

## Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha



Photo source: <https://buddhaweekly.com/>

The Sanskrit word Kṣitigarbha is literally translated as "Earth Treasury" or "Earth Store". Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha is one of the eight great bodhisattvas. He is the embodiment of Buddha's merit. He is the guidance of the Earth and savior of the six realms. He holds a six-ringed staff in his right hand to smash open the gates of the hell to rescue suffering beings there and a glowing wish-fulfilling jewel in his left hand to light up the darkness of the infernal realms, to grant wisdom and to fulfill wishes of beings. The six jingling rings on his staff symbolize the six realms that he protects (god, asura, human, animals, preta, and hell). He vowed in front of Buddha Shakyamuni to take responsibility for guiding all beings in the six realms before the next Buddha Maitreya comes. During innumerable kalpas, in evil worlds stained by the five defilements, worlds without a living Buddha and so on, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha manifested in various forms meeting the needs of and saving all beings according to their natures, even entering various hells to liberate their suffering through his indomitable compassion, wisdom, and the power of his profound Great Vow: "If I do not go to the hell to help the suffering beings there, who else will go? ....If the

*hells are not empty, I will not become a Buddha. Only when all sentient beings have been saved, will I attain Bodhi.*" Because of his great deeds, he has accumulated inconceivably great merits and earned the merit of being one of the eight great bodhisattvas and as the embodiment of Buddha's great merit. Adored as the "Master of the Six Worlds of Desire," Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha sometimes depicted as being surrounded by a group of six beings—a god, an asura, a man, an animal, a preta, and a hell being demon holding a pitchfork, symbolizing the six different forms that he assumes in the six realms to liberate beings.

The Mahayana sutra *The Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha's Fundamental Vows (Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Purvapravidhana Sutra)* was spoken by the Buddha towards the end of his life to the beings of the Trayastrimsa Heaven as a mark of gratitude and remembrance for his beloved mother. In this Sutra, the Buddha revealed that in the distant past aeons, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, then was a Brahman maiden by the name of 'Sacred Girl', who was deeply troubled when her mother died as she had often been slanderous towards the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To save her mother from the great tortures of hell, the young girl sold whatever she had and used the money to buy offerings which she offered daily reverently to the Buddha of her time, known as The Buddha of Flower of Meditation and Enlightenment. She made fervent prayers that her mother be spared of the pains of hell and requested the Buddha for help. One day at the temple, while she was thus pleading for help, she heard the voice of the Buddha advising her to go home immediately and there to sit down and practice meditation on the Buddha's name if she wanted to know where her mother was. She did as she was told and while doing so, her consciousness was transported to the Hell Realm where she met a hell-guardian who informed her that through her fervent prayers and reverent offerings, her mother had accumulated much merits and therefore she had already been released from hell and ascended to heaven. She was greatly relieved and should have been extremely happy, but the sights of the great sufferings in Hell that she had witnessed profoundly touched her and she made an immediate vow: "I shall do my very best to relieve beings of their sufferings forever in my future lives of kalpas to come". The young maiden has since then become an accomplished bodhisattva through her great acts of merits and is now known as Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha.

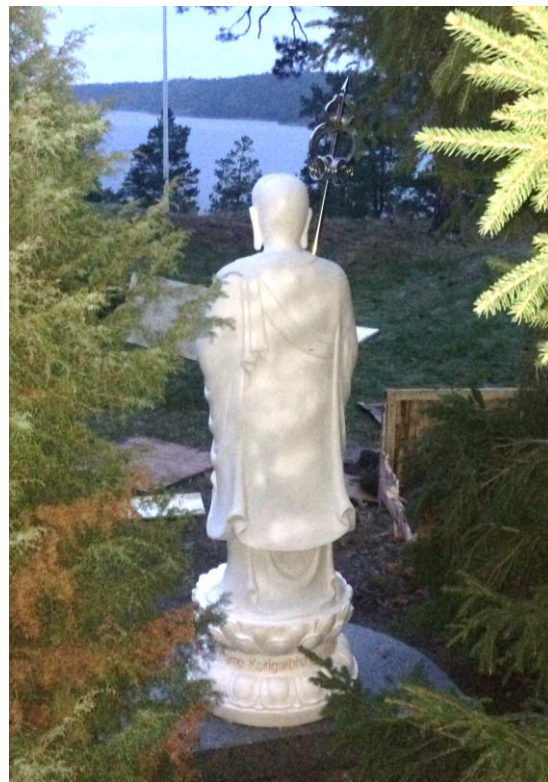
The sutra also expounds at length the retributions of unwholesome karma, descriptions of hells and the benefits of good merit both great and small. The vows and deeds of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva are so numerous that even the Buddha said, "I cannot complete the counting of those beings already delivered, those not yet delivered, those still to be delivered, and those representing the work already accomplished and yet to be accomplished by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva." In the last Chapter 13, Buddha also spoke about twenty-eight kinds of benefits for "any good man or good woman who should see Ksitigarbha's image and hear this Sutra and, furthermore, read and recite it whole-heartedly, and who should also offer incense, flowers, drink, food, clothing and precious treasures as offerings, in addition to giving praise and making obeisance to Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha". One will gain the quality of loving kindness and compassion, abundance, free from the evil paths, fortunate rebirths, virtuous fruition, non-regressing from the bodhi-path and so on, and even enlightenment. Even reciting Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha's name sincerely and whole-heartedly and, simultaneously, reverently making an offering to Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, one can acquire inconceivable benefits and happiness. (Download sutra at <http://ftp.budaedu.org/ebooks/pdf/EN123.pdf>)

In Tantra, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha appears in the Kalachakra mandala of 634 deities, along with the Guhyasamaja mandala (in the east, standing beside Maitreya). He is also part of the Vajrasattva mandala, Vajradhatu mandala and many more.

The ringed staff, also called the Khakkhara, is often carried by buddhist monks in their travels so that the sounds caused by the jingling rings can warn small animals and insects of their approach so as to avoid stepping on them and be killed, also to inform people of their presence through the jingling caused by the rings. Often a travelling monk on a pilgrimage has to stop at homes to seek alms and since he does not wish to speak unnecessarily, he usually announces his arrival by shaking his sounding staff. The number of loops or rings in the Khakkhara are four, six or twelve. The four-ringed staff is carried by a monk who has perceived the Four Noble Truths—the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the cessation. The six-ringed staff belongs to a bodhisattva who is constantly practicing the six paramitas. The twelve-ringed staff is held by a pratyekabuddha who has realized the twelve-fold interdependent links of causation.



H.E. Garchen Rinpoche with Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha statue at Garchen Buddhist Institute in Arizona, USA



Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha statue at Ratnashri Meditation Center retreat place in Sweden overlooking the sea.