

# Food and the Vinaya

*The overview is aimed less at the question, 'What **are** the food rules?' and more at the question, 'What do the food rules **do**?'*

*All quotations from the Canon are taken from Ajahn Brahmali's translations on Sutta Central.*

## The Overall Picture

The ways in which bhikkhus can't get food

So how do bhikkhus get food?

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Tonics

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Mixing different classes of Food

## Considerations that affect several of the food rules

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Invitations

Family

'If it is by means of his own property'

The Robe Season

## What the food rules do

Daily dependence on the lay people

How do the rules fit together to ensure that the bhikkhus live in dependence on the lay people and do not hoard food and tonics?

Eating only in the right time

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Proper Use of Meal Invitations

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Maintaining Samana Sañña

Avoiding Food Waste

## Ajahn Thanissaro's rule summaries:

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**“When physical food is comprehended, passion for the five strings of sensuality is comprehended. When passion for the five strings of sensuality is comprehended, there is no fetter bound by which a disciple of the noble ones would come back again to this world.” SN 12:63**

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## **The Overall Picture**

Bhikkhus need to eat. But the act of eating and acquiring food is full of potential pitfalls that can obstruct a bhikkhu’s spiritual progress, paint the Sangha in a bad light and upset the lay people. The food rules create a living framework that tries to mitigate the risks of these pitfalls without overly restricting a bhikkhu’s access to food.

Before describing this framework, it would be useful to first describe:

- The general picture of how bhikkhus can and can’t get food
- The different classes of food
- Considerations that have a bearing on several of the rules, namely:
  - Illness
  - Invitations
  - Family
  - ‘If it is by means of one’s own property’
  - The Robe Season

### **The ways in which bhikkhus can’t get food**

A bhikkhu cannot dig (**Pc 10**) nor can they intentionally cut or kill living plants (**Pc 11**). Together these mean that a bhikkhu cannot grow or forage for their own food. They also cannot eat abandoned food that has not been properly offered (**Pc 40**), for example food left as offerings at a shrine or food thrown into the bin of a supermarket. Since a bhikkhu cannot accept or obtain money (**NP 18 and 19**) nor engage in trade (**NP20**) they also cannot buy or barter for their food. The only option left is for bhikkhus to be given food by lay people.

However, a healthy bhikkhu cannot make uninvited requests for food from lay people (**Pc 39** and **Sk 37**). The food has to be properly offered under the initiative of the lay people (**Pc 40**).

But a bhikkhu should avoid receiving uncooked provisions like raw meats and uncooked grains (e.g. **DN 2**, receiving such items would likely come under the blanket rule against all bad habits (**Cv.V.36**)). If there are uncooked foods in monastery stores (which the Buddha allowed (**Mv.VI.33.2**)), a bhikkhu should not cook these for them to be eaten by bhikkhus (although bhikkhus are allowed to reheat food that has already been cooked) (**Mv.VI.17.3-6**).

In other words a bhikkhu should only accept food that requires no further preparation to be eaten. Having received cooked food, a bhikkhu cannot set some aside to be eaten another day (**Pc 38**).

Taken together, these boundaries are such that if a bhikkhu wants to eat, they must be in daily contact with the lay people who take the initiative to feed them.

A potential loophole would be bhikkhus only eating at public alms-centres (like soup kitchens). The Buddha closed this loophole by discouraging bhikkhus from making overly frequent use of such centres (**Pc 31**, the actual prohibition is against eating two days in a row in such a centre without having left the centre).

### **So how do bhikkhus get food?**

The texts most often describe the bhikkhus either going on alms-round to collect food or being invited by a family, village or guild to eat a meal outside of the monastery where the lay people take the initiative to feed the bhikkhus. There are also some references to lay people coming to the monastery to offer already prepared food or to cook the meal in the monastery. Further, a bhikkhu can eat at public alms-centres if they need to, although doing so frequently should be avoided (**Pc 31**).

As mentioned above, whether on alms-round or at a meal invitation, in or out of the monastery, food must be properly offered (**Pc 40**). This means that the lay person who is doing the offering must be within reaching distance when they offer the food either directly into the hands of the bhikkhu or onto something that the bhikkhu is holding (like a receiving cloth or oven glove when handling hot dishes). Once one bhikkhu has received the food it has in effect been received on behalf of all bhikkhus.

But a bhikkhu can only eat food received between dawn and noon (hereafter referred to as *the right time*) and cannot eat substantial food from noon until the next dawnrise (hereafter referred to as *the wrong time*) (**Pc 37**).

Although a healthy bhikkhu cannot normally ask for food (**Pc 39** and **Sk 37**), there is the following allowance:

- “There are wilderness roads where there’s little water and little food, where it’s not easy to travel without provisions. I allow you to look for provisions: whatever you need of rice, mung beans, black gram, salt, sugar, oil, and ghee.” (**Mv.VI.34.21**, the *Meṇḍaka* allowance)

This allowance doesn’t mention an exception to the rule prohibiting a bhikkhu from eating food they have themselves stored having received it on a previous day (**PC 38**). However there is no offence in a bhikkhu storing food that they don’t intend to eat, such that a bhikkhu could travel with a non-bhikkhu each carrying the other’s food.

## Different classes of 'Food'

Different rules apply to different classes of food. There are four main classes of food. Roughly speaking staple and non-staple food are what might be served for breakfast or the main meal, tonics are non-substantial items that can assuage hunger in the afternoon or keep you going, juices are juices and medicines are plants and substances used to treat some kind of illness or to maintain health.

Each class of food has its own lifespan, the time within which a bhikkhu can eat that item without falling into offence:

- **Staple and non-staple foods** can be eaten until noon of the day on which they are received.
- **Juices** can be consumed until dawn the day after they were received.
- **Tonics** can be consumed until dawn on the seventh day after they were received.
- **Medicines** can be consumed for life once received.

### Staple foods (Bhojana/bhojaniya):

1. **Cooked grains**
2. **Kummāsa**: "The Commentary describes this as a staple confection made out of yava but doesn't give any further details aside from saying that if the kummāsa is made out of any of the other grains or mung beans, it doesn't count as a staple food. References to kummāsa in the Canon show that it was a very common staple that could form a rudimentary meal in and of itself and would spoil if left overnight." (BMC I p308)
3. **Sattu**: Grain dried or roasted and pounded into meal. This may cover flour and items made from flour.
4. **Fish**: The flesh of any animal living in the water.
5. **Meat**: The flesh of any animal living on land, except for that which is unallowable.

There are ten unallowable meats (**Mv.VI.23.9-15**): that of human beings, elephants, horses, dogs, snakes, lions, tigers, leopards, bears, and hyenas. It is a thullacaya to eat human flesh, a dukkhata to eat the others.

A bhikkhu must ask if they are uncertain about what kind of meat has been offered to them (**Mv.VI.23.9**).

Raw flesh and blood are not allowed (**Mv.VI.10.2**) (unless one is possessed by non-human beings).

Even if meat is cooked and of an allowable kind, a bhikkhu may not eat it if they know or suspect that the animal was killed specifically to feed them (**Mv.VI.31.14**).

### **Non-staple foods (Khādaniya):**

Non-staple foods are defined differently in the context of the different rules, but in general this covers all other kinds of food (fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, seeds, sauces, etc), and sometimes the five tonics, juice drinks, medicine, conje (rice porridge), water and toothwood.

#### ***Fruit***

Fruit is a non-staple food. Fruits that have viable seeds that cannot be easily separated from the flesh must be made allowable before a bhikkhu eats them:

- “I allow you, bhikkhus, to consume fruit that has been made allowable for monks in any of five ways: if it is damaged by fire, by a knife, by a fingernail, if it is seedless, and the fifth is if the seeds are discharged.” (**Cv.V.5.2**)
- “Now at that time there was a great quantity of fruit at Sāvattthī, but there was no one to make it allowable.... (The Buddha said,) ‘I allow that fruit that is seedless or whose seeds are discharged be consumed (even if) it has not been made allowable.’” (**Mv.VI. 21**)

However a piece of fruit is made allowable, it must still be properly offered to a bhikkhu before being eaten (**Pc 40**).

#### **Tonics**

The five tonics allowed by the Buddha are **ghee**, fresh butter (navanītam), oil, honey, sugar/molasses:

- “Then as the Blessed One was alone in seclusion, this line of reasoning occurred to his mind:

‘At present the bhikkhus, afflicted by the autumn disease, bring up the conje they have drunk and the meals they have eaten. Because of this they are thin, wretched, unattractive, and pale, their bodies covered with veins. What if I were to allow medicine for them that would be both medicine and agreed to be medicine by the world, and serve as food, yet would not be considered gross food.’

“Then this thought occurred to him:

‘There are these five tonics—ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, sugar/molasses—that are both medicine and agreed to be medicine by the world, and serve as food yet would not be considered gross food...’

‘Bhikkhus, I allow that the five tonics, having been accepted, be consumed at the right time or the wrong time (from noon to dawnrise).’” (Mv.VI.1.2-5)

Once a bhikkhu receives a tonic, they may use it up to the seventh dawn after they receive it. Before this time period elapses, the bhikkhu should relinquish a tonic (unless they determine to use it for some purpose other than consuming it). There is no offence if having relinquished a tonic “to an unordained person, abandoning desire for it—he receives it in return and makes use of it ” such that the bhikkhu would have another seven days to consume the tonic (NP23).

