

Grave of Shodo Shonin

Inside the fence is the grave of the ascetic monk Shodo Shonin (735–817), founder of the Nikko-zan shrine-temple complex that is the forerunner of Rinnoji Temple. Shodo's cremated remains were first buried in the upper reaches of this valley and were later moved to this location when the Founder's Hall was built around 1620, soon after the consecration of Toshogu Shrine.

Shodo Shonin's grave is marked by a stone five-ringed pagoda (*gorinto*). Although *gorinto* are now common grave markers throughout Japan, initially they were only used by Esoteric Buddhist sects such as Shingon and Tendai. Rinnoji is a Tendai temple.

The five levels of *gorinto* represent the five fundamental elements with five different shapes. Starting from the bottom, the cube represents earth; the sphere represents water; the triangle represents fire; the crescent represents wind or air; and a globular shape on top represents void or energy. This top shape varies in different parts of the world; in Japan it is often the shape of a lotus bud.

The other graves nearby are those of Shodo's disciples.