

### **Dai-Gomadō**

The Dai-Gomadō is used for the *goma* fire ritual, an esoteric Buddhist rite. Prayers written on paper and small wooden tablets are burned at the altar during the ritual. The fire is thought to burn away defilement and illusions, and to send the prayers skyward. The principal object of worship behind the altar is Fudō Myō-ō (foremost among the Five Great Wisdom Kings), who is the messenger of Dainichi Nyorai (Cosmic Buddha).

The Dai-Gomadō was built in 1998 out of concrete to provide a fireproof place to hold the fire ritual without threatening the historic temple buildings. The ritual is performed daily.

### **Inside the Dai-Gomadō**

There are more than 30 statues of Buddhist deities in the hall. In the center of the statues is a golden pagoda flanked by cabinets containing images of two of the temple patriarchs: Ennin (794–864) and Tenkai (1536?–1643). On the central dais are Heian period (794–1185) carvings of the Five Great Wisdom Kings, with Fudō Myō-ō in the center. The other figures include the Seven Lucky Gods and the Twelve Celestial Beings, who guard the eight cardinal directions, heaven and earth, and the sun and moon.

Hidden from view in a cabinet is a statue of Chinjō Yasha, a manifestation of Bishamonten (one of the Four Heavenly Kings), who guards the nation and changes calamity into good fortune. Chinjō Yasha is one of Rinnōji's *hibutsu*, or hidden Buddhas, and is displayed to the public only once every nine years.

### **Rising Dragon**

The dragon painted on the ceiling of the Dai-Gomadō is believed to take prayers to the heavens. This painting is remarkable for its vivid use of gold leaf, as dragons on temple ceilings are generally painted using only black ink. It was created by Yoshihara Akio (1927–1998), who spent two and a half years painting the dragon on cypress boards before it was installed in the ceiling. Yoshihara was nationally recognized for his skill in the conservation of the historic art and architecture of the shrines and temples of Nikkō.