a house with laypeople. If they are reasonably wealthy, a small room will have been set aside by them as a family shrine and in this, the Bhikkhu will be invited to stay, study, meditate, and sleep. It is customary that only Bhikkhus are invited to sleep in a shrine-room, no member of the family doing so, that room being reserved at other times for *pūja* and meditation.

If Buddhists in other lands are able to set aside such a room for their own special devotion

¹² See *The Wisdom Gone Beyond*, Social Science Press of Thailand, Phaya Thai Rd., Bangkok.

and practice, it may prove very useful when they are able to welcome a Bhikkhu. Its position in the house must of course be decided by circumstances, but relative quietness is a consideration and it is preferable to have it upon an upper floor. In houses where gardens contain a small detached outbuilding, this will be even more suitable.

There are some offenses into which a Bhikkhus may fall regarding his place of lodging. The first is that he cannot sleep in the same room with one who is not fully ordained as a Bhikkhu, except for a limited period of three nights; while a second training rule states “should any Bhikkhu sleep along with a woman, this entails expiation.” The commentary takes this to mean “under the same roof” but as this will cause much inconvenience, it should rather be taken that he should have a room to himself away from one in which a woman sleeps.¹³ There is here the consideration seen in many places in the Vinaya that not only should a Bhikkhu be able to maintain his special mode of life with ease, but also that his repute, the reputation of the Sangha as a whole, and of course the good name of the Dhamma, should in no way suffer, not even from those who might invent and spread malicious gossip. For these reasons, strict Bhikkhus are most circumspect in their meetings with women (as the Vinaya leads them to be), while well-informed women in Buddhist lands help a Bhikkhu, by their modest and careful behavior, to keep to his code of discipline.

In the handling of certain things, there are offenses for a Bhikkhu; these, therefore need not be left about in his place of residence. In this list there are both animate and inanimate. Thus women and girls, however small,¹⁴ are included here, it being an offense for him to touch one, even though his mind is quite free from sensual intentions. Thus women keep their distance from the Bhikkhu and avoid actions which could lead him to come into contact with them. It may be emphasized once again, that this is simply for the good of the Bhikkhu concerned, who, since Arahant s are not easily met with, is still capable of experiencing lust. Lord Buddha’s teachings, as one soon sees, are always realistic. Women’s clothes and articles of jewelry and cosmetics also cannot be touched by him. Neither can female animals, dolls, or money.

Money

Regarding money, there are some Bhikkhus who are of the opinion that this training rule cannot be kept in the modern world: they are willing to handle it for their own transport. (The use of money by Bhikkhus is certainly not a new thing, since the original cause for the holding of the Second Saṅgāyana at Vesālī, in Buddhist Era 100, was the acceptance of gold and silver by them.) Laypeople are also heard to criticize Bhikkhus who do not agree to handle money, on the grounds that this impedes the work of spreading Dhamma. On the other hand, there are traditions where Bhikkhus bear in mind that this is an offense of expiation with forfeiture, while Lord Buddha has: “I do not say, O Bhikkhus, that *in any way* may gold or silver (= money and valuables, according to the Commentary) be consented to, may be looked about for.” The Second Saṅgāyana ruled that it was inadmissible for Bhikkhus to possess money and referred to the training rule in the Pātimokkha. (Vinaya, Nissaggiya Pācittiya 18.)

Where this rule is fully adhered to, laypeople do not therefore give money to Bhikkhus, nor

¹³ This interpretation may not be acceptable to the strictest Bhikkhus for whom some small self-contained residence (as a flat without women residents) would be needed. In respect of the different interpretations possible in some points of vinaya, it is worthwhile for laypeople to enquire beforehand regarding particular points about which an individual Bhikkhu, or the tradition to which he belongs, holds to strictly. Another case is in the handling of money.

