

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET

INDIAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world's most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt and Goya. The Museum also features a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh and Cézanne—as well as 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help prepare your students for their tour. These materials include lesson plans and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our [website](#), where you can find information about special exhibitions, podcasts and a collections database with information about individual works of art.

Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*

Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

Railing Pillar: The Great Departure of Siddhartha, c. 100 BCE

India: Madhya Pradesh, Bharhut

Sandstone

54 x 9 x 11 in. (137.2 x 22.9 x 27.9 cm)

Buddhist Art without the Buddha

This railing pillar is the earliest example of **Buddhist** art in the Norton Simon collection and is among the earliest surviving examples of **Buddhist** stone sculpture. The Great Departure is the moment when the **Buddha Shakyamuni**, then Prince Siddhartha, decided to leave his father's palace and forgo the life of a prince for the life of an **ascetic**. This episode is a major turning point in the story of the **Buddha** and marks the beginning of his spiritual quest.

Key Concepts

Early **Buddhist** art does not include personified images of the **Buddha**. Instead he is represented by symbols such as a footprint, a **Dharma** wheel, an umbrella and a **chari**, or fly whisk. The umbrella and fly whisk both refer to his early life as a prince, when servants shielded him from the sun with umbrellas and fanned him with fly whisks. The **Dharma** wheel is a symbol of the **Buddha's** teachings.

This pillar comes from a **stupa**. **Stupas** are **reliquary** mounds that hold relics of the **Buddha** and other enlightened figures.

The shallow carving on this pillar is typical of this period, differing from the **high relief** in later sculptures, such as *Cosmic Vishnu* (also in this packet).

A Closer Look at Railing Pillar

- In the upper **register** two women, possibly deities, stand on lotuses and watch Prince Siddhartha, in the form of wheel-marked footprints, move toward his horse, which is led by his trusty groomsman, Channa.
- The upper-middle **register** shows a horse with an umbrella flanked by two fly whisks, representing Siddhartha, positioned above the saddle. Flowers indicate the presence of the divine and muffled the sound of the horse's hooves to keep their departure hidden.
- In the lower **register** figures play the drums and make gestures of adoration, celebrating the **Buddha's** decision to seek spiritual release and provide salvation for others.



Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the narrative of the **Buddha's** departure is included on a monument memorializing him?
- Think about examples of symbols, such as logos and mascots, from your daily life. What do you think they represent?

Activity

- Create a symbol to stand for the main character of your favorite book. Then create a series of images depicting events from that book in which the main character is represented by the symbol you designed.

Vocabulary

- **Ascetic:** a person who practices severe self-discipline and refrains from all forms of indulgence.
- **Buddha:** an enlightened being who has achieved knowledge of truth and is thereby freed from the cycle of death and rebirth known as samsara.
- **Buddha Shakyamuni:** the Buddha of our age, founder of Buddhism; formerly Siddhartha, a prince who renounced his life as a householder to seek spiritual truth sometime between the 6th and 4th century, BCE.
- **Buddhism:** a faith based on the teaching, known as the Dharma, of the Buddha Shakyamuni.
- **Chari:** a fly whisk, a tool to swat flies that is associated with royalty.
- **Dharma:** the teachings of the Buddha, often represented in Buddhist art as a wheel.
- **Register:** a vertical level in a sculpture with many levels, like a row.
- **Relief:** a sculpture in which objects project outward from a flat supporting background.
- **Reliquary:** a container for the relics, or remains, of holy figures.
- **Stupa:** a reliquary mound that holds relics, or remains, of the Buddha or other enlightened figures. Stupas also hold the remains of royalty.

Bodhisattva Maitreya, 2nd–3rd century
Pakistan: Ancient Gandhara
Schist
69 x 28 x 10 in. (175.3 x 71.1 x 25.4 cm)

Bodhisattva: East Meets West

This sculpture represents **Bodhisattva Maitreya**. His status as a deity is signified by his **ushnisha**, a cranial protuberance, and his **urna**, a tuft of hair or light between his eyebrows signifying the third eye of enlightenment.

