

### **Amida Temple and Tanzei Shonin Mausoleum**

Amida Temple, at the north end of Ohara, was established in 1609 by Tanzei Shonin (1552–1613), an ascetic Buddhist priest who founded his own sect of Pure Land Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism focuses on salvation through faith in Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Limitless Light. Originally from what is now Aichi Prefecture, Tanzei is famous for welcoming even the lowest classes to his teachings, including miners and others whose work was considered or unclean. He is renowned for copying out the Buddha's name four million times and distributing it to his followers.

Tanzei later instructed his disciples to excavate a cave in the mountainside behind the temple, and then construct a stone mausoleum within. In 1613, at the age of 62, he entered the cave to pray and fast. At his request, his disciples closed him in, leaving just a few air holes. Three days later, when they could no longer hear Tanzei chanting sutras, they sealed the tomb completely.

The practice of Buddhist priests enduring harsh conditions up to the moment of death while praying for the salvation of all is known as *sokushinbutsu*, or becoming a Buddha within one's own body. Tanzei believed his actions would ensure the salvation of all those who would later come to worship at his tomb.

There were plans during the Meiji era (1868–1912) to place Tanzei's remains in a grave. When the chamber was opened, however, the remains were found to be perfectly mummified, so it was decided to inter the body in a new mausoleum instead. This new tomb, a cube of stone measuring approximately 1.5 square meters, remains in the cave for people to visit and offer prayers.