

## **The Temple of Hōjūji Overview and History**

### **History**

The Hōjūji Temple originated in the sprawling Hōjūjidono temple-palace complex built in the mid-twelfth century by retired emperor Goshirakawa (1127–1192). The original complex covered well over 14 hectares (about 10 soccer fields) in the Shichijō area between the Kamo River and Kyoto's eastern hills. It encompassed several residential palaces and numerous Buddhist temples, including the famous Sanjūsangedō.

### **Worship at Hōjūji**

The majority of visitors to Hōjūji are local community members who visit frequently to pray before treasures of inestimable value and powerful religious efficacy. The most important of these is the principal icon of Fudō Myō-ō, a deity whose fierce appearance stands in stark contrast to his limitless compassion. The statue at Hōjūji is thought to have the special power of transferring afflictions from the faithful to itself. On the 28th day of every month, a dramatic fire ritual is held before Fudō Myō-ō during which timber planks inscribed with prayers are burned as offerings. This and all of the rituals that take place within the Main Hall are enhanced by rays of sunlight that shine through crystals embedded into the Japanese cypress walls.

The Amida Hall is located beyond the Main Hall, near the center of the temple complex. Inside is a statue of Retired Emperor Goshirakawa that is thought to have been carved by the revered craftsman Unkei (1150–1223). This statue is enshrined by Kokei Eri at Heian-Bussho. The other statue at the grave of Goshirakawa is said to be enshrined within a gilded cabinet and is hidden from public view. Reportedly, the 1,001 statues of

Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, at Sanjūsangendō all face this single statue.

There is a similar alignment with the grave of Goshirakawa, which is located immediately to the east of Hōjūji. The former sovereign's grave was originally part of the temple grounds and was ceded to the Imperial Household Agency during the Meiji era (1868–1912). The grave can still be seen from Hōjūji, just beyond a small garden and low wall to the east of the Amida Hall.