Key Concepts

This sculpture was produced in ancient **Gandhara**, a region located in present-day northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. **Gandhara** was situated along the **Silk Road**, once the primary trade route connecting the East with the West, and as a result, Gandharan art fuses the influence of the Western Greco-Roman world with the **iconography** of Indian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Unlike images of the **Buddha**, **bodhisattvas** are typically depicted wearing jewelry and luxurious clothing because, unlike the **Buddha**, **bodhisattvas** have chosen to remain on earth until all sentient beings have attained enlightenment. This **bodhisattva** wears a draped and tasseled robe and lavish jewelry, including an armlet and a string of charm boxes that sweeps across his chest to ward off misfortune. His adornments would have been modeled after those of a king.

Around his neck, the **bodhisattva** wears a necklace with a protective amulet depicting the Greek god of the sea, Poseidon. The presence of this Greek god in a Buddhist sculpture tells us that **Gandhara** was a religiously tolerant kingdom and that Greek culture remained vibrant in the region.

A Closer Look at *Bodhisattva Maitreya*

- The influence of the Greco-Roman world can be seen in the figure's togalike robe, sandals, wavy hair, mustache and musculature, which is far more defined and anatomically precise than the softer, more supple figures of most Buddhist and Hindu sculptures from India (see Cosmic Vishnu, also in this packet).
- Originally, **Maitreya's** right hand was in the **mudra**, or gesture, of reassurance, and his left hand held a **water pot**. **Maitreya's water pot** is a symbol of his future role as the **Buddha** on earth once the current **Buddha's** teachings have been forgotten. In Indian art the **water pot** represents the exchange of goods or acknowledgment that an agreement has been made. **Maitreya's water pot** signifies the transference of power from **Buddha Shakyamuni** to him.
- On the base of the sculpture is a relief of a turbaned **bodhisattva**, possibly **Maitreya**, meditating while seated on a lotus. He is surrounded by donors and worshippers. **Maitreya** is often pictured seated on a throne, waiting for the time when he will descend to earth to once again spread the teachings of the **Buddha** after they have been lost.



Discussion Questions

- Compare the pose, naturalism, format, textures and adornments of this sculpture with *Cosmic Vishnu*. What do these sculptures have in common? How do they differ?
- This sculpture is distinguished by the repeating waves of his hair and the heavy beaded ropes of his necklace. What other patterns and textures do you see in the sculpture?

Activity

- Make a **contour drawing** of the sculpture, concentrating on the variety of lines in the drapery, the hair, the jewelry and the figure itself.

Vocabulary

- **Bodhisattva:** an enlightened being who has vowed to help others achieve enlightenment before crossing over to Buddhahood.
- **Buddha:** an enlightened being who has achieved the highest knowledge of truth and is thereby freed from the cycle of rebirth known as samsara.
- **Buddha Shakyamuni:** the Buddha of our age, founder of Buddhism; formerly Siddhartha, a prince who renounced his life as a householder to seek spiritual truth.
- **Contour drawing:** a drawing in which the artist, looking closely at the outlines of an object or person, transfers it in one continuous line to paper without looking down to see the outcome of his or her work until it is completed.
- **Gandhara:** a region in present-day northern Pakistan and Afghanistan once located along the Silk Road, and, as such, subject to both Eastern and Western influences.
- **Iconography:** conventions or symbols regarding the treatment of a subject in artistic representation.
- **Maitreya:** the Buddha of the future; known as the benevolent one, he awaits in heaven to reestablish the Dharma, or teachings.
- **Mudras:** symbolic hand gestures used in Buddhist, Hindu and Jain art.
- **Silk Road:** in ancient times, the primary trade route connecting the East with the West.
- **Ushnisha:** the protuberance on the crown of a bodhisattva's or Buddha's head signifying enlightenment.
- **Urna:** the tuft of hair between the eyebrows of a Buddha, frequently depicted as an inlaid gem that is believed to emit a ray of light that illuminates distant worlds.
- **Water pot:** a vessel carrying water signifying the exchange of goods or an acknowledgment that an agreement has been made.