¹⁴ It is one of the wrong ways of livelihood for a Bhikkhu if he fondles children, boys, or girls — such tactics to increase gains in popularity being left to politicians!

expect them to carry it. Money can be made available for the use of a Bhikkhu but not given to him. Such money, which is called after that which it purchases, the “four supports,¹⁵” *remains the property of the donor* but is kept by the Bhikkhu’s steward or attendant (who is often a lay-disciple in training) to be used whenever this becomes necessary. At the time when such “four supports” are made available, the donor may say to a Bhikkhu (or Bhikkhus), “I invite you, sir, with this sum of... for the four supports,” at the same time handing that amount to the Bhikkhu’s steward. Or a Bhikkhu may receive from the hand of a layman a slip of paper reading; “I invite you with the four supports equal in amount to the sum of... which has already been handed to the steward. As you have need of it, please request it from him.” Whatever is needed is then bought by the steward from that money. In this tradition, a Bhikkhu has no money troubles and may leave such affairs to his steward. He is thus free from thoughts on having only a little, and not troubled by thoughts of what he will buy if there be much money. He can therefore concentrate on the work of Dhamma and Vinaya which he has chosen as his life.

Other items which it is not allowable for a Bhikkhu to touch include: fruits (when still growing on trees), weapons, poisons (unless as prescribed as medicines), nets and snares, seeds, and musical instruments. Generally he will have no need of radio or television either!

Food and Drink

Perhaps one of the best-known training rules of the Bhikkhu concerns his not eating between midday and dawn: it is an offense for him even to touch food—let alone eat it—during this period, which is called the “wrong-time.” Lay-people keeping the eight precepts upon Uposatha days or at other times have basically the same discipline. As the sixth precept they recite: “I undertake the training rule refraining from eating at the wrong time.” A sāmaṇera (novice) has also to keep this precept every day while he commits himself to observe the ten training rules for novices. It has many advantages both for the Bhikkhu and sāmaṇera, as well as for lay-people. The former benefit since they have free time, thoughts not concerned with food, and lightness of the body, which is suitable for study, meditation, and so on. As for the latter, they are not burdened by having to prepare food for Bhikkhus at night.

Although not included among the heavy offenses, this training rule (an offense of expiation) will not be broken by the scrupulous Bhikkhu (unless ill), since its breaking implies giving way to craving, losing the spirit of renunciation, encumbering the stomach, and hence making mind-development more, not less, difficult.

The “right time” for Bhikkhus (and sāmaṇeras) to eat begins when the day is light enough to see the lines on the palms of one’s hand and ends at noon. During this time a Bhikkhu may eat once¹⁶ or twice. If the former, then an adequate quantity of food is needed to last for twenty-four hours, while if he eats twice the second meal is usually served about quarter past eleven so as to finish well before noon.

There are very few dietary restrictions and these are reasonable, ruling out the consumption of certain animals’ flesh (for instance, dogs’, snakes’, tigers’, bears’, hyenas’) and also that of human beings. Here we may briefly consider the question of meat in relation to the Bhikkhu. The word Bhikkhu is derived from the root *bhikkh* = “to beg” (this English word is from the same Indo-Aryan root). Although a Bhikkhu, when he goes out to obtain almsfood, does not beg (he collects what is offered), since he is not allowed (unless ill) to ask for food, still he is largely

¹⁵ See [above](#).

¹⁶ See *The Blessings of Piṇḍapāta* and *With Robes and Bowl*, The Wheel Nos. 73 and 83/84.

dependent upon whatever is put into his bowl. After he has returned to the vihara he may if he wishes, select whatever vegetable foods he has been given and eat only that. In this respect it is proper to remember that when Devadatta requested Lord Buddha for a ruling that Bhikkhus should abstain from flesh, the latter did not agree to rule thus, saying: "And the eating of flesh that is pure in three respects, that is to say, that the eater has not seen, heard, or suspected that it has been killed (specially for Bhikkhus) is allowable." (Flesh and fish allowable must, however, be cooked as Bhikkhus cannot eat any kind raw or uncooked.) There is also the Discourse to Jivaka on the same subject and the oft-quoted Āmagandha Sutta, in which the evils of ill-conduct in so many ways are pointed out as much more harmful than the eating of meat.

