

Akiha Gongendō

Akiha Gongendō is a small hall located on a hillside in the neighborhood near Eiheiiji Temple. Local residents gather there twice a year to pray for protection from fire and other calamities. The hall was originally constructed in 1816 and was most recently rebuilt in 1971.

For much of Japanese history, buildings were made of wood and built relatively close together, and fire was a significant threat for many communities. Eiheiiji Temple itself has burned down, either partially or completely, several times throughout its history. The most recent disaster occurred in 1879, but prior to that, every century since the temple's founding was marked by at least one major fire. Eiheiiji Temple is surrounded by mountains on three sides, and any fires that start in the temple complex can easily spread down the valley into the neighborhood. In order to protect the community from future catastrophes, the monks distribute fire-warding paper charms to each household at the start of each year.

The enshrined kami (Shinto deity) is Hi no Kagutsuchi no Kami, who is associated with fire prevention and appears in one of the earliest written records of Japan. Hi no Kagutsuchi no Kami is also known by the Buddhist name “Akiha Daigongen,” and he is known locally as “Akiha-san.” It was common for elements of Buddhism and Shinto to be mixed together in this way until the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the government ordered a clear separation between the two.