

Hotoke Iwa and Six Guardians of Buddhism

This cliff was named Buddha Rock (*hotoke iwa*) for an image of the Buddha that could be discerned in the shape of the rock. At some point, the cliff face crumbled in an earthquake, and the image is now lost. This rock face is on the eastern side of the mountain where the tomb of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, is located.

The six stone figures in front of the shallow cave are all Buddhist guardian deities. From left to right, the figures are: Taishakuten, Bonten, Fudo Myo-o, and two of the Four Heavenly Kings. Taishakuten is the commander of the Four Heavenly Kings and defends humans and deities against evil. Bonten is often depicted with four heads and is a protector of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. Taishakuten and Bonten frequently appear together in scenes from the Buddha's life in art and sculpture, often as the flanking figures in a Buddha triad.

Fudo Myo-o is foremost among the Wisdom Kings and, despite his fierce appearance, he is an advocate for the faithful in Buddhism. Fudo Myo-o and the other Wisdom Kings are the principle deities worshipped by the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism. They are venerated in both the Godaido Hall of Chuzenji Temple and in the Great Goma Hall of Rinnoji Temple. Fudo Myo-o is particularly important to Esoteric Buddhist beliefs, and his image can be seen scattered throughout the precincts of Nikko's shrines and temples.