



Daruma dolls

The legend of Daruma is simple and powerful. And to Western ears, it's also a bit gruesome. In Japan, the word "daruma" originally referred to the founder of Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma. It's now most commonly used to denote the dolls dedicated to Bodhidharma's memory.

According to legend, Bodhidharma once practiced something we might today call "extreme meditation." Arriving at a Shaolin temple, he tucked himself into a zazen meditation posture, legs folded under his body. Fading into deep meditation for nine years, his legs atrophied and fell away from his body, followed by his arms.



A 19th century painted scroll of Bodhidharma by the artist Gyosai, from the Meiji Period. But before the dropping of limbs, Bodhidharma figured out a rather novel method of overcoming his body's need to sleep. He cut off his eyelids, and flung them to the ground, where they became tea plants, the source of modern man's somewhat less drastic way of staying up all night.

Bodhidharma's single-minded pursuit of meditation and enlightenment may be a bit serious for modern Americans. But it represents a beautiful ideal often forgotten in modern times: the willingness to dedicate oneself to an important, life-changing project, and not rest until it is completed.

Daruma dolls to the rescue! These strange, legless, armless, eyelid-less red Japanese papier-mâché creations are portable, tangible **New Year's resolutions** from another culture. When embarking on a major project or commitment, you paint in Daruma's left eye, symbolizing your commitment to the task ahead. When the task is completed, you paint in his right eye, leaving you with a finished doll and a feeling of immense, smug satisfaction.