

## **The Thousand-Armed Kannon**

To the right of the Rushana Buddha stands Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. Also known as Kanzeon, the bodhisattva is variously depicted, sometimes in a simple form and on occasion with 11 faces, but in this image with an even more striking appearance.

Known as the Thousand-Armed Kannon, this image has a total of 953 hands, 42 of them large, 911 small, and it is thought that originally there were 1,000. It is one of only three images of this kind in Japan. Others feature 42 hands, two regular and 40 additional ones, each one representing 25 hands, or the 25 Buddhist worlds, for a total of one thousand. Toshodaiji's Kannon dates back to the eighth century and is believed to be the oldest wooden statue in Japan.

Another characteristic of this Kannon image is its relaxed posture and compassionate but powerful facial expression that suggests a resolve to live up to his name as the bodhisattva of mercy. Kannon can assume the form of a woman, and this has given rise to the popular description as a "goddess of mercy."

The *kan* in Kannon refers to a supernatural power of seeing and hearing the normally invisible and inaudible. Kannon is regarded as a deity who employs this extraordinary power to see and hear all beings on earth with compassion, offering them help in time of need.

Like Rushana Buddha and many other Buddhist images made in the same era, this image was made using the dry lacquer technique, a method that died out in the subsequent Heian period (794–1185), when wood became the favored sculpting material.