

Tachiki Kannon

The Thousand-armed Kannon enshrined here is known as Tachiki Kannon—meaning the “standing-tree Kannon”—and it is the oldest Buddhist statue in Nikko. It was carved by the monk Shodo Shonin (735–817), who founded most of the early temples at the complex of shrines and temples known as Nikko-zan. Shodo reportedly carved the statue from a single katsura tree without cutting it down. The statue has no feet, and the hem of the garment fades into the roots of the tree at the base of the statue.

Kannon, the bodhisattva of mercy, is an important figure in Buddhism. The deity is said to hear the pleas of all people and to help those who are suffering. Kannon takes many forms to be able to save people according to their circumstances.

Thousand-armed Kannon is one of the three principal deities of Rinnoji Temple and is considered to be a manifestation of Mt. Nantai. It is the main deity here at Chuzenji Temple, which is part of the larger Rinnoji complex.

Although called the Thousand-armed Kannon, this statue actually has 42 arms. Two are part of the torso and the other 40 were carved separately and joined to the body of the statue. Each of the 40 additional hands is either in the position of a mudra (a sacred hand gesture) or is holding an implement that can be used to fight evil or to provide assistance. Each extra hand is believed to be able to grant 25 requests, for a total of a thousand.

The statue has eleven heads. The ten lower heads represent the ten steps required to attain enlightenment, and the eleventh head, in the center and at the highest position, represents Buddhahood. This eleventh head is usually identified as Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise.