

Rules for Foreign Meditators at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery

At Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, there is one basic rule of conduct, which embodies the spirit and essence of all the other rules that follow: to act properly at all times, showing respect and consideration for one another. As the Buddha encouraged his followers, let us live “in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”¹

Arrival/Departure

1. Pa-Auk Forest Monastery is divided into the Upper, Middle and Lower Monasteries. Upon arrival and departure, foreigners must register at the following locations: male residents – the Registration Office for Foreigners in the Upper Monastery; female residents – the Lower Monastery Office.
2. If you plan to be away from your kuṭi (meditator’s hut) for more than one week, you must leave it ready for anyone else to come and occupy: male residents – wash and clean what you have used, lock your kuṭi and return all borrowed items, including your kuṭi key, to the Sangha Office (in the Library building); female residents – wash and clean what you have used, lock your kuṭi and return your kuṭi key to the Lower Monastery Office. (Both male and female residents: You must return your kuṭi key even if the kuṭi is your own offering to the monastery.)
3. Do not leave the grounds overnight with the key to your kuṭi or take any Sangha items with you, such as eating utensils, umbrella, books, or tapes.

¹ M.31.6 *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta* (The Shorter Discourse in Gosinga)

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4. Do not leave your personal belongings behind. Please make prior arrangements with a fellow resident to store those items that you wish to keep and inform the Sangha Office of those items that you do not wish to keep.

Meditation

1. Everyone must attend the group sittings at their respective meditation hall (unless their meditation teacher has given them permission to meditate in their own kuṭi). Group sittings are held at the following times: 4:00-5:30 am, 7:30-9:00 am, 1:00-2:30 pm, 3:30-5:00 pm and 6:00-7:30 pm. A wooden sounding block is struck at 3:30 am, 7:15 am, 12:45 pm and 5:45 pm to notify meditators of the upcoming sitting.
2. Meditators are encouraged to continue their practice during unstructured hours and personal time, whether standing, walking, sitting, lying down, etc. Those who wish to continue sitting in the meditation hall are welcome to do so during this time.
3. New arrivals should come for an interview with their meditation teacher every day (or make a suitable arrangement that accords with their meditation teacher's schedule).
4. Meditators must practise according to the instructions of their meditation teacher.
5. Out of respect to your teacher, please describe your meditation experiences with absolute honesty. The report should be brief and to the point, and should reflect your personal experience.
6. Do not discuss your meditation practice with others or speak about your attainments. Questions about your meditation practice should be directed to your meditation teacher only.
7. Practise mindfulness. Move slowly and quietly when entering and leaving the meditation hall, while going to your seat, sitting down and in making any other

movements. Please be considerate of others. Do not bring extraneous books, bottles, plastic bags, etc. into the meditation hall. Do not make noise when handling items such as keys or your meditation manual. Although the need for silence applies particularly during scheduled meditation hours, you should make an effort to observe it at all times, as there are meditators who practise beyond the scheduled hours.

8. Do not talk in or around the meditation hall. If you must talk, then do so quietly, away from the meditation hall or out on the veranda where you cannot be heard. Loud talk, noisy whispering and, in particular, laughter can be distracting to other meditators. Remember that even after the formal meditation period has ended, others may still be meditating. Please be respectful of their efforts.
9. Do not use strong smelling balms, beeping clocks or noisy watches in the meditation hall.

Kuṭis

1. Please accept the kuṭi that has been assigned to you. Any problems with your kuṭi should be addressed to the Registration Office for Foreigners or the Lower Monastery Office. Do not change kuṭis without permission.
2. When you leave your kuṭi during the day, remember to lock the door and windows. Make sure your valuables are stored in a safe place (or leave them at the Lower Monastery Office).
3. If you wish to repair or renovate your kuṭi (at your own expense and supervision), please discuss this with U Candimā or the monastery kappiya (steward) in the Lower Monastery Office.

General Conduct

1. Smoking, drinking, chewing tobacco or betel nut, and the use of recreational drugs are strictly forbidden. If it is

discovered that you have been using any of these items, you will be asked to leave.

