

Toenji Temple

The story of Toenji Temple begins in the early ninth century with a visit to eastern Japan by the renowned Buddhist monk Kukai, known posthumously as Kobo Daishi. Discovering a sacred spring northeast of Mt. Fuji, Kukai had a place of worship built in honor of Dainichi Nyorai, the central deity of Esoteric Buddhism, and the one traditionally associated with the mountain. The temple was moved to its present location in 1711, and most recently rebuilt in 1865.

The main enshrined image (*honzon*) is the Amida Buddha, who welcomes enlightened believers to heaven, attended by the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi. The temple has another wooden statue of Kannon dating to 1317. This figure originally belonged to the neighboring Shibokusa Sengen-jinja Shrine, and was carved by the same sculptor as that shrine's statue of the goddess Konohanasakuya-hime. For centuries, Shintoism and Buddhism had a syncretic relationship, and Toenji shared close ties with the shrine over much of its history. This lasted until the Meiji era, when the government attempted to remove all Buddhist influence from the Shinto religion.

In the nineteenth century, the temple oversaw construction of the Oshino Hakkai Springs, which Fujiko pilgrims used to purify themselves before ascending Mt. Fuji. The Fujiko faith became so popular that the shogunate was forced to limit access to the mountain. Toenji was the only Buddhist temple empowered to authorize passage for pilgrims, and the resulting stream of pilgrims helped revitalize the impoverished village.