

# Fifty Stanzas Of Guru Devotion

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{written in the first century B.C.E.}

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## Homage to the Bhagavan Vajrasattva!

Bhagavan is one of the many epithets used for an Enlightened Being, a Buddha. The Tibetan term for it, "Chom-dan-da (bCom-ldan 'das)", is etymologies as follows. "Chom" means to overcome. Buddhas have overcome both the obstacles preventing Liberation and those preventing Omniscience. The former include the delusions or moral and mental defilements (klesa), and the ignorance of grasping for true independent existence, as well as the seeds of all of these. The latter refers to the instincts of both these defilements and this ignorance. "Dan" means to possess. Buddhas possess all good qualities, having completed their accumulations of both merit and insight resulting in their Form and Wisdom Bodies respectively. "Da" means to pass beyond. Buddhas have passed beyond samsāra, the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth with suffering due to karma and delusions. The hidden meaning of Vajrasattva, Dor-je sem-pa (rDo-rje sems-dpa') in Tibetan, can also be discovered from its etymology. "Dor-je" means indestructible diamond-lightening. Here it refers to the diamond-hard wisdom of the non-duality of (1) the mind that has bare perception of Void-ness, experienced with a feeling of Great Bliss and (2) the Void-ness that is the object of this mind. "Sem-pa" means the one with a heroic mind. It signifies someone who has himself abandoned all delusions, ignorance and their instincts and has the heroic mind that is ready to help others in all possible ways. Thus Bhagavan Vajrasattva refers to the state of Vajradhara, the form Buddha takes in the tantras. As the way to attain his enlightened state is through Guru-devotion, Ashvaghosha begins his work with this homage.

(1)

**Bowing in the proper way to the lotus feet of my Guru who is the cause for me to attain the state of a glorious Vajrasattva, I shall condense and explain in brief what has been said in many stainless tantric texts about Guru devotion. Therefore listen with respect.**

(2)

**All the Buddhas of the past, present and future, residing in every land in the ten directions, have paid homage to the Tantric Masters from whom they have received the highest empowerments. Is there need to mention that you should too?**

[In general there are three types of empowerments or initiations, casual, pathway and resultant. The first is to ripen your mind stream, the second is an actual path of practice through which to gain Enlightenment and the third is into the actual liberated state of Buddhahood. Everyone who ever has or will attain Enlightenment does so through receiving these highest empowerments from their Tantric Masters.]

(3)

**Three times each day with supreme faith you must show the respect you have for your guru who teaches you the Tantric path, by pressing your palms together, offering a mandala as well as flowers and prostrating touching your head to his feet.**

[As a disciple you must regard your Guru as an Enlightened Being. Even if from his own point of view he is not enlightened and you, his disciple, have gained Buddhahood before him, you must still show him respect and pay homage. For instance, Maitreya, the fifth and next Buddha of the thousand of this world age, who now presides over Tusita Buddha-field, became enlightened before his Guru, Shakyamuni Buddha. To demonstrate respect for his Guru, Maitreya has a stupa or reliquary monument on his forehead. Likewise Avalokitesvara, the incarnation of the compassion of all the Buddhas, is crowned in his eleven-headed aspect with the head of his Guru, Amitabha Buddha, the one who presides over Sukhavati Buddha-field.

This learning from a Guru should not be like killing a deer to extract its musk and then discarding its corpse. Even after attaining Enlightenment you must still continue to honor your Guru who made all your achievements possible.]

(4)

**Those who hold ordination vows, if your Guru is a layman or your junior, prostrate in public while facing such things as his scriptural texts in order to avoid worldly scorn. But in your mind prostrate to your Guru.**

(5)

**As for serving your Guru and showing him respect, such as obeying what he says, standing up when he comes and showing him to his seat - these should be done even by those with ordination vows whose Gurus are laymen or their junior. But in public avoid prostrating and unorthodox actions such as washing his feet.**

[One of the ordination rules is that monks and nuns should not prostrate to laymen. This is taken to mean that in public you should not show this type of respect for your lay Guru as it might cause misunderstanding and scorn among those who casually observe. It is better to prostrate facing scriptural texts or Buddha images near him, while directing your reverence in your mind to your Guru.

