

Monjudō Hall and Shōkū's Miraculous Encounter

This is believed to be the site of a miraculous encounter between Engyōji's founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007), and an incarnation of Monju (Sanskrit: Manjushri), the Bodhisattva of Spiritual Insight. According to legend, in 966 Shōkū was traveling to the capital in Kyoto after decades spent in Kyushu, where he lived as a hermit and studied the Lotus Sutra. After entering Harima Province (now Hyogo Prefecture), Shōkū noticed a plume of mysterious purple clouds floating over Mt. Shosha. As he ascended the mountain's western face, he encountered an old, grey-haired monk. The monk taught Shōkū about Mt. Shosha's origins and history, revealing that the mountain enshrined soil from Vulture Peak, the place in ancient India where Shakyamuni Buddha first preached the Lotus Sutra. When Shōkū expressed his desire to live on Mt. Shosha, the old man revealed himself to be an incarnation of Monju and vanished without a trace.

The hall that originally stood on this site was named for Monju, and it once held a statue of him as its principal image. The present structure was built after the original was destroyed by fire in 1987.

In front of the hall is a cluster of small stone carvings and pagodas. The carvings, which resemble a child monk wearing a crimson bib, represent the bodhisattva Jizō. Found throughout Japan, Jizō statues are thought to protect the souls of children who die before birth or while still very young. The bibs that may adorn these statues are often donated (and, in many cases, handmade) by mourning parents.