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## Gyōgi Bosatsu

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# HOLY PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

## *A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia*

VOLUME 1: ENTRIES A TO G

*Phyllis G. Jestice, Editor*

*Foreword by Lionel Rothkrug*

A B C  C L I O

Santa Barbara, California

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Oxford, England

sembly while the discourse was in progress without removing his pandit's hat in the customary way. Tsong kha pa noticed him but continued to teach. Gyeltsap strode up to the throne on which Tsong kha pa was seated and began to mount it. Tsong kha pa, without halting his teaching, simply moved over to make room for him and continued. As he listened, Gyeltsap began to realize that he was in the presence of an enlightened master, and his arrogance began to subside. First, he removed his hat, then he got down from the throne and seated himself among the listeners. Rather than challenge Tsong kha pa, he now aspired to become his student.

When Tsong kha pa was establishing Ganden Monastery, Gyeltsap assumed responsibility for its construction and participated personally in the administrative work. When Tsong kha pa was near death, he gave Gyeltsap his pandit's hat, yellow robes, and cape as a sign that he was to succeed him. Gyeltsap took on this responsibility at the age of fifty-six when Tsong kha pa died. In retrospect, it was said that Gyeltsap's first encounter with Tsong kha pa had been an auspicious indication that he would be the successor as holder of the Ganden throne. Gyeltsap held the position for thirteen years. At the age of sixty-eight, shortly before his death in 1432, he installed Kaydrub Gelek belsangbo (mkhas sgrub dge legs dpal bzang po), Tsong kha pa's other closest disciple, as the next holder of the throne. Gyeltsap was also a great scholar and wrote a number of important commentaries to Buddhist philosophical works that are utilized by scholars in the present-day Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.

—James B. Apple

**See also:** Attributes of Holy People; Scholars as Holy People; Tsong kha pa lo zang drak pa

**References and further reading:**

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## Gyogi Bosatsu

(668–749 C.E.)

*Buddhist preacher, social activist*

Gyogi (or Gyoki), a wandering Buddhist preacher, magician, social welfare activist, and overseer of the construction of Todaiji temple, became one of the great popular figures of early Japanese Buddhism. Born in Osaka of Korean immi-

grants in 668, at age fifteen Gyogi went to study under Master Dosho at Yakushiji temple in Nara. Nara Buddhism at this time was largely a religion of the elite, generally treated as a means for establishing state protection. Gyogi was the first prominent voice of dissent against such a vision of Buddhism. He chose to focus on the universal, compassionate ideals of Buddhism, which he believed were relevant to all sectors of Japanese society. After completing his vows, Gyogi retreated to the mountain forests to meditate, during which time it is said he received divine power and blessings. In 704, he quit his position as a court priest and began to travel widely, preaching his message of compassion, attending to the sick, establishing numerous temples, and engaging in various projects of social welfare, such as building roads, ponds, canals, dikes, bridges, and charity houses. He is said to have attracted more than 1,000 followers, both laity and clergy.

In 717, Gyogi was banished from the capital region for disobeying the imperial decree by which monks were prohibited from preaching to the common people. Yet his popularity was such that the government was eventually forced to repeal the ban. Upon his return to the capital, Gyogi was named overseer of Emperor Shomu's great construction project, Todaiji temple, whose main hall remains to this day the largest wooden building in the world, housing the world's largest bronze statue—the *Daibutsu* (Great Buddha). Gyogi took up the task in earnest, rallying funds and popular support for the project, which, somewhat ironically, given Gyogi's earlier populist tendencies, became the symbol of state-sponsored Buddhism. In 745, a fully rehabilitated Gyogi was given the title of Great Priest (Daisojo), the first to achieve that honor. Todaiji was finally completed in 749, the year of Gyogi's death.

Not long after his death, Gyogi began to be revered as a Buddhist "saint" or *bodhisattva* (enlightened being; Jap.: *bosatsu*), either a manifestation of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, or an avatar of the cosmic healing buddha, Yakushi Nyorai. Popular legends of his works and miracles abound. Gyogi is frequently pictured as a wanderer with a chestnut walking stick in his hand. Since the Sino-Japanese characters for "chestnut" literally mean "west" and "tree," this symbol indicates the western paradise of Amitabha.

—James Mark Shields

**See also:** Amitabha; Buddhism and Holy People; Gods on Earth; Laity; Manjushri; Mission; Recognition

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Kashiwahara, Yusen, and Koyu Sonoda. 1994. *Shapers of Japanese Buddhism*. Translated by Gaynor Sekimori. Tokyo: Kosei.