

Daikōdō Shaka Triad (Shakasanzon)

The statues at the center of the Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall) are known collectively as the Shaka Triad. The central figure represents the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. He is seated in a meditative posture, with eyes half-closed and hands in a mudra gesture that indicates teaching. The statue's elongated ears, cranial bump, and curls of hair are iconographic devices used in Buddhist imagery to signify compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment. The dais beneath his lotus throne symbolizes Mt. Sumeru, the sacred mountain of Buddhist cosmology that sits at the center of the physical and metaphysical universes.

Shakyamuni is flanked by attendants, whose hands also display the teaching mudra. To the Buddha's right is Monju, the Bodhisattva of Spiritual Insight. To his left is Fugen, the Bodhisattva of Right Conduct. Behind each statue is a gilded mandorla that, like a halo, symbolizes the emanation of sacred power. From their elevated position, the three icons gaze across the courtyard toward the stage of the Jōgyōdō, where performances are held in their honor during major temple functions. The precise alignment of these two structures shows the careful planning that went into the composition of the Three Halls.

The three statues were created in about 986 by the monk Kan'na, a disciple of Shōkū (910–1007), the founding abbot of Engyōji. Each statue was meticulously carved from a single piece of cypress timber and finished with lacquer and gold leaf. The Daikōdō and each member of the statue triad are Important Cultural Properties.