We may summarize by saying that as far as his alms-round is concerned, a Bhikkhu receives whatever is offered without discrimination (except the unallowable meats, which he is not very likely to be given nowadays). If he wishes to be a vegetarian, he may choose from among the food placed in his bowl, although where he receives only little, this will be very difficult for him. In any case, whether almsfood or that brought to the vihara by lay-supporters, he cannot ask for this or that kind of food unless he is ill, when it is allowable to do so. In countries where the almsround is not possible, a Bhikkhu or a Sangha of Bhikkhus will be dependent upon laypeople who agree to give support. Where a number of Bhikkhus are staying, laypeople will organize the buying, cooking, and offering of food in the way most convenient to them and in accordance with the Vinaya. There is no need for food offered by them to be special but it should be nutritious. Therefore, laypeople should not ask, "Do you like...?" or "What shall we cook for you today...?" The Bhikkhu tradition is to accept whatever laypeople wish to offer from the food they have themselves, in this way being as little trouble as possible to householders, of whom it is as true now as it was in Lord Buddha's days, that they have "a lot to do" (*bahukicca*).

A Bhikkhu cannot go to a restaurant or shop and buy or order food (or anything else for that matter). Nor can he personally store food overnight. Once food has been formally offered (see below) to him, it must be consumed by him before noon, or else left for lay-people to finish. Again, a Bhikkhu cannot cook for himself (although he is allowed to reheat food cooked already). Storing or cooking may, however, be done by a *sāmaṇera* or by a lay-disciple in the vihara. The principle underlying these three training rules is that greed, ever-ready to spring up where food is concerned, should of course be discouraged, while the Bhikkhu's dependence upon lay-people is greatly stressed. He is taught to reflect every day: "My life is dependent upon others"—this should frequently be reflected on by one gone forth." (AN 10:48)

We should now deal briefly with the formal offering of food and other items to Bhikkhu. It is a slight offense for a Bhikkhu intentionally to touch—let alone consume—food or drinks which have not been offered. The reason lying behind this rule is not difficult to see. A Bhikkhu is always very careful to avoid any act which could even be interpreted as approaching an offense of defeat. Taking what is not given with intent to steal is a defeat-offense and, even if he has not fallen completely into this, he may have a grave offense to confess. Hence the importance of formal offering. This offering is done by placing into his hands every item to be consumed, except these things be on a tray when this may be offered. A layman raises from the table, plates, and dishes (or tray) bearing food *with both hands*, or with the left hand touching the right wrist when the item concerned is a small one (as salt-cellars etc.), and gives each one into the hands of the Bhikkhu. If there are a number of Bhikkhus, the most senior is offered food first and the others in due order afterwards. It is not necessary to offer food into the hands of *sāmaṇeras* as this training rule does not apply to them. Having completed the offering (to each Bhikkhu) a layman will usually salute with *añjali* and then take a seat a little to one side, waiting to see whether he can be of any further help. He should not, after having placed the food into the hands of Bhikkhus, touch it again; if he does so, that food or drink must be re-offered,

Should he *receive* anything from the hands of a Bhikkhu, whether it is food or such things as paper or books etc., it is again skillful training for the layman to salute with *añjali* before taking it.

Due to the training rules above, Bhikkhus cannot share food from the same dishes as those being used by laypeople and it is customary to give them their food apart. In a family this could be just one end of the table, while in any lay assembly where many are dining, Bhikkhus should have a table specially set aside for them. Sāmañeras, since they do not have the acceptance into the Sangha as Bhikkhus, cannot share food with the latter and should be given separate food; they traditionally eat sitting elsewhere. As honored guests in the houses of lay-people, Bhikkhus are offered their food before the family sits down to eat or, when there is not time for this, their food is first formally offered to them before the others eat. Since it is an offense for a Bhikkhu to eat or drink standing, he should always be offered a seat. He cannot therefore take food buffet-style, since eating is for him a serious matter, a meditation and not an occasion for delight or gossip.

So far we have referred to a layman offering the food but the case is different when a laywoman makes the offering. A Bhikkhu does not receive anything directly from the hands of a woman, but she may place whatever is to be offered upon the small receiving-cloth which a Bhikkhu carries. Once she has placed it upon this cloth, it is considered to be offered into his hands.¹⁷ In formulating such ways of conduct as these the *theras* of the first Saṅgāyana (Council) have been most careful to guard against physical contact between the sexes so that no possibility of slander or of infatuation might arise. One may here remember the opening suttas of Aṅguttara Nikāya: “O Bhikkhus, I do not perceive at all any other form which thus stands taking hold of the mind of man as does this: the form of woman... sound... scent... taste... the touch of woman. O Bhikkhus, I do not perceive at all any other form which thus stands taking hold of the mind of woman as does this: the form of man, sound, scent, taste, touch of man.” These words of Lord Buddha find practical expression in the Vinaya training rules for both Bhikkhus and for Bhikkhunīs (when they existed).

As regards placing food into a Bhikkhu’s bowl which is in his hands, whether he is standing, as on the alms-round, or sitting in a layman’s house, there is no difference between the way it is done by a layman and a laywoman. Nor does the bowl have to be offered to him since it is in his hands.¹⁸

Other articles besides food and drink which should be offered to him include anything which will go inside the body, such as medicines. Also, his bowl, robes, and other requisites, if they are touched by laypeople, as these are then considered to be out of his possession. Upon occasions of making *puñña* when Bhikkhus are invited, the gifts which are offered to them by the laity such as flowers, incense, candles, medicines, and any other items useful for their lives, may also be formally offered. If such an occasion is during the “wrong-time” and laypeople wish to offer food in tins or jars (milk is included) these things cannot be placed into his hands or accepted by him, but intimation is made to the Bhikkhus of its offering and it is put aside to be kept by a sāmañera or lay-disciple. Such small points as these constitute not only a discipline for Bhikkhus but also for the laity who may thereby grow in carefulness.

It was emphasized above that offering, whether by a layman or laywoman, is made with *both* hands. This is not simply some sort of ritual but has a very good reason behind it. When one gives something in the ordinary way, the giving is done with one hand if the object permits it.

¹⁷ Custom in Sri Lanka and Burma does not use this receiving-cloth and women may offer Bhikkhus *dāna*, provided that their fingers do not come into contact.

¹⁸ In Sri Lanka, his bowl may be taken from him by a laywoman for placing food in it, and placed into his hands by her, both actions so performed that there is no physical contact.

This kind of giving may as a fact become habitual in the sense that one is not aware any more of “giving” and from a Buddhist point of view this shows slackness of mind and lack of care. Now, Bhikkhus who are striving on the Path of Dhamma-Vinaya are said to be a “good field for *puñña*”—that is, the results to be expected from giving to them as they strive towards Nibbāna, leading a pure life, are great indeed, and will result in clarity and peace increasing in the hearts of the donors. Thus it becomes important when making offerings to Bhikkhus, whether of their daily food or upon some special occasion, to make the offering consciously, with a strong intention of giving. The stronger the intention, which is here skillful kamma, the greater the fruits of happiness reaped by the donors. So that laypeople are reminded to make this giving-intention strong, they are instructed to offer with both hands—an act which requires more forethought than the usual ways of giving. Respect is also expressed in this method of offering and it is also used by new Bhikkhus and *sāmaṇeras* when presenting anything to their teachers or preceptors.

The meal having been consumed, a Bhikkhu chants briefly (and a number of Bhikkhus for some time) verses of well-wishing for the laity. It is actually an offense of wrong-doing for him (them) not to do so if laypeople are present. The least which is done will be for a senior Bhikkhu to say a few words such as: “Long-life and beauty, happiness, and strength” (*āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ*). Whether laypeople have also finished eating, or whether they have not yet begun, at least the donor will sit quietly with folded hands listening to these words or verses of well-wishing. Every word of the Pali verses may not be understood but it is more important that the mind should be concentrated upon the chanting to the exclusion of everything else. A mindful and concentrated mind is always full of skillfulness. Frequently, such chants as are translated below form the core of well-wishing:

“Just as the rivers full of water
 Fill the ocean full,
 Even so does that here given
 Benefit the dead (the hungry-ghosts, *peta*)
 Whatever by you wished or wanted
 May it quickly be,
 May all your wishes fulfilled—
 As the moon upon the fifteenth day, (the full moon)
 Or as the wish-fulfilling gem.
 May all distresses be averted
 May all diseases be destroyed
 May no dangers be for them
 May (they) be happy, living long.
 He of respectful nature who
 Even the elders honoring,
 Four qualities for him increase:
 Long-life and beauty, happiness, and strength.”

At the close of the chanting it is the custom in many places to say “*Sādhu, sādhu...*” and then to raise the hands in *añjali* to the forehead, to lower the body. “*Sādhu*” means “it is well,” and is an expression of delighted approval heard everywhere in Buddhist countries when a deed of *puñña* has been done, such as giving, helping, listening to Dhamma, and so forth.

