

Statue of Aizen Myo-o

Aizen Myo-o, the Bright King of Passion, appears here seated, teeth flashing fiercely from a bright red face. The headdress is in the shape of a mythical Chinese lion's head, while the six arms holds multiple religious artifacts signifying his myriad powers. Aizen is one of the five wisdom kings of Buddhism, a fierce-looking bright red deity who helps convert practitioners' lust into thoughts of enlightenment and is often consulted in times of romantic distress. There are two-, four- and six-armed incarnations of Aizen, with the latter being most common, the hands holding such symbols as an unopened lotus flower, which represents conquest, and a *vajra*, a ritual implement that implies cutting through illusion. The statue here, which dates to the Heian period (794–1185), is designated an Important Cultural Property. The torso and head were carved from a single piece of wood, while the limbs were made separately, an early example of the assembled-block construction technique of sculpture (*yosegi-zukuri*). Aizen is an important deity in schools of esoteric Buddhism like Shingon, whose Omuro school is headquartered at Ninnaji. This statue is a particularly early example of the Bright King of Passion in statue form, and is thus a valuable contribution to deepening our understanding of Buddhism in the Heian period.