For example, the great masters Candragomi and Candrakirti often debated with one another. The former was layman, the latter a monk. One day Candrakirti invited Candragomi to his monastery. He wanted all the monks to form a procession, but the lay Master objected that the local townspeople would find it strange. Candrakirti told him not to worry. He placed a statue of Manjusri on a high throne and in the procession had a monk carry it directly before Candragomi. All the people thought that this ceremony was in honor of Manjusri, the manifestation of the Buddhas' wisdom, and thus the monk avoided any bad feelings.

Although restraint and indirect means of showing respect are often called for out of consideration for others, in private disciple must follow all the proper procedures of Guru-devotion no matter what the status of his Guru may be. However general respect, such as rising when he comes, must be shown at all times.

On his own part, however, a Guru should always be humble never arrogant or pompous thinking himself great and worthy of honor. P'a-ra Rinpoche, one of the most realized disciples of the Senior and Junior Tutors of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, always kept a scriptural text by his seat. Explaining why, he said that when people would come to visit him and prostrated, at least they would gain some merit from showing respect to the scriptures since he himself had no qualifications.]

(6)

**In order for the words of honor of neither the Guru nor the disciple to degenerate, there must be a mutual examination beforehand (to determine if each can) brave a Guru-disciple relationship.**

[At tantric empowerments many sets of vows are taken never to abandon the practices and procedures essential for spiritual progress. The disciple pledges his word of honor never to transgress these vows, such as always to visualize his Guru as inseparable from the meditational deity into whose practice he has just been initiated. Such deities, as well as the Gurus, share the same enlightened nature as all the Buddhas, differing only in the physical aspect they manifest.

The Guru, too, has previously pledged his word of honor never to disclose the tantric secrets to those who are unable to understand and keep them. Just as the milk of a lion should not be kept in a clay pot, so the profound and powerful methods of the tantra should not be entrusted to those who are not ready. If, having taken such vows, either the Guru or disciple should allow his word of honor to degenerate, it will be impossible for either to attain any of his goals and very serious unfortunate consequences will follow for both. Therefore it is extremely important for there to be a mutual examination between the Guru and disciple before they enter a formal relationship.

In ancient times in order to receive an empowerment a potential disciple would have to ask over a period of three years. An initiation was not at all something casual. By making the disciple wait so long, a Guru impressed on him the seriousness of entering the tantric path, tested his commitment and ensured that he was properly prepared. Often a Guru would make a disciple wait even longer before agreeing to teach him anything. He would repeatedly test his character and only when he had understood him well would he accept him as his disciple.

The disciple also must test his potential Guru and determine if he is fully qualified. He must be confident that he will be able to devote himself fully to this Master. Before entering a formal Guru-disciple relationship, you have complete freedom of choice. But once such a bond has been established, these teachings on Guru-devotion must be followed with total commitment.]

(7)

**A disciple with sense should not accept as his Guru someone who lacks compassion or who is anger-some, vicious or arrogant, possessive, undisciplined or boasts of his knowledge.**

(8)

**A Guru should be stable in his actions, cultivated in his speech, wise, patient and honest. He should neither conceal his shortcomings nor pretend to possess qualities he lacks. He should be an expert in the meanings of the tantra and in its ritual procedures of medicine and turning back obstacles. Also he should have loving compassion and a complete knowledge of the scriptures.**

(9)

**He should have full expertise in both ten fields, skill in the drawing of mandalas, full knowledge of how to explain the tantra, supreme pure faith and his senses fully under control.**

[In general a Mahayana Guru should have the following ten qualities:

- (1) Discipline as a result of his mastery of the training in the higher discipline of moral self-control;
- (2) Mental quiescence from his training in higher concentration;
- (3) Pacification of all delusions and obstacles from his training in higher wisdom;
- (4) More knowledge than his disciple in the subject to be taught;
- (5) Enthusiastic perseverance and joy in teaching;
- (6) A treasure of scriptural knowledge;
- (7) Insight into and an understanding of Void-ness;
- (8) Skill in presenting the teachings;
- (9) Great compassion; and
- (10) No reluctance to teach and work for his disciples regardless of their level of intelligence.

A Tantric Master must have even more good qualities, as listed in the text. Most important is that he be an extremely stable person, with his body, speech and mind totally under control.

