

# The Heart of Buddhism

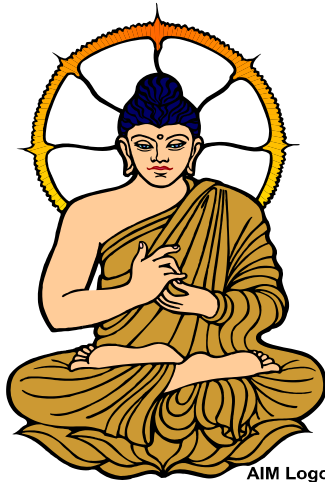


by  
Bhikkhu Pesala



# The Heart of Buddhism

by  
Bhikkhu Pesala



AIM Logo

© Latest Edition August 2015

Bhikkhu Pesala

Association for Insight Meditation

You may print copies of this book for your own use. However, all rights are reserved. You may not use this PDF file on your own web site, nor for commercial distribution. If you post an extract on a forum, post a link to the appropriate page. Please do not link directly to the PDF file.

# Contents

## The Heart of Buddhism

Grades of Offences.....	2
Offences of Defeat (Pārājika).....	2
Offences Entailing A Formal Meeting (Saṅghādisesa).....	4
Indeterminate Offences (Aniyata).....	4
Grave Offences (Thullaccaya).....	5
Expiation with Forfeiture (Nissaggiya Pācittiya).....	5
Unrighteous Giving (Adhammadāna) .....	8
Offences Requiring Expiation (Pācittiya).....	9
Confession (Pāṭidesanīya).....	10
Offences of Wrong-doing (Dukkaṭa).....	11
Rules Outside of the Pāṭimokkha.....	12
The Lesser and Minor Training Rules.....	12
The Importance of the Pāṭimokkha.....	15
The Skilful Way to Relax.....	17
Rules That Lay Supporters Need to Know.....	19
Becoming a Refined Buddhist.....	21
Relinquish Greed, Practise Renunciation.....	22
Conquer Hatred, Develop Loving-kindness.....	22
Eradicate Delusion, Cultivate Wisdom.....	23

# The Heart of Buddhism

The Vinaya is the heart of Buddhism that keeps it alive and healthy. It pumps the life-giving blood of self-discipline and awareness to every corner of the Buddhist community. Although the Vinaya is meant for monks, nuns, and novices, it concerns the whole Buddhist community, as the Saṅgha cannot survive without lay support, and the laity need the guidance of virtuous monks.

There is no esoteric teaching in Buddhism, anyone can study the Vinaya if they wish. However, one should be careful when interpreting the Vinaya because the consequences of superficial knowledge can be dire. For example, groundlessly accusing an innocent monk as immoral will lead to hell, unless one retracts the accusation. In this context, innocent only means that he is not guilty of an offence of defeat. It is like acting as judge and jury in criminal matters, and lynching an innocent person accused of a crime. Even if a person is of weak character, he is not automatically guilty of all accusations that might be made against him. A proper investigation must be made, and the accused must be judged and sentenced by those with a thorough knowledge of the law. Even then, the innocent can sometimes be wrongly convicted. The guilty cannot escape from the results of their own kamma, so they should reflect on this, and own up to any wrong-doing to mitigate its effects.

The Vinaya is a legal system for the administration of the Saṅgha. It provides clear guidelines for monks to train themselves on the path to nibbāna. The primary responsibility lies with each monk to train himself to the best of his ability. His fellow monks may admonish him if they think he is amenable to advice. If lay people have a sound basic knowledge of the Vinaya, they will know how to deal with awkward situations without making unwholesome kamma or causing offence.

Mature lay people should study the Vinaya to help preserve the Dhamma for future generations. The Buddha laid down most rules after complaints by lay people that the monks were

“behaving just like lay people who indulge in sensual pleasures.” Corruption and wrong-doing thrive in secrecy — purity and virtue prosper with openness.

I will begin by summarising the various grades of offences, defining which are lesser and minor offences. I will quote a key passage from the Sutta Piṭaka to show why the Vinaya is so vital to the health of Buddhism. Then I will outline a few Vinaya rules most likely to affect lay people, especially those concerning the offering of food and other requisites.

Finally, I will explain how the minor rules and duties can help a monk or a lay person to become a refined and cultured Buddhist.

## **Grades of Offences**

There are several grades of offence, each requiring a different punishment or remedy to purify it. The most serious entail disrobing, while the least serious just need to be acknowledged.

### **Offences of Defeat (Pārājika)**

There are four offences of defeat: sexual intercourse, stealing, intentionally killing a human being, and making a false claim to supramundane attainments. A monk who has committed any of these offences is defeated and no longer entitled to wear the robe. After confessing his offence, he must disrobe and cannot ordain again. The burden of responsibility lies with an individual bhikkhu to confess his offence. If he does not admit defeat, he cannot be made to disrobe on circumstantial evidence.