As regards drinking, a Bhikkhu may not drink distilled or fermented intoxicants (*sura-meraya-majja*) (except minute quantities contained in necessary medicines). Before noon any other drink may be offered to him, with or without milk. After twelve o’clock noon it is not

allowable for him to take milk (or any drink containing milk), cereals, eggs, etc., nor any kind of soup. He may be offered any fruit juice (uncooked but strained and free from particles of fruit), or any of the bottled soft drinks which are now common. The five medicines allowable over a period of seven days may also be taken by him if he is indisposed. The first of these, ghee, is generally not available outside India, but the other four are common: butter (but not cheese), vegetable oil (such as margarine), honey, and molasses (including all sorts of sugar). If more of these is accepted by him than he can consume in one evening, it may be kept by him for seven days at most. Any remaining after this time he cannot consume without falling into an offense. It is thus common for these "medicines" to be kept by a *sāmaṇera* or lay-disciple, to be offered as they are needed. Tea, coffee, and cocoa (all without milk) are also allowable during the afternoon and evening. With these allowable drinks and fortified in any case by having few desires and some ability to endure, Bhikkhus (and *sāmaṇeras*) sustain themselves for study, practice or teaching.

Travel

Since a Bhikkhu keeping strictly to the Vinaya will not handle money, if he is being invited to teach or to stay, it is customary in Buddhist countries for a layman to come and fetch him. Where distance prevents this, train tickets may be bought and sent to him. If the journey is a long one, he may be accompanied by a lay-disciple who will buy tickets and the Bhikkhu's food at the right time. When he is traveling alone, it is usual to meet him at the station.

A Bhikkhu commits an offense if he makes an arrangement to go on a journey with a woman, so that if he is accompanied, his companion must be a man (though where a male companion is present, women may also be in the party as well). This is another provision to prevent offenses and to stop the wagging of slanderous tongues. When the Bhikkhu travels by car, a woman should not sit beside him, though of course a man may do so. It is preferable that he does not travel in a car with only a woman who is driving.

There are also several places to which it is not proper to take Bhikkhus, such as the following, which are called the "wrong resort" for Bhikkhus: namely crowded places or places of entertainment, theaters, concert halls, cinemas, stadiums, games-fields, exhibitions, fairs, casinos, nightclubs, brothels, army parades, and even fields of battle. It is common-sense that Bhikkhus have no need for the various sorts of sense-stimulation provided by such places.

General Conduct

In Buddhist countries such as Siam, the general conduct of laypeople in the presence of Bhikkhus is molded upon the discipline followed by Bhikkhus and *sāmaṇeras* when they are in the presence of *theras*. Much of this code of good conduct is contained in the articles of the seventy-five Trainings (*sekhiya*) found in the Pātimokkha. Rather than comment upon all these, we may select the most important groups of points for outline explanation.

Buddhist laypeople living in Siam have a good chance to acquaint themselves with the details of this conduct since they can at any time go to a Wat where Vinaya is well observed and see for themselves how Bhikkhus do things. They have another chance also not available to most Western Buddhists, for the custom here (and in Burma, Laos, and Cambodia) is that most young men (and a few young women) ask for temporary ordination over periods of time ranging from one to four months. While they are in the robes they learn, among other things, how to conduct themselves in the manner proper to those that have gone forth. Every day they receive instruction in the Vinaya (and much else) which includes, of course, the seventy-five Trainings.

Not only that, for these Trainings, while they constitute only small offenses when broken, actually are very important since they cover events of everyday occurrence, such as walking, sitting, wearing robes, eating, teaching, and listening to Dhamma. When these temporarily-ordained monks (often called “rains-Bhikkhus”) disrobe and return to their homes, they take with them experience of a good discipline and it is this which becomes the basis for lay conduct in the presence of Bhikkhus. As this training in good conduct applies to contact between laypeople and Bhikkhus almost as much as it does between junior Bhikkhus and *theras*, there is a considerable basis for common understanding and hence concord.

