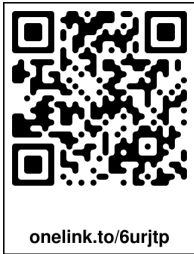


# EMBODYING COMPASSION GALLERY GUIDE

Key: C=Chinese; J=Japanese; S=Sanskrit; T=Tibetan



Google Play

Please scan these codes with your phone to access the free app that accompanies the exhibition. There you will find more information, including audio guides to the artworks.



Apple Store

**Amitabha (S): Buddha** of Infinite Light, from whom Avalokiteshvara emanates. Also known by the names Amida, Amitayus, and Amituo.

**Avalokiteshvara (S): Lord Who Looks Down. Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva** of compassion. Known as Padmapani in some early incarnations, Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, Karunamaya in Nepal, and Chenrezig in Tibet. In both China and Japan, Avalokiteshvara is often depicted as a feminine figure.

**Bodhisattva (S): Mahayana Buddhist** adherent who wishes to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Great bodhisattvas like **Avalokiteshvara** have already achieved a high degree—if not complete—awakening.

**Buddha (S): Awakened One.** Often used to refer to the “historical Buddha,” Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince, who lived sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He achieved enlightenment and became known as **Shakyamuni**. In **Mahayana Buddhism**, Shakyamuni is only one of many past, present and future buddhas.

## Attributes

Avalokiteshvara’s common attributes include:

- Lotus flower in Tibet, Nepal, and India
- Willow branch in East Asia (associated with medicine and healing)
- Vase (filled with *amrita*, elixir of immortality)
- Wish-fulfilling jewel
- *Mala (S):* prayer beads

## The Lotus (S: *Padma*)

The lotus is an essential attribute to Avalokiteshvara. Because it grows from a muddy lake but still produces a beautiful bloom, the flower represents purity and transcendence of *samsara*. The lotus manifests in many forms, including the pedestal upon which the **bodhisattva** sits, the yogic posture (S: *padmasana*), and the physical flower itself.

**Buddhism (S):** religion based on the teachings of **Shakyamuni Buddha**. Its aim is to free beings from suffering and to lead them to awakening. In **Mahayana Buddhism**, numerous celestial **buddhas** and **bodhisattvas** assist in this goal.

**Esoteric Buddhism:** often called *Vajrayana*. Buddhist vehicle that employs complex practices based on tantric texts. Esoteric deities often have multiple limbs and heads to signify increased powers and abilities.

**Heart Sutra:** “heart” or essence of the lengthy *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Fundamental **Mahayana Buddhist** teaching delivered by Avalokiteshvara.

**Lokeshvara (S):** Lord Of The World. Common title of **Avalokiteshvara**. Variations of this name include Khasarpana

Lokeshvara (“Sky-Gliding Lord of the World”), Phagpa Lokeshvara (“Noble Lord of the World”) and Shadakshari Lokeshvara (“Lord of the Six Syllables”).

**Lotus Sutra:** early and influential **Mahayana Buddhist** scripture. Includes a chapter entirely dedicated to **Avalokiteshvara**, in which he takes thirty-three different forms in order to alleviate the suffering of all beings through his endless compassion.

**Mahayana Buddhism** (S): Great Vehicle. Appearing early in the first millennium, this vehicle evolved—and also departed—from the earliest Buddhist schools. Its philosophy and practices place special emphasis on **bodhisattvas** and their mission. It also includes a vast number of celestial **buddhas** who preside over innumerable Pure Lands.

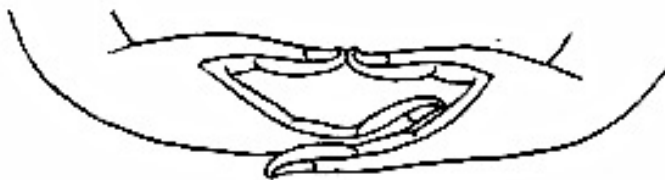
**Mandala** (S): a geometric cosmological diagram used in rituals and meditation. The most common type represents a deity in his or her palace.

**Mantra** (S): sacred utterance used in **Buddhist** practice.

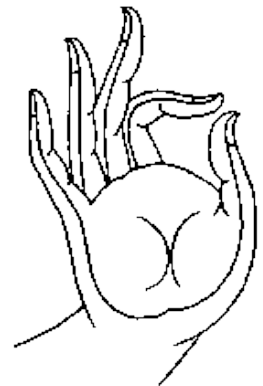
**Mudra** (S): gesture, usually made with the hands or fingers, which symbolizes an exalted quality.



**Varada mudra:**  
Gesture of generosity  
and granting wishes



**Dhyana mudra:**  
Gesture of meditation



**Vitarka mudra:**  
Gesture of  
teaching

**Om mani padme hum** (S): six-syllable mantra associated with Shadakshari **Lokeshvara**. *Mani* means jewel and *padme* refers to lotus, both attributes of **Avalokiteshvara**.

**Potalaka** (S): legendary mountain island where **Avalokiteshvara** dwells. Mount Putuo in China and Fudarakusan sites in Japan are understood as localized manifestations of this holy island. The Potala Palace in Tibet, the former residence of the Dalai Lama, is also named for this legendary place.

**Pure Land Buddhism:** tradition of **Amitabha** worship in which devotees aim to ascend to his Pure Land of Bliss, also called Sukhavati (S) and Gokuraku (J).

**Samsara** (S): continuous cycle of birth, life and death that sentient beings endure until achieving enlightenment.

**Sanskrit:** scholarly language of ancient and medieval Indian scriptures.

**Shakyamuni** (S): Sage of the Shakyas. Name that Siddhartha Gautama acquired once he achieved enlightenment and became a **buddha**.

**Sudhana** (S): young pilgrim boy seeking enlightenment in the *Avatamsaka* or Flower Garland **Sutra**. Also known as Shancai (C) and Zenzai Doji (J).

**Sutra** (S): Indian scriptures. **Buddhist sutras** contain **Shakyamuni**'s teachings.

**Note:** The many heads and arms of **Avalokiteshvara** seen in some of the works displayed here do not denote the bodhisattva's wrath but instead indicate his increased power and ability to help all sentient beings be free from suffering.

Please visit the exhibition website: <http://pages.vassar.edu/embodyingcompassion>