For example, even if a bhikkhu has spent the whole night alone with a woman, unless he had sexual intercourse, he is not guilty of defeat. He is like a warrior wounded in battle, who may die from his injuries, but he is not dead yet. If he makes a full recovery, he may be a better warrior than before. Though a monk may be guilty of many serious offences, if he is not defeated, he is still a monk. If he was mad at the time, whatever he did, he is not defeated, and there is no offence!

If a monk tells a deliberate lie to get something, he may not be guilty of stealing, but only of deliberate lying. The Vinaya is different to secular law. A monk found guilty of receiving stolen goods in a court of law might not be guilty of any offence according to the Vinaya. Each case must be judged on its merits by monks learned in the Vinaya, and a just decision must be made.

If a monk tries to kill a human being, speaks in praise of death, or recommends abortion, and if that person dies or a woman has an abortion following his advice, he is guilty of defeat. Human life is precious, however painful and difficult it may be, since it is a unique opportunity to gain profound insights by practising the Dhamma. No Buddhist should ever speak in praise of destroying life. Even recommending a swift execution or euthanasia can result in defeat for a monk.

If a monk falsely claims to have attained the Path, its Fruition, nibbāna, jhāna, or psychic powers, though he has no such attainment, unless it is a through over-estimation, he is also defeated.

These four offences are the most serious that a monk can commit. If a monk accuses another monk of one of these offences, without grounds for suspicion, he is himself guilty of an offence requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha. Intention is crucial. Scolding a monk with harsh words, "You are not a monk," when he is not behaving at all like a monk, to arouse a sense of shame, is not an accusation of defeat. One should weigh up all the facts very carefully indeed before making such a serious accusation against a bhikkhu, as the following story from the Dhammapada Commentary graphically illustrates.

An Arahant went for alms to the house of a jeweller who was making an ornament for the king with a precious ruby. While the jeweller was out of the room, his pet heron swallowed the ruby.

When the jeweller returned with the almsfood, he thought that the Arahant had stolen the ruby. The Arahant denied it, but the jeweller beat him to elicit a confession, in spite of urgent

protests by his pious wife. In his rage, the jeweller kicked the heron. After ensuring that the heron was already dead, the Arahant told the jeweller that the heron had swallowed the ruby. The jeweller cut open the heron and discovered the ruby. He was distraught when he realised his mistake, and begged for forgiveness, but nevertheless he fell into hell due to the wickedness of his actions. The heron was reborn in the womb of the jeweller's wife, and she was later reborn in heaven. The Buddha stated the destination of each on being told what had happened at the jeweller's house. Then he uttered the following verse:

“Some are born in a womb,  
The wicked are born in hell,  
The pious go to heaven,  
The pure attain nibbāna.” (Dhp v 126)

### **Offences Entailing A Formal Meeting (Saṅghādisesa)**

Thirteen offences require a formal meeting of the Saṅgha to impose a penance on the offending monk, and to reinstate him after he has completed the penance to the satisfaction of the Saṅgha. Reinstatement requires at least twenty bhikkhus, so these offences are serious. Five deal with sexual offences, two with dwellings, two with accusing bhikkhus of defeat, two with striving to create schism, and two with stubborn, shameless behaviour.

### **Indeterminate Offences (Aniyata)**

These two are not separate offences, but legal procedures for dealing with accusations by a trustworthy female lay-disciple who has seen a monk alone with a woman, and suspects he has committed an offence. For a monk to sit alone with a woman is an offence requiring expiation. To touch a woman, to use lewd speech, or to speak in praise of sex, with lustful intent, and to act as a match-maker, require a formal meeting of the Saṅgha. Sexual intercourse is an offence of defeat.

If a lay supporter suspects that a serious offence has occurred, he or she should report what was seen, heard, or



suspected to other monks. If the accused monk admits an offence, he should be dealt with according to the rule. The monks should investigate the matter, and question the accused monk closely to establish the truth. Their decision depends on what the bhikkhu admits to, not on what the lay supporter thinks that the bhikkhu did.

The mind can change very quickly, so a bhikkhu should try to avoid touching women. Thai bhikkhus use a receiving cloth when accepting gifts from women, to avoid accidental contact that might be a serious offence. Burmese monks receive offerings directly from women, but they are careful to avoid direct contact. Many Sri Lankan monks tie Paritta threads around the wrists of women, sometimes taking hold of their hands to do so. The middle way practised by Burmese monks is sensible.

Another point should be considered here. If others see a monk smiling on touching a woman, they may suspect him of lustful intent. He may be free from immoral thoughts, but he can be accused of a serious offence. It is a potentially dangerous situation for all concerned. The ideal standard is to avoid all suspicion by avoiding all contact — even eye-contact!

### **Grave Offences (Thullaccaya)**

These result from the incomplete commission of offences of defeat or those requiring formal meeting. For example, if a bhikkhu tries to kill a human being but fails, or if, with lustful intent, he touches the hem of a woman's clothing, it is a grave offence. Clearly, these are neither lesser, nor minor offences.