What sort of things are included in this training? First, we may mention regulation of the body in the four positions, the first of these being *walking*. When walking in company with a Bhikkhu, a layperson will walk somewhat behind him rather than immediately at his side, and certainly not push in front, always giving way to him where this is necessary. This is particularly important if the Bhikkhu is talking Dhamma, when it will be an offense for him to follow behind a layperson, or to walk to one side of the path while doing so. The ancient Buddhist tradition from India prescribes that one should as a mark of respect, “keep one’s right side towards” one’s teacher, the right side of the body being symbolically that associated with conscious effort and general skillfulness in conduct. If a Bhikkhu is sitting and a layman has occasion to pass in front of him (a laywoman will observe a stricter decorum and not come very near a Bhikkhu) it is good training in mindfulness to stoop the body and head and perhaps say something like “Excuse me, sir.”¹⁹ Again, if a layman or woman should enter a room where a Bhikkhu is sitting and perhaps talking Dhamma with others, he or she usually performs “the action of *añjali*” or lowers the body, according to what is suitable, before sitting down.

In *standing*, one should not stand upon a higher step or level than a Bhikkhu and talk to him. We have in the English the phrase “to look up to” implying respect, and if one is learning Dhamma that is what one should do, literally as well as figuratively. Standing, one does not stand too near or too far but at the “right” distance. One’s hand should be clasped in front and one’s body controlled while talking to a Bhikkhu. In Buddhist countries agreement or questions are accompanied by “the action of *añjali*” in the case of talking to a senior Bhikkhu. All these bodily actions help one to correct the mind and ensure that it is functioning in a way proper for the reception of Dhamma.

Should the Bhikkhu be barefooted, as is often the case in the East, a lay person with shoes on will not talk to him but remove his or her shoes first. This is because it is an offense for him to talk dhamma to one who is wearing shoes when he is not, though this situation is not likely to occur in the cold countries of the West.

When *sitting*, especially if Dhamma is the subject of a Bhikkhu’s speech, one should sit attentively and not sprawling in a chair. It is also against the spirit of the Vinaya for a Bhikkhu to teach Dhamma to one who is smoking. (It is not against the letter, as this custom was not known in Lord Buddha’s days). However, smoking is bound to distract from listening to Dhamma and is often a sign of unmindful or tense states of mind. All such conditions are opposed to the profitable and attentive hearkening with which Dhamma should be received. Dhamma is so important, so valuable, that it becomes an offense for a Bhikkhu to teach it to anyone who shows by his bodily position that his mind is not concentrated to receive it.²⁰ The body should be controlled when sitting such that the feet are tucked in under a chair (or

¹⁹ The traditional mode of address used for Bhikkhus in the time of Lord Buddha, and still used in Sri Lanka, is “*Bhante*” (venerable sir).

²⁰ Under “nonsensical chatter” (*samphappalapa*), Tibetan tradition counts it “true” nonsense to teach Dhamma to one who is unprepared. There is also worldly nonsense (animal-talk, [see below](#)) and untrue nonsense (tales).

inconspicuous if sitting on the ground), with the back reasonably erect and hands placed comfortably in the lap. In sitting down a layperson is careful to notice whether the chair he is about to sit upon has a Bhikkhu's robe upon it. If so, he will sit elsewhere or else remove the robe, offering it to the Bhikkhu. As the robe is a symbol of pure life in Dhamma, it is never sat upon or leaned against by laypeople. A seat taken by a layman or woman should not be higher than that used by the Bhikkhu, and if several people are seated on the ground, a Bhikkhu should be given a separate mat to sit upon. All these sorts of things are also observed by good Bhikkhus in the presence of their teachers and other *theras*, and make for a spirit of respect and harmony.

Then in *lying down*, laymen if they do so in the same room as a Bhikkhu, will never point their feet at him. Nor for that matter will any Buddhist, whether in robes or "wearing white" (a layperson), lie down with his feet pointing towards any respected or sacred object in a room such as Buddha-images, stupas, pictures of the Buddha or of any teacher alive or dead, Buddhist scriptures, and so on. The head is always placed in their direction and usually before lying down, a triple lowering is made to any shrine etc., which happens to be in the room.

On the same principles as those set out above, if a Bhikkhu is sitting, a layperson does not talk to him standing but, after lotussing or lowering the body, sits down to talk; while if a Bhikkhu is standing, a layman will stand to talk with him. It is part of the reasonableness of this training that almost none of the usual lay conduct mentioned here is performed if a layperson is ill.

If one approaches a Bhikkhu to give something while he is sitting, one's head should not be higher than his own, and better lower. This avoids leaning over him and also helps the donor to give with a humble mind, which in itself will bear good fruits.

