Amitabha Dhyani Buddha



Amitabha Buddha cast in copper (detail)

The original Buddha, Sakyamuni Gautama, or Gautama Siddhartha, was born in India in the 5^{th}-6^{th} century B.C. He was born into a noble family, but left this life to lead the life of a wandering ascetic and thinker. Reflecting on the human condition one night while sitting under a Bodi tree, he awoke to find he had realized nirvana, the state of absolute beatitude, and would not be reborn again. He spent the rest of his life as a preacher, his teachings contained in a series of documents called the Sutras.

As time passed, Buddhism adapted to new cultures. At the beginning of the first century A.D. Buddhist doctrine underwent a change from a simple philosophy of life into a set of religious doctrines with the Buddha transformed into a deity on the same level as Hindu gods. It is thought, however, the Buddha never projected himself as a divine entity or master, demanding from his followers only personal attainment through meditation and reflection, the object being to liberate oneself from the cycle of rebirths to reach nirvana.



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Ultimately, many types of Buddha evolved, each representing a different aspect of the original Buddha. One group of five Buddhas is called the Dhyani Buddhas. The word Dhyani is derived from the Sanskrit dhyana, meaning meditation. These Buddhas are also called Jinas (victors or conquerors) and are considered to be great healers of the mind and soul. Dhyani Buddhas reflect various aspects of enlightened consciousness.

The fourth Dhyani Buddha is named Amitabha. Amitabha represents boundless light and bestows immortality, a reference to breaking the endless cycle of birth and rebirth by attaining nirvana. Buddhist missionaries brought their doctrines very early to other countries. Ultimately, the effigies representing the Buddha assumed a local character, and the faces of the deities became influenced by local ethnic types and the aesthetic canons of the regions. In Nepal, the depictions of the Buddha became almost lifelike with refined features, and the “attitudes” became meditative in nature. Depictions of Buddha in Nepal attempted to convey a single, simple truth conveyed in the hand positions (mudras), leg positions (asanas), and serene, knowing faces.

Most Nepalese Buddhas are depicted in the seated position with a leg position, or Asana called “Padmasana,” the lotus position, which is the meditative position. This is true of your Buddha as well. Oftentimes, multiple mudras, or hand positions, are represented. However, your Buddha depicts the hands laying on top of one another in a single mudra called “dhyana.” This is also known as “Buddha’s Mudra” and is associated with the path to nirvana

as taught by Buddha himself – often called the middle path, which lies between complete austerity and complete attachment to worldly goods and affairs.

Virtually all Nepalese Buddhas and statues are created using the lost wax process. In this process a meltable substance (usually hard wax) is carved as the original sculpture. Around the original a mold is created, usually composed of clay and straw. After the mold hardens the molten metal is poured inside where it displaces the wax. After the metal hardens the mold is broken, revealing the statue. The lost wax process can only produce one-of-a-kind objects since both the original and mold are destroyed in the production process. A solid wax model produces a solid casting; a hollow wax model with a clay core produces a hollow cast. For economic reasons and ease in handling, only very small objects and sculptures are solid cast. All pieces, whether solid or hollow cast, require hand finishing after the molds are broken. Today, it is widely recognized that the finest lost wax process castings come from Nepal because of the artistry, level of detail and finesse with which they are created.