

Butsuden

The Butsuden (Buddha Hall) is one of the most important buildings of Kenchoji Temple and was the first of the temple's structures to be completed. It enshrines a towering statue of the bodhisattva Jizo, the central Buddhist deity of the temple. From hell to paradise, Jizo's compassionate presence illuminates the righteous way, and he saves from harm those who call out to him.

Like many buildings within the temple grounds, the Butsuden has suffered fires and disasters and has been rebuilt several times. During Japan's Warring States period (1467–1568), Kenchoji suffered from a lack of patronage and was badly in need of reconstruction.

The Tokugawa shoguns (1603–1867) became supporters of the temple during the seventeenth century, after the appointment of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) to shogun in 1603. The Tokugawa funded the rebuilding of Kenchoji, and donated the current Butsuden to the temple in 1647. The building was previously located at Zojoji Temple in Edo (now Tokyo), the Tokugawa family temple.

Because of its association with the Tokugawa family, the hall is much more richly decorated than a typical Zen temple building. The ornate, carved panels on the walls and gilt decorations on the ceiling reflect the power and influence of the Tokugawa at the time it was built. The ceiling is decorated with auspicious birds on a brilliant gilded background.

The Butsuden was constructed between 1624 and 1644, and is designated an Important Cultural Property. It is open to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation.