

Shakuzoji Temple (Kuginuki Jizo)

[LEGENDS]

Shakuzoji Temple is also known by its nickname Kuginuki (“nail puller”) Jizo because its main hall is covered in planks mounted with pliers and long nails. It is thought that these symbols originated with a sixteenth-century merchant who came to pray to the temple’s principal deity, the bodhisattva Jizo, savior of all sentient beings, for the pain in his hands to disappear.

According to legend, Jizo appeared in front of the merchant after he had made his plea, and told him that the pain in his hands was there because he had pierced the hands of a man he hated in a past life. The merchant donated his tools to the temple to atone for his sins, and the pain disappeared. Since then, Shakuzoji has been frequented by those who wish to be relieved of both physical and emotional pain.

Visitors pray by engaging in a ritual practice of circumambulation, whereby they circle the main hall that contains the statue of Jizo while carrying the number of wooden sticks that corresponds to their age. In the traditional East Asian system of reckoning, people are considered age one at the time of birth. A 37-year-old would thus take 38 sticks from those on offer at the front of the hall, and hold them while circling the building 38 times.