careful, don’t confuse this with the word for “karma” (which has a short vowel); note the long vowel in this word. This means “desires of the flesh” and is of course considered a bad thing in Buddhism. Related to the term ทรมานซามัย which is literally “thirst for fleshly desires,” often meaning sexual desire.

suffering...this is what all humans are destined to endure, and that which we can only escape by extinguishing desire (see above)

this is the classifier you use for the Buddha, monks, Buddha images, and while we’re at it, kings and assorted deities or angels. Ask in class for more on this.

Talking to Monks

Yes, monks act differently from the rest of us...for the most part. They’re still Lao, however, and in reality they only stray so far from the contours of Lao culture. This tendency is compounded in Laos today by the fact that most monks are young...very young. One can only expect them to be so detached and serious. You’ll also see monks doing things like smoking cigarettes—older ones as well. This has long been accepted in Laos and its neighboring countries. You’ll also sometimes see younger monks buying music and other “entertainment” items in stores from time to time; this is technically considered breaking the precepts.

Nevertheless, we laypeople are supposed to treat monks differently, and they’re supposed to treat us differently. This is most striking in the case of women. Quite simply, monks are not supposed to touch, or even look at, women. If you’re female, please respect this fact and don’t put a monk in an uncomfortable situation. You can talk to them, but keep it brief, and don’t look them in the eyes. Above all, don’t touch them. We’ll show you in class at SEASSI how to give an object to a monk, there’s a special procedure for that.

Most of the ways that laypeople relate to monks differently than to each other (and vice versa) is expressed in language. On Track 10 of your Course Audio CD, you will hear a list of the pronouns and other terms you’ll need to use when speaking with monks: memorize them. It’s really not that hard to switch to these words when you’re talking with a monk. You’re always switching pronouns in Lao anyway, right? And don’t worry, you’ll be forgiven when you make a mistake. You’ll hear monks making mistakes from time to time too. You’ll find a list of all these special terms, which are pronounced on your Audio CD, on page 54 of this textbook. But here are some additional notes on them:

This is main Lao word for “monk.” It’s not what you address them as, though (in the second person). Another term for monk is simply พระ .
is what you address a young novice monk. You can also use จีอุ is how to address a full-fledged monk the same age as you or older (2nd person) ดิน is how you refer to yourself in the first person when talking to a monk.

Similarly, โอม is the “affirmative response particle” (meaning “yes,” but more as well) that you should use with monks. You probably know these two terms already, which you can use with elders and in any situation you want to show a great deal of respect (like when trying to talk your way out of a sticky situation with police!)

As for what monks will call you in the second person, it varies. Often they’ll just refer to you by a normal kinship term appropriate to your age relationship with them. If you’re quite a bit older than them, though, they may call you either ฿้้้ (technically the term a monk uses to refer to his parents) or พ่อ if you’re an older man, แม่ if you’re an older woman.

ิ่ง is what a full-fledged monk uses to refer to himself. Though sometimes, monks will use ถ้้ิ instead.

There are several special verbs used when referring to monks’ activities in Lao. The only two you need to be concerned about for now are ๏้, meaning to eat (this term is only applied to monks), and ๏ิิิมิิิ, meaning “to invite” (this is used to refer to when we invite monks, usually to chant at a ceremony at one’s home, for instance when someone is sick, or when a marriage is to be performed). At SEASSI, we’ll give you plenty of opportunity to practice all the above terms, plus we’ll take you to a Lao temple so you practice them with real live monks! Above all, don’t be afraid of talking to monks. They can be a valuable source of information and knowledge pertaining to Lao culture.