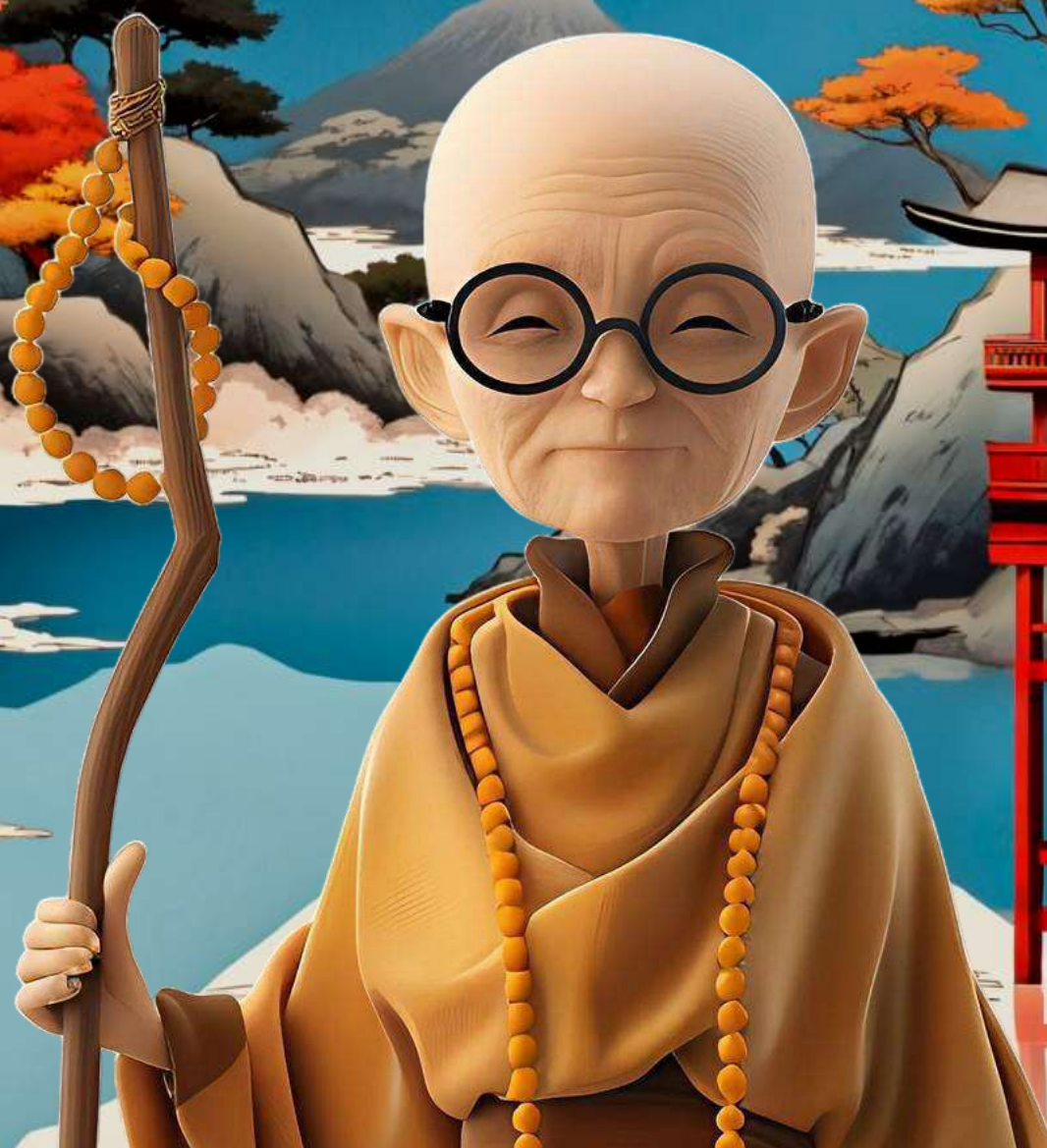




# Spectacular Stories for Curious Kids

## Mummify Yourself ... Alive





When you think of mummies, you probably think of Egyptian royalty, preserved and prepared for the transition into the next life. In that process, they had help. They couldn't have prepared for it themselves, for the simple fact that they were dead. But in Japan up until the 19th century, there were Buddhist monks who did exactly that. They mummified themselves!



The first question that'll pop into your mind is surely, why, oh why would they do that? Let's first see what this whole thing is about. Self-mummification in Japan is known as Sokushinbutsu, which roughly translates to "becoming a Buddha in this body".