There are two sets of ten fields in which the Guru must be a complete master. The ten inner ones are essential for teaching the yoga and anuttarayoga classes of tantra, which stress the importance of purifying mainly internal mental activities. These are expertise in:

- (1) Visualizing wheels of protection and eliminating obstacles;
- (2) Preparing and consecrating protection knots and amulets to be worn around the neck;
- (3) Conferring the vase and secret empowerments, planting the seeds for attaining a Buddha's Form Bodies;
- (4) Conferring the wisdom and word empowerments, planting the seeds for attaining a Buddha's Wisdom Bodies;
- (5) Separating the enemies for Dharma from their own protectors;
- (6) Making offerings, such as sculptured tormas;
- (7) Reciting mantras, both verbally and mentally, that is visualizing them revolving around his heart;
- (8) Performing wrathful ritual procedures for forcefully catching the attention of the meditational deities and protectors;
- (9) Consecrating images and statues; and
- (10) Making mandala offerings, performing the meditational practices (sadhanas) and taking self-initiations.

The ten external qualities are required for teaching the kriya and carya classes of tantra, which stress the importance of purifying mainly external activities in connection with internal mental processes. These are expertise in:

- (1) Drawing, constructing and visualizing the mandala abodes of the meditational deities;
- (2) Maintaining the different states of single-minded concentration (samádhi);
- (3) Executing the hand gestures (mudras);
- (4) Performing the ritual dances;
- (5) Sitting in the full meditational position;
- (6) Reciting what is appropriate to these two classes of tantra;
- (7) Making fire offerings;
- (8) Making the various other offerings;

(9) Performing the rituals of (a) pacification of disputes, famine and disease, (b) increase of life span, knowledge and wealth, (c) power to influence others and (d) wrathful elimination of demonic forces and interferences; and

(10) invoking meditational deities and dissolving them back into their appropriate places.

It is not sufficient for a Tantric Master merely to know how to perform the superficial actions of these above rituals. He must actually be able to do them. For instance, when consecrating an image of a meditational deity, he must be able to invoke the actual deity and place it in the image, not merely recite the words of the accompanying text.

If you take as your Guru a Master with all these qualifications and powers, and he accepts you as his disciple, you must devote yourself fully to him. Although it is possible that out of delusion you might disagree with your Guru, never show him disrespect or despise him from the depth of your heart.]

(10)

**Having become the disciple of such a protecting (Guru), should you then despise him from your heart, you will reap continual suffering as if you had disparaged all the Buddhas.**

(11)

**If you are so foolish as to despise your Guru, you will contract contagious diseases and those caused by harmful spirits. You will die (a horrible death) caused by demons, plagues or poison.**

(12)

**You will be killed by wicked kings or fire, by poisonous snakes, water, witches or bandits, by harmful spirits or savages, and then be reborn in a hell.**

(13)

**Never disturb your Guru's mind. Should you be foolish and happen to do this, you will surely boil in hell.**

(14)

**Whatever fearful hells have been taught, such as Avici, the Hell of Uninterrupted Pain, it is clearly explained that those who disparage their Guru will have to remain there a very long time.**

(15)

**Therefore exert yourself whole-heartedly never to belittle your Tantric Master who makes no display of his great wisdom and virtues.**

As your Guru is a Buddha, despising him is the same as hating all who are Enlightened. The state of Buddhahood is one of complete Liberation from all suffering, ignorance, delusions and obstacles. It is the attainment of all good qualities, complete perfection and total Omniscience. Despising or belittling such a state by disparaging your Guru, you cast yourself in the opposite direction from happiness and freedom. Having contempt for wisdom and Liberation, you gain instead bondage and pain. Such tormented states are what have been described in all the scriptures as the various hells.

Thus there are great dangers in entering a Guru-disciple relationship. Your Tantric Master may be the one who has given you empowerments, a tantric discourse or even instruction on mandala drawing. As he has no pretension and is never boastful, he will

always hide his good qualities and never hesitate to admit shortcomings. If you do not recognize such traits as indications of his perfection, humility and skillful means, you may make the serious mistake of belittling or seeing faults in him. Having established a formal bond with this Guru and through him entered a pathway to Buddhahood, you have then cast yourself into terrible suffering if from the depth of your heart you break this link. Therefore you must have great awareness, for although Guru devotion will elevate you to Full Enlightenment, a breach of it will be your downfall.