Even in the time of the Buddha, monks were not clear how to categorise novel food stuffs that did not neatly fit into the various categories of food. The Buddha set out the great standards to address this situation:

- At that time the monks were anxious about all sorts of matters, thinking, “What has the Buddha allowed and what hasn’t he allowed?”

They told the Buddha.

“If I haven’t specifically prohibited something, then it’s unallowable to you if it’s similar to what’s unallowable and opposed to what’s allowable.

If I haven’t specifically prohibited something, then it’s allowable to you if it’s similar to what’s allowable and opposed to what’s unallowable.

If I haven’t specifically allowed something, then it’s unallowable to you if it’s similar to what’s unallowable and opposed to what’s allowable.

If I haven’t specifically allowed something, then it’s allowable to you if it’s similar to what’s allowable and opposed to what’s unallowable.” (Mv.VI.40.1)

In other words:

- If a bhikkhu suggests that a novel food item should be prohibited, they must show that it is like something that the Buddha prohibited and isn’t like anything the Buddha made allowable.
- If a bhikkhu suggests that a novel food item should be allowable, they must show that it is like something that the Buddha allowed and isn’t like anything the Buddha prohibited.

The Great Standards have been used to expand the range of tonics (colloquially known as allowables) available to modern bhikkhus, for example:

- **Cheese**

The Buddha allowed bhikkhus to consume five products of the cow: milk, curds, buttermilk, fresh butter, and ghee (Mv.VI.34.21)

In communities that class cheese as curds (described as a finer staple food in **Pc 39**), cheese is not allowable. In communities that class cheese as fresh butter, cheese may be allowable.

#### - **Gelatine-based Sweets and Jelly**

The Buddha allowed the tallow of bear, fish, alligator, pig, and donkeys to be consumed as food (**Mv.VI.2.1**). Further, tallow that is received, rendered and filtered in the right time can be consumed as oil (i.e. a tonic) (**Mv.VI.2.1**).

Gelatin is another substance derived by rendering allowable parts of an animal. Most gelatin is derived from pork skins, pork and cattle bones, or split cattle hides. As such, some communities have agreed that gelatin can also be considered an oil. Therefore gelatine-based sweets are allowable in such communities.

#### - **Chocolate**

Pure chocolate is made from cocoa butter and mixed with the ground up mass of husked fermented cocoa beans. The cocoa butter could be classed as an oil. The cocoa mass could either be considered a tonic (as it could be argued that fermented cocoa seeds with their gentle stimulant effect is such that it is considered “both medicine and agreed to be medicine by the world, and serve as food yet would not be considered gross food”). Any added sugar would of course be sugar. Chocolate mixed with milk would count as food (see below for further discussion of mixtures).

### **Juices**

The Buddha allowed bhikkhus to accept juices (**Mv.VI.35.6**). In the vinaya texts juices can be consumed any time before the next dawn on the day they are received.

These days there are really three sorts of juice:

- Fresh juice
- Pasteurised juice not from concentrate
- Pasteurised juice from concentrate

Fresh juice is generally treated as juice as described in the vinaya texts. The purpose of the short juice lifespan seems to be to avoid drinking juice that has started to ferment.

Pasteurised juices are very unlikely to ferment, especially when refrigerated. As such some communities have a practice of treating unopened containers of pasteurised juices as tonics (i.e. they need to be relinquished after seven days) until they are opened at which point the juice life-span starts. Even then, juices are frequently treated as ‘one-day tonics’ in that having been relinquished before the end of their ‘until the next dawn’ lifespan, they can be reoffered to a bhikkhu after that dawn.

Some communities argue that even opened pasteurised juices should be treated as seven-day tonics, more so for juices made from concentrate which are effectively sugar-water. The same argument is used to classify fizzy drinks as sugar-water seven-day tonics.

Soya milk and miso are two further drinks that may fall under the category of juice.

- **Soya milk**

The Buddha also made allowance for strained meat, rice or mung bean broth for a bhikkhu who has taken a purgative to be consumed at any time during the day (like juices) (**Mv.VI.14.7**).

Some communities agree to include soya milk under the class of mung bean broth. This is why soya milk is allowed in the afternoons but not other plant milks. The definition of illness is also extended by some communities to cover any bhikkhu who needs something to keep them going.

The life-span of soya milk depends on whether a community classes it as a juice, a tonic or a medicine. Sometimes unsweetened soya milk is classed as a medicine and soya milk sweetened with apple juice concentrates as a juice. Sometimes both are classed as tonics.

- **Miso**

The Buddha allowed a substance called loṇasovīraka (translated by I.B. Horner as salty broth) to be taken in the wrong time as a medicine for ill bhikkhus and, when mixed with water, as a beverage for bhikkhus who are not ill (**Mv.VI.16.3**). Apparently the recipe given for loṇasovīraka in the commentary resembles miso, so some communities extend the allowance to miso.

## **Medicines**

The Buddha allowed medicines (**Mv.VI.3.1-8**). In effect, anything of medicinal value that is not used in and of itself as a staple or non-staple food, tonic or juice is a medicine. This typically include teas, coffee, fruits (like lemons), roots (like ginger) and any other plant or plant derived substance and salts. A bhikkhu may keep and use medicines for as long as they live. For example:

- **Modern medicines**

Modern medicines are generally classed as salts, which has become a synonym for chemically produced substances.

- **Marmite**

Marmite is made from the yeast by-products of beer brewing and is not generally taken as a meal in and of itself. Marmite's medicinal value is its high B vitamins content. Yeast is technically classed as a fungus and so comes under plant-derived



substances.

- **Miso paste**

As mentioned above, a substance called loṇasovīraka was allowed to ill bhikkhus which seems to be similar to miso paste. However, once the paste is diluted in water, it becomes classed as a juice.

### **Mixing different classes of Food**

The general principle (**Mv.VI.40.3**) is that mixtures of different classes of food take on:

- The classification of the constituent with the shortest life-span, and therefore:
  - The shorter lifespan, and;
  - The allowable reception time for that class of food
- The reception date of the constituent that was received longest ago.

As such, a mixture is only allowable if all of the constituents were received in the allowable time of the constituent with the shortest life-span.

The exception to this is that medicines received at any time can be mixed with tonics at any point in their lifespan.

Examples:

- **Crystallised ginger**

Crystallised ginger is ginger (a medicine) mixed with sugar (a tonic). Sugar has the shorter lifespan (seven days) so the ginger's lifespan (lifetime) reduces to seven days (or however many days the sugar has left in its lifespan.)

Because ginger is a medicine, it doesn't matter if it was accepted before the sugar.

- **Marmite on toast**

A bhikkhu is offered a slice of toast (staple food) and a jar of marmite (medicine) for breakfast. The bhikkhu spreads some of the marmite on the toast. The marmite on the toast is now classed as food and now can only be consumed in that right time. The marmite left in the jar remains unmixed and so retains its classification as a medicine.

The next day, the bhikkhu is offered a slice of toast but no further marmite. If the bhikkhu spreads the marmite from the previous day on the toast, the spread marmite would once again be classed as food. However, since the marmite was received the previous day, the mixture of toast and marmite counts together as being received on

the previous day. If the bhikkhu consumes this mixture, they would break the prohibition against eating food that a bhikkhu has stored having received it on a previous day (**Pc 38**).

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## Considerations that affect several of the food rules

The non-offence clauses to many of the rules make reference to the following considerations:

- Illness
- Invitations
- Family
- 'If it is by means of his own property'
- The Robe Season

We will briefly describe what each of these might mean. This will give us a more nuanced picture of how the food rules fit together not simply as a set of restrictions on a bhikkhus' access to food, but also as facilitators of access to food and cohesion with the lay community.

### Illness

Many of the rules do not apply to ill bhikkhus or to bhikkhus trying to get food for an ill bhikkhu. The Buddha seemed to be concerned that ill bhikkhus had access to the nutrition that they needed.

That being said, it is notable that there is no exception for an ill bhikkhu to eat staple or non-staple food after midday (**Pc 37**) nor for an ill bhikkhu to consume food received and stored from a previous day (**Pc 38**). The Buddha seemed to be satisfied that ill bhikkhus would have enough access to food from what they could receive, or what could be received on their behalf, in the right time. Further, ill bhikkhus would of course be able to make use of juices, tonics and medicines outside of the right time and within their respective lifespans (**Pc 37**). Water can be taken at any time without having to be offered (**Pc 40**).

### Invitations

The suttas and Vinaya texts make frequent reference to lay people inviting bhikkhus for a meal or to ask for the various categories of food (and any other requisite). The Buddha allowed the bhikkhus to accept such invitations. Invitations could be specific or general with regards to what requisites were being offered and for how long the invitation was valid, and they may be made to individual bhikkhus, entire communities or to all bhikkhus everywhere.

On the one hand, such invitations increase the security of access to requisites for bhikkhus, provide a wonderful opportunity for the lay community to practice and delight in generosity and foster closer relationships of mutual care between bhikkhus and the lay community. A

recurrent vignette in the suttas is of the Buddha giving dhamma talks after having eaten at a meal invitation.

On the other hand, the Buddha was all too aware that conditions change such that invitations cannot be presumed to last indefinitely and that they can also be taken advantage of by unscrupulous or unmindful bhikkhus. A lay person's financial situation may change or a bhikkhu may ask more frequently than had been anticipated, for example. Depending on the broader conditions and the manner in which a bhikkhu asks for what they have been invited to ask for, a lay person could delight or be dismayed by such a request.

The rules that govern calling upon invitations seem to be trying to maximise the goodness of invitations whilst avoiding that which can go wrong are discussed below.

## Family

Many of the rules do not apply in situations where a bhikkhu is interacting with their relatives. It seems that it was understood that bonds of family kinship were maintained when a householder became a bhikkhu. Given that invitations are usually listed as a separate non-offence clause from interacting with relatives, the principle seems to be that invitations from relatives can be taken as presumed.

Indeed, in the origin story to **Pd 1**, the Buddha says to a bhikkhu who accepts food from the hands of an unrelated bhikkhuni:

- "Foolish man, a man and a woman who are unrelated don't know what's appropriate and inappropriate, what's good and bad, in dealing with each other."

Presumably related people, both men and women, do know "what's appropriate and inappropriate, what's good and bad, in dealing with each other." Of course one should pay attention to whether this is in fact true of any given relationship in a family.

## 'If it is by means of his own property'

*N.B. The below is purely conjecture*

Many of the rules have the enigmatic non-offence clause: 'If it is by means of his own property'.

Perhaps this means that whilst a bhikkhu may not buy or trade for food (**NP 18, 19, 20**) themselves, they are allowed to indirectly prompt stewards with whom donors have deposited funds to purchase requisites on their behalf (**NP10**).

Another possibility is that inheritance laws of the time were such that Bhikkhus were allowed to inherit property and collateral from their deceased parents (though not money), and that a bhikkhu could prompt whoever was stewarding these for the bhikkhu to purchase requisites on their behalf.

## **The Robe Season**

Many of the rules restricting a bhikkhu's contact with the lay people around receiving food are relaxed in the robe making season or when a bhikkhu is making a robe. Apparently attending meal invitations or visiting lay families was an important way of obtaining cloth and sewing requisites.

Roughly speaking the robe season is the lunar month following the end of the rains retreat. This can be extended by four lunar months for bhikkhus who live in a community that has a kathina ceremony, although bhikkhus can voluntarily relinquish these extended privileges if they wish.

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## **What the food rules do**

Bhikkhus receiving food by going on alms-round or accepting meal invitations seems simple enough. However, these acts bring with them plenty of opportunity for poorly behaved bhikkhus to conduct themselves in a way that impedes their own or other bhikkhu's comfort and spiritual progress and/ or cause the decline or non-appearance of faith in the lay people.

The food rules come together to provide a framework in which bhikkhus have reasonable opportunity to obtain the food they need to practise whilst guarding against misuse or make disrespectful use of the opportunities that come with leaving the monastery to obtain food.

The key features of this framework are such that:

- Bhikkhus live in daily dependence on the lay people
  - Bhikkhus eat only at the right time
  - Bhikkhus treat meal donors with respect
  - Bhikkhus do not misuse the opportunity to be out of the monastery before and after a meal offering
  - Bhikkhus make respectful and appropriate use of invitations for food requisites
  - Bhikkhus maintain samana sañña when obtaining food requisites
  - Bhikkhus avoid food waste
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## Daily dependence on the lay people

### How do the rules fit together to ensure that the bhikkhus live in dependence on the lay people and do not hoard food and tonics?

As discussed above, bhikkhus cannot dig (**Pc 10**) nor intentionally cut or kill living plants (**Pc 11**) and so they cannot grow or forage for their own food. Bhikkhus also do not use money or trade (**NP 18, 19, 20**) and so they cannot buy or barter for their food. They also cannot eat abandoned food that has not been properly offered (**Pc 40**), for example food left as offerings at a shrine or food thrown into the bin of a supermarket. The only option left is for bhikkhus to be given food by the lay people by being in contact with them on a daily basis.

The default means of a bhikkhu obtaining food is by going on alms-round. Otherwise bhikkhus get food by being invited to meal offerings. In both cases, bhikkhus can only receive food that has been properly offered (**Pc40**) and a healthy bhikkhu cannot make unsolicited invitations for specific foods (**Sk 37 and Pc 39**).

Bhikkhus should not store the food that they have offered to be eaten another day (**Pc 38**) nor keep it beyond the allowable life span for the various classes of food (**NP 23**). Bhikkhus should avoid receiving provisions that require further preparation to eat like raw meats and uncooked grains (e.g. **DN 2**). The Buddha did make an allowance for uncooked food and ingredients to be stored on monastery grounds (**Mv.VI.33.2**), but a bhikkhu should not cook these foods for themselves (**Mv.VI.17.3-5**).

A bhikkhu is allowed to eat at public alms-centres (like soup kitchens) but should avoid doing so on a regular basis. There is a prohibition against eating two days in a row in such a centre without having left the centre (**Pc 31**).

Taken together, these boundaries are such that if a bhikkhu wants to eat, they must be in daily contact with the lay people who take the initiative to feed them.

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**Pc 40** prohibits bhikkhus from eating unoffered food. Therefore bhikkhus must come into contact with lay people to eat:

The monks heard the complaints of those people, and the monks of few desires complained and criticised him, “How can this monk eat food that hasn’t been given?”

*Final ruling:*

**“If a monk eats food that has not been given, except for water and tooth cleaners, he commits an offence entailing confession.”**

As stated in the ruling, water and tooth cleaning sticks do not need to be offered.

Offered is defined as:

“[A non-bhikkhu] standing within arm’s reach of one [i.e. the bhikkhu] giving by body or by what is connected to his body or by releasing, he [the bhikkhu] receives it by body or by what is connected to his body—this is called “given” [i.e. offered].

The actual offence is in eating unoffered food, regardless of whether the bhikkhu thinks that it has been offered or not.

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**Sk 37** and **Pc 39** prohibit healthy bhikkhus from making unsolicited requests for food. In other words, lay people should be the ones taking the initiative in offering food and bhikkhus should accept whatever they are offered.

**Sk 37:**

At that time the monks from the group of six ate rice and bean curry that they had requested themselves. People complained and criticized them, “How can the Sakyan monastics eat rice and bean curry that they have requested themselves? Who doesn’t like nice food? Who doesn’t prefer tasty food?”

*Final ruling:*

**“When not sick, I will not request bean curry or rice for myself and then eat it,” this is how you should train.”**

‘Rice and bean curry’ seems to mean everyday foods.

**Pc 39:**

People complained and criticized them, “How can the Sakyan monastics eat fine foods that they have requested for themselves? Who doesn’t like nice food? Who doesn’t prefer tasty food?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk who is not sick asks for any of these kinds of fine foods for himself—that is, ghee, butter, oil, honey, syrup, fish, meat, milk, and curd—and then eats it, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

Perhaps finer staple foods could be extended to include all sorts of more expensive/ fancier foods that do not generally form a standard part of a given culture’s daily diet.

For both **Sk 37** and **Pc 39** a bhikkhu can ask for such foods:

- When they are sick, or to collect food for a sick bhikkhu

- From relatives
- From those who have have given a relevant invitation
- By means of his own property
- If there is an emergency (Sk 37 only)

There is also the following allowance:

- “There are wilderness roads where there’s little water and little food, where it’s not easy to travel without provisions. I allow you to look for provisions: whatever you need of rice, mung beans, black gram, salt, sugar, oil, and ghee.” (Mv.VI.34.21, the Meṇḍaka allowance)

This allowance doesn’t mention an exception to the rule prohibiting a bhikkhu from eating food they have themselves stored having received it on a previous day (PC 38). However there is no offence in a bhikkhu storing food that they don’t intend to eat, such that a bhikkhu could travel with a non-bhikkhu each carrying the other’s food.

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**Pc 31** prohibits a healthy bhikkhu from eating two days in a row in a public alms centre (like a soup kitchen) without having left the centre:

People complained and criticized them, “How can the Sakyan monastics stay on and on, eating alms at the guesthouse? We don’t prepare the alms-food just for them; we prepare it for everyone.”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk who is not sick eats more than one alms-meal at a public guesthouse, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

As such, bhikkhus could accept food from such centres if they are really struggling to obtain food otherwise, or if they pass such centres whilst on tudong.

There is no offence:

- if he is so sick that he cannot leave the centre sick;
  - if he is not sick and he eats once;
  - if he eats while coming or going, i.e. not on consecutive days;
  - if he eats after being invited by the owners;
  - if the food is prepared specifically for him;
  - if there is not as much as he needs, i.e. if the food is served, the bhikkhu doesn’t help themselves;
  - if it is anything apart from the five staple foods;
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**Pc 38** and **NP 23** prohibit bhikkhus from storing and consuming staple and non-staple foods and tonics beyond their lifespans (before noon that day and seven days respectively). **Pc 38** also states:

- “If he receives post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics for the purpose of food, he commits an offence of wrong conduct”.