### **Expiation with Forfeiture (Nissaggiya Pācittiya)**

Bhikkhus are entirely dependent on lay devotees to provide the necessities of life. They should be easily contented and must know the proper limit in accepting things, even when invited to accept whatever they want. Requisites should be shared without miserliness. Bhikkhus may exchange things

with bhikkhus, novices, or nuns, but not with lay people. Monks should not give gifts to lay people to gain favours. However, they can give things to temple attendants and others who serve the Saṅgha, and may support their parents if they are needy. Monks should not act in a servile way towards lay people, *e.g.* by preparing drinks for them, conveying messages for them, or flattering them. Such ingratiating actions are wrong livelihood for a bhikkhu.

If a bhikkhu receives anything in an improper way, such as by exchanging goods with lay people, it must be forfeited to another monk. Allowable requisites such as robes or almsfood can be returned to the offending monk. Non-allowable requisites such as money, or goods purchased with money, must be disposed of. (Venerable Sāriputta once told Venerable Moggallāna to throw away some rice gruel obtained by a deity's intervention.)

Money must be forfeited to the Saṅgha, not to an individual bhikkhu. The Saṅgha should give it to a lay person if one is present. If the lay person asks what should be done with it, the monks can say what would be useful. The offending monk cannot use anything purchased with the forfeited money, though the other monks may. If no lay person is available, the money must be thrown away outside the monastery by a trustworthy monk. Even if a monk accepts money unknowingly, he still falls into the same offence, and the above procedure should be followed, so concealing money in an envelope or package is worse than offering it openly. Even an Arahant or a scrupulous bhikkhu may fall into an offence if he thinks that the envelope contains something allowable (a cheque made payable to a lay person who is the bhikkhu's attendant is allowable, but not a cheque made payable to a bhikkhu).

The offence comes from ownership of money, not from touching it. If a monk finds money in his own monastery he must pick it up, and keep it in a safe place until the owner claims it.

If a donor wishes to offer something to a monk, but does not know what he needs, or is too busy to buy it for him, it is allowable to give money to a trusted lay person, saying, for example: “Venerable sir, I have given ten pounds to your attendant, please ask him for whatever you need.” If the attendant fails to provide what the monk asks for, he should inform the donor. He should not coerce the attendant into giving him what he wants. If he does that, he falls into an offence requiring expiation with forfeiture. The money does not belong to the monk, nor to the attendant, but still belongs to the donor. The attendant is acting as a Trustee for the donor. Any breach of that trust is therefore nothing to do with the monk. This rule, which is the longest in the Pātimokkha, makes it crystal clear that neither ownership of money, nor control over it is allowable for monks.

Some monks maintain that a bank’s employees are acting as the monk’s attendant when he signs cheques or uses a credit card. This is incorrect, as the monk has legal control over the funds, unless the account requires the signature of at least one lay person. A monk can countersign a cheque to authorise a lay person to use such funds.

A donor can make a specific invitation to provide transport, medicine, almsfood, service, *etc.* In the case of an invitation to accept medicine, a monk can accept an invitation for four months. If he accepts an invitation for longer than that, unless it is a repeated invitation, or a lifelong invitation, it is an offence entailing expiation.

A monk’s livelihood is defiled by offences requiring expiation with forfeiture, so they are not minor offences. Scrupulous monks are totally dependent on charity that is freely given by devotees wishing for merit. If donors offer what is not allowable, monks should refuse it, and explain the Vinaya rule unless there is a good reason not to. Monks who obtain requisites improperly, corrupt the donors and harm the reputation of the Saṅgha.

Donors will not want to make demerit by offering unallowable things to monks, so they should know clearly what is allowable and what is not allowable.

### **Unrighteous Giving (Adhammadāna)**

Here, I must digress to clarify how one can make demerit by giving, as many people may be doubtful about this. There are two kinds of donation: *dhammadāna* and *adhammadāna* — righteous giving and unrighteous giving. The first is always meritorious, while the second is demeritorious.

How can giving result in demerit? If something corrupts the morality of others it should not be given. If it is given, it results in demerit. Alcohol, weapons, and poison should not be given. Animals for slaughter should not be given. Prostitutes should not be given. Foolish entertainments and pornography should not be given. Bribes should not be given. Giving such things is demeritorious.

Whatever is not allowable for monks should not be given to them. Money should not be given, almsfood should not be given at the wrong time. Music and entertainments should not be given. The meat of animals killed for the purpose of giving alms should not be given.

In the Jīvaka Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya, the Buddha said, “Whoever offers to the Tathāgata or to his disciples what is not allowable makes much demerit.” Here, the Buddha did not say, “meat that is not allowable,” but just “what is not allowable,” so we should take this as an inclusive statement. The Pāḷi word used here for ‘offer’ is *‘āsādeti,*’ which means ‘invite to accept.’ So demerit is made even if a monk refuses what is offered.

If you consider the awkward position that a scrupulous monk faces when offered unallowable things, then you should be able to appreciate that urging him to break his precepts is a demeritorious deed. It is like offering a bribe to an honest official. Even if a monk is unscrupulous, condoning and supporting his shameless behaviour cannot be a meritorious deed. Such actions fly in

the face of the commands given by the Omniscient Buddha when he laid down the training rules for his ordained disciples.

