

Enko Daishi Hall

Enko Daishi is the first of eight honorary names given posthumously to Honen (1133-1212), the founder of the Jodo sect of Buddhism. This practice hall dedicated to him was completed in 2009, and is a fine example of traditional architecture, made entirely of *hinoki* cypress, a fragrant, light-colored wood. A rather intimate hall of 40 tatami mats, everyone is welcome to practice *nenbutsu* (ritual chanting) in front of the carved wooden statue of the founder sitting on a lotus pedestal.

Honen was born in 1133 in what is now Okayama Prefecture. When he was only nine years old, his father died from wounds suffered in a night attack. Rather than seeking revenge, Honen entered a Buddhist monastery. After years of study at Enryakuji Temple at Mt. Hiei, he became disenchanted with Buddhism's role as a religion for the elite, and devoted his time to find a way of bringing salvation to all beings through Buddhism. In 1175, he established the Jodo (Pure Land) sect, in which followers can attain enlightenment through the practice of chanting the Buddha's name. This brought salvation within the reach of the common people. Though he faced resistance and persecution from the established sects, his teachings spread broadly among the masses, and even among the aristocracy. Honen continued his missionary work throughout his life, chanting *nenbutsu* in order to be reborn in the Pure Land until his death in 1212. He is buried at Chion-in Temple, the sect's headquarters in Kyoto.

On the altar behind the carving of Enko Daishi is a revered relic of the founder, set in a glass sutra case shaped like a *gorinto*, the five-ring tower of Buddhist memorials.