This makes it clear that if a bhikkhu is to eat that day, they must come into contact with the lay community.

**Pc 38:**

The monks of few desires complained and criticized him, “How can Venerable Belaṭṭhasīsa eat food that he has stored?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk eats fresh or cooked food that he has stored, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

The context of the rule makes it clear that the offence is in a bhikkhu storing food overnight that is then eaten by a bhikkhu on a subsequent day. There seems to be no offence in a bhikkhu eating food that was relinquished on a previous day, stored by lay people overnight, then re-offered by a lay person.

A bhikkhu can also keep an item from breakfast to be eaten at lunch.

There is no offence:

- if he both stores and eats staple and/or non-staple foods during the right time

**NP 23:**

**NP 23** prohibits a bhikkhu from hoarding tonics.

People said, “They say Venerable Pilindavaccha has performed a superhuman feat, a wonder of supernormal power, for the king and his court!” Being delighted and gaining confidence in Pilindavaccha, they brought him the five tonics: ghee, butter, oil, honey, and syrup. Ordinarily, too, Pilindavaccha was getting the five tonics. Since he was getting so much, he gave it away to his followers, who ended up with an abundance of tonics. After filling up basins and water pots and setting these aside, they filled their water filters and bags and hung these in the windows. But the tonics were dripping, and the dwellings became infested with rats. When people walking about the dwellings saw this, they complained and criticized them, “These Sakyan monastics are hoarding things indoors, just like King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha.”

The monks heard the complaints of those people and the monks of few desires complained and criticized those monks, “How can these monks choose to live with such abundance?”



*Final ruling:*

**‘After being received, the tonics allowable for sick monks—that is, ghee, butter, oil, honey, and syrup—should be used from storage for at most seven days. If one uses them longer than that, one commits an offence entailing relinquishment and confession.’”**

Monastery attendants may store tonics for longer than seven days within a monastery. Bhikkhus should relinquish tonics before dawn of the seventh day after they were received. In many communities monastery attendants re-offer such relinquished items, though bhikkhus should bear in mind the spirit of not hoarding tonics.

There is no offence:

- if within seven days they have been determined, given away, lost, destroyed, burned, stolen, or taken on trust;
- if, without any desire for them, he gives them up to a person who is not fully ordained, and he then obtains them again and then uses them; if he is insane; if he is the first offender.

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## **Eating only in the right time**

**How do the rules fit together to ensure that the bhikkhus only eat staple and non-staple food during the right time, but still have enough to sustain them in the wrong time or times of illness?**

**Pc 37** makes it seem that in the time of the Buddha it was self-evident that samanās would only eat during the right time of the day (from dawn to noon). Eating in only one part of the day is a defining feature of the bhikkhu’s life.

However, the Buddha also recognised that bhikkhus may need something to keep them going in the wrong time:

- “Then as the Blessed One was alone in seclusion, this line of reasoning occurred to his mind: ‘At present the bhikkhus, afflicted by the autumn disease, bring up the coney they have drunk and the meals they have eaten. Because of this they are thin, wretched, unattractive, and pale, their bodies covered with veins. What if I were to allow medicine for them that would be both medicine and agreed to be medicine by the world, and serve as food, yet would not be considered gross food.’ “Then this thought occurred to him: ‘There are these five tonics—ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, sugar/molasses—that are both medicine and agreed to be medicine by the world, and serve as food yet would not be considered gross food... ‘Bhikkhus, I allow that the five tonics, having been accepted, be consumed at the right time or the wrong time (from noon to dawnrise).’” (**Mv.VI.1.2-5**)

The Buddha also allowed juices (**Mv.VI.35.6**) and medicines (**Mv.VI.3.1-8**) in the wrong time.

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**Pc 37** prohibits a bhikkhu from eating staple or non-staple food in the wrong time:

The monks from the group of six complained and criticized them, “How can those monks from the group of seventeen eat at the wrong time?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk eats fresh or cooked food at the wrong time, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

The permutations to this rule make clear that:

“If he receives post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics for the purpose of food, he commits an offence of wrong conduct. For every mouthful, he commits an offence of wrong conduct.”

However, the non-offence clauses make clear that there is no offence:

- if, when there is a reason, he uses post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics

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## Respect for Meal Donors

### How do the rules fit together to ensure that meal invitations are treated respectfully?

Offering a meal is often a big deal for a family or restaurant, so it’s important that bhikkhus treat such occasions with respect.

One thing that can go wrong is that bhikkhus turn up to a meal offering with little or no appetite. **Pc 33** tries to ensure that bhikkhus arrive hungry.

Bhikkhus can also offend those offering a meal by saying that they’re full then going off and eating more elsewhere. The meal offerer may take this as an insinuation that they were not able to provide enough food or that the food they offered was somehow not good enough. **Pc 35** tries to avoid this situation by not allowing monks to eat after a meal offering where they were fed enough (or at least where they turned down an offer of more food).

Sometimes lay supporters are overly generous to the point of offering more than they can really afford to. **Pd 3** tries to protect such families by limiting the amount of contact such families have with bhikkhus on alms-round. But even then, the Buddha allowed such families to continue to make invitations for meal offerings should they wish to.

Finally **Pd 4** makes it clear that bhikkhus have a responsibility to do what they can to safeguard donors bringing meal offerings to monasteries that are potentially dangerous to

get to. The implication seems to be that bhikkhus should be the ones running the risks of getting to and from the village by going on alms-round

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**Pc 33** prohibits a bhikkhu from eating staple food before attending a meal offering so that they turn up with an appetite. **Mv.VI.25.7** implies that a meal donor can offer bhikkhus both breakfast and lunch without a bhikkhu falling into offence. However, the Buddha came to recognize that there are circumstances when this rule should not apply as detailed below:

That poor worker complained and criticized them, “How could the venerables eat elsewhere when invited by me? Am I not able to give as much as they need?”

The monks heard the complaints of that worker, and the monks of few desires complained and criticized those monks, “How could those monks eat elsewhere when invited for a meal?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk eats a meal before another, except on an appropriate occasion, he commits an offence entailing confession. These are the appropriate occasions: he is sick; it is the robe-giving season; it is a time of making robes.’**”

This rule only applies to meals where staple food is being offered, in which case it is only an offence to eat staple foods beforehand. However, one would be wise not to fill up on non-staple foods before a meal offering nonetheless.

In this rule sick is defined as:

- “if he is not able to eat as much as he needs in one sitting, he may eat a meal before another.”

The robe-giving season and times of making a robe are discussed above. In such times, the needs of gathering cloth and sewing materials take precedence over the concerns of meal offerers (who would hopefully be understanding of the situation).

There is no offence:

- if he assigns his other meal to someone else and then eats elsewhere;
- if he eats the food from two or three invitational meals together;
- if he eats the meals in the same order that the invitations were received;
- if he is invited by a whole village and he eats anywhere in that village;
- if he is invited by a whole association and he eats anywhere that belongs to that association;
- if, when being invited, he says, “I’ll get almsfood;”

- if it is a regular meal invitation; if it is a meal for which lots are drawn; if it is a half-monthly meal; if it is on the observance day; if it is on the day after the observance day;
- if it is anything apart from the five cooked foods;

Whereas Pc 33 covered what a bhikkhu shouldn't eat *before* they attend a meal offering, **Pc 35** covers what a bhikkhu shouldn't eat *after* a meal offering. Put simply, if a bhikkhu is offered enough food at a meal offering to satisfy their hunger and turns down a further offer of food at that meal offering, then they shouldn't eat any more staple or non-staple food that day, unless it's leftover food:

That brahmin complained and criticized those monks, "How could the venerables eat in our house and afterwards eat elsewhere? Am I not able to give them as much as they need?"

The monks heard the complaints of that brahmin, and the monks of few desires complained and criticized those monks, "How could those monks finish their meal and refuse an invitation to eat more, and then eat elsewhere?"

*Final ruling:*

**'If a monk has finished his meal and refused an invitation to eat more, and then eats fresh or cooked food that is not left over, he commits an offence entailing confession.'**

This rule only applies if staple food is offered at the meal. As soon as a bhikkhu has eaten any of that staple food, "even what fits on the tip of a blade of grass" then as soon as they turn down an offer of further staple food the rule kicks in. Refusing an invitation to eat more is defined as:

- "there is eating; there is cooked food; it is brought forward within arm's reach; there is a refusal."

Whilst it would only be a full offence if further staple or non-staple food were eaten:

- If he receives post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics for the purpose of food, he commits an offence of wrong conduct. For every mouthful, he commits an offence of wrong conduct.

Remaining food in a bhikkhu's bowl can be made leftover (and therefore eligible to be eaten by other bhikkhus regardless of whether or not they have turned down a further offer of staple food at a meal offering) simply by that bhikkhu saying:

- 'I don't need any of this.'

There is no offence:

- if he eats it after having it made left over;
- if he receives it with the intention of having it made left over and then eating it;
- if he is taking food for the benefit of someone else;
- if he eats the leftovers from a sick person;
- if, when there is a reason, he uses post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics

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**Pd 3** covers the situation in which donors become overly generous beyond what they can really afford. A community can formally designate such donors as 'in training' that the bhikkhus should avoid calling upon uninvited. Even in this situation, the Buddha allowed the bhikkhus to accept meal invitations from 'in training' families.

