

Hattō (Dharma Hall)

The Hattō, or Dharma Hall, is used for daily morning services, sermons on the teachings of the Buddha, and for certain other important occasions. It has been rebuilt several times, most recently in 1843. The Hattō at Eihei-ji Temple is notably one of the largest such halls that survives from the Edo period (1603–1867).

The hall's main image is a statue of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. The front altar is guarded by four white *shishi* (Chinese guardian lions), creatures believed to ward off evil spirits. The two *shishi* on the right have their mouths open, while the two on the left have their mouths closed. Together, these two pairs represent the first and last sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet, *ah* and *un*, which symbolize the beginning and end of all things. The open and closed mouths of the *shishi* also represent the two sides to Zen practice: the teachings of the Buddha are transmitted both through words (oral teaching) and through actions (the daily practice of Zen).