ABOVE:

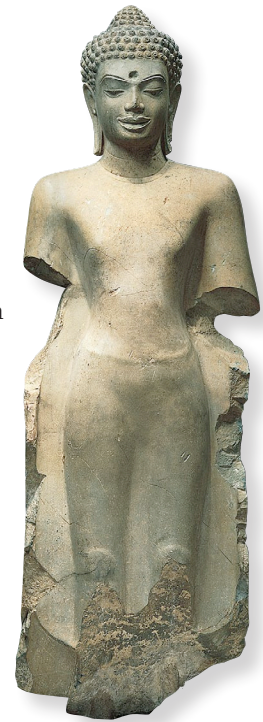
Cosmic Vishnu (Trivikrama) with Spouses, 11th century

India: West Bengal or Bangladesh, 1000–1099

Chlorite

57 x 28 in. (144.8 x 71.1 cm)

Buddha Shakyamuni, 9th century
Thailand: Si Thep, Mon-Dvaravati period
Sandstone
88 in. (223.5 cm)



Buddha Shakyamuni: The Enlightened One

Shakyamuni is the Buddha of our age. Prior to becoming enlightened, he was born as Prince Siddhartha Gautama around the 6th century BCE. His teachings are the foundation of **Buddhism**, and emphasize moderation, detachment and compassion.

Key Concepts

In art, the Buddha's enlightened status is represented by his various attributes including his ushnisha, a cranial protuberance signifying the Buddha's great wisdom, and his urna, a tuft of hair between his eyebrows which represents the third eye of wisdom.

The Buddha's elongated earlobes are a reminder of his former life as a prince. Elongated earlobes are seen on images of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain deities as a marker of one's elite status. The heavy and bejeweled earrings that such figures would have worn caused their earlobes to become distended.

This sculpture of Buddha Shakyamuni once stood over nine feet tall. Colossal statues were rare in Southeast Asia at the time of this sculpture's creation, and this sculpture is the largest Thai image of the Buddha outside of Thailand. His size demonstrates his importance, and pious Buddhists would have come from neighboring kingdoms to pray to this image.

A Closer Look at *Buddha Shakyamuni*



- Originally this Buddha would have held out both hands in the mudra, or gesture, of teaching, which was a hallmark of **Mon-Dvaravati** Buddha images.
 - The Buddha smiles and gazes serenely down on devotees. Originally this sculpture's urna would have been inset with a red gem; today there is merely a cavity where the gem once sat. His facial features are generally more detailed than his smooth torso, and the grooves in his eyebrows and around his eyes likely would have been filled with metal or colored stone.
- As is common for Thai images of the Buddha from this time, the sculpture's back is almost completely unmodeled, and he wears a very thin, smooth robe which reveals the contours of his body.

Discussion Questions

- Identify the features of the Buddha that indicate his enlightened status. What features does the sculptor seem to be emphasizing in this figure?
- What effect does the lack of detail in the lower portion of the sculpture have on the focus of the sculpture? How would this effect have been changed or reinforced by the inlay in the figure's face?

Activities

- Images of the Buddha can vary stylistically as a result of where they were made, what materials they are made of and the time period when they were produced. Research images of the Buddha throughout Asia, and compare and contrast styles of clothing and facial features.

Vocabulary

- **Buddhism:** based on the Buddha's teachings that emphasize compassion for all, freedom from all worldly attachments and release from suffering through the attainment of enlightenment.
- **Mon-Dvaravati:** Mon refers to an Austroasiatic dialect and the people who speak the language. Dvaravati (6th–9th centuries) refers to a chiefdom and culture that inhabited much of present-day Thailand and Cambodia.

Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), 975–1025

India: Tamil Nadu

Bronze

31¾ x 24 in. (80.6 x 61.0 cm)

Shiva Nataraja: Lord of Dance

Shiva, the god of destruction, is one of the principal gods of **Hinduism**. He is frequently depicted in his form as the Lord of Dance, or **Nataraja**.

Key Concepts

This sculpture conveys the Indian concept of the never-ending cycle of death and rebirth, or **samsara**, wherein every end leads to a new beginning, as symbolized by the circle of flames surrounding **Shiva**. As the **Hindu** god of destruction, **Shiva** enables the regeneration and continued harmony of the universe through his dance.

Shiva's four arms indicate his dominion over the four cardinal directions.

In two of his hands he holds the flame of destruction (outer right) and the hourglass-shaped, double-sided drum (outer left), which he uses to beat the world back into creation. The two other hands are in the mudras, or gestures, of reassurance (inner right) and refuge (inner left).

Shiva's third eye, or **trilocana**, symbolizes his ability to see all and destroy ignorance with his gaze. The cobra draped over his arm signifies his mastery over death. He stands triumphant in his dance atop a dwarf, signifying his victory over ignorance.