At one time the Buddha was staying at Sāvattī in the Jeta Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Monastery. At that time in Sāvattī there was a family where both the husband and the wife had confidence. They were growing in faith, but declining in wealth. Whatever food they had in the morning, they gave to the monks. Sometimes they went without food.

People complained and criticized the monks, "How can the Sakyan monastics not have a sense of moderation in receiving offerings? After giving to them, these people sometimes go without."

The monks heard the complaints of those people and they told the Buddha. Soon afterwards the Buddha gave a teaching and addressed the monks: "Monks, if a family's faith is growing, but its wealth is declining, I allow you to designate it as 'in training', through a legal procedure consisting of one motion and one announcement.

*Final ruling:*

**'There are families that are designated as "in training". If a monk, without being sick and without first being invited, eats fresh or cooked food after personally receiving it from such a family, he must acknowledge it: "I have done a blameworthy and unsuitable thing that is to be acknowledged. I acknowledge it."'**

Although this rule is specifically about food, bhikkhus should be careful around accepting other requisites from such supporters.

There is no offence:

- if he has been invited;
- if he is sick;
- if he eats the leftovers from one who has been invited or who is sick;
- if other people's almsfood is prepared there;
- if they give after coming out from the house;

- if it is a regular meal invitation; if it is a meal for which lots are drawn; if it is a half-monthly meal; if it is on the observance day; if it is on the day after the observance day;
- if the family gives post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics, saying, "Use these when there's a reason;"

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**Pd 4** covers the situation in which it is dangerous for lay people to bring meal offerings to a monastery. The principle is that bhikkhus should do what they can to warn people of the dangers before offerings are made.

At one time when the Buddha was staying in the Sakyan country in the Banyan Tree Monastery at Kapilavatthu, the slaves of the Sakyans were rebelling. The Sakyan women wished to prepare a meal at the wilderness dwellings, but the slaves heard about this and infested the path. When the Sakyan women took various kinds of fine food and set out for a wilderness dwelling, the slaves emerged, and they robbed and raped those Sakyan women. Soon afterwards the Sakyan men came out, and they got hold of those criminals together with their loot. They then complained and criticized the monks, "How could they not inform that there are criminals staying near the monastery?"

*Final ruling:*

**'There are wilderness dwellings that are considered risky and dangerous. If a monk who is not sick, without first making an announcement about those dwellings, eats fresh or cooked food after personally receiving it inside that monastery, he must acknowledge it: "I have done a blameworthy and unsuitable thing that is to be acknowledged. I acknowledge it."'**

The way the rule is phrased, it seems that bhikkhus have a responsibility to proactively inform likely nearby donors of the dangers of bringing offerings to the dangerous to get to monastery. If donors say that they will come anyway, then the bhikkhus should try and find the potential criminals and tell them "People are coming here; go away."

If donors turn up unexpectedly with meal offerings without having been told about the dangers, then it is an offence for the bhikkhus to eat those offerings unless they are ill (i.e. they can't walk for alms).

This rule seems unrealistically strict. Perhaps the Buddha was trying to suggest that the onus is on the bhikkhus in a situation like this to go going on alms-round such that they are the ones having to deal with the dangers, not the lay people.

There is no offence:

- if there has been an announcement;
- if he is sick;
- if he eats the leftovers from where there has been an announcement or from one who is sick;
- if he receives the food outside the monastery and then eats it inside;

- if he eats a root, bark, a leaf, a flower, or a fruit originating in that monastery (i.e. if an unannounced visitor picks and offers these in the monastery);
- if, when there is a reason, he uses post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics;

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## Proper Use of Meal Invitations

### How do the rules fit together to make sure that unscrupulous bhikkhus do not misuse the opportunity to be away from the monastery on their way to and from meal invitations?

The suttas and the Vinaya suggest that alms-round and meal invitations have three main purposes:

- For bhikkhus to be fed
- As an opportunity for bhikkhus to be offered other requisites, especially robe making materials during the robe season
- As an opportunity for the lay people to practise generosity and receive instruction in the Dhamma

However, poorly behaved bhikkhus may take advantage of the time away from the monastery and other monastics for other purposes.

Sociable bhikkhus who enjoy the company of lay people might visit other families in the morning before or after a meal invitation. Whilst social interaction with lay folk can be harmless enough in itself, bhikkhus can quickly get drawn into worldly topics of discussion and worldly activities. Such a bhikkhu may also create inconvenience for other bhikkhus and the lay people by turning up to meal offerings late and by being difficult to find after the meal offering. **Pc 46** prevents a bhikkhu from doing this (without reason or without informing another available bhikkhu). **Pc 85** prevents a bhikkhu from visiting lay people in the village for the rest of the day, from noon to dawn (again without reason or without informing another available bhikkhu).

This rule may create impractical situations in which a bhikkhu has legitimate reasons to visit families or go elsewhere in the village before or after a meal invitation (for example to go to the dentist) but would seem to be prohibited from doing so. However the Buddha allowed a bhikkhu to visit the village at any time for any legitimate reason so long as they first inform another available bhikkhu. If no bhikkhu can be found to inform then the bhikkhu can still go. If there is an emergency a bhikkhu can go without having to make an effort to first inform another bhikkhu.

These rules are specifically about what a bhikkhu does before and after meal offerings. There is no equivalent rule covering alms-round leaving a potential loophole of bhikkhus using alms-round as an opportunity to visit families. Presumably the Buddha felt that it would

have been impractical to try and draw a line between going around the village collecting alms and visiting families.

Meal invitations are contexts in which stronger bonds can form between bhikkhus and the lay people. This may well be innocent and give rise to greater faith in the lay people and greater support for the Sangha and was allowed by the Buddha. However, groups of bhikkhus who wish to split off from the wider community may take advantage of meal offerings to find support for their group. **Pc 32** prevents this by prohibiting four or more bhikkhus from eating a meal to which they were specifically invited (four bhikkhus being the minimum number to formally start a schismatic group).

Instead, the Buddha allowed for types of meal invitations that are more transparent and reduce the potential for schismatics to gather support:

- “Now at that time Rajagaha was short of food. People were not able to provide a meal for the Community, but they wanted to provide a designated meal, an invitational meal, a lottery meal, a meal on a day of the waxing or waning of the moon, on uposatha days, and on the day after each uposatha day. They told this matter to the Blessed One. He said, ‘I allow, bhikkhus, a Community meal, a designated meal, an invitational meal, a lottery meal, a meal on a day of the waxing or waning of the moon, on an uposatha day, and on the day after an uposatha day.’”  
(**Cv.VI.21**)

The Vinaya texts do not give further definition of these types of invitation. Perhaps they can be understood as follows:

- **Community meals** - A donor invites a whole community of bhikkhus.
- **Designated meal** - A donor invites X number of bhikkhus and the community decide amongst themselves who will go.
- **Invitational meal** - A donor invites one, two or three named bhikkhus (more would be prohibited by **Pc 32**)
- **Lottery meal** - A donor invites X number of bhikkhus and the bhikkhus use some random selection method to decide who will go.
- **Periodic meal** - Any of the above four kinds of meals offered periodically.

That the Buddha seemed to want to avoid bhikkhus becoming too close to lay people through spending time together at meal invitations is further emphasized in **Pc 33**. Here the Buddha says:

- “Monks, I allow you to eat a meal before another [to which you have been invited] if you assign the other meal to someone else.

And, monks, this is how it should be assigned: ‘I give my expected meal to so-and-so.’”



Apparently the Buddha felt that it is adequate for the lay people to feed *any* bhikkhu at a meal invitation and not be attached to making offerings to particular bhikkhus.

However, it is not just lay people who may express favouritism through meal invitations. **Pd 2** prohibits bhikkhus from eating at a meal invitation where a bhikkhuni directs the lay people to feed the bhikkhus in line with her favouritism. Whilst this rule only applies only to bossy bhikkhunis, perhaps a general principle can be drawn that bhikkhus should also avoid the distribution of requisites based on favouritism.

Finally, really reprobate bhikkhus might try and use the various food rules to make well-behaved bhikkhus fall into offence out of spite. **Pc 36** prohibits a bhikkhu from tricking another well-behaved bhikkhu who earlier refused further food at a meal offering into eating food that has not been made left over, thereby breaking **Pc 35**. This rule covers quite a specific scenario, but perhaps one can extend the principle to all of the rules.

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**Pc 46** prohibits a bhikkhu from visiting families in the morning before or after a meal invitation.

At that time a family that was supporting Venerable Upananda the Sakyan had invited him to a meal, and they had invited other monks too. But since Upananda was visiting other families before that meal, the other monks said to that family, "Please give the meal."

"Please wait, Sirs, until Venerable Upananda arrives."

A second time ... A third time those monks said, "Please give the meal before it is too late."

"But we prepared the meal because of Venerable Upananda. Please wait until he arrives."

Then, after visiting those families, Upananda arrived late, and those monks did not eat as much as they had intended. The monks of few desires complained and criticized Upananda, "How can Venerable Upananda visit families first when invited to a meal?"