2. Please be respectful of the environment: do not litter; do not waste water or electricity.
3. Do not talk while waiting in the piṇḍapāta line for alms. Such talk may be disturbing to others in the piṇḍapāta line and is not in accord with the spirit of piṇḍapāta.
4. During almsround, do not accept more food than you expect to eat.
5. Please do not feed the dogs or chickens within the confines of the monastery.
6. The following items are allowable after midday: hot and cold water; fresh strained fruit juice diluted with cold water; sugar or jaggery diluted with hot or cold water; herbal teas. To counteract sickness/weakness/tiredness, you may take butter, ghee, oil, honey, sugar and allowable medicines.
7. The following items are not allowable after midday: solid food; boiled or otherwise processed juices made from fruits or vegetables; coffee, tea, Milo, milk, soft drinks, chocolate, cocoa, etc.
8. If you go barefoot, according to the *Vinaya*, you should wash your feet before entering Sangha buildings.
9. Between 7:00 and 7:30 am, residents should clean their kuṭis and sweep the surrounding paths and areas. Those who wish may join the local Sangha between 5:00 and 6:00 pm in cleaning the meditation hall, sweeping public paths and walkways, cleaning public toilets, etc.
10. Male residents may not receive women in their quarters without direct permission from U Candimā or the person in charge of the Registration Office for Foreigners. The same rule applies to female residents receiving men. Conversations between men and women must be conducted in public places. A single woman should not approach a monk without another man nearby who understands what is being said. Although two or more

women may approach a single monk, they may not do so inside a kuṭi or other enclosed area.

11. Yoga, Chi Gong and other acceptable forms of exercise may be done in private, but not in public. Do not teach such exercises to others without permission from the Sayadaw.
12. Speak only when necessary. The rest of the time you should keep noble silence and attend solely to your meditation practice.
13. In General: Please be mindful in thought, speech and action; avoid finding fault with others; practise contentment and tolerance. When misunderstandings or doubts arise, please discuss them with your meditation teacher.

Seclusion

1. Silence and seclusion are important aids in developing concentration. For your own benefit, it is best not to leave the monastery grounds unless it is really necessary. If you need to leave, check first with your meditation teacher. If he approves your request, please inform U Candimā or the person in charge of the Registration Office for Foreigners. If you plan to be away overnight or longer, please also inform the appropriate office when, where and how you will be travelling, and when you expect to return.
2. Please avoid mingling with villagers and other local people outside the monastery.

Immigration

1. If your visa (or visa extension) was obtained with a Pa-Auk Sponsorship Letter, this means you have agreed to stay at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery for the visa's duration. To use an entry/meditation visa for sightseeing and tourism would constitute an abuse of the privilege granted to you by the Sponsorship Letter and could create problems for the monastery. (For all other types of travel, please see Rule 1 in the previous section.)

Theravāda Monks, Novices and 10-Precept Nuns

1. Sīla: Monastics must observe their respective *sīla*: for Theravāda monks (bhikkhus) – the 227 rules of the *Pātimokkha* and all other *Vinaya* rules; for novices (sāmaṇeras) – the 10 precepts, 75 *Sekhiya* (training) rules and all other *Vinaya* rules that apply; for Theravāda nuns – the 10 precepts.
2. Unallowable Items: Theravāda monks, novices and 10-precept nuns are not permitted to use, handle or possess money in any form, including: cash, credit cards, cheques, electronic transactions, gold, silver, jewellery, etc. Monastics who carry their own funds must relinquish them PERMANENTLY before taking up residence in the monastery. There are no exceptions to this rule.
3. Food: No food is to be eaten after midday. If you are sick, you are allowed the five tonics: butter, ghee, oil, honey and sugar, as well as the appropriate medicines.

Theravāda Monks

1. Nissaya: If you have less than 5 *vassa*, you must take *nissaya* with a Theravāda monk who has at least 10 *vassa* and is knowledgeable.
2. Food Storage: Bhikkhus may not store food overnight or keep tonics longer than seven days. Before the eighth dawn, all tonics must be relinquished to a layperson, nun or novice, without expecting to have them returned. To avoid waste, the best procedure is to take the exact amount you need for seven days. Be aware that medicines that contain oil or sugar are also subject to the seven-day rule.
3. Incoming Parcels: If a package arrives for you that might contain food, tonics or medicine, DO NOT TOUCH IT until it has been opened and examined by a layman or novice. He will then personally offer you those items that are allowable (at that time) and keep the remainder (to offer at the appropriate time). Be aware that if you touch any of the

above items BEFORE they have been offered to you, you will have to PERMANENTLY RELINQUISH them.