(16)

**If from a lack of awareness you have shown disrespect to your Guru, reverently present an offering to him and seek his forgiveness. Then in the future such harm as plagues will not befall you.**

[As a Buddha, a Guru will never hold a grudge, showing him disrespect cannot possibly offend or hurt him. The only one you harm is yourself. Therefore if you repent and beg his forgiveness, he will accept what you offer with great compassion. Then by the force of your faith, respect and devotion, you need not experience great misfortune.

The beneficial effects of Guru-devotion and the dire consequences of a breach of it are not rewards and punishments from a godly Guru. They follow directly from cause and effect. Your Guru is the focal point for your practices leading to Enlightenment. The more devoted you are towards the state of perfection he represents, the closer you come toward this goal. Despising him can only take you further away into darkness and ignorance.]

(17)

**It has been taught that for the Guru to whom you have pledged your word of honor to visualize as one with your meditational deity, you should willingly sacrifice your wife, children and even your life, although these are not easy to give away. Is there need to mention your fleeting wealth?**

(18)

**Such practice of offering can confer even Buddhahood on a zealous disciple in his very lifetime, which otherwise might be difficult to attain even in countless millions of eons.**

(19)

**Always keep your word of honor. Always make offerings to the Enlightened Ones. Always make offerings also to your Guru, for he is the same as all the Buddhas.**

(20)

**Those who wish to attain the inexhaustible state of Buddha's Wisdom Body should give to their Guru whatever they themselves find pleasing, from the most trifling objects to those of the best quality.**

(21)

**Giving to your Guru is the same as making continual offerings to all the Buddhas. From such giving much merit is gathered. From such collection comes the supreme powerful attainment of Buddhahood.**

[Making offerings to your Guru as the representative of all Buddhas is extremely important. Such generosity is symbolic of your total dedication to achieve Buddhahood. If because of miserliness or selfishness you hold back from giving what you find the most pleasing and offer only what you do not want for yourself, how can you promise to give

yourself totally for the work of benefiting all sentient beings be anything but a farce? Without any attachment you must be willing to sacrifice everything for your attainment of Enlightenment through your Guru. The offering mandala symbolizes this dedication of your body, speech and mind, and even the entire universe for this goal.

If you are poor like Je-Tzun Milarepa, it does not matter that you do not have riches to offer. What is important is your state of mind and willingness to sacrifice anything for the sake of your Guru, Enlightenment and all sentient beings. The best offering, then, is of your practice. But if you have wealth, you must never hesitate to use it for gaining merit. Therefore making offerings is not so that your Guru can become rich. On his part the Guru should regard such offerings as a tiger would look at grass. The point is to benefit yourself and ultimately everyone else by your total dedication. Great merit is gathered from such practice, resulting in your attainment of the Form Body of a Buddha. If you can see the void nature, that is the lack of true independent existence of yourself, your Guru and what you offer, then you accumulate at the same time the insight that will result in your achievement of a Buddha's Wisdom Body. Thus the supreme powerful attainment of Buddhahood comes from making offerings to your Guru.]

(22)

**Therefore, a disciple with the good qualities of compassion, generosity, moral self-control and patience should never regard as different his Guru and the Buddha Vajradhara.**

[Your Guru, the meditational deities and Vajradhara, the form Buddha assumes in the tantras, are all the same in nature. They are like a single person in a drama changing masks and costumes and playing different roles. The same is true if you have many Gurus. You must regard them all as Buddha, differing only in the face he wears.

The ability to see your Guru as not different from Buddha Vajradhara depends on your motivation. If you have developed an Enlightened Motive of Bodhicitta, you are striving to become a Buddha yourself in order to be fully able to benefit others. The stronger this motive, the more the thought of Enlightenment comes to pervade your mind completely. Thinking only of Enlightenment and ways to achieve it, you will automatically be able to see your Guru in terms of this state because nothing else will be in your mind.

The more you wish to attain Enlightenment, the clearer you see the necessity for your Guru to be a Buddha. Thus with the strong compassion of wishing others never to suffer, you can dedicate yourself easily and with joy. Through the practice of the perfections of generosity, the discipline of moral self-control, patience and so forth, all centered around your Guru, you will then be able to attain his state.]