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When he heard that the Buddha had prohibited visiting families before the meal, Upananda visited them after the meal instead. As a consequence, he returned late to the monastery, and the food [offered at the monastery specifically for him] had to be returned to the donors.

The monks of few desires complained and criticized Upananda, "How can Venerable Upananda visit families after the meal?"

*Final ruling:*

**'If a monk who has been invited to a meal visits families beforehand or afterwards without informing an available monk, except on an appropriate occasion, he commits an offence entailing confession. These are the appropriate occasions: it is the robe-giving season; it is a time of making robes.'**

In the context of sick monks needing to visit families in the morning to seek medicines, the Buddha also made the following allowance in this rule:

- **“Monks, I allow you to visit families after informing an available monk.”**

If no available bhikkhu is available, then a bhikkhu can still go to the village in the morning (though presumably only if they have a reason the other bhikkhus would accept if they were available).

This rule is relaxed during the robe-season and any time a bhikkhu is making a robe.

There is no offence:

- if it is an appropriate occasion;
- if he enters after informing an available monk;
- if, when there is no available monk, he enters without informing anyone;
- if the road passes someone else’s house;
- if the road passes the vicinity of someone else’s house;
- if he is going between monasteries;
- if he is going to the dwelling place of nuns;
- if he is going to the dwelling place of the monastics of another religion;
- if he is returning to the monastery;
- if he is going to the house where he has been invited;
- if there is an emergency

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**Pc 32** prohibits bhikkhus from eating a meal to which four or more individual bhikkhus have been specifically invited.

At that time, because of his loss of material support and honour, Devadatta and his followers had to ask families repeatedly to get invited to meals. People complained and criticized him, “How can the Sakyan monastics repeatedly ask families to get invited to meals? Who doesn’t like nice food? Who doesn’t prefer tasty food?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk eats in a group, except on an appropriate occasion, he commits an offence entailing confession. These are the appropriate occasions: he is sick; it is the robe-giving season; it is a time of making robes; he is travelling; he is on a boat; it is a big occasion; it is a meal given by a monastic.’**

The various caveats describe situations in which it may be impractical or counter-productive to not eat these kinds of meals.

A big occasion is described as:

- “if two or three monks can get by on walking for alms, but not a group of four, he may eat in a group.”

For example, this may be the case whilst attending a large Sangha gathering, or whilst on a pilgrimage with many other bhikkhus.

Notably the offence relates to eating in a group of four or more *at a meal invitation*. There is no offence in any number of bhikkhus gathering to eat together after alms-round. This further emphasizes the principle that what is to be avoided is overly strong bonds with lay people, not between bhikkhus.

There is no offence:

- if it is an appropriate occasion;
- if two or three eat together;
- if they eat together after walking for alms;
- if it is a regular meal invitation;
- if it is a meal for which lots are drawn; if it is a half-monthly meal; if it is on the observance day; if it is on the day after the observance day;
- if it is anything apart from the five cooked foods

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**Pd 2** prohibits a bhikkhu from eating at a meal invitation where a bhikkhuni is directing the distribution of food based on favouritism and none of the bhikkhus has dismissed her.

At that time, when families invited monks to meals, the nuns from the group of six were directing people toward the monks from the group of six, saying, “Give curry here; give rice there.” The monks from the group of six ate as much as they wanted, but not so the other monks.

The monks of few desires complained and criticized them, “How could the monks from the group of six not restrain the nuns from giving directions?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘When monks eat by invitation to families, if a nun is there giving directions, saying, “Give bean curry here; give rice there,” then those monks should stop her: “Stop, Sister, while the monks are eating.” If not even a single monk addresses that nun in this way to stop her, they must acknowledge it: “We have done a blameworthy and unsuitable thing which is to be acknowledged. We acknowledge it.”’**

The rule defines favouritism as:

- Giving directions: saying, “Give bean curry here; give rice there,” according to friendship, according to companionship, according to who one is devoted to, according to being a co-student, according to being a co-pupil

The non-offence clauses make clear that there are situations when it is fine for a bhikkhuni to direct the distribution of food. It is only when her favouritism kicks in that the rule comes into effect.

Of course bhikkhus are also fully capable of distributing requisites based on favouritism. Perhaps we can draw a principle from this rule that all favouritism should be avoided.

There is no offence:

- if a nun does not give it herself, but gets someone else to give her own food;
- if a nun does not get someone else to give it, but she gives someone else's food herself;
- if a nun gets someone else to give what has not yet been given;
- if a nun gets someone else to give to someone who has not yet received anything;
- if a nun gets someone else to give equally to all;
- if a trainee nun is giving directions;
- if a novice nun is giving directions;
- if it is anything apart from the five kinds of cooked food;

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**Pc 36** prohibits a bhikkhu from tricking, out of spite, another well-behaved bhikkhu who earlier refused further food at a meal offering into eating food that has not been made left over, thereby breaking **Pc 35**.

The second monk told the monks what had happened, and the monks of few desires complained and criticized the other, "How could a monk invite another monk to eat food that's not left over, when the other has finished his meal and refused an invitation to eat more?"

*Final ruling:*

**'If a monk invites a monk, whom he knows has finished his meal and refused an invitation to eat more, to eat fresh or cooked food that is not left over, saying, "Here, monk, eat," aiming to criticize him, then when the other has eaten, he commits an offence entailing confession.'**

Unfortunately for the tricked bhikkhu they would still commit Pc 35 in this scenario as that rule states:

- "If it [the food] is not left over, and he does not perceive it as such, and he eats fresh or cooked food, he commits an offence entailing confession.

There is no offence:

- if he gives it after having it made left over;
- if he gives it, saying, "Have it made left over and then eat it;"
- if he gives it, saying, "Take this food for the benefit of someone else;"
- if he gives the leftovers from a sick person;

- if he gives, saying, “When there’s a reason, use these post-midday tonics,” “... use these seven-day tonics,” “... use these lifetime tonics”
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## **Invitations for Food Requisites**

### **How do the rules fit together to ensure that invitations for requisites are treated respectfully?**

Bhikkhus are allowed to accept invitations to ask for all kinds of requisites including all classes of food.

Invitations are opportunities for lay people to practise generosity and increase the security of bhikkhus with regards to requisites. However, much can go wrong in this area causing decline in the faith of the lay people. Just a few examples:

- **Change in the donor’s financial situation**

A donor’s financial situation may change such that they would no longer be able to fulfil invitations without difficulty. Unmindful bhikkhus don’t notice that the donor is politely trying to skirt around their previous invitation and make explicit requests within the terms of the original invitation. The donor doesn’t want to lose face and provides the items putting even more of a financial strain on their household.

- **Unrestrained requests**

A donor makes a general invitation to ask for requisites presuming that the bhikkhus will not ask for anything particularly extravagant. Later some unrestrained bhikkhus ask for an expensive, not really necessary item beyond what the donor had imagined they’d be asked for. The donor provides the item, but stops coming to the monastery nearly as often as they used to.

- **Pushy or overly frequent requests**

A donor is delighted to be asked for an item within the terms of an invitation that they made. However, they become irritated when a bhikkhu presses them to provide the item more quickly or more often than the donor can do without causing much inconvenience. The donor is careful not to make any further invitations.

The general principles guiding bhikkhus in how to make use of invitations are set out in **Pc 47, NP 10**, the Mendaka Allowance (**Mv.VI.34.21**), **Pc 34** and **Pd 3**.

**Pc 47** gives a framework in which invitations are made for specific items for a specific period (although the rule itself applies only to the five tonics). Bhikkhus should not ask for items outside of these terms.

**NP 10** and the Mendaka Allowance (**Mv.VI.34.21**) give a framework in which bhikkhus can make requests within the terms of an invitation in a way that does not pressure the donor and gives the donor space not to fulfil an invitation without losing face. Although these rules apply specifically to bhikkhus making requests from stewards as opposed to donors who directly make the invitations, it seems reasonable to extend the principles to all kinds of invitations.

The general principle is that Bhikkhus should not make any direct, demanding or overly persistent requests to a lay person who has made an invitation to provide the relevant requisite. Requests from bhikkhus therefore tend to be indirect and couched more in terms of letting whoever made an invitation know that they are now in need of the relevant requisite. As such, if a donor's financial situation or mind has changed since making an invitation, they can avoid providing the requisite without losing face.

**Pc 34** suggests that bhikkhus should be sensitive regarding the nature of what they are being offered. Bhikkhus should avoid making use of invitations to accept items that are freely offered if they know or suspect that the donor had another use for those items in mind, but are so full of faith that they offer the items anyway despite the inconvenience or upset this might cause elsewhere in the lay person's life.

However, the non-offence clauses to **Pc 34** and **Pd 3** make it clear that if lay people really do want to give such items, and make explicit invitations to do so, bhikkhus are free to accept them. At the end of the day lay people are free to make, and responsible for, whatever invitations they wish to make.

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**Pc 47** describes how lay people can make time period specific invitations for any or all of the five tonics to a community of bhikkhus. A bhikkhu should not ask for a tonic outside of the terms of such an invitation.

