



Tibetan Guru Mask

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the teacher is a valued and honoured mentor worthy of great respect and is a source of inspiration on the path to Enlightenment, however the teacher is not generally considered to be a guru but rather a spiritual friend or Kalyāṇa-mittatā.

In the Tibetan tradition, the guru is seen as the Buddha, the very root of spiritual realization and the basis of the path. Without the teacher, it is asserted, there can be no experience or insight. In Tibetan texts, great emphasis is placed upon praising the virtues of the guru. Blessed by the guru, whom the disciple regards as a Bodhisattva, or the embodiment of Buddha, the disciple can continue on the way to experiencing the true nature of reality. The disciple shows great appreciation and devotion for the guru, whose blessing is the last of the four foundations of Vajrayana Buddhism.

The Dalai Lama, speaking of the importance of the guru, said: "Rely on the teachings to evaluate a guru: Do not have blind faith, but also no blind criticism." [28] He also observed that the term 'living Buddha' is a translation of the Chinese words *huo fuo*. In Tibetan, he said, the operative word is *lama* which means 'guru'. A guru is someone who is not necessarily a Buddha, but is heavy with knowledge.

Tantric teachings include the practice of guru yoga, visualizing the guru and making offerings praising the guru. The guru is known as the *vajra* (literally "diamond") guru. Initiations or ritual empowerments are necessary before the student is permitted to practise a particular tantra. The guru does not perform initiation as an individual, but as the person's own Buddha-nature reflected in the personality of the guru. The disciple is asked to make *samaya* or vows and commitments which preserve the spiritual link to the guru, and is told that to break this link is a serious downfall.

There are Four Kinds of Lama (Guru) or spiritual teacher in Tibetan Buddhism:

gangzak gyüpe lama — the individual teacher who is the holder of the lineage

gyalwa ka yi lama — the teacher which is the word of the buddhas

nangwa da yi lama — the symbolic teacher of all appearances

rigpa dön gyi lama — the absolute teacher, which is *rigpa*, the true nature of mind