(23)

**If you should never tread on even your Guru's shadow, because the fearsome consequences are the same as destroying a stupa, is there need to mention never stepping on or over his shoes or seat, sitting in his place or riding his mount?**

[A stupa is a monument in which relics of a Buddha are kept. Like your Guru, it serves as a focal point for your veneration and devotion to attaining Buddhahood. Destroying one and stepping on your Guru's shadow, then, are both acts of extreme disregard and disrespect for the state of Enlightenment. Therefore the fearsome consequences of both are the same.

If you treat your Guru's shoes, seat and the horse or vehicle he rides as ordinary objects, and presume to use them yourself or step on them, your arrogant attitude can only become a major hindrance to your attainment of Buddhahood.]

(24)

**A disciple having great sense should obey the words of his Guru joyfully and with enthusiasm. If you lack the knowledge or ability to do what he says, explain in polite words why you cannot comply.**

(25)

**It is from your Guru that powerful attainments, higher rebirth and happiness come. Therefore make a wholehearted effort never to transgress your Guru's advice.**

[Obeying your Guru's orders and following his advice are more important than making countless offerings. Entrusting yourself fully to him, he will guide you along the path to Enlightenment. If with haughty pride and stubborn closed-mindedness you think you know what is best for your own spiritual progress, how will you be able to learn anything from him?

This does not mean that you should become a mindless slave or that your Guru can take undue advantage of you. As you are aiming for the complete freedom of Enlightenment, there must also be freedom in the means of attaining it. You should never follow your Guru's wishes simply because you feel obligated or forced to obey. Rather try to understand his intentions and aim. Your Guru will only tell you to do what is beneficial for yourself and others. What he asks may be difficult and its immediate purpose may not be obvious, but you should receive his advice joyfully and with deep gratitude for his concern with your welfare.

Examine yourself honestly to see if you can follow his wishes. If there is no way in which you can comply, do not be rude or arrogant. Explain politely and with extreme humility what the difficulty is. Your Guru will not be unreasonable; as a Buddha he is filled with great compassion.

If, however, you can avoid transgressing his advice, this is best. Following the spiritual path as he directs, you can attain not only the ordinary powerful attainments (siddhi) of extra-physical and mental powers common to non-Buddhists, but depending on your motivation, a higher rebirth, the happiness of Liberation or the supreme powerful attainment of Buddhahood.]

(26)

**(Guard) your Guru's belongings as you would your own life. Treat even your Guru's beloved (family) with the same (respect you show) for him. (Have affectionate regard for) those closely around him as if they were your own dearest kin. Single-mindedly think (in this way) at all times.**

[Before Drom-ton-pa studied with Atisa, he served another Guru in K'am. During the day he carried his master's children on his back, spun wool with his hands and softened leather with his feet. At night he tended his animals. He did all this with great joy, and although he was only a layman, Atisa appointed him to receive all the teachings he brought to Tibet.

When Je-Tzun Milarepa was serving Marpa, he would throw himself in the mud and beg his Guru's wife to sit on him while she milked the cows. You must have such respect and devotion for everyone close to your Guru. Remember that he is a Buddha with equal

regard and love for all. If you are jealous of his family, attendants or other disciples, if you are possessive of his time and attention, this clearly shows that you do not sincerely believe him to be a Buddha.]

(27)

**Never sit on the same bed or seat as your Guru, nor walk ahead of him. At teachings do not wear your hair in a topknot, a hat, shoes or any weapons. Never touch a seat before he sits down or if he happens to sit on the ground. Do not place your hands proudly on your hips or wring them before him.**

(28)

**Never sit or recline while your Guru is standing nor lie while he is sitting. Always be ready to stand up and serve him skillfully in an excellent manner.**

(29)

**In the presence of your Guru never do such things as spit, cough or sneeze without covering your head. Never stretch your legs when at your seat, nor walk back and forth without reason before him. And never argue.**

(30)

**Never massage or rub your limbs. Do not sing, dance or play musical instruments for other than religious purposes. And never chatter idly or speak in excess or too loudly within the range of your Guru's hearing.**

[All these examples of improper behavior are prohibited not because your Guru will be offended: Buddhas cannot be affected by rudeness. It is because you wish to attain his state of perfection, and have great respect for this achievement, that you should not act in a coarse, arrogant or inconsiderate manner.

The customs outlined here are not meant to be unnatural and cruel restrictions. If you are sitting cross-legged at a discourse and this becomes uncomfortable, you are certainly permitted to lift your knees or shift your position. But to sit casually with your feet stretched out towards your Guru reflects a flippant, disrespectful attitude. Receiving a discourse is not like attending a sporting event. It is not for your amusement, but for your attainment of Enlightenment that you are with your Guru. Therefore you must show him great respect and always be alert to his needs and comfort.]

