

Myoshoji Temple

Myoshoji is a small Soto Zen temple with deep ties to the Matsudaira samurai family that ruled the lands around the village of Matsudaira from the late 1300s onward. The temple is located in Otaki Gorge on a terraced plot supported by moss-covered stone walls. It is a few minutes' walk uphill along the river from the parking lot at the entrance to the gorge. The structures include the main hall built in 1854, a somewhat older gate that faces the gorge, and a bell tower. As Myoshoji does not have a resident priest, the main hall is usually closed to the public.

The temple was founded in the 1350s by an itinerant Zen priest and was initially a place for solitary spiritual practice. When Matsudaira Chikauji (d. 1394?), the founder of the Matsudaira family, placed the temple under his protection, he expanded it and had permanent halls built for the first time. Myoshoji has enjoyed the patronage of the Matsudaira family ever since.

Among the temple's treasures is a wooden plaque with an order by Matsudaira Motoyasu (1543–1616), who later assumed the name Tokugawa Ieyasu and founded the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867). The order is thought to have been issued between 1557 and 1563, a time of great turmoil, and prohibited the use of force within the Myoshoji grounds. This indicates that the temple functioned as a safe haven of sorts for local villagers, who could take shelter within its gates in case a battle broke out nearby.