

The Laughing Buddha



The celestial Buddha named **Hotei** or **Pu-Tai** is best known as the jolly **Laughing Buddha**. In China, he is known as the Loving or Friendly One. He is based on an eccentric Chinese Ch'an (Zen) monk who lived over 1,000 years ago and has become a significant part of Buddhist and Shinto culture. Because of this monk's benevolent nature, he came to be regarded as an incarnation of the bodhisattva who will be **Maitreya** (the Future Buddha). His large protruding stomach and jolly smile have given him the common designation "Laughing Buddha."

The Laughing Buddha's image graces many temples, restaurants, and amulets, as he has become a deity of contentment and abundance. The image of Hotei is almost always seen carrying a cloth or linen sack (that which never empties) which is filled with many precious items, including rice plants (indicating wealth), candy for children, food, or the woes of the world. He is patron of the weak, poor and children.

Laughing Buddha statues depict a stout, smiling or laughing bald man in robes with a largely exposed pot belly stomach, which symbolizes happiness, good luck, and plenitude. Some sculpture has small children at his feet. Another item that is usually seen with the Laughing Buddha figure is a begging bowl to represent his Buddhist nature.

In some scenes the Laughing Buddha may be found sitting on a cart drawn by boys, or wielding a fan called an *oogi* (said to be a "wish giving" fan -- in the distant past, this type of fan was used by the aristocracy to indicate to vassals that their requests would be granted). All of these images display Hotei as a wandering monk who goes around and takes the sadness from people of this world.

According to legend, if one rubs the Laughing Buddha's great belly, it brings forth wealth, good luck, and prosperity. Hotei is also referred to as the patron saint of restaurateurs, fortunetellers and bartenders. When one overeats or over drinks, friends jokingly attribute it to the Laughing Buddha's influence.

Objects

Bowl

The meaning of sculptures depicting Buddha holding a bowl points to an essential part of a monk's life - it is a begging bowl and represents the idea that monks live off what is given or donated by others. There is also a story associated with Buddha and the begging bowl. It is said that as Buddha came close to reaching enlightenment and young woman gave him a bowl of milk rice, however at this time Buddha was fasting. Realizing that his fasting had weakened his body and he would require more nourishment in order to attain enlightenment he accepted. Having reached enlightenment he discarded the little remaining contents of the bowl symbolizing his detachment from material possessions. The link between the renunciation of material possessions and reaching enlightenment plays a prominent part in Buddhist philosophy.

Fan

A laughing Hotei Buddha with a fan is a symbol of happiness and joy. Some scenes the Laughing Buddha may be found sitting on a cart drawn by boys, or wielding a fan called an *oogi* (said to be a "wish giving" fan -in the distant past, this type of fan was used by the aristocracy to indicate to vassals that their requests would be granted).

Sack or bag

Sculptures of Buddha with a sack usually depicts Hotei Buddha. Hotei, meaning 'cotton sack' is the representation of the travelling Buddha. It is said that he wanders the world collecting people's sadness and woes and putting them in his sack. The sack is also said to represent wealth and good fortune.

Beads

The beads, known as a 'mala,' represent never-ending meditation practice, even when engaged in worldly activities.

Ball

The ball has various meanings, the more popular one is that the ball is a wealth ball which brings wealth and prosperity. Other meanings include medicine balls, pearls of wisdom, and a peach or apricot representing health and prosperity.

Happy Hotei's come in many forms:

Safe Travels Buddha

The Safe Travels Buddha is an old-fashioned rendition. He either carries a stick with a bundle tied to the end of it or he has a sack thrown over one shoulder. Both variations include him holding a wealth ball in his other hand.

Long Life Buddha

The Long Life Buddha is seated and has a bag of blessings by his side or holds the bag in his lap. In one hand, he cradles a wealth ball raised in front of him and a Ru-Yi pot in his other hand.

Spiritual Journey Buddha

The Spiritual Journey Buddha has quite a few symbols to study. Typically, he carries a gourd of enlightenment suspended from a stick while holding a fan in his other hand. He wears a necklace made of prayer beads.

Happy Home Buddha

The Happy Home Buddha is seated and holds a parasol over his shoulder, protruding behind his back.

Love Buddha

Combinations of symbols create a seated Love Buddha holding a wealth ball in one hand with a bag slung over his shoulder.

Earth Buddha

Also known as, Calling Earth to Witness, the Earth Buddha sits on the ground with his right hand extended so his fingers point to the earth beneath him. This statue honors the time when Buddha was repeatedly tempted by the demon, Mara, but resisted and reached enlightenment.

Reclining Buddha

Buddha awaits his transition from this life to death, which he viewed as a mere journey of transition into a different state of being.

Wealthy Brass Laughing Buddha Sitting On Dragon Chair

Depicted in an ever smiling face, holding a gold ingot in his left hand and a sack of wealth in his right, sitting on a Dragon Chair with the Chinese character for "Good Fortune and Luck" on the back with the auspicious gold coins scattered underneath, the Laughing Buddha on Dragon Chair for Good Fortune is a must for those wishing for riches and abundance

Buddha on Coins/Bag

Buddha standing or sitting on a pile of coins or his bag is protector of wealth.