Present-day Buddhists can no longer discern right from wrong. For centuries, shameless monks have neglected the bhikkhus' training. Shameless preceptors cannot train their disciples properly, who inevitably become shameless in turn.

Supporters of shameless monks also become shameless by association. Because they lack a thorough knowledge of the Dhamma-Vinaya, they become partial towards shameless monks who flatter them for their generosity and kindness, and look down on scrupulous monks who admonish them to talk less, to restrain their senses, and to practise meditation diligently. Thus the true Dhamma has almost disappeared. It is primarily the fault of those monks who refuse to follow the training rules laid down by the Omniscient Buddha, but infatuated lay people who do not wish to abandon craving and ignorance are also blameworthy, and guilty of complicity.

### **Offences Requiring Expiation (Pācittiya)**

To 'expiate' means to make amends. Having fallen into one of these offences, a monk should approach another monk, put his robe over one shoulder, pay respects (if the other monk is senior), and confess the offence, undertaking to restrain himself in future. This section of the Pāṭimokkha contains ninety-two training rules. Some offences, such as killing, lying, abusing, slandering, and drinking alcohol, are faults for lay people as well as for monks. Most, such as digging the earth, damaging vegetation, playing in the water, sleeping under the same roof as a woman, are not faults for lay people. These rules define the proper code of behaviour for one who is dependent on alms, who has renounced sensual pleasures to strive for nibbāna, and so is worthy of special respect. They are fundamental to the training.

The training rules were laid down by the Buddha after lay people complained about monks behaving "like householders who enjoy sensual pleasures." If monks do not follow the

training rules, respect for the Saṅgha will diminish. Lay people will not show due respect, and the monks will not be able to instruct them in the way to nibbāna, since they themselves are not striving for it.

“One should first establish oneself in what is proper, then only should one instruct another. Such a wise man will not be reproached.” (Dhp v 158)

“Should one see a wise man who, as if indicating a hidden treasure, points out faults and reproves, let one associate with such a wise man; it will be better, not worse, for him who associates with such a one.”

“Let him advise, instruct, and dissuade one from evil. Truly pleasing is he to the good, displeasing is he to the bad.” (Dhp vv 76-77)

When the Vinaya is lost, the Dhamma is also lost. Donors will give gifts to gain praise and favour. Monks will look for and favour wealthy donors, and both monks and the laity will become corrupt.

### **Confession (Pāṭidesanīya)**

Two of these four offences no longer apply, since the fully ordained female Saṅgha (*bhikkhuni*) no longer exists.<sup>1</sup> A third prohibits a monk from asking for things from lay disciples who are agreed upon by the Saṅgha as Noble Ones, so it rarely applies nowadays. However, a monk should know the proper limit when accepting from pious devotees who offer more than they can afford. The fourth applies to monks staying in remote places that might be dangerous for lay people to visit due to wild beasts or thieves.

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* has been revived in some countries, but is not recognised in Burma or Thailand. Wherever there is at least one *bhikkhuni*, the *bhikkhus* will also have to observe these two training rules: 1) Not eating any almsfood accepted from the hands of a *bhikkhuni* who is unrelated, 2) Failing to dismiss a *bhikkhuni* who is instructing lay people to serve the *bhikkhus* while they are eating.

Although these rules rarely apply nowadays, failure to observe them can have serious consequences, so they are not minor offences, and should be avoided.

### **Offences of Wrong-doing (Dukkaṭa)**

Seventy-five training rules concern etiquette and decorum. Monks should train themselves to become serene and dignified, to inspire faith in lay devotees. If these rules are broken due to unmindfulness, there is no offence. However, if a monk shows disrespect to the training rule or to a monk who reminds him of the rule, in disrespect there is an offence requiring expiation.

If a monk commits many offences, and makes himself difficult to admonish, he should be brought into the midst of the Saṅgha and reminded of his faults. If he persists, he falls into a serious offence requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha. He can be excommunicated from the Saṅgha for refusing to acknowledge an offence.

In the infamous dispute at Kosambī, a monk who was a teacher of the Dhamma neglected to perform the duties when using the toilet. A Vinaya master who used the toilet after him reminded him of his oversight, adding that it was no offence if it was done through unmindfulness. Thus the Dhamma teacher did not confess an offence. The Vinaya teacher told his pupils that the Dhamma teacher had fallen into an offence. The Dhamma teacher told his pupils that the Vinaya teacher did not know what was an offence and what was not.

The pupils quarrelled, and the dispute escalated out of all proportion, until the Vinaya monks excommunicated the Dhamma teacher for not confessing his offence.

What we should learn from this is that even the minor rules are important, but one should maintain a sense of proportion. A monk should train himself, seeing danger in the slightest fault, but he should be tolerant and equanimous, though not indifferent. If he thinks that admonishing others will cause disharmony, he should avoid confrontation, and look for another way to teach the Vinaya and preserve the true Dhamma.