Generally in talking to Bhikkhu one should try to avoid unsuitable subjects of discussion. Bhikkhus were several times rebuked by Lord Buddha for engaging in "animal-talk," which is defined by this quite common passage in the discourses: "Talk about kings and robbers, ministers and armies, danger and war, eating and drinking, clothes and dwellings, garlands and scents, relations, vehicles, villages and markets, towns and districts, women and heroes, street talk, talk by the well, talk about those departed in days gone by, idle chatter, talk upon the world and the sea, and also on gain and loss." (AN 10:69) When one comes to think about it, this list covers most of the subjects to be found in our newspapers! A layman may also remember that right speech, the third constituent of the Eightfold path, is defined as: restraint from lying, slander, rough speech, and chatter. Nor is it suitable to ask a Bhikkhu what food and drink he likes, unless he is ill. Again, it is not proper to ask about the attainments which he has won through his Dhamma-practice. It is an offense of expiation for a Bhikkhu to tell a layman even the truth regarding his own attainments, and an offense of Defeat should he be tempted to lie, saying that he has won what has not been won by him. Also among requests which are improper, as they could embroil a Bhikkhu in what is not-Dhamma, are questions upon luck, signs, stars, and palms. All this is called animal-knowledge by Lord Buddha and he has made it an offense of wrong-doing for a Bhikkhu to learn or to teach it.

In this section also, one might mention some special provision regarding the conduct of laywomen. For instance, when coming to a Bhikkhu for instruction in Dhamma, it is proper if a man or boy accompanies the laywoman. Where this is not possible, provided that there is another Bhikkhu or *sāmaṇera* in the room when the teaching of Dhamma takes place, there will be no offense for the Bhikkhu. But he should not find himself alone with a woman in a room, especially one into which others cannot see. Again, women desirous of Dhamma-instruction should not visit a Bhikkhu after dusk but do so during the day. All these provisions are to guard individual Bhikkhus against their own mental stains and so help them in their training, thus being for the well-being of the Sangha and therefore, since the Sangha guards and maintains the Dhamma, for the good name of Dhamma too.

Laywomen when visiting a vihara are therefore very modest whenever they have cause to speak to Bhikkhus. Their dress should be modest and their persons devoid of ornaments while they address themselves to Bhikkhus with humility. In so doing, they help both themselves and the Bhikkhus: themselves by following the way of Dhamma which is to realize the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and unbeautiful nature of the body; and the Bhikkhus by remembering that most of those in the yellow robe have not yet conquered the mental stains (*kilesa*).

Those laypeople who are very well practiced and who have seen for themselves the immense value of Dhamma, will in the presence of their teacher or other respected Bhikkhus, sit keeping their hands lotussed all the time. Faith (*saddhā*) and serene clarity (*pasada*) of mind do, after all, increase in proportion to one's experience of Dhamma. Laypeople having this sort of deep appreciation of Dhamma after "the action of *añjali*" and the triple lowering are also seen to recite when their teacher or other Bhikkhus are departing: "Excuse me, venerable sir, for all the faults I have committed through the three doors (of mind, speech and body); for these please forgive me. A second time, venerable sir... A third time, venerable sir... please forgive me."²¹ Only those who have had the blessing of a personal teacher and who feel great reverence for him, will feel like making this opening-up of faults. It has been included here just because it is a very good practice. All who are not Arahants have the stain of pride and will therefore grow in the Dhamma as this is lessened and genuine humility increased. This practice can sometimes be beneficial. *The conduct of Buddhist laypeople in the West towards Bhikkhus who are their teachers may in these matters vary somewhat with the customs of the country which are accepted as polite. It may be stressed once again that such behavior, governed by mindfulness and wisdom, is for the welfare of all who practice Dhamma.*

Finally, a word may be said upon what a Bhikkhu may do in connection with lay ceremonies and what he may not. Where there are numerous Bhikkhus as in Siam, they are frequently invited to the house of people for teaching, chanting and upon occasions of making *puñña*. For instance at the time when a new house is occupied, as well as the various anniversaries of birth and death. Their chanting of the words of Lord Buddha to the listening laypeople who sit with "action of *añjali*" and minds concentrated upon the chanting, brings, in this case, peace and happiness. But it should not be thought that without the effort of hearkening on the part of the laypeople, that blessing automatically results. Indeed, Bhikkhus and their chanting are in no way a vehicle for the bestowal of "sacraments" or blessings. What are sometimes written about as "blessings" in connection with Bhikkhus' chanting, would accurately be called well-wishings (see the stanzas translated above in the section on food etc.). In other words, a Bhikkhu's work is not that of a priest.