A Closer Look at *Shiva as Lord of Dance*

- **Shiva** normally wears his dreadlocks coiled on top of his head in a bun, but during the momentous spinning of his dance, his hair is freed from its coils and flies out in all directions. During this dance, the goddess **Ganga** of the Ganges River, who is caught in **Shiva's** hair, is flung away by his dancing and brings forth the water of life on earth.
- Dance is very important in Hindu practice; ritual dance is an integral part of ceremonies in the temple, and sculptural poses are often derived from these ritual dances.
- During holy days and festivals, bearers inserted poles into the holes in the base of the sculpture to carry it from the temple and into the streets to be worshipped by devotees. Before the procession, the sculpture was dressed in clothes and jewels.

Discussion Questions

- What elements of this sculpture indicate movement? (For example, the pose, his hair, the cord around his waist and the scarf on his arm all suggest movement.)
- This sculpture was once polished to the same golden gleam as Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, which was originally purchased by an Indian maharaja to be placed in a temple of meditation in India. Compare *Bird in Space* to *Shiva Nataraja*. What makes these two bronze sculptures dynamic? How do they inspire contemplation?





Activity

- The 19th-century sculptor Auguste Rodin admired the bronze depictions of Nataraja from this period for their graceful forms. Compare the bronze *Shiva as Lord of Dance* with Rodin's [*The Burghers of Calais*](#). How do these sculptures tell a story? Create a figural sculpture that tells a story and shows movement through its pose and dress.

Vocabulary

- **Ganga:** the goddess of the Ganges River, from which all life flows.
- **Hinduism:** the most widely practiced faith in India; based on the belief that the material world is illusory; there are three principal deities: Shiva, the destroyer; Vishnu, the preserver; and Brahma, the creator.
- **Nataraja:** Shiva's form as Lord of Dance.
- **Samsara:** the continuous cycle of death and rebirth that is a central belief in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.
- **Shiva:** the Hindu god of destruction; one of the principal gods of Hinduism.
- **Trilocana:** the third eye of Shiva, signifying his all-seeing nature.

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Bird in Space, 1931
Constantin Brancusi
Romanian, 1876–1957
Polished bronze
73 in. (185.4 cm)

ABOVE:

The Burghers of Calais, 1884–95
Auguste Rodin
French, 1840–1917
Bronze, Edition of 12, Cast No. 10
82½ x 93½ x 70¾ in. (209.6 x 237.5 x 179.7 cm)

Cosmic Vishnu (Trivikrama) with Spouses, 11th century
India: West Bengal or Bangladesh
Chlorite
57 x 28 in. (144.8 x 71.1cm)

Cosmic Vishnu: Three Great Strides

This sculpture depicts the Hindu god **Vishnu**'s victory over the greedy King Bali. King Bali was not content to rule the earth and wanted to take over the heavens as well, so **Vishnu** visited him in the guise of the beggar dwarf, **Vamana**, and asked the king for a plot of land that he could cover in three steps. As soon as the king granted his request, **Vishnu** transformed into the giant **Trivikrama** seen at the center of the sculpture. In two strides he covered the earth and the heavens, and in his last stride, he landed on Bali's head, defeating Bali and restoring order to the universe.

Key Concepts

Vishnu, the preserver, is one of the principal gods of Hinduism. He saves the earth ten times in ten different avatars, or forms, including a giant boar, a turtle and a man-lion. This sculpture depicts **Vishnu** in two forms: as the giant **Trivikrama**, in the center of the sculpture, and the dwarf **Vamana**, in the lower right.

The first episode of the story is depicted on **Vishnu's** (**Trivikrama's**) lotus pedestal. King Bali is shown seated on his throne, while the dwarf **Vamana**, holding a parasol, stands before him. Between them, a minister pours water on their outstretched hands to seal their contract and make the gift of land official.

This sculpture, made out of **chlorite**, is meant to be seen from the front only, and the figures are sculpted in **relief**. Originally this sculpture would have fit into a wall in a temple, and the columns behind **Trivikrama** would have echoed the columns in the room.



