

In Touch with Bodhisattvas

Ango Art Practice Fall 2020

For this Ango we will take up and express the spiritual energy and creative impulse of the bodhisattva: to see and serve ourselves and others unselfishly. Bodhisattvas are not restricted to being Buddhist—such beings come from all spiritual and cultural traditions, and also perhaps from unseen dimensions.

In the Ango Art Practice, we'll work with three bodhisattvas from our Buddhist tradition: Jizo, Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara. In getting to know these three traditional bodhisattvas, we will study their characteristics and the teachings and practices they embody, drawing on their qualities to gain insight and guidance in how to live and practice wholeheartedly.

For September we will focus on Jizo Bodhisattva; in October, Manjushri Bodhisattva; and in November we'll concentrate on Avalokiteshvara. Each month you will receive a short written piece about that month's bodhisattva to help you get started.

The Art Practice

SEPTEMBER: JIZO

Jizō Bosatsu (Sanskrit: Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva) is an enlightened being most often depicted as a Buddhist monastic. Their name means Earth Stone, Earth Treasury, Earth Womb, or Earth Matrix. Jizo vowed to teach all beings of the six worlds between the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha and the appearance of Maitreya Buddha. Known as the bodhisattva of the earth, they are considered to be the bodhisattva of all those who are trapped in hell realms; the guardian of the souls of children who have died and unborn fetuses; protectors of travelers, children and all who are vulnerable.

The great compassionate vow of Jizo Bodhisattva is “If I do not journey into the hell realms to help the suffering beings there, who else will go? As long as there are beings suffering in such realms, I will not enter Buddhahood. Only when all living beings have been saved, will I attain Bodhi.”

To begin, read about Jizo Bodhisattva. Look for your own resources and as you study, pull out key words, phrases or characteristics that you feel a bodily resonance with.

For example from the above passage: earth, womb, trapped, hell, saved.

Then sit in zazen with one word or phrase at a time. Create an expression of the essence or the feelings and movement that come as a living life force in your body and mind. Allow this unfoldment and stay close to the experience in your body. This art practice is not about replicating a likeness of an archetypal image but about opening up to your felt experience and the creative impulse. Trust the direct expression of what emerges. Feel your way into your vital presence, the spiritual power of your bodhisattva life.

Shantideva wrote: “For the sake of all, I do adopt the spirit of enlightenment and will follow the way of the bodhisattva.” How do you experience this in your life and how can you express it?