

What devotees should know about BHIKKHUS AND MONEY/ GOLD/ SILVER

The life-blood of the *Sāsana* (Dispensation)

"*Vinayo nāma Sasanassa āyu*" means "The Vinaya is the life-blood of the *Sāsana*" It was thus declared by the mahātheras of ancient times at the Buddhist Councils. We can therefore see the immense importance of the Vinaya in the dispensation. According to the Vinaya, bhikkhus are forbidden to accept money/ gold/ silver in any way whatsoever. However, the Buddha permitted the acceptance of (material) requisites derived from the offerings of money, gold or silver.

An incident from the days of the Buddha

At one time a virtuous gentleman by the name of Manicuḷaka asked the Buddha whether the statement he had made at a meeting, 'Bhikkhus ought not to accept the offering of money,' was true or not. To that the Buddha replied, "Headman, that which you stated is, indeed, true. Bhikkhus must not accept money. If money is allowable, it will be the same as allowing the enjoyment of the five sensual pleasures (including that of having a spouse and offspring). The person who accepts (such) money/ gold/ silver is one who is not a true bhikkhu: he will definitely not be considered as one who is a son of the Sakkyan prince (The Buddha)."

However, should the monastery be with a leaking roof or some such, then bhikkhus are permitted to don robes and do the rounds in the towns and villages to receive grass, thatch and other such materials in the same way as they receive offerings in their alms-food rounds. If at such time devotees who understand should ask, "Bhante, what is it that you need?", then it is permitted for the bhikkhu to ask for grass, thatch, etc. that is required. The bhikkhu must not ask for or make any hints in to receive money, gold or silver. Thus did the Buddha make a proclamation. (*Gāmaṇi Samyutta Pāli*, 509-510.)

[If, while standing(waiting) in front of the devotees, they do not ask anything, the bhikkhu, on his part, must not start to make any demands (except in the case of a bhikkhu who is ill, he may ask for suitable medicines for his illness.) Otherwise, he should simply move on and stop at the next devotee's house.]

Refusing the offering (of money/ gold/ silver)

It remains the duty of any bhikkhu to clearly indicate his refusal to accept, either verbally or by action, any offering of money/ gold/ silver. Also, bhikkhus shall not direct such offering to be placed in a suitable/ secure location; nor shall he point to the kappiya to hand over the offering; nor shall he ask the kappiya to receive the offering. [Even though one may not have the desire or the intention to enjoy such offering, failure to show indication of refusal (either verbally or by action or manner) amounts to a *dukkata* offense.]

Inappropriate ways in offering money/ gold/ silver

Offering of money/ gold/ silver delivered with statements such as:

- 'I/we wish to offer 10 dollars/kyats/bahts, etc., (or),
- 'I/we wish to offer 10 dollars/kyats/bahts, etc. of allowable requisites': (or),
- 'I/we wish to offer 10 *vatthu* (objects/things)': (or),
- 'I/we wish to offer 10 *navakamma* (new work)'-

These statements are inappropriate/invalid ways in making the offering of money/ gold/ silver.[Even though the term ‘allowable requisites’ may have been used, the appropriate term(s) ‘(monetary unit) worth (bhikkhus’ allowable requisites)/(bhikkhus’ allowable requisites) to the value of (monetary unit)’ have not been uttered, and therefore, direct reference to money/ gold/ silver/ cash has been implied.] (See following paragraph for appropriate ways.)

Appropriate ways of offering allowable requisites to the value of money/ gold/ silver

In the offering, the donor himself must say,

- "Bhante, please accept from me/us the offering of (say, 10 dollars) worth bhikkhus’ allowable requisites whenever bhante wants /needs them.", (or),
- "Bhante, please accept from me the offering of bhikkhus’ allowable requisites to the value of (say, 10 dollars)," (or),
- "I/we have put in the care of bhante’s kappiya (say, 10 dollars) worth bhikkhu’s allowable requisites. Please ask of him those bhikkhus’ allowable requisites whenever bhante wants /needs them."

If the offering has been made accordingly, then it is appropriate and acceptable up to no more than the value of the specified amount offered.

If a donor says, "Bhante, I would like to offer bhikkhus’ allowable requisites to the value of that derived from this gold/silver/valuables", or, "I wish to offer for *navakamma* (new work). Please direct me to the kappiya. Please direct me to a suitable place for safekeeping", then the bhikkhu may point to the kappiya and/or to a suitable place. In so doing, the bhikkhu is permitted to say only, "So-and-so is the kappiya," and/or, "Such-and-such is a safe place." He must not say, "Give it to So-and-so", (or) "Keep it with So-and-so", (or), "Put it at such-and-such place."

If a devotee says, "Bhante, please consider me as your supporter of the four requisites", the bhikkhu needs simply to regard him as such - meaning, the bhikkhu is not allowed to ask for any requisites.

If the devotee/ donor says, " Bhante, please consider me as your supporter of the four requisites. Please ask for the allowable requisites when you need them’, only then is the bhikkhu permitted to ask for the requisites.

Note:

If devotees are desirous of supporting the saṅgha in accordance with the Dhamma and the Vinaya, they need to study and practice the valid/allowable way of making offerings of money/ gold/ silver. It should be realised that a bhikkhu who, even unknowingly, happens to accept requisites derived from money/ gold/ silver that has been offered in an unallowable way (with inappropriate words of speech), he would be committing an offense which may result in rebirth in the woeful realms. (*Sārattha.3-379*)

It should be noted that cheques, credit cards, money orders, bank drafts, saving certificates and bank account books also fall into the category of money/ gold/ silver.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that devotees be especially careful in making allowable (in words/verbally) those offerings concerning money/ gold/ silver. In this way, not only will bhikkhus be prevented from committing any offenses but, devotees also will enjoy the benefits of their *dāna* in the present as well as in *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirths.