

The Monks Chikō and Raikō

Chikō's Mandala of the Pure Land was vital to the development of Gangōji. Fittingly, the story of the mandala's creation is miraculous. The circumstances are recorded in "Japanese Records of Rebirth in the Land of Bliss" (*Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*), a text written in 986.

The monk Chikō Hōshi (709–c.778) is thought to have been born in Kawachi (now southeast Osaka). He entered the Sanron sect of Buddhism at the age of eight or nine. It is unclear when he arrived at Gangōji, but he is known to have studied there alongside another monk named Raikō (dates unknown). Chikō and Raikō shared a passion for their studies, and the two became friends. Then, one day, Raikō suddenly stopped speaking, and he died without uttering another word.

Naturally, Chikō was troubled by Raikō's fate, and he wondered what had happened to him. One night, Raikō appeared to Chikō in a dream. Raikō explained that he had spent every moment of his long period of silence fervently envisioning the Pure Land, and through this visualization practice, he had achieved rebirth there. In the dream, Raikō brought Chikō before Amida Buddha himself and showed him the splendor of the Pure Land.

As soon as Chikō woke, he set about capturing his vision in a mandala. In it, on the small central platform in the painting's foreground, he depicted himself and Raikō—two friends now reunited in Amida's Pure Land.