



Illustration by
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Practicing Devotion to a Lama

Always show deference for the robes. No matter who is wearing them, what you think of them or how close you are to them they, represent nothing less than the Buddha. You cannot show too much respect.

Don't use coarse speech in their presence or in a shrine room. There shouldn't be carelessness in your manner and all your attention should be towards the Lama. Take the moment to be aware of your behavior.

There should be no physical contact between a monk and nun and the opposite sex, for instance: handshakes, hugs, kissing, etc. (excluding children). This should not be taken to an extreme but the idea is to respect their vows.

Lamas should always be the honored guest; have the best seat, sit the highest, have special cups and dishes available and the choicest foods. Take every opportunity to be generous. They should be served first and the food given to them, not handed to them to serve themselves. They should be treated as though the Buddha himself were at your table...offering them food before you take anything for yourself. Western manners are similar for honored and special guests.

Your speech should be honorific, as much as there is in English. Do not call them by their first name. The shortest form should be: "Lama-La."

Even if you have become very close to the Lama your behavior should teach others to maintain a public formality. If you show an informal attitude then others will as well and miss the opportunity to practice respect and devotion to the Lama. There are foundation teachings on the benefit of this practice of Devotion to the Guru.

At teachings or even at social gatherings, one should stand when a Lama enters and attend to what they need. Stand quietly with hands folded respectfully until they have taken their seat. After they have done their prostrations to the shrine, if they do them, and sit down THEN you should do prostrations to the shrine and Lama who represents the Buddha's teachings. There are wonderful teachings on imagining the teacher as the Buddha himself and you as a Bodhisattva listening to His words in a pure realm. Make the occasion special and extraordinary in anycase.

Never stretch out your legs towards the shrine and Lama. They should never see the soles of your feet.

Never lay a Dharma book, picture, prayers, mala or religious articles on the floor. Never lick your fingers while turning the pages of Dharma books; it is considered bad form and negative karma.

The robes represent the teachings of the Buddha embodied in the Lama. Because that manifestation of the Doctrine is standing in front of us, we should take the opportunity to practice taking refuge to that symbol through first prostrations. As they speak we should hear their words as the Buddha's speech. They are the compassionate companions who have devoted their lives to our well being and we should not lose the opportunity to repay this commitment with respect and devotion.