(31)

**When your Guru enters the room get up from your seat and bow your head slightly. Sit in his presence respectfully. At night or at rivers or on dangerous paths, with your Guru's permission you may walk before him.**

(32)

**In the direct sight of his Guru, a disciple with sense should not sit with his body twisted around, or leaning casually against pillars and such. Never crack your knuckles, play with your fingers or clean your nails.**

[You must always be considerate of your Guru. As he is the one who will show you the way to complete freedom from all your suffering and how to be able to liberate others, he is more precious than anything else. If he is in danger, you must protect him. Do not sit back idly and proudly as if you owned the entire world.]

(33)

**When washing your Guru's feet or his body, drying, massaging or shaving him, precede such actions with three prostrations and at their conclusion do the same. Then attend to yourself as much as you like.**

[If you have the opportunity to wash your Guru, shave his head or in anyway attend to his comfort, you will be able to gain a great deal of merit. Thus all such actions must be done with the greatest respect. Never selfishly think of your own needs first. Your primary concern is with your Guru and your attainment of his enlightened state. Only afterwards should you care for yourself.]

(34)

**Should you need to address your Guru by his name, add the title "Your Presence" after it. To generate respect for him in others, further honorific may also be used.**

[Once when Je Tzong-ka-pa was giving a discourse to a few disciples in a retreat house above where Sera Monastery later was built, Ka-drub Je came to meet him for the first time. He asked a nun living nearby where the Venerable Tzong-ka-pa could be found and she ran off without saying a word. She rinsed her mouth, lit a stick of incense and then replied, "My gracious, venerable Abbot, His Presence Je Tzong-ka-pa resides over there."

If your Guru's name is Rin-chen dor-je, you may refer to him when speaking to others as 'my spiritual master, His Presence, the holy, venerable Rin-chen dor-je.' At least some respectful title must be used. It is extremely crude, arrogant and grating to address, refer to or write about your Guru merely using his personal name. Your Guru is not your childhood playmate, but a Buddha leading you to Enlightenment.]

(35)

**When asking for your Guru's advice, first announce why you have come. With palms pressed together at your heart, listen to what he tells you without letting your mind wander about. Then when he has spoken you should reply, "I shall do exactly as you have said."**

(36)

**After doing what your Guru has told you, report what has happened in polite, gentle words. Should you yawn or cough, clear your throat or laugh in his presence, cover your mouth with your hand.**

[Never waste your Guru's time by coming to him merely for idle chatter. After making prostration three times, announce the purpose of your visit directly. Ask your questions in a straightforward manner, with extreme politeness and humility.

If your Guru gives you advice or asks you to do something, examine yourself to see if you can comply. If you cannot, then excuse yourself and explain why. Do not promise to do something and then go back on your word. The consequences of such disobedience and negligence are very serious. But if you can comply, tell him you will do what he says. Keep him informed of your progress and always report in the end what you have done.]

(37)

**If you wish to receive a certain teaching, request three times with your palms pressed together while kneeling before him on your right knee. Then at his discourse sit humbly with respect, wearing appropriate clothing that is neat and clean, without ornaments, jewelry or cosmetics.**

(38)

**Whatever you do to serve your Guru or show him respect should never be done with an arrogant mind. Instead you should ever be like a newlywed bride, timid, bashful and very subdued.**

(39)

**In the presence of the Guru who teaches you the path, stop acting in a conceited, coquettish manner. As for boasting to others what you have done for your Guru, examine your conscience and discard all such acts.**

[It is improper for a Guru to offer to teach without being specifically requested. He teaches to benefit his disciples, not to display his knowledge. Therefore it is important to make such requests in the proper, formal manner. However, do not try to pressure your Guru into teaching you something too advanced for your level. He will judge when you are ready. Do not haughtily order him to do what you think is best.

When attending his discourse, remember it is not a social event. The only reason you are there is to learn how to attain Enlightenment for the benefit of others. You have not come to show off your wealth or beauty to others, so do not adorn yourself like a peacock. Also be aware and considerate of the social customs of those around you. Never dress in a manner offensive to others that would cause their minds to become disturbed. Be neat, clean and unostentatious, sitting with great respect for your Guru.

When serving your Guru, do not be childish. Whatever service you do or offerings you make are for you to attain Enlightenment through its merit. Do not do such things so that you can boast to others how pious and devoted you are. No merit is to be gained from arrogance. Do not serve your Guru with haughty pride as though you were doing him a great favor. He does not need your help; he is a Buddha. But you need his help very much, for by allowing you to perform small tasks he is giving you a great opportunity to gather merit. Therefore remember his kindness in allowing you to serve him.

Also do not act in a coquettish manner, flirting with your Guru as though you could win his favor in this way. Your Guru is a Buddha with equal loving compassion for all. He will not be impressed by your frivolous behavior.]

(40)

**If you are requested to perform a consecration, an initiation into mandala or a fire offering ceremony or to gather disciples and deliver a discourse, you may not do so if your Guru resides in that area, unless you receive his prior permission.**

(41)

**Whatever offerings you receive from performing such rites as the consecration known as Opening the Eyes, you should present all these to your Guru. Once he has taken a token portion, you may use the rest for whatever you like.**

(42)

**In the presence of his Guru a disciple should not act as a Guru to his own disciples and they should not act towards him as their Guru. Therefore before your own Guru stop your disciples from showing you respect such as rising when you come and making prostration.**

[Even when you have become a Guru yourself, you must still practice great devotion to your Guru. If you are requested by your own disciples to give an empowerment, a discourse and so forth, and your own Guru resides in the same area, you should ask him

first if he can give this in your place. If your Guru cannot, then only with his approval may you perform such ceremonies yourself.

If your Guru lives far away, you should write to him for permission to accept a disciple or give any teachings. You should not act independently with pride as if you were a great and holy Master, but always in deference to his advice. Especially in the presence of your Guru you must not allow your own disciples to show you respect. You must at all times be humble. Therefore any offerings you receive should be taken to your Guru as a sign of your respect. He will take a token and then give them back. He has no greed for your offerings, but you must always have him foremost in your mind.

Once Ra-chung-pa was living in the same town as his Guru, Je-Tzun Milarepa. As he was noted for being very handsome, many devotees came to see him and presented him with a great deal of offerings. He thought, "If I have been given so many offerings, then surely my guru has received at least three times as much."

He went to his Master and said, "Didn't we receive a lot of offerings today. Let us share them with all the other disciples." But his Guru showed him that all he had been given that day was a piece of meat, a cheesecake and some butter. Ra-chung-pa felt very embarrassed that he had received more offerings than his Guru and told him he would leave town immediately.

He asked permission to go to Lhasa to see the famous Buddha image. Je-Tzung Milarepa replied, "If you see your Guru as a Buddha, what use is it to look at a statue?"

He then asked if he could visit the ancient monastery at Sam-ya. Again his Guru answered, "When looking at the spectacle of your mind, what use is it to see a building?" A third time he requested to make a pilgrimage to Lhodrag where his Guru's Master, the great Marpa had lived. His Guru only said, "If you meditate on my Master's teachings, what good is it to see his house?"

Je-Tzun Milarepa told him not to try to do too many things, but to go into meditational retreat in order to gain more confidence in his practice. And this is what Ra-chung-pa did, for he realized that is not proper for a disciple to receive more respect and offerings than his Guru.]

(43)

**Whenever you make an offering to your Guru or whenever your Guru presents you with something, a disciple with sense will present and receive this using both hands and with his head slightly bent.**

(44)

**Be diligent in all your actions, alert and mindful never to forget your word of honor. If fellow-disciples transgress, correct each other in a friendly manner.**

[All disciples who receive tantric empowerment from the same Guru become "Vajra" brothers and sisters. You should have great affection and regard among you, helping each other stay on the path. Never be jealous, proud or compete with your fellow disciples. By correcting each other you please your Guru and everyone benefits. If there is unity and harmony among Dharma friends, this will spread into the lives of others around you.]

(45)

**If because of sickness you are physically unable to bow to your Guru and must do what normally would be prohibited, even without his explicit permission, there will be no unfortunate consequences if you have a virtuous mind.**

[Guru-devotion is not a fanatic practice. If you are ill and your Guru enters the room, you need not stand up and prostrate. If you have something to present, but are too weak to extend your hand, it is permissible even for your Guru to bend down to your bed and receive it. This is not showing disrespect for your Guru, because in your heart you wish to do what is proper but your physical condition prevents you. However, there are certain things for which there are no exceptions. You must never disturb your Guru's mind, boast, be arrogant or disrespectful no matter what the circumstances.]

