

Myorenji Temple

[TEA & ART]

Myorenji Temple is one of the oldest Nichiren Buddhist temples in Kyoto. It was founded in 1294 by the priest Nichizo (1269–1342), who had been entrusted with missionary work in Kyoto by Nichiren (1222–1282), the founder of the Nichiren school. The temple has stood in its current location since 1587, but most of its buildings were reconstructed after a fire devastated the neighborhood in 1788.

Myorenji is noted for its Arhat rock garden, in which 16 dark rocks rise from a sea of impeccably raked white gravel. The rocks signify the bodhisattvas that bring salvation in the Lotus Sutra, on which the teachings of the Nichiren school are based. The garden is thought to have been constructed in the early 1600s, and was recently restored to its original appearance.

The *fusuma* sliding panels in the Shoin building facing the garden feature paintings of plants, animals, and other nature themes. These works, painted in the 1980s by Kono Yutaka, express the changing seasons and are conceived to appear particularly beautiful when viewed in the light of their respective season. For example, the depiction of red leaves on a maple tree reveals its full richness of color in the low-angled light of a November day.