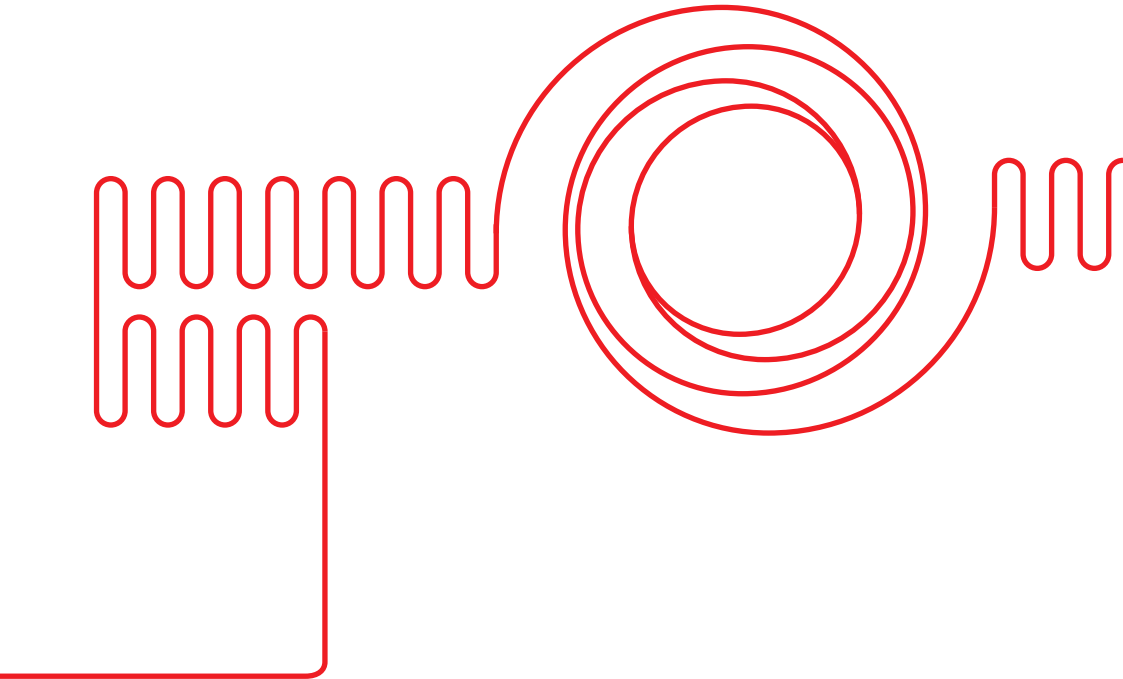




Sojiji Head Monastery

700 Years on the Path: Keizan Zenji and Us



Have you had the opportunity to see Kannon?

Kannon is the bodhisattva who is devoted to saving all sentient beings.



The Eleven-faced Kannon Bodhisattva Statue that Keizan Zenji's mother, Ekan, prayed to was later enshrined in Entsuin, a hall within Yokoji Temple.

In Echizen Province during the latter half of the Kamakura period, there was a woman who revered Kannon with great devotion.

She prayed

“May a child be born who will help all people.”

The woman, continuing to chant sutras single-mindedly, gave birth to a baby boy on the grounds of the Kannon Hall. This boy came to be known as Keizan Zenji.



His childhood name was Gyosho. The current theory is that he was born in the first year of Bun'ei (1264).

At the age of three, Keizan Zenji is said to have made a magnificent Kannon out of mud when he was playing outside.

Then, at the age of five, he began to be able to recite the Kannon Sutra that his mother chanted.



The late Kamakura period, in which Keizan Zenji lived, was a time of confusion, with the attempted invasions by the Mongolian Empire, major earthquakes, warfare, epidemics, and various other calamities.

At the age of eight, he decided to become a monk and entered the gates of Eiheiiji, beginning his life of