A Closer Look at Cosmic Vishnu

- **Vishnu** as **Trivikrama** carries **Vishnu's attributes**: the conch shell, representing the sound of victory over chaos; the chakra, a disc-shaped weapon symbolizing Vishnu's ability to cut through ignorance; the mace, a clubbed weapon representing his power to impose universal law; and a lotus flower, symbolizing divine purity.
- **Trivikrama** is flanked on the left by **Lakshmi** and on the right by **Sarasvati**.
- Along the base of the sculpture sit four figures, from left to right: two adoring donors; **Garuda**, **Vishnu's** mount; and **Bhudevi**, the earth goddess, offering a water pot.

Discussion Questions

- How did the sculptor create a sense of drama in this sculpture? Do you notice any advantages to sculpting in **relief** as opposed to creating a freestanding sculpture?
- There are many figures and details in this sculpture. How did the artist direct your attention to the most important elements in the story despite all the visual components?

Activity

- Create a **relief** or drawing depicting two or more scenes from your favorite adventure story. How do you make your characters recognizable and differentiate between scenes? (For example, using **hierarchical scale**, positioning within the composition, etc.)

Vocabulary

- **Attribute:** an object that helps identify a figure or character (for example, a crown is an attribute of a king).
- **Bhudevi:** goddess of the earth, a form of Lakshmi.
- **Chlorite:** a type of stone ranging in color from light gray to dark green.
- **Garuda:** the half-bird mount of Vishnu; an enemy of snakes.
- **Hierarchical scale:** the manipulation of size and space in an image to emphasize the importance of a person or object in relation to the people or objects around them.
- **High relief:** a sculpture in which objects project outward from a flat supporting background.
- **Lakshmi:** Vishnu's spouse; the goddess of wealth, beauty, fortune and creation; the lotus is her attribute.
- **Sarasvati:** Brahma's spouse; the goddess of knowledge, music, arts and science.
- **Trivikrama:** the god of three strides; an avatar of Vishnu.
- **Vamana:** a dwarf; the fifth avatar of Vishnu.
- **Vishnu:** known as the preserver; one of the three principal Hindu gods; he came to earth 10 times in 10 different forms, or avatars, to save the world.

Green Tara, c. 1450
Nepal
Gilt bronze with semiprecious stones
12 x 7½ x 7½ in. (30.5 x 19.1 cm)



Green Tara

The goddess **Tara** is the female counterpart to the bodhisattva **Avalokiteshvara**. She is believed to have been born out of his tears of compassion for others. Like **Avalokiteshvara**, she vowed to ensure the enlightenment of all sentient beings. In her form as **Green Tara**, she is represented in art with her right hand across her knee in a gesture of generosity while holding the stem of a blue lotus, which blossoms at her right ear. Her left hand is in the mudra, or gesture, of blessing and also holds the stem of a blue lotus.

Key Concepts

Tara helps devotees overcome obstacles encountered on their paths toward enlightenment. **Tara** takes on several different forms, but here she appears as **Green Tara**, a peaceful figure who intervenes to save those who pray to her.

The goddess's right arm is extended in a mudra of generosity while her left hand is in the mudra of blessing.

Green Tara typically sits in a relaxed pose called **lalitasana**, in which her left leg is folded and her right leg hangs down, with the right foot supported by a lotus. The lotus, a pristine flower that grows out of muddy waters, is a symbol of enlightenment.

A Closer Look at *Green Tara*

- The goddess's hands hold the stems of blue lotuses that seem to slither up her arms and bloom at her shoulders. The blue lotus is a symbol of the spirit's triumph over the senses and the physical world.
- **Tara** wears sumptuous ornaments inset with colorful jewels to denote her divinity and high status. Hymns tell worshippers to envision her dripping with jewelry made from heavenly gems and gold. She is often depicted wearing a crown, earrings, necklaces, armbands, bracelets, rings and anklets.
- Unlike humans, gods do not grow old, and **Tara** is presented as forever young and beautiful.

Discussion Questions

- Describe the goddess in your own words. What is your impression of her based on her appearance, posture, expression and gestures?
- In contemporary terms, **Tara** is a heroine; an extraordinary being who intervenes to save people. Can you think of some other popular heroines? How does she compare to these other examples?



Activity

- Compare this sculpture to a sculpture of [Buddha Shakyamuni](#). What similarities and differences do you notice between these two sculptures? What effect do these commonalities and contrasts have on the overall impressions made by the sculptures?

