

Jizo Bodhisattva Statue

The main deity of Kenchoji Temple is the bodhisattva Jizo, who is known as Ksitigarbha in Sanskrit. A bodhisattva is one who postpones their own enlightenment for the sake of the salvation of others, and Jizo has vowed not to achieve full enlightenment until the underworld is emptied of suffering souls. In Japan, Jizo is often depicted as a monk, and is considered a deity of mercy and a protector of travelers and children.

Jizo is one of the most popular Buddhist deities in Japan and commonly appears as a small statue wearing a red cap and bib, often seen in graveyards and by roadsides. However, while many temples have small Jizo statues, it is rare for Jizo to be the main deity of a large temple. Jizo's presence in this area dates back to before the building of Kenchoji.

A section of the land that belongs to Kenchoji was an execution ground before the temple was established in 1253. A Jizo statue was enshrined there for people to pray to the deity on behalf of the souls of those who had been executed. When Kenchoji was built, the monks carried on that mission.

The wooden statue is from the fifteenth century and is about 2.4 meters tall (roughly 4.8 meters including its pedestal). The statue holds a walking stick in the right hand and a wish-granting jewel in its left hand.

Everyone is welcome to pray to Jizo. Visitors simply put their palms together and bow deeply, then think of something that is important to them. After praying, an optional donation can be placed in the wooden collection box.