

Statue of Fudō Myō-ō

The principal icon at the temple of Hōjūji is the statue of Fudō Myō-ō, a deity whose fierce appearance stands in stark contrast to his limitless compassion. Rooted in Indian tradition and appearing in several illustrated mandalas, Fudō Myō-ō is deeply revered in Japan within the esoteric Buddhist sects of Tendai and Shingon. He is said to be a powerful deity who protects the faithful by burning away all impediments and defilements. His face expresses extreme wrath and fangs protrude from his mouth. He holds a straight sword in the right hand and a noose in the left. As a hallmark of his key role as Dharma warrior and purifier, Fudō Myō-ō is depicted as engulfed in flame standing on a solid rock.

This image of Fudo Myō-ō is thought to have the special power of transferring afflictions from the faithful to itself. On the 28th day of every month, the lattice windows that usually obscure the statue are opened wide for a ritual *goma* fire ceremony in the central chamber. Prayers are written on timber planks and they are burned in the fire. The temple walls, rafters, and Fudō Myō-ō himself are covered in soot from many hundreds of fire rituals.