

Godaidō (Important Cultural Property)

The Godaidō is the largest hall of Chūzenji Temple and houses the Five Great Wisdom Kings, or Godai Myō-ō. The hall looks out over Lake Chūzenji, towering above the other temple buildings. These five deities are central figures in Tendai Buddhism and mountain asceticism, and their images can be found throughout Nikkōzan. Fudō Myō-ō, the most powerful of the five, is usually seen on altars used for the *goma* fire ritual.

Utagahama Beach

The waterfront directly in front of the Godaidō is known as Utagahama Beach and has been a site for religious practice since the eighth century. It was the last stop on the spring pilgrimage circuit established by Shōdō Shōnin, and monks would spend 20 days in April by the lake reciting sutras. The name “Utagahama” means “Beach of Song,” which comes from a legend that heavenly beings appeared before Shōdō, singing as they descended.

Inside the Godaidō

The Five Great Wisdom Kings are venerated in the prayer hall of the Godaidō. Fudō Myō-ō stands in the center, flanked by Gōzanze Myō-ō and Gundari Myō-ō on the right and Daiitoku Myō-ō and Kongō Yasha Myō-ō on the left. They are usually depicted as ferocious and menacing, often engulfed in flames. Their ferocity subdues evil and the flames burn away passions and material desires.

On the ceiling of the Godaidō is a large black-and-white dragon surrounded by clouds. It was painted by Katayama Nanpū (1887–1980), who also restored the dragon painting on the ceiling of the Yakushidō within Tōshōgū. In front of the Wisdom King statues is an altar for the *goma* fire ritual. The flowers on the ceiling above it were painted by one of Nanpū’s disciples.