

A Brief Introduction to Etiquette with Monks and Nuns

Retreats with Bhante Vimalaramsi are very relaxed and enjoyable, but there are a few practical tips meditators should know concerning polite etiquette toward monks and nuns who observe Theravada Buddhist monastic rules.

1. Physical contact: Monks and nuns do not shake hands or exchange hugs, and do not have physical contact with a person of opposite gender.
2. Greeting: The traditional greeting is hands held together in an attitude of prayer. A monastic does not return a bow; you will just get a smile in return.
3. Dress: Men and women should dress modestly, avoiding provocative or revealing clothing. Shoulders and knees should be covered. Please remove headwear and footwear before going into the meditation hall; wearing socks or slippers is okay.
4. Entering a room: If a monk or nun is seated when you enter a room or meditation hall, be seated before starting a conversation. Stand up, in respect, when they enter or leave the room. Remain standing until they are seated or they have departed.
5. Attentiveness: Please do not cross your arms or legs or lie down while a monk or nun is speaking or leading a meditation. It is considered rude to point the soles of your feet at a Buddha image, monk, or nun. Take care of personal needs before Dhamma talks so that you will be comfortable throughout the period. Unless it's urgent, do not leave the room during the talk without prior permission.
6. Timeliness: Be present and seated at the scheduled starting time for every event. Contact a retreat manager if you are unable to attend a group sitting or Dhamma talk.
7. Silence: Bhante's instructions are to maintain silence during the retreat. Silence includes the avoidance of nonverbal communication through unnecessary eye contact, nonverbal greetings, etc. Speaking is allowed during teacher interviews and in Q&A periods at Dhamma talks.
8. Offering: Offering food or gifts is considered a privilege in Buddhist countries. Monks and nuns accept everything with gratitude but will not request an item directly. When offering food or anything else, please offer with both hands.
9. Meals: Monks and nuns are served first at meal times. Please wait for them to be seated and eating before serving yourself.
10. Gifts: Monks and nuns offer the teaching freely without pay or reward. You may express your gratitude with dana, a gift of financial support, by placing currency or check in an envelope with their name on it. Dana may be offered personally at your final teacher interview or following the retreat. (For your convenience, credit card payment for dana offerings will also be available.)

Please ask a retreat manager for guidance if you have questions or concerns.