## Rules Outside of the Pāṭimokkha

Besides the 227 rules in the Pāṭimokkha that come up for recitation every fortnight, there are countless other rules for monks to follow. There are duties towards preceptors, teachers, pupils, and visiting monks. There are duties towards the monastery, in the dining-hall, and in the bathroom. There are rules concerning the use and storage of medicines, and about the maintenance of robes and buildings. There are procedures for the recitation of the Pāṭimokkha rules, and preliminary duties before the Uposatha Ceremony. Regulations specify how to establish a boundary (*sīma*) within which all monks must gather for the Uposatha. The Vinaya also specifies the procedure to be followed by the Saṅgha when shameless monks refuse to follow the training.

Nowadays, most monks do not fully follow the training rules. The usual excuse is that the Buddha gave the Saṅgha permission to abolish the lesser and minor training rules, so they neglect or totally ignore the rules requiring expiation, or expiation with forfeiture. However, most of these rules are not minor precepts, but fundamental to the monastic life-style.

### The Lesser and Minor Training Rules

There is unanimous agreement that the offences of defeat are serious offences, and most will agree that offences requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha are also serious, but there are different opinions regarding the other classes of offences.

Before the Buddha passed away, he said to the Venerable Ānanda, "After my passing, the Saṅgha may, if it wishes, abolish the lesser and minor training rules (*khuddānu-khuddakāni sikkhāpadāni*." D.ii.154) However, the Venerable Ānanda neglected to ask the Buddha which rules were the lesser and minor precepts. At the first Buddhist Council, soon after the Buddha's demise, the five hundred Arahants were also not unanimous about this matter, and they blamed the



Venerable Ānanda for not asking about it. Some Arahants said, "Apart from the four offences of defeat, the remainder are lesser and minor." Others said, "Apart from the four offences of defeat and the thirteen offences requiring formal meeting, the rest are lesser and minor." Others said, "... and the two indeterminate offences, the rest are lesser and minor." Others said, "... and the thirty offences requiring expiation with forfeiture, the rest are lesser and minor offences." Others said, "... and the ninety-two offences requiring expiation, the rest are lesser and minor." Others said, "... and four offences requiring confession, the rest are lesser and minor."

Since there were different opinions, Venerable Mahākassapa addressed the monks saying: "People will say, 'While the Buddha was alive the monks followed the training rules, but after his passing away they do not.' So we should continue to train ourselves in all of the precepts." Thus the five hundred Arahants agreed not to abolish any training rules. Not one of the later Councils abolished any training rules either.

That was the decision made by the five hundred Arahants, and all later Buddhist Councils, so the monks of the present day must also train themselves in all of the training precepts. There is no legitimate reason to ignore a single one of them. Nevertheless, one should distinguish between serious, medium, and minor offences.

In the *Milinda Pañha* the Arahant Nāgasena says that the Buddha gave permission to abolish the lesser and minor rules to test his disciples, as a king on his death-bed might test his sons by saying, "You can let the border regions go after my death if you wish." Then the sons would surely make efforts to subdue the border regions, and even conquer more territory. Venerable Nāgasena concludes, "The offences of wrong-doing are the lesser precepts, and offences of wrong speech are the minor precepts." I will now show why this is a wise decision.

As already pointed out, groundlessly accusing a monk of defeat leads to rebirth in hell, unless one admits the offence

and apologises. For a monk, this offence requires a formal meeting of the Saṅgha.

Causing a schism in the Saṅgha is heavy kamma that inevitably leads to rebirth in hell. Striving to create a schism, when admonished by the Saṅgha to desist, is an offence requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha. Clearly, offences that lead to hell or that require a formal meeting of the Saṅgha are not minor offences.

A novice must observe ten precepts, which includes not accepting money. If a bhikkhu accepts money, it must be forfeited to the Saṅgha. The Saṅgha must then give it to a lay person or appoint a bhikkhu to dispose of it. The money must be thrown away outside the monastery, taking no notice of where it falls. So offences requiring confession with forfeiture are not minor, since they deal with a bhikkhu's correct means of livelihood, and some donations of the faithful may go to waste.

If a bhikkhu kills an animal, tells a deliberate lie, abuses, slanders, hits, or threatens a bhikkhu, drinks intoxicants, or eats after midday, these are offences requiring expiation. These offences are contrary to the five or eight precepts observed by lay disciples, temple attendants and nuns, so they are also not minor offences.

If a bhikkhu who is staying in a remote area, which is considered dangerous due to wild beasts or robbers, accepts almsfood in his own place, thus endangering lay supporters who bring it, it is an offence requiring confession. Since his action endangers the life or property of lay people, this offence cannot be regarded as minor either.

If a bhikkhu laughs loudly in town, if he talks with food in his mouth, if he teaches Dhamma while standing to one who is sitting, if he urinates while standing — these are offences of wrong-doing. If he makes a sarcastic remark or tells a joke, it is an offence of wrong speech. These offences should be avoided too, but they can rightly be called lesser and minor offences. Having committed any of them, a bhikkhu should confess his

offence, and undertake to restrain himself in the future. He should not overlook them, nor dismiss them as trivial.

