

Enmei Jizo

A Temple for Long Life

This temple is known to date back to at least 1725. At that time, it contained only a small statue of Jizo, the protector of pregnant women, travelers, and children. In 1813, a traveler spotted an unusual rock in the bed of the Araragi River, which runs parallel to the main street of Tsumago. The rock had a discolored patch in the shape of a reclining Jizo at its base. The local priest arranged for the rock to be brought here, where it was placed on a stone base in the shape of a lotus leaf and enshrined in a two-tier miniature shrine, or *zushi*. (The original Jizo statue is on the upper level, but cannot be seen.)

Notice also the giant prayer beads hanging on the left-hand side of the miniature shrine. Groups of people would hold these and count them off as they chanted the sutras over and over again in a practice known as *hyakumanben nenbutsu*, “a million [recitals of the] *nenbutsu* prayer.” The pieces of paper stuck randomly all over the porch of the building are *senmaifuda*, on which pilgrims have written their names as proof of their visits.

Enmei-do means “Hall of Long Life.” A prayer to Jizo is a prayer for a long life.