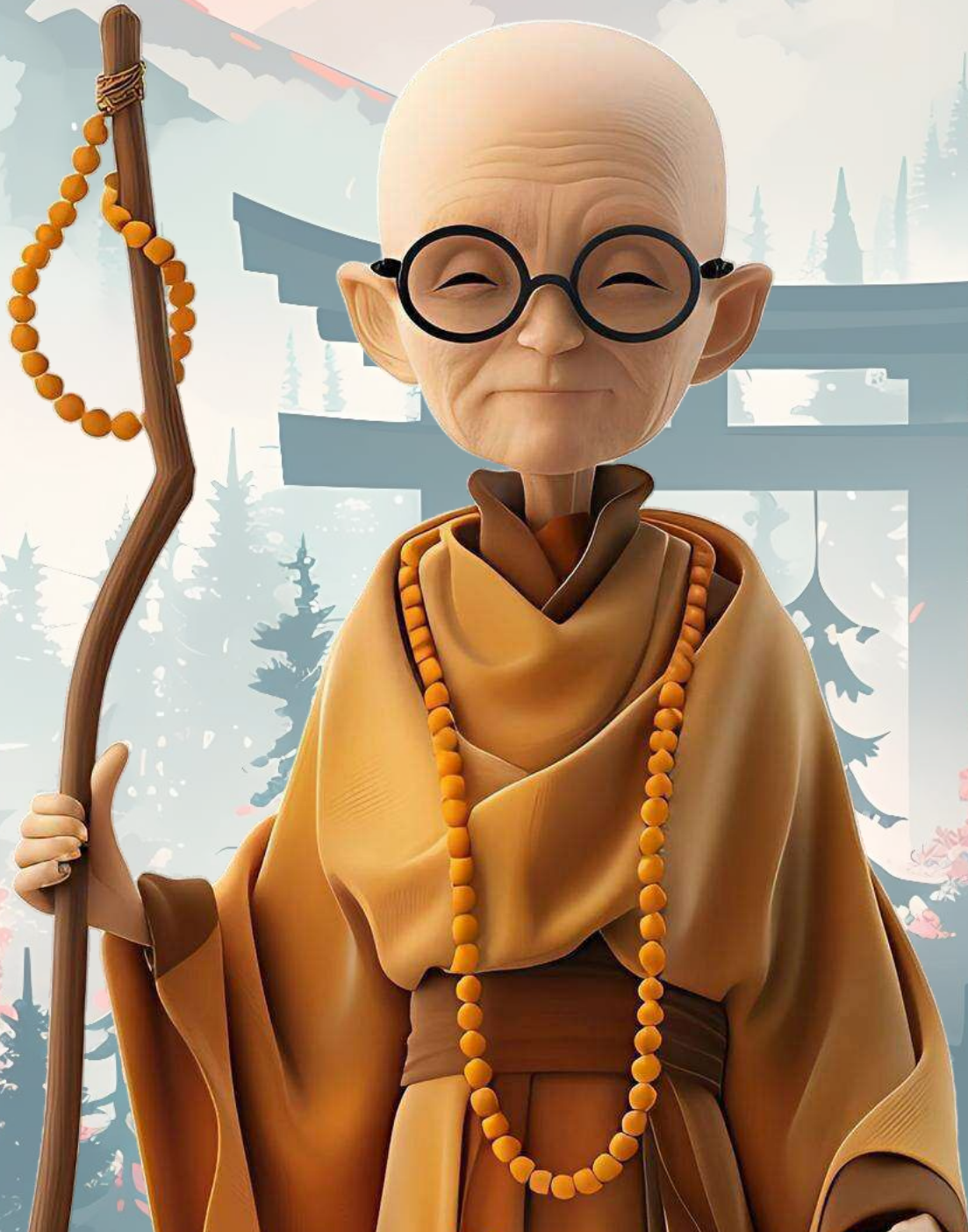




First, let's see why anyone would want to be mummified. Many cultures hold the mummification process in high regard. Leaving a corpse behind that doesn't decay has always been a sign of something amazing.



The most famous monks who practiced Sokushinbutsu are the Japanese Shingon monks of Yamagata. What they're doing is seeking redemption for mankind. Self-mummification is a sacrificial act. They did it so that they would be granted entrance to Tusita Heaven, from where they would also be able to protect humans on Earth.



The trick for Tusita Heaven is that their bodies can't decompose. It has to be bound to their spiritual selves. This is why the self-mummification process is extremely painful, long and arduous.





What they did was mummify themselves from the inside out. The process lasts at least 3 years and it starts off with a special diet known as mokujikigyo. The monk would go wandering through the nearby woods, eating only nuts, berries, tree bark, tree roots and pine needles. This way, they would lose fat and prevent any future fat from being stored in their bodies.



Basically, the body is starting to dry up from the inside as this diet lacks vital nutrients and moisture. In addition to the diet, solitary wandering adds to the spiritual journey so the monk can contemplate life, death and everything in between.





This would go on for exactly 1000 days. Once usually isn't enough, so many undergo this process several times, to make sure they'd really mummify themselves in the end. Otherwise, all that effort would be for nothing, right?



The next phase is the embalming process. This was done by drinking tea made of urushi, which is the sap of the Chinese lacquer tree. It is highly toxic and the monk drinks it so that after his death, insects won't start gnawing on his body. They still drink water, but very little. And they add salt to it. Meditation and contemplation continues as well.





Slowly, the monk would feel death knocking on the door. He would then place himself in a super small, tight pine box, which would then be lowered ten feet below the ground. A small bamboo rod would allow fresh air flow, and there would be a bell that the monk would ring every day as he continued to meditate in total darkness.



The tomb would be sealed and left undisturbed for 1000 days. After that, they would open the lid and check the body. If it showed any signs of decay, they would bury the body because the monk did not achieve Sokushinbutsu. If it was intact, they would proceed to dress it in ceremonial robes and put it up in a special place at the temple.





Luckily, Sokushinbutsu became illegal in 1877 and rightly so. Hundreds of monks had tried to do it since the first attempt way back in 1081, but only about two dozen actually achieved it.





# THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

