

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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CONTRIBUTOR'S BULLETIN

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A CURIOSITY



Dear Friends,



In one of my trips to Japan, I made an interesting discovery. The antique shops display a variety of religious objects suitable for private worship or inclusion in museum collections. While browsing around, I came across an extraordinary item which is photographed above. The dealer was not very fluent in English, but I was able to piece together a few fragments of useful information concerning this curiosity.

There was a fine, heavy black wooden box with handsome old hardware. The box itself was ornamented with lotus flowers, leaves and buds floating on the surface of water or arising therefrom. In the box, arranged on shelves were twenty-five miniature images of Buddha, and in the center, a large gilded figure of the Buddha standing on a lotus pedestal. All the figures were carved from wood and the case is lined with gold leaf. According to the dealer, this is a kind of sample box. Whenever a woodcarver is engaged to make images for a temple, he is supposed to send one to the chief depository of the sect which remains on permanent file. Different artists prepare different groups of figures according to the request or need of some sanctuary. Cases are prepared for safe storage of the original designs. How this example came upon the market is obscure and I have never seen any other example resembling it.

*Handmade - not as
Std. taken on more -
13 mo - lunar calendar
Dec,*

This may be a good opportunity to clarify the significance of images in Mahayana Buddhism. Under no conditions are these sacred figures actual objects of worship. They are representations of a venerated teacher whose life and labors contributed greatly to the advancement of Asiatic civilization. Some type of object seems to be necessary to both private and public worship. It is a reminder of a great teacher who departed from this world more than twenty-six hundred years ago.

The Buddha image according to the inscription on the great bronze image at Kamakura is sanctified by the veneration of ages. It is therefore entitled to respect because it brings to mind the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Three Precious Jewels of the faith. In the West, we cherish pictures of parents and grandparents who have passed out of this life. We build monuments to our national heroes and like to remember the services they have rendered for the preservation of our nation. We do not expect these pictures or images to hear what we say or to be captured within the forms which we have fashioned in their honor. It is an involuntary gesture of our own for in their likenesses we remember their deeds.

This is true wherever the images of Buddha and his disciples are placed on temple altars. In many European cathedrals and American churches there are sacred likenesses before which the devout kneel in prayer. We honor the teacher and the teaching as one reality, and are strengthened in our resolution to live as honorably as possible. To the Buddhist, the Buddha stands for eternal compassion, personified by a compassionate person who journeyed along the dusty roads of India for over eighty years. Those who knew him in life testified to his nobility, and the shrines and temples built to his honor are testimonies to the determination to preserve the essence of the teachings which he brought.

In days of strife and turmoil, when the dignity of integrity is threatened and physical securities fade away, the human heart seeks refuge in the conviction that the Noble Eightfold Path is real and, in the fulness of time, the gentle and the meek shall inherit the earth.

In most of the Japanese Buddhist temples, pilgrims can secure sacred souvenirs to take home as reminders of pilgrimage to some holy place. The carvers of sacred images must be themselves inspired artists. Even the simplest figurines have a quality of life derived from their creator who is a simple and kindly man. He may pray for many hours and put on a simple white raiment and try to clear his mind from all temporal concerns. When the time comes, his family, including the small children, may sit quietly on the mat a short distance from him watching a miracle. When the image is finished and is consecrated, another messenger of the Four Noble Truths will become a silent servant of the Great Doctrine.

One of the greatest of the Buddhist images in Japan stands in the Todaiji Temple in Nara. It is the largest bronze casting ever attempted as most bronze images are built up from sheets of metal held together in various ways. The temple in which it sits is the largest all wooden structure in the world and, according to some reports, is built without nails. Unfortunately, the huge figure was seriously damaged by fire, but it has been restored and once a year it is subjected to an over-all cleaning. While there, you may have the opportunity of purchasing a miniature replica of the sixty foot image on its lotus stand. The replicas come in assorted sizes and I selected one which was neatly packed in an unpainted wooden box. A Japanese emperor gave all his fortune to the temple of the great Buddha at Nara.

I remember that in the late nineteen-twenties, I was on friendly terms with the Buddhist priest who had a little temple in a second-story room on East First Street in Los Angeles. I invited him to perform a service for our audience in Trinity Auditorium and loaned him a Buddhist altar which I had acquired not long before. It was quite an event. The ceremony and the accompanying lecture were entirely in Japanese with no interpreter. Over a thousand non-Japanese attended the event and, when he finished, he received a standing ovation. A friend of mine who attended the event said he did not understand a word, but the little Japanese priest was a wonderful inspiration.

Later in the same year, the priest managed to have his own altar in that second-story room and he was desperately desirous of having a genuine antique figure of Kannon to be an object of veneration. I provided him with a fine old antique woodcarving about two feet high on perpetual loan. It really makes very little difference what faith you belong to for the essence of religion is not in words and names, but the sincerity of the human heart paying homage to the service of a gentle truth.

Very sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall

MANLY P. HALL



RECOMMENDED READING:

Boscolo	Key to the Future	(P)	\$ 7.95
Buber	Ecstatic Confessions	(C)	16.95
Buck	Symbolism or Mystic Masonry	(C)	12.00
Buscaglia	Love	(P)	3.95
Capt	Missing Links Discovered in Assyrian Tablets	(P)	10.00
Capt	Our Great Seal	(P)	3.00
Case	True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order	(C)	22.50
Cohen	Rising in Love	(P)	5.95
Cousins	Healing Heart	(P)	3.95
de Waal	Medicinal Herbs in the Bible	(P)	5.95
Dinsmore	Teachings of Dante	(C)	17.00
Goddard	Buddha's Golden Path	(P)	9.00
Grant	Winged Pharaoh	(P)	7.95
Green	God's Fool The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi	(C)	16.95
Roberts	Freemasonry in American History	(C)	20.00
Schwartz	Elijah's Violin & Other Jewish Fairy Tales	(P)	8.95
Tansley	Subtle Body	(P)	10.95
Taylor	Acupressure Yoga and You	(P)	11.95

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