The seventy-second offence requiring expiation states: “While the Pāṭimokkha is being recited, if any bhikkhu should say, ‘Why are these lesser and minor training rules recited? They only lead to worry, bother, and fret’ then in disparaging the training rules there is an offence requiring expiation.” Thus, the sanctity of the lesser and minor training rules is protected by a specific offence requiring expiation.

The seventy-third offence requiring expiation expects every bhikkhu to be familiar with all of the training rules included in the Pāṭimokkha (in Pāḷi), within four to six weeks of his ordination. Claiming ignorance of the rule as a defence requires expiation, and he is also to be censured by the Saṅgha for his ignorance.

## The Importance of the Pāṭimokkha

Every fortnight the monks have a duty to recite the 227 training rules included in the Pāṭimokkha. If there is a danger to life, or to the holy life, the Pāṭimokkha may be recited in brief, otherwise it should be recited in full whenever four bhikkhus are present on the Uposatha day. If no bhikkhu is able to recite it in full, one bhikkhu should go to learn it, or the bhikkhus should attend the recital in another monastery. Because the Buddha said, “I allow you, monks, to recite the Pāṭimokkha” the monks are obliged to recite it, and fall into an offence of wrong-doing if they fail to recite it without good reason. If they do not have a suitable boundary (*sīma*) they should consecrate one. The Pāṭimokkha recital preserves the vitality of the Buddha’s teaching, and must not be neglected. As wise lay people will fully observe the five precepts, wise monks will fully observe the 227 precepts.

The Upāli Sutta from the Gradual Sayings gives ten reasons why the Pāṭimokkha should be recited.

The Vinaya master, Venerable Upāli, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage and sat at one side.

Sitting there, Venerable Upāli asked the Blessed One: “Seeing how many benefits has the Blessed One laid down the training rules for his disciples, and the recital of the Pāṭimokkha?”

“Seeing ten benefits, Upāli, the Tathāgata has laid down the training rules for his disciples, and the recital of the Pāṭimokkha.

1. For the excellence of the Saṅgha (*Saṅghasutṭhutāya*).
2. For the well-being of the Saṅgha (*Saṅghaphāsutāya*).
3. To control wicked individuals  
(*Dummaṅkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya*).
4. For the comfort of well-behaved bhikkhus  
(*Pesalānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ phāsuvihārāya*).
5. To restrain present taints  
(*Diṭṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ saṃvarāya*).
6. To prevent the arising of future taints  
(*Samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighātāya*).
7. To arouse faith in those who lack faith  
(*Appasannānaṃ pasādāya*).
8. To strengthen faith in those who have faith  
(*Pasannānaṃ bhīyyobhāvāya*).
9. To establish the true Dhamma (*Saddhammaṭṭhitiyā*).
10. To support the Vinaya (*Vinayānuggahāya*).” (*A v 70*)

Those monks who have no respect for the training, disparage those who respect it, and neglect the recital of the Pāṭimokkha, are shameless and wicked individuals. Though some monks fall into many offences due to shamelessness, if they correct themselves, and respect the training, they are not wicked.

The Vinaya defines a shameless monk as follows:

“A shameless monk is one who, with knowledge of the Vinaya rules, transgresses them and commits offences. Having committed offences, he then conceals his actions. Moreover, he follows the four wrong courses of action (*i.e.* through desire, ill-will, delusion, or fear).” (Parivāra, Vin.v.158)

Monks who commit offences due to ignorance of the rules are not shameless, just negligent (new monks who don't know the rules yet are not negligent). Monks who knowingly transgress the rules due to human weakness, are shameless only until they confess their offences. They are like good citizens who occasionally break the law.

Wicked monks are like criminals who plead not guilty when charged with some offence, although they are guilty; or like outlaws who are neither caught nor charged, but who remain at large, committing further crimes daily. Even if the offences are minor, stubbornness and shamelessness are obstructions to an individual's spiritual development, and wicked monks pose a serious threat to the health and longevity of Buddhism. Minor offences often lead to major offences.

“Do not disregard evil, saying, ‘It will not affect me.’  
Even a big water-jar is filled by the falling of drops.  
Likewise, the fool, gathering little by little, fills  
himself with evil.” (Dhp v 121)

## The Skilful Way to Relax

Why are there so many rules? Because human beings have so many defilements.

In the early years of the Buddha's dispensation the monks soon became Noble Ones, even Arahants. Such pure-hearted individuals instinctively knew what was suitable for a recluse, as they were intent on realising the various stages of the Path. As the years went by, men began to join the Saṅgha for less noble reasons, and they neglected to practise meditation. Most of the rules were made due to the shameless behaviour of the group of six monks. More than two thousand five hundred years since the Buddha's demise, the situation has degenerated even further. Monks now need *more* rules to protect themselves from the temptations of modern life, not *fewer* rules.

