

## GUAN YIN CEREMONY

Bodhisattva Guan Yin, which means the “observer of sounds,” is also known as Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. A Bodhisattva is someone who aims to become a buddha and at the same time vows to help all other beings reach buddhahood. Guan Yin Bodhisattva has actually attained buddhahood countless kalpas (a Sanskrit word for a time unit measured in tens of millions of years) ago. When the Bodhisattva was practicing many kalpas ago, he heard the chanting of the Dharani of the Great Compassionate Mind. He was moved and immediately resolved to manifest a thousand hands and a thousand eyes so he could be fully equipped with the great power to help all beings who were suffering. At the moment he made this compassionate vow, a thousand hands, each with an eye on its palm, immediately manifested on his body.

Although already a buddha, Guan Yin is willing to come into this world as a Bodhisattva. He vows to listen for the cries of any beings who are in danger or distress and immediately comes to their rescue when they single-mindedly chant his name. With the unconditional compassion and unwavering resolution to help all beings, Guan Yin is able to access the power of the pure mind to manifest a thousand hands and eyes, and to show up in 32 different bodies. For example, Guan Yin can show up as a man, a woman, a monk, a nun, a statesman, the wife of a statesman, a young boy or a young girl, to help whoever can be helped by manifesting that character.

The story of how the Bodhisattva comes to be known as "Guan Yin" and how he vows to liberate all beings from suffering is described in "The Universal Gateway Chapter," of the Lotus Sutra. The liturgy of the Great Compassionate Repentance is based on the Dharani of the Great Compassionate Mind, and is compiled by Zhi Li, a Tiantai School Master in the Song dynasty (960-1279). In a Guan Yin Ceremony, participants chant the "Universal Gateway Chapter" and the Great Compassionate Repentance together in an atmosphere of reverence and goodwill. The energy of compassion generated from the ceremony opens our hearts and minds to learn from Guan Yin, and to care for ourselves as well as all beings with unconditional compassion.