



**INSIGHT: THE PATH
OF BODHIDHARMA**

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Credited with introducing Chan (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism to China in the sixth century, the Indian monk Bodhidharma (known as Daruma in Japan) has become a well-known subject in Buddhist art. As Chan Buddhism gained popularity, various legends associated with the Chan patriarch evolved, and artists began to depict those legends alongside his conventional portraits. Traditional depictions of Bodhidharma were executed in ink monochrome with free, expressive brush strokes, alluding to his teaching on the spontaneous nature of reaching enlightenment through meditation. During the Edo period (1603–1868) in Japan, the depiction of this pious monk's stern expression went through a radical change as he was often paired with a courtesan of the pleasure quarters—a parody to expose the hypocrisy of society. Today, Bodhidharma is still widely represented both in fine art and as a pop culture icon of good luck. Through an array of objects from paintings and sculptures to decorative objects and toys, *Insight: The Path of Bodhidharma* illustrates the visual and conceptual shift in depictions of this religious figure from the 17th century through today.



BODHIDHARMA AS CHAN PATRIARCH

One of the most common portrayals of Bodhidharma is a bust portrait revealing only the upper half of his body. In a three-quarter profile, he was frequently depicted in ways that emphasize his non-East Asian heritage and iconoclastic persona with large glaring eyes, a prominent nose and beard—sometimes an earring and red hooded robe. The primary goal of Bodhidharma's teaching is to reach personal enlightenment through meditation that clears one's mind from distracting thoughts and worldly concerns. Over time, ink monochrome became the style closely associated with Bodhidharma and his philosophy, preferably executed in a quick and evocative manner to express the patriarch's religious views and personal convictions. Whereas his face is often rendered in a more naturalistic manner, with a variety of brush strokes to express his intensity and resoluteness in reaching enlightenment, his body is finished with freer and more spontaneous brushwork suggesting an amorphous and impromptu path to enlightenment without aid from sutra (sacred texts) or strict rituals. Thus, Bodhidharma portraits are not merely expressions of artists' personality or talent, rather they serve as an inspirational tool for practitioners' meditation or a means of declaring and celebrating the experience of enlightenment.

DARUMA AS SATIRE AND HUMOR

Zen/Chan Buddhism garnered substantial support from the samurai class during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) in Japan and from this period onwards, depictions of Bodhidharma became widespread among practitioners as an aid to attaining enlightenment. The image of Bodhidharma, or Daruma, as he

TOP: *Bodhidharma*, China, Ming Dynasty; Wanli Period (1573–1620); 17th century, Porcelain, glaze, Gift of Meilinki Enterprises in Memory of Richard Miles, 2002.38.1

ABOVE: Hotei Hokuga (active early 19th century), *Daruma and Courtesan*, Japan, Edo Period (1603–1868); c. 1805, Ink, color, silk, paper, wood, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Calvin Frazier, 1986.67.8

came to be called in Japan, reached unexpected reincarnation during the Edo period, when he was often paired with a courtesan of the pleasure quarters—a humorous critique of the ruling samurai class who boasted to be dedicated Zen Buddhists as a symbol of their cultured minds. The images of this ascetic with an alluring courtesan belonged to the genre *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world), and, through wordplay, also satirized Buddhism itself. In a Buddhist sense, the word *ukiyo* (憂き, ‘transitory world’) refers to the ephemeral nature of the world. However, by replacing that character for *ukiyo* with the homonym 浮 (meaning ‘floating’), a profound Buddhist idea was turned upside down to instead characterize the attitude of *joie de vivre* in the pleasure quarters.