Those who advocate relaxing the rules to suit modern times have not understood the purpose of the Vinaya. The meaning

of the word ‘*Pāṭimokkha*’ given in the *Visuddhimagga* is: “*Pāṭimokkha* is the virtue of the training precepts; for it frees (*mokkheti*) him who protects (*pāti*) it and guards it, it sets him free (*mocayati*) from the pains of the states of loss, *etc.*, that is why it is called *Pāṭimokkha*.” (*Vism.* 16)

Instead of abandoning the rules, monks need to abandon their pride and attachment. They should have confidence in the wisdom of the Omniscient Buddha, who laid down the training rules for his disciples.

It is like the confidence needed when learning to swim. Poor swimmers are afraid to put their head into the water, but the head is heavy, and it is hard to hold it out of the water when swimming. Confident swimmers fully immerse the head in the water, turning the mouth just enough to breathe, thus they can relax in the water and float horizontally. They can use all of their strength to propel themselves along, without any fear of drowning. Monks should suppress their ego and immerse themselves fully in the monastic discipline, then they will be able to use all of their strength to study, to teach, or to meditate.

Refer to the *Bhaddāli Sutta* and other *Suttas* in the *Bhikkhu Vagga*, *Majjhimanikāya*. The Buddha said to the monks, “I keep myself healthy by eating only one meal. You should do the same.” When the monks told Venerable *Bhaddāli* about this, he declared his inability to follow that practice. They then advised him to keep back a portion from the morning meal to eat later (*i.e.* before midday), but he complained that even that was too hard. For three months the Buddha said nothing, but he admonished Venerable *Bhaddāli* severely at the end of the *Rains Retreat*: “Surely, *Bhaddāli*, a transgression overcame you, in that like a fool, confused and blundering, when a training precept was being made known by me, you publicly declared in the *Saṅgha* of *bhikkhus* your unwillingness to follow the training.” (*M.i.437*)

Monks used to walk for alms soon after dawn, taking the meal on their return to the monastery or at some suitable place outside

the village. Most monks would have eaten about 9:00 am, well before noon, and before it started to get uncomfortably hot.

Those who do not wish to follow the strict one-sessioner's practice can eat twice or more, but all food must be finished before midday. For each *mouthful* taken after midday, a monk should confess an offence of expiation. If it is after midday, but he thinks it is not, or if he is doubtful, it is an offence of expiation. If it is before midday, but he thinks it is not, or if he is doubtful, it is an offence of wrong-doing for each mouthful. A monk should check the time before eating. If there is no clock, and he is doubtful about the time, he should not eat.

## **Rules That Lay Supporters Need to Know**

The Vinaya defines what is food, what is medicine, and when each can be used. Five 'medicines' — ghee, butter, oil, honey, and sugar — can be kept and used at any time for seven days. Fruit juice *free from pulp* can be used until before dawn of the day after accepting it. Roots, seeds, and leaves that are not used as food can be used as long as they last. Plain tea or herbal medicines can be taken at any time, but soup can only be taken before midday, even if it is free from solids. Milk is food, and so cannot be taken after midday. Horlicks, Ovaltine, and all other drinks containing food are also food.

Everything taken by the mouth except water or tooth cleaners must be offered by a lay person or novice, at the right time. For food, this means after dawn and before midday on the day that it is to be used. Medicine and fruit juice can be offered at any time. 'Offered' means that the donor must come within arms-reach and put it into something held in a monk's hands, such as an almsbowl, plate, or tray. Novices can eat food that is not formally offered, and they can cook food for monks.

Once food or medicine has been received by a bhikkhu, it can be used at the right time by any bhikkhu, until it has been discarded. If discarded food is offered again, it may be used, but a bhikkhu should not store food up to use the following

day. Some say that discarded food should not be used again, but a lot of food would be wasted due to the absence of beggars and others who eat leftovers. A bhikkhu should be content to eat any allowable food that is good for his health. If he renounces the leftover food, it is better to use it up the next day rather than throwing it away. If he gets annoyed because someone else eats it or throws it away, he can know that he is guilty of storing up food.

The seven-day medicines may also be used as food, but once used as food, they cannot later be used as medicine. What a monk can do, having accepted them, is put aside a portion to use as medicine, and then use the rest as food. Salt or ginger, kept as lifetime medicine, cannot be mixed with food. Ginger mixed with sugar can be used as seven-day medicine, but not lifetime medicine.

Four foods — fish, meat, milk, and curds (yogurt) — plus the five medicines are ‘superior’ or ‘luxurious’ foods. A bhikkhu may not request these for his own use, unless he is sick. ‘Sick’ means that he cannot be comfortable without them. If a donor makes an open invitation to ask for whatever he wants, a bhikkhu can ask for these superior foods. If donors offer vegetarian food with essential proteins such as nuts or pulses, a bhikkhu should be able to remain healthy, and all but the poorest villagers will be able to offer alms without difficulty.

If a bhikkhu sees, hears, or suspects that an animal has been killed to provide meat for the Saṅgha, he should refuse it. These days, meat and fish are bought from the supermarket, so one need not worry about this offence.

