

## Shiki Kodo (Important Cultural Property)

The origin of the Lecture Hall of Four Seasons dates back to the Joshinbo dwelling of Ryogen (912–985).

It used to enshrine a statue of the bodhisattva Miroku. However, in 967, when Ryogen was fifty-four, Emperor Murakami decreed that the building should be used for the study and discussion of the Mahayana sutras by students throughout the year, hence the name “Shiki Kodo.” Ryogen became the eighteenth Tendai Abbot at age fifty-five. During his nineteen-year tenure, he refurbished many of the buildings on Mount Hiei that had been damaged or fallen into disrepair due to various conflicts or natural disasters. He introduced reforms for the monks, and improved the level of scholarship by establishing a curriculum of broad formal debates.

The Yokawa district produced many outstanding monks such as Genshin, and its population of monks grew to over three thousand, putting it on a par with the Eastern and Western Pagoda areas of Mount Hiei. Posthumously, Ryogen was given the honorary title of Master, or “Ganzan Daishi.” Great spiritual strength is attributed to him, and he is worshipped as an incarnation of Nyoirin Kannon, a form of the goddess of mercy, or the Fudo Myo-o, the preeminent deity of the Five Wisdom Kings. Ryogen is credited with the introduction of omikuji fortune-telling strips. He also features on a popular talisman believed to ward off evil, which portrays him sporting horns, the Tsuno Daishi, “Great Horned Master.” It is said that Ryogen’s reflection in a mirror would appear in the form of a devil.

Ryogen passed away during the New Year in 985 and hence his title is Ganzan Daishi, which means “the Master who died on the third day of the New Year.” An image of him was enshrined in the hall, which became the center for the worship of Ganzan Daishi in Japan. Every year on the anniversary of Ryogen’s death, a lecture and debate on the Lotus Sutra is held in his memory, and his birthday, on the third day of September, is celebrated with a Nyoirin Kannon Mandala memorial service. Buddhist services with lectures on the “Eight Lotus Sutra Lectures” are conducted in each of the four seasons. The abbot of the Yokawa-innai temple performs ceremonies and gives lectures every day in memory of Ryogen. These practices are so exacting that they are called the “Hell of Chanting the Sutras,” one of the three hell-like religious practices on Mount Hiei, along with the practices of “circling the peaks” and “cleaning.”

S: Sanskrit

Shiki Kodo (Four Seasons Lecture Hall) (also Ganzan Daishi-do)

Miroku (S. Maitreya)

Nyoirin Kannon (Wisdom Ring Avalokitesvara)

Fudo Myo-o (S. Acalanatha)

Tsuno Daishi (Great Horned Master)

Kankin jigoku (hell of chanting the sutras)

Kaiho jigoku (hell of circling the peaks)

Soji jigoku (cleaning hell)