(46)

**What need is there to say much more. Do what ever pleases your Guru and avoid doing anything he would not like. Be diligent in both of these.**

(47)

**"Powerful attainments follow from doing what your Guru likes." This has been said by the Buddha Vajradhara himself. Knowing this, try to please your Guru fully with all the actions of your body, speech and mind.**

[Everyone wants only happiness and never to experience any suffering. The source of these achievements is your Guru, for he shows you the path to Buddhahood and, by his living example as an Enlightened Being, inspires you to travel this path yourself. If you realize this, you will understand the importance of single-minded Guru-devotion and you will do only what pleases him. As the source of these teachings is the Buddha Vajradhara, you should put aside all doubts. Follow them with full conviction and you can attain Enlightenment.

What pleases your Guru, then, is your practice leading to Buddhahood. Thus your motivation for pleasing him should be Bodhicitta and your wish to help others. You should not be prompted by worldly desires such as seeking your Guru's praise or fatherly approval. Moreover, if your Guru scolds you, examine your feelings. If you have not intentionally belittled him or sought to annoy him, and if you have not responded to his scolding with anger or accusations that he is unenlightened, then you have not committed a breach of Guru-devotion. In such a situation it is totally inappropriate to become depressed, despondent anymore. To do so is an indication of your strong ego-grasping which causes you to take his criticism too personally.

Marpa scolded and even beat Je-Tzun Milarepa many times. This was not because he personally disliked him, but because out of compassion he saw the need for skillful means that were forceful. Thus if your Guru is wrathful with you try to see this as a method he is using to tame your mind and lead you to Enlightenment. As a Buddha, how could he possibly hate you?]

(48)

**After a disciple has taken refuge in the Triple Gem and developed a pure enlightened motive, he should be given this text to take to his heart how to abandon his own arrogant self-will and follow in his Guru's footsteps along the Graded Path to Enlightenment.**

(49)

**By studying the prerequisite training of Guru-devotion and the Graded Path, common to both the sutra and tantra, you will become a suitable vessel to hold the pure Dharma. You may then be given such teachings as tantra. After receiving the**

**proper empowerments, recite out loud the fourteen root vows and take them sincerely to your heart.**

[If as a disciple you have pure thoughts to benefit others, are humble, not arrogant or selfish and have no rough manners, your Guru will first teach you what it means to take refuge. He will demonstrate the stability, direction and meaning your life can be given by going for protection from all your suffering and confusion to the Triple Gem of the Buddhas, their teachings of Dharma and the Sangha community of those who realize them. He will then guide you gradually through the Three Principal Paths of renunciation, an Enlightened Motive of Bodhicitta and a correct understanding of Voidness. On the firm foundation of your refuge and Bodhicitta vows, you can then be given these detailed teachings on Guru-devotion.

This text was written to be recited daily so that disciples will not forget the important points of how to conduct themselves with their Guru. When your Master has prepared you in this way for the tantric teachings, and you have become a suitable vessel, then it is proper for him to initiate you. He will then explain the tantric vows and you must be sure never to transgress them. Buddha Vajradhara has promised that even if you do no meditation but keep purely for sixteen lifetimes the root tantric vows, you will thereby accumulate enough merit and eliminate sufficient obstacles to attain enlightenment. After receiving initiations, you will be empowered to follow the complete tantric path as your Guru directs you through the development and completing stages. Your success will depend on your Guru-devotion and the purity of keeping all the vows. Thus proper devotion to your Guru in accordance with these teachings is essential throughout the path to the enlightened state of non-duality with your Guru-Buddha-meditational deity.]

(50)

**As I have not made the mistake when writing this work of adding my personal interpretation, may this be of infinite benefit to all disciples who follow their Guru. By limitless merit I have gathered in this way, may all sentient beings quickly attain the state of Buddha!**

[This concludes the "Fifty Stanzas of Guru-devotion" by the great Master Ashvaghosha. It has been requested and translated (into Tibetan) by the monk translator, the great editor Rin-ch'en zang-po, together with the Indian Abbot Padmakaravarma.]