Bhikkhus may be invited to chant stanzas of well-wishing before or after a marriage, an occasion when the engaged or married couple jointly make *puñña* to ensure the success of their new life. However a Bhikkhu cannot "marry" laypeople as do priests in other faiths. Should he do so, he stands in danger of falling into a heavy offense, the fifth of the formal meetings (*saṅghādisesa*) where, acting as a go-between either for a man to a woman or a woman to a man, quite rules out the possibility of Bhikkhus marrying others. Marriage in Buddhist countries is purely a lay-contract between the parties undertaking it, the ceremony being conducted by a senior layman, this being ratified in various ways through some government agency.

²¹ "Okāsa ahaṃ bhante, dvārattayena kataṃ sabbaṃ aparādhaṃ khamata me bhante. Dutiyampi, ahaṃ bhante... Tatiyampi, ahaṃ bhante ... khamatha me bhante."

Conclusion

It now remains only to say a little about how Bhikkhus are regarded by laypeople in Siam at the present time. In this matter, as in so many others, one may perceive two extremes and a profitable middle course. One sort of extreme attitude which is sometimes found (more often in the West than in Siam) is that of unqualified praise of certain Bhikkhus. In the eyes of those laypeople who follow him, he can absolutely do no wrong. It is as though they are bewitched by the yellow robe and, out of faith (or sometimes from less noble motives), will hear no word against their idol and see no imperfection in him. He is an Arahant, a Bodhisattva or by whatever other name they like to glorify him! Some amongst them, out of delusion, imagine that all those who wear the yellow robe are automatically Arahants and so lavish a Bhikkhu with praise such that if his head is not turned and his heart not corrupted by such flattery, it will be a great wonder. Such sweet doses of "spiritual" praise are very liable to cause a personality-cult, rather than devotion to the Triple Gem.

The other extreme, which is much less common, is the sort of drain-inspector's attitude to a Bhikkhu's life. It is the very critical, probing examination of a Bhikkhu and his way of doing things, which springs out of the root of hatred. Slander is often employed as well so that small offenses of omission and commission by a Bhikkhu become magnified into mountains of iniquity. Untrue stories are eagerly chewed over and added to the unwholesomeness, and perhaps the people pride themselves upon the benefits which they are bringing about by making public what they regard as hidden crimes.

In Siam, neither of these two extremes is prevalent. People tend to be respectful of Bhikkhus and sāmaṇeras but, unless particularly devoted to a teacher, do not lavish devotion upon those they do not know. There are, after all, about a quarter of a million men and boys wearing robes in Siam; the quality of Bhikkhus in such a large Sangha, very naturally, varies considerably. On the other hand, laypeople generally shut their eyes to small faults of Bhikkhus and rarely criticize. This is quite proper since criticism is of no avail unless it can raise the other from unskill to skill. A teacher has much power over both his monastic and lay disciples, but a layperson rarely possesses such ability. It is well to reflect about kamma and how each person is—"owner of kamma, heir to kamma, born of kamma, bound by kamma, determined by kamma"—for such reflection cultivates equanimity. Each person trains himself, a Bhikkhu according to his knowledge and ability and a layman likewise.

Thus, we have all, Bhikkhus and laity alike, a great debt of gratitude to Lord Buddha who has "made known the training rules for Bhikkhus founded upon these ten reasons:

"For the welfare of the Sangha,
For the comfort of the Sangha,
For the control of unsteady men,
For the comfort of well-behaved Bhikkhus,
For the restraint of the pollutions in this present life,
For the guarding against pollution liable to arise in a future life,
For the pleasing of those not yet pleased (with Dhamma),
For the increase of those pleased (with Dhamma),
For the establishment of True Dhamma,
And for the benefit of the Vinaya.

"Ayaṃ dhammo ayaṃ vinayo idaṃ Satthu-sāsanaṃ."

This is Dhamma, this is Vinaya, here indeed is the Teacher's Instruction.

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