At that time the monks from the group of six were shabbily dressed and improper in appearance. Mahānāma criticized them, "Venerables, why are you shabbily dressed and improper in appearance? Shouldn't one who has gone forth be suitably dressed and proper in appearance?"

The monks from the group of six developed a grudge against Mahānāma. Thinking of ways to humiliate him, it occurred to them, "Mahānāma has invited the Sangha to ask for tonics. Let's ask him for ghee."

They then went to Mahānāma and said, "We need a doṇa measure of ghee."

"Please wait until tomorrow. People have gone to the cow-pen to get ghee. You may come and get it in the morning."

A second time and a third time the monks from the group of six said the same thing, and Mahānāma replied as before. They then said, "Why do you give an invitation if you don't wish to give?"

Mahānāma complained and criticized them, “How can they not wait for one day when asked?”

The monks heard the complaints of Mahānāma, and the monks of few desires complained and criticized those monks, “How could the monks from the group of six not wait for one day when asked by Mahānāma?”

*Final ruling:*

**‘A monk who is not sick may accept an invitation to ask for requisites for four months. If he accepts one beyond that limit, except if it is a further invitation or a permanent invitation, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

Invitations for tonics can be limited to particular items, to a particular time period, to both or to neither (i.e. a lifelong invitation for any medicine). The origin story suggests that this rule covers invitations made to a community of monks. Although such invitations can be accepted when a bhikkhu is not ill, they should only ask for such requisites *when* they are ill. Also, an ill bhikkhu should not ask for a tonic other than the one they need.

One of the non-offence clauses reads “if it is from those who have given an invitation”. Perhaps this suggests that invitations for tonics made to individual bhikkhus can be called upon regardless of whether the bhikkhu is ill. Having suggested this, presumably it remains a wise policy for all bhikkhus in all circumstances to respect the terms of all invitations unless there is real need. For example, it probably wouldn’t be appropriate to ask for new sandals just because a bhikkhu has stopped liking how they look.

There is no offence:

- if he asks for those tonics for which he was invited to ask;
- if he asks during the time period for which he was invited to ask;
- if he asks by informing, “You have invited me to ask for these tonics, but I need such-and-such a tonic;”
- if he asks by informing, “The time period during which you invited me to ask has passed, but I need tonics;”
- if it is from relatives;
- if it is from those who have given an invitation;
- if it is for the benefit of someone else;
- if it is by means of his own property

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**Pc 34** prohibits a bhikkhu from accepting, after having been invited, more than two or three bowlfuls of what has been prepared as gifts or provisions for a journey. The origin stories suggest that bhikkhus should be sensitive to whether accepting what they are being offered would cause inconvenience for the donor. Donors full of faith may feel they want to give such items regardless of any inconvenience. If inconvenience would be caused, a bhikkhu should be modest in the amount they accept.

Soon afterwards a certain caravan was ready to go south from Rājagaha. An alms-collecting monk went up to that caravan to get almsfood, and a lay follower gave him flour products. Vin-vn-ṭ.1233: Sattūti baddhasattuabaddhasattūnaṃ gahaṇaṃ, imināva tilādīni upalakkhitāni, “Sattu: the taking of flour, whether made into goods or not; sesame, etc., which are characterised by this.” After leaving, that monk told another monk, and he too was given flour products. And the same happened a third time. At that, all his provisions were gone.

That lay follower said to the other people in the caravan, “Sirs, please wait one day. I’ve given my provisions to the monks. I need to prepare more.”

“We can’t wait. The caravan is already on its way.” And they left.

After preparing provisions, that lay follower followed after the caravan, but he was robbed by thieves. People complained and criticized them, “How can the Sakyan monastics receive without moderation? This man gave to them, and then because he was following after the caravan he was robbed by thieves.”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk goes to a family and is invited to take pastries or baked goods, he may accept two or three bowlfuls if he wishes. If he accepts more than that, he commits an offence entailing confession. If he accepts two or three bowlfuls, he should take it away and share it with the monks. This is the proper procedure.’”**

The vinaya text defines pastries as whatever has been prepared as a gift and baked goods as whatever has been prepared as provisions for a journey.

The rule indicates that a bhikkhu who has received items originally intended as gifts or provisions for a journey should tell any other bhikkhu that he comes across not to visit that donor. This would hopefully avoid even further inconvenience to the donor who may continue to offer out of faith despite the inconvenience.

A bhikkhu should share any received items originally intended as gifts or provisions for a journey when he returns from alms-round.

There is no offence:

- if he accepts two or three bowlfuls;
- if he accepts less than two or three bowlfuls;
- if they give anything that has not been prepared as a gift or as provisions for a journey;
- if they give the leftovers from what was prepared as a gift or as provisions for a journey;
- if they give after the plans to travel have been cancelled;
- if it is from relatives;
- if it is from those who have given an invitation;
- if it is for the benefit of someone else;
- if it is by means of his own property



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## Maintaining Samana Sañña

### How do the rules fit together to ensure that Bhikkhus are perceived as samansa when obtaining food?

The lay people presented in the Vinaya texts were quick to notice and complain about behaviour of bhikkhus on alms-round or at meal invitations that they felt was unbecoming. As well as a number of sekhiya rules that outline the proper deportment and comportment of a bhikkhus whilst collecting food or being fed, a number of the other rules have a bearing on how a bhikkhu is perceived in relation to food.

Apparently in the time of the Buddha offering food from your hands into the hands of another was an act laden with meaning. It seems that those offering with their hands were placing themselves in a reverential and/ or deferential position relative to the person receiving with their hands. In effect, those offering were seen as householders. As such, the lay people didn't like seeing bhikkhus offering food with their hands to the wanderers of other sects (**Pc 41**) and neither the lay people nor the Buddha were please with bhikkhus who received food from the hands of an unrelated bhikkhu in a village (**Pd 1**). Notably in both cases the offence is with offering food from one's hands. There is no offence in placing the food on the floor and then the other person picking it up. Further, the Buddha did not seem to mind bhikkhus receiving food from the hands of members of other sects. **Pc 32** states that "if any kind of wanderer is making the meal, he [a bhikkhu] may eat in a group."

In brief, bhikkhus should not behave like householders nor treat bhikkhunis like householders.

Lay people were also unhappy if they felt bhikkhus were taking advantage of public alms-centres where food was being distributed freely to anyone in need (**Pc31**). Here the lay people complained:

"How can the Sakyan monastics stay on and on, eating alms at the guesthouse? We don't prepare the alms-food just for them; we prepare it for everyone."

There seemed to be no issue with bhikkhus occasionally using such centres, but overly frequent use caused the lay people to grumble.

Finally, a bhikkhu should avoid becoming intoxicated (**Pc 51**). Although in the origin story to this rule it is the lay people that ply Venerable Sāgata with alcohol, it seems reasonable to conclude that at least part of its purpose is to prevent the conduct of bhikkhus deteriorating in front of lay people in an uninspiring fashion.

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**Pc 41** prohibits a bhikkhu from handing food with their hands to ordained members of other religions.

They then went to the Buddha, bowed, sat down, and said, “Venerable Sir, these monastics of other religions want to disparage the Buddha, the Teaching, and the Sangha. It would be good if the monks didn’t personally give anything to the monastics of other religions.”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk personally gives fresh or cooked food to a naked ascetic, to a male wanderer, or to a female wanderer, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

To offer food with their hands to wanderers of other sects would be placing the bhikkhu in the social position of a deferential householder.

As the non-offence clauses make clear, the Buddha had no issue with bhikkhus sharing food with people ordained in other religions if he does not give it directly with his hands. Indeed, the suttas contain many accounts of bhikkhus peacefully interacting with the wanderers of other sects and brahmins. As such, this rule seems to be aimed at maintaining a sense that bhikkhus should not place themselves in positions where they appear to be reverential or deferential to people ordained in other religions. Interactions that wouldn’t be perceived in that way seem to be fine.

There is no offence:

- if he does not give, but has it given;
- if he gives by placing it near the person;
- if he gives ointments for external use

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**Pd 1** prohibits bhikkhus from receiving food directly from the hands of an unrelated bhikkhuni in a village area, which implies during alms-round.

At one time when the Buddha was staying at Sāvattḥī in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Monastery, a certain nun was returning from alms round in Sāvattḥī. She saw a monk and said to him, “Here, Venerable, please take some almsfood.”

Saying, “Alright, Sister,” he took everything. But because the time for eating was coming to an end, she was not able to go for alms, and she missed her meal.

The next day and the following day the same thing happened again. On the fourth day that nun was walking along a street, trembling. A wealthy merchant coming by carriage in the opposite direction saw her and shouted out, “Watch out, Venerable!” As she stepped aside, she collapsed right there.

The merchant asked her for forgiveness: “Forgive me, Venerable, since you fell because of me.”

“I didn’t fall because of you, but because I’m weak.”

“But why are you so weak?”

The nun told him what had happened. He then brought her to his house and gave her a meal. Afterwards he complained and criticized the monks, “How can the venerables receive food directly from a nun? It’s difficult for women to get material support.”

The monks heard the complaints of that merchant, and the monks of few desires complained and criticized that monk, “How could a monk receive food directly from a nun?” ... “Is it true, monk, that you did this?”

“It’s true, Sir.”

“Is she a relative of yours?”