DARUMA AS ICON OF GOOD LUCK IN POP CULTURE

With numerous legends annotating his supernatural power, the Bodhidharma’s abilities have been extended to an almost limitless range, from protecting one’s child from smallpox to granting success in political campaigns. While the story of Bodhidharma centers on China, it is in Japan that he, as Daruma, has achieved far-reaching popularity, endowing him with other roles more directly related to people’s concerns and needs. A variety of Daruma forms and modes are embedded with rich meanings, some trite and others profound, that relate to the history of Zen Buddhism as well as to the shared experiences of the Japanese people. One of the most popular Daruma representations is *okiagari koboshi* (tumbler doll); a reference to the legend that Bodhidharma lost his arms and legs due to atrophy after nine years of wall-gazing meditation. Bodhidharma was not deterred by this physical condition, achieving enlightenment with extreme mental concentration. Thus, the tumbler doll that resists falling and returns quickly to an upright position also simulates Bodhidharma’s remarkable resilience and perseverance. Giving a tumbler toy to a child is to deliver a lesson of never giving in to adversity. A typical Daruma tumbler doll is without eyes at the time of purchase. A petitioner will paint one eye on the doll while



Dirk Hagner, *Sam Hamill*, 2003, Etching. Courtesy of the artist ©Dirk Hagner

making a wish and prayer; when the wish or goal is realized, the other eye is painted in. This practice of painting eyes on Daruma dolls can find its origins in a traditional Buddhist ceremony. When a Buddha’s image is painted, the painting is left without eyes. A priest would finish the Buddha’s image with eyes when the image was first introduced to worshippers, infusing the image with spiritual power.

Bodhidharma or Daruma still continues to inspire artists and serves as an agency to convey their conceptual or artistic concerns. Akemi Maegawa employs Daruma to explore questions about the impact of popular and material culture on contemporary art in her *Daruma Commodity Series*. Others reflect upon this pious religious figure, as seen in Dirk Hagner’s etching where the patriarch’s teaching of soul-searching remains evident long after he has gone.

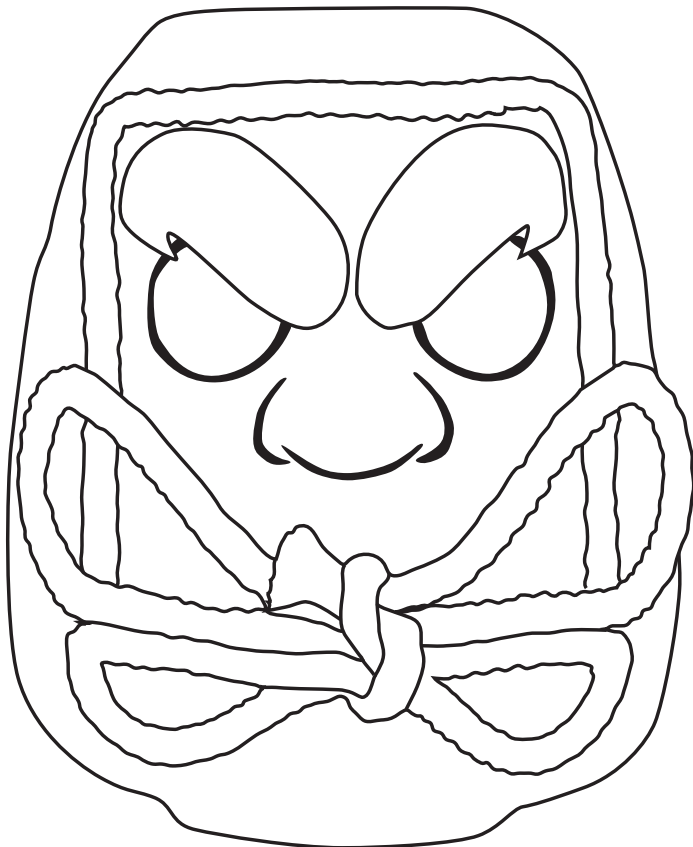


Daruma, Japan, 20th century, Wood, paint, Baker Family Trust, 2004.13.83

MAKE YOUR OWN RESOLUTION WITH DARUMA!

Around the world, the New Year is a time for making resolutions. In Japan, people write their goals on the back of Daruma dolls as he is a symbol of strong will and persistence. The dolls then serve as a reminder to work hard to achieve their goals.

Write your goal in the space below with the date and color in just one pupil of Daruma. This shows you are halfway to completing your goal. Decorate the Daruma however you want. Do your best to complete your goal; you can color in the other pupil when you succeed!



Write in your goal/wish:

COVER: Kanō (Shushin) Chikanobu (1660–1728), *Daruma*, Japan, Edo Period (1603–1868), Ink, paper, silk, wood, Gift of Dr. Jesse L. Greenstein, 2002.4.15