4. Ordination and Food Storage: This rule applies to both laymen and the novices who are planning to take higher ordination. If food, tonics or medicine are in your possession at the time of ordination, DO NOT TOUCH any of these items until after they have been offered to you by either a layman or novice. See Rule 3 (directly above) for details on how these items should be offered.

Theravāda Monks and Novices

1. Unallowable items: Requisite items obtained from unallowable sources (e.g., items that you or another Theravāda monk has bought) must be permanently relinquished before taking up residence in the monastery. There are no exceptions to this rule.
2. Requisites: Do not request requisite items from anyone other than a blood relative or someone who has previously made an invitation to you. An exception to this rule may be made when requesting medicine if you are ill.
3. Piṇḍapāta: Foreign monks must collect piṇḍapāta at the Piṇḍapātasāla. If you want to go for piṇḍapāta in the village, you must first receive permission from the Sayadaw.
4. Piṇḍapāta Etiquette: Foreign monks are privileged guests and are invited to receive alms ahead of even the most senior Myanmar bhikkhus. In order to show respect, please arrive at the Piṇḍapātasāla on time. If you are late, do not rush to the front of the piṇḍapāta line. If the line has already begun to move and you are unable to reach the foreign monk's section, you should enter the Myanmar line according to your *vassa* age. Do not cut in front of senior bhikkhus. If Mahāyāna monks are late, they may not enter the Theravāda line, but should wait until it has passed. ON NO ACCOUNT should anyone enter the line beyond the last turn (at the sign).

5. Ordination: A candidate for ordination as a bhikkhu must study and thoroughly familiarize himself with the 227 rules of the *Pātimokkha* before taking ordination. A Mahāyāna monk must relinquish his Mahāyāna ordination completely before taking Theravāda ordination.

Mahāyāna Bhikshunīs, 8/10-Precept Nuns and Laywomen

1. Pindapāta Etiquette: The queuing order for the piṇḍapāta line is according to *vassa* for Mahāyāna bhikshunīs and according to age for 8/10-precept nuns and laywomen. Once the line has begun to move, bhikshunīs and 8/10-precept nuns may not enter the line in front of other bhikshunīs or nuns, but only at the end of the nun's queue.
2. Walking: Women should not walk alone between the Upper and Lower Monasteries. Please make arrangements to always have at least one female companion with you.
3. Interviews: A single woman should never be alone with a male teacher. If you are alone, please excuse yourself and find a companion or come at another time.
4. Decorum: During interviews, please maintain a proper distance from the male interpreter/teacher and observe modesty in all ways.

Laymen and Laywomen

1. Precepts: For the sake of communal harmony, as well as for your own practice, please memorise the eight precepts and observe them strictly. Everyone is encouraged to take the precepts formally upon arrival, and at the appointed time once a week. For Buddhists, the taking of the precepts is compulsory. Exception to the sixth precept is given only in cases of severe gastric problems.
2. Attire: Please dress modestly at all times.
Men – no bare shoulders, no bare calves, no bare knees; no shorts, no sleeveless shirts, vests or undershirts; no ripped or otherwise improper attire. Shirts must always be worn.

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Women – no bare shoulders, midriff, calves or knees; no short skirts, no shorts, no sleeveless shirts or blouses; no thin, transparent, tight, revealing, brightly coloured or otherwise improper attire.

3. Piṇḍapāta Etiquette: Please do not wear unclean or unsuitable attire (shorts, undershirts, etc.) to piṇḍapāta.
4. Requisites: You are responsible for providing yourself with a bowl, mosquito net, blankets and other necessities. You may go to the market twice a month, after receiving permission from your teacher.
5. Dāna: If you wish to offer a meal, you may arrange it through the Lower Monastery Office.

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