Vocabulary

- **Avalokiteshvara:** (Ava-loki-teśh-vara) the bodhisattva of compassion and the patron deity of Tibet. He is the most popular of the bodhisattvas and appears throughout Asia. The Dalai Lama said to be an incarnation of him.
- **Dalai Lama:** the leader of Tibetan Buddhism.
- **Lalitasana:** a seated pose in which one leg is folded and the other hangs down. This relaxed posture is associated with Green Tara in Tibetan art.
- **Tara:** the female counterpart to the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, and the most popular Buddhist goddess in Nepal. Tara is said to help devotees on their road to enlightenment.

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Buddha Shakyamuni, c. 1100

India: Tamil Nadu, 1075–1125

Granite

50 x 37 x 16 in. (127 x 94 x 40.6 cm)

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads, c. 1500

Tibet

Gilt bronze with copper, gold and silver inlay and pigment

17 x 8¼ x 3⅞ in. (43.2 x 21 x 9.2cm)

Avalokiteshvara: The Splitting Headache

Avalokiteshvara is the bodhisattva of compassion, and he appears in art as both benevolent and **wrathful**. This sculpture depicts him in his form as **ekadasamukha**, which means “eleven faces” in Sanskrit. A Buddhist text called the *Lotus Sutra* tells of how Avalokiteshvara became so overwhelmed by all the suffering in the world that his head split into ten pieces. Fortunately, **Amitabha Buddha**, Avalokiteshvara’s spiritual father, formed new heads from the fragments and then arranged them on the bodhisattva’s original head facing the four cardinal directions so he could see all. The eleventh head, depicted above all the rest, is that of **Amitabha Buddha**.



Key Concepts

Avalokiteshvara is the patron deity of the Potala Palace in Tibet, the former home of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists. The Dalai Lama is said to be the incarnation of one of Avalokiteshvara’s many manifestations.

Standing balanced on two feet, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads* exudes the calm compassion for which the god is known. His principal hands are in a gesture of greeting and reverence, while his additional hands hold a variety of implements. Originally, the sculpture stood on a lotus flower, a Buddhist symbol of enlightenment and divine purity.

Legend explains that, out of compassion for all sentient beings, Avalokiteshvara’s head split into ten fragments, which symbolize the ten stages of enlightenment. The first three heads are tranquil, while the other seven depict **wrathful deities**.



A Closer Look at *Railing Pillar*

- The tenth head, just above the first three tiers of elaborately crowned heads, depicts the **wrathful** form of Avalokiteshvara, called **Hayagriva**. Though he appears to grimace in anger, **Hayagriva** is actually a protector deity, ready to spring into action to defend followers from harm.
- Avalokiteshvara also has eight arms and hands, including his principal hands, which form the gesture of greeting and prayer at his chest. On the right side, his upper hand holds prayer beads, his middle hand holds the **Dharma wheel** and his lower hand forms the gesture of charity. On his left side, his upper hand once held a lotus flower, his middle hand holds a bow and arrow, which represents concentration, and his lower hand holds a water pot.
- Over his left shoulder Avalokiteshvara wears the skin of a magical deer. This deer was exceptionally strong and compassionate, and it is believed that just touching such a deerskin calms the mind and aids concentration.

Discussion Questions

- What about the bodhisattva reflects his role as the deity of compassion? (For example, his expression, his attributes, etc.)
- How did the artist communicate Avalokiteshvara's supernatural status? (For example, his clothing and adornments, his multiple limbs and heads, etc.)

Activity

- Imagine what you could accomplish if you had extra hands and heads. Write a short story or essay about the projects you would take on to help make the world a better place if you had such extraordinary features.

Vocabulary

- **Amitabha Buddha:** the “Buddha of Infinite Life,” considered the spiritual father of Avalokiteshvara.
- **Ekadasamukha:** the Buddhist religious figure Avalokiteshvara in his eleven-headed form.
- **Dharma wheel:** a symbol of the Buddha's teachings.
- **Hayagriva:** the wrathful form of Avalokiteshvara; guardian of sacred texts and patron deity of horse traders.
- **Wrathful deities:** “protectors of the Dharma” in the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. A wrathful deity is often an alternative manifestation of a bodhisattva, for instance, Hayagriva is the wrathful form of Avalokiteshvara.