

## Jogyodo, Hall of Ascetic Practice

A hall for the practice of walking meditation has existed here since 848 CE, when the original hall was built by the monk Ennin (ca. 794–864). The *Jogyo Zanmai*, from which the hall derives its name, was practiced here. In this very intense ascetic practice, monks walk around the Buddhas placed in the middle of the hall for ninety days without rest while continuously chanting the *Nenbutsu* prayer. According to tradition, the Amida Buddha would appear before a monk who successfully completed this meditation. The current building dates from the Edo period (1603–1867).

The central object of worship here is a crowned Amida Nyorai accompanied by four bodhisattvas. This is the only example in Japan of this unusual depiction of the Amida Buddha. Typically, Amida Buddha is seated atop a lotus flower, but in this depiction Amida and the four bodhisattvas sit astride peacocks. As the peacock eats worms and insects, it is considered to be a symbol of purity. It symbolically eats the worms of the heart—doubt, fear, laziness, and the like—and thus keeps one's spirit pure. This statue of the Amida Buddha wears a crown. Buddhas wear nothing on their heads to indicate their attainment of enlightenment. Bodhisattvas, the rank below enlightened Buddhas, wear crowns, to indicate both their exalted status and their proximity to human existence. Amida's crown harks back to ancient mandalas that predate the development of this differentiation.