“No, Sir.”

“Foolish man, a man and a woman who are unrelated don’t know what’s appropriate and inappropriate, what’s good and bad, in dealing with each other. So how could you do this? This will affect people’s confidence ...”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk receives fresh or cooked food directly from an unrelated nun who has entered an inhabited area, and then eats it, he must acknowledge it: “I have done a blameworthy and unsuitable thing that is to be acknowledged. I acknowledge it.”’**

This rule seems to present two principles.

The man’s complaint in the origin story starts with, “How can the venerables receive food directly from a nun?” It is the perception around giving with one’s hand that is the issue. Here the issue seems to be that the householder felt that a bhikkhu should not allow a bhikkhuni to subordinate herself in this scenario as though she were a householder. Indeed, the non-offence clauses make clear that there was no problem if a bhikkhuni gave not with her hands but by placing the food nearby the bhikkhu, or getting someone else to give to the bhikkhu. That there is also no offence if such an exchange occurs away from the village, i.e. out of sight of the lay people, further suggests that the Buddha was sensitive to how direct exchanges of food involving bhikkhus and bhikkhunis were perceived by the lay people.

The householder continued, “It’s difficult for women to get material support” and the Buddha eventually announced,

- “Foolish man, a man and a woman who are unrelated don’t know what’s appropriate and inappropriate, what’s good and bad, in dealing with each other.”

The second principle seems to be that bhikkhus should not accept from those who are struggling to obtain the basic requisites themselves, although the actual offence pertains

only to bhikkhunis. A bhikkhu, for example, may want to avoid situations in which a hungry looking homeless person offers them some food or a ragged looking bhikkhu offers them a new robe.

There is no offence:

- if she is related;
  - if she gets someone else to give it and does not give it herself;
  - if she gives by placing it near;
  - if it is inside a monastery;
  - if it is at the dwelling place of nuns;
  - if it is at the dwelling place of the monastics of another religion;
  - if it is on returning to the monastery;
  - if she gives after carrying it out of the village;
  - if she gives post-midday tonics, seven-day tonics, or lifetime tonics, saying, "Use these when there's a reason"
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**Pc 51** prohibits a bhikkhu from consuming any alcohol whatsoever.

And the lay followers prepared Kāpotikā (liquor) in house after house. Then, when they saw that Sāgata had entered the town for alms, they said to him, "Drink, Venerable, drink the Kāpotikā liquor." Sāgata drank that liquor in house after house, and as he was leaving town, he collapsed at the town gate.

Just then the Buddha, together with a number of monks, was also leaving town, and he saw Sāgata at the town gate. He said, "Monks, pick up Sāgata." Saying, "Yes, Sir," they led him to the monastery, where they put him down with his head toward the Buddha. But Sāgata turned around, pointing his feet toward the Buddha.

The Buddha said, "Previously, monks, wasn't Sāgata respectful and deferential toward me?"

"Yes."

"But is he now?"

"Certainly not."

"Just recently, didn't Sāgata fight the Ambatittha dragon?"

"Yes."

"Would he now be able to fight a dragon?"

"Certainly not."

"So, monks, should one drink that which makes one senseless?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

“It’s not suitable, monks, it’s not proper for Sāgata, it’s not worthy of a monastic, it’s not allowable, it’s not to be done. How could Sāgata drink alcoholic drinks? This will affect people’s confidence ...”

*Final ruling:*

**‘If a monk drinks this or that kind of alcoholic drink, he commits an offence entailing confession.’”**

The rule definitions make clear that a bhikkhu commits this offence regardless of whether or not they knew what they were about to consume contains alcohol and “even if he drinks even what fits on the tip of a blade of grass.” Inevitably there will be situations where a bhikkhu unwittingly eats a liquor chocolate (or whatever) by accident, but the general principle seems to be that a bhikkhu should pay attention to what they’re eating or drinking. Such a bhikkhu is unlikely to take a second bite or swig of an alcoholic food item or drink and so avoid becoming truly drunk and unrestrained.

The non-offence clauses make clear that it is ok for a bhikkhu to consume food in which alcohol was added but has been cooked off.

There is no offence:

- if he drinks a non-alcoholic drink that has the colour, smell, or taste of an alcoholic drink;
- if it is cooked in a bean curry;
- if it is cooked with meat;
- if it is cooked with oil;
- if it is in syrup from emblic myrobalan;
- if he drinks a drink that is normally alcoholic, but which is actually without alcohol

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## **Avoiding Food Waste**

In general the food rules restrict a bhikkhu’s access to food. Nonetheless, a bhikkhu may receive more than they need on alms-round or from meal invitations. The Buddha seemed to be concerned that excess received food did not go to waste, primarily by allowing bhikkhus to eat the leftover food of other bhikkhus. The following is from the origin story to **Pc 35**:

Soon afterwards the monks were bringing back fine almsfood for the sick monks. But because the sick monks were unable to eat as much as they had intended, the monks threw the leftovers away. When the Buddha heard the loud sound of crows cawing, he asked Venerable Ānanda, “Ānanda, why is there this loud sound of crows cawing?” Ānanda told him what had happened, and the Buddha said,

“But Ānanda, don’t the monks eat the leftovers from those who are sick?”

“No, Sir.”

Soon afterwards the Buddha gave a teaching and addressed the monks:

**“Monks, I allow you to eat the leftovers both from those who are sick and from those who are not sick.”**

And, monks, this is how you make food left over: ‘I don’t need of any of this.’

**Pd 3** normally prohibits a bhikkhu from eating food from ‘in training families’ (those whose faith is increasing but whose financial situation is declining) on alms-round. A bhikkhu can receive food from ‘in training’ families if the family invites them for a meal or if the bhikkhu is sick and struggling to find food elsewhere. The non-offence clauses allow a healthy bhikkhu who has not been invited by the ‘in training’ family to eat the leftovers from one who has been invited by such a family or who is sick and received food from such a family.

**Pd 4** normally prohibits a bhikkhu from eating unannounced food in a dangerous wilderness monastery unless they are sick. The non-offence clauses allow a healthy bhikkhu to eat both left over announced food and left over unannounced food that was received by a sick bhikkhu.

**Pc 34** normally prohibits a bhikkhu from accepting more than three bowls of food that had been prepared with the intention of being used as gifts or as provisions for a journey. However, the non-offence clauses allow a bhikkhu to receive unlimited leftovers from what was prepared as gifts or as provisions for a journey.

**Pc 39** normally prohibits a healthy bhikkhu from eating finer staple foods that they have requested for themselves. The non-offence clauses allow a bhikkhu to eat such food that was asked for when he was sick even if he is no longer sick. This may well be the case if the bhikkhu received ghee, butter/ curds, oil, honey or molasses as food that could then be kept for seven days as tonics. A healthy bhikkhu can also eat the leftovers from one who was able to receive finer staple food because they were sick.

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## **Ajahn Thanissaro's rule summaries:**

NP 23 - Keeping any of the five tonics - ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, or sugar/ molasses- for more than seven days, unless one determines to use them only externally.

Pc 31 - Eating food obtained from the same public alms centre two days running - without leaving in the interim - unless one is too ill to leave the centre.

Pc 32 - Eating a meal to which four or more individual bhikkhus have been specifically invited - except on special occasions.

Pc 33 - Eating a meal before going to another meal to which one was invited, or accepting an invitation to one meal and eating elsewhere instead, except when one is ill or during the time of giving cloth or making robes.

Pc 34 - Accepting more than three bowlfuls of food that the donors prepared for their own use as presents or provisions for a journey.

Pc 35 - Eating staple or non-staple food that is not leftover, after having earlier in the day finished a meal during which one turned down an offer to eat further staple food.

Pc 36 - Deliberately tricking another bhikkhu into breaking Pc 35, in hopes of finding fault with him.

Pc 37 - Eating staple or non-staple food in the period from noon to the next dawnrise.

Pc 38 - Eating food that has been received and stored [by a bhikkhu (inserted)] on a previous day.

Pc 39 - Eating finer staple foods, after having asked for them for one's own sake, unless one is ill.

Pc 40 - Eating food that has not been formally given.

Pc 41 - Handing food or medicine to a person ordained in another religion.

Pc 46 - Visiting lay families - without having informed an available bhikkhu - before or after a meal to which one has been invited - except during the robes season or anytime one is making a robe .

Pc 47 When a supporter has made an offer to supply medicines to the community: asking them for medicine outside of the terms of the offer when one is not ill.

Pc 51 - Consuming alcohol regardless of whether one is aware that it is alcohol

Pd 1 - Eating staple or non-staple food after having accepted it from the hand of an unrelated bhikkhuni in a village area.

Pd 2 - Eating staple food accepted at a meal to which one has been invited and where a bhikkhuni has given directions, based on favouritism, as to which bhikkhu should get which food, and none of the bhikkhus has dismissed her.

Pd 3 - Eating staple or non-staple food after accepting it - when one is neither ill nor invited - at the residence of a family formally designated as 'in training'.

Pd 4 - Eating an unannounced gift of staple or non-staple food after accepting it in a dangerous wilderness lodging when one is not ill.

Sk 37 - Not being ill, not to eat rice or bean curry requested for one's own sake.