

CHENRIZI

Tradition Tibetan Buddhism

Etymology Eye (chen) continually (re) looking (zig)
One who looks upon all being with compassion

Equivalents Chenrezig
Avalokitesvara, Padmapani (India)
Migjid Janraisig (Mongolia)
Kwan-Yin (China)
Matsyendranath (Nepal)
Lokesvaranatha (Sri Lanka)
Kan-non (Japan)

Affiliations Amitabha (Celestial Buddha)
White Tara (consort)
Buddha Shakyamuni
Tulku tradition of Dalai Lama



Summary

In Tibetan Buddhism, Chenrizi is considered to be the embodiment of compassion. In his various forms, he is the most revered bodhisattva in Buddhism (a bodhisattva is one who achieves enlightenment but chooses to remain in this world until all other sentient beings achieve enlightenment). The manifestation of Chenrizi is specific to Tibetan Buddhism, which spread to Tibet from India around the fifth century CE.

Chenrizi's role in Tibetan Buddhism is to guide and protect the Tibetan people. The vehicle by which this is accomplished is the reincarnation of Chenrizi in the person of the Dalai Lama. Accordingly, the current Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th successive Dalai Lami) is considered to be a manifestation of Chenrizi. The Dalai Lama is also considered to be a regular person as well as a reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama; therefore he possesses three incarnate parts: Chenrizi, the previous Dalai Lama, and Tenzin Gyatso.

Attributes and Powers

Universal compassion toward all beings in the billions of worlds.

Ability to hear all cries for assistance and support.

Postponement of personal Buddhahood in order to assist others.

One thousand hands and eyes to offer compassion.

Lord of the six syllables (Om Mani Padme Hum).

Dual gender.

Radiates light that penetrates the entire universe.

Events and Situations

Deathbed assignment from Buddha Shakyamuni (Siddhartha Gautama), roughly 400 BCE, to bring Buddhism to “the kingdom of snows in the north.”

Head splits into eleven pieces after contemplating the monumental task of providing compassion to all sentient beings. Receives eleven heads from Buddha Amitabha.

Two arms shatter after trying to offer compassion to all sentient beings. Receives one thousand arms from Buddha Amitabha.

Creation of Tibetan people (through the monkey myth).

Arrival of Chenrizi in Tibet foretold by Padmasambhava.

Holds a jewel and white lotus flower.

Local Example

Buddhist temple, 9160 Steveston Highway, Richmond.

Gold (brass) statue of Avalokitesvara with thousand hands.

Resonances in Other Traditions

Mother Mary (Christian: compassion)

Odin (Norse: eye of wisdom)

Horus (Egyptian: All-Seeing eye)

Shenla Okar (Bon: god of compassion)

Isis (Egypt)

Contemporary Relevance

Tibetan culture and struggle for independence.

Spiritual integrity of China.

Spiritual leadership of the Dalai Lama (honorary Canadian citizen, 2006).

(In September 2007 China issued new rules controlling the selection of the next Dalai Lama which will prevent his followers from choosing his reincarnation within China.)

Further Information

Wikipedia: Avalokitesvara

DharmaWeb: Avalokitesvara and the Tibetan Contemplation of Compassion

Thomas Laird, *The Story of Tibet*