The Buddha refused to lay down a rule forbidding the eating of meat, presumably because this might have prevented the Dhamma spreading to areas where meat-eating was widespread, or might inhibit some from joining the Saṅgha. Medical advice is that excessive amounts of meat and over-eating in general contribute to heart-disease. If he failed to get alms, the Buddha happily went without food (*see* the



Piṇḍa Sutta, S.i.113, and *cf.* Dhammadāyāda Sutta, M.i.12). He was lean and physically fit.

The Buddha recommended rice gruel for good digestion. In the West one could use oat-porridge, which helps to reduce cholesterol. Frugal use of the luxurious foods — ghee, butter, oil, honey, molasses, meat, fish, milk, and curds — would keep monks healthy and make them easy to support.

Several rules concerning women are designed to preserve a monk's chastity and good reputation. Monks may not touch women, sit alone with them, arrange to travel with them, sleep under the same roof as them, or teach Dhamma to them at length unless a man is present who understands the meaning. However, if a woman asks a question, a monk can answer in detail. If someone else makes the arrangements, he can travel with a woman, but not alone with her. If she sits while the bhikkhu walks, or she walks while the bhikkhu sits, or they sit in separate rooms, or in an open place, not on the same seat, there is no offence. These rules are not designed to make it difficult for women to learn and practise the Dhamma, but to restrain evil-minded men and to forestall gossip.

A monk is not permitted to damage plants or dig the earth, so lay supporters should maintain the monastery's garden by cutting the grass, trimming hedges, weeding flower-beds, *etc.* Monks can help by cutting up severed branches, and they can dig earth without life, *e.g.* sand or gravel. They can sweep leaves, and rake up grass cuttings. They can burn garden waste, but only in a place without living things. In clearing undergrowth, one should avoid destroying nests or eggs. Water containing living things must be filtered before using it.

## **Becoming a Refined Buddhist**

Every rule was laid down by the Buddha out of compassion for living beings. Even the minor rules help to expel defilements. A lay Buddhist who studies the Vinaya for the right reasons will gain more reverence for monks, realising how refined and

demanding the monastic training is. To follow the training perfectly requires constant mindfulness, which prevents the arising of greed, anger, and egoism. Many of the rules are a useful guide for a lay person who aspires to nibbāna. A 'recluse' means one who sees fear in the cycle of rebirth caused by defilements. A lay person who strives hard to attain nibbāna is a recluse, but a monk who strives for worldly aims is more heedless than a lay person.

The Vinaya is a guide to a virtuous life: showing one how to live without greed, hatred, or delusion, and how to cultivate renunciation, loving-kindness, and wisdom.

“This is the beginning for a wise bhikkhu: sense control, contentment, restraint in the Pāṭimokkha precepts, association with noble and energetic friends whose livelihood is pure.” (Dhp v 375).

### **Relinquish Greed, Practise Renunciation**

Be content with what you have, or whatever people offer you from their own generosity. Share anything you don't need with others. Covet nothing that belongs to others. Waste nothing, and reflect well on gratitude when using the gifts of faith. Live one day at a time. Needs can easily be fulfilled, but greed is insatiable. You won't die if you go one day without food, but if you are overwhelmed by greed just once, it can destroy your life.

### **Conquer Hatred, Develop Loving-kindness**

Guard your mind well against anger. Practise tolerance and patience to the highest possible extent. Ward off ill-will and selfishness by doing noble-minded deeds for the welfare of others. Revere and show due respect to the learned, pious, and virtuous: without partiality or prejudice. If others lack these basic virtues, they deserve compassion, since they are heading towards suffering. Avoid wicked individuals as far as possible, they are a danger to your happiness. Protect yourself from them

by practising forbearance and equanimity. All beings are heirs of their own kamma, and must inherit its results.

### **Eradicate Delusion, Cultivate Wisdom**

Know one thing: you don't know anything until you are enlightened. If you have not yet attained right view, what are you doing to rectify this appalling ignorance? Do you enjoy reading Dhamma books, or do you prefer newspapers and magazines? Do you meditate frequently, or only when the mood takes you? Is your conversation usually about politics, food, and material things, or is it mere gossip and idle chatter? It is better to remain silent than to make unwholesome kamma. To criticise shamelessness and negligence is right, but do not get caught in your own net, or you will drown in defilements. Do you like to stay alone, or are you never happy without company? A refined Buddhist delights in solitude, renunciation, learning Dhamma, meditation, and silence, which are indispensable to develop concentration and insight.

Be mindful at all times. If you leave a mess for others to clean up, and let others do what you should do yourself, you have missed the right path, which is only for the diligent. If you have never practised mindfulness meditation intensively, you have certainly been negligent, so be ready to admit it. Confess any offences immediately — a man who cannot make a mistake, cannot make anything.

“The bhikkhu who delights in heedfulness, and looks with fear on heedlessness, is not liable to fall; he is in the presence of nibbāna.” (Dhp v 32)

“Not insulting, nor harming, restrained by the Pāṭimokkha. Moderation in food, a secluded abode, intent on higher thought — this is the teaching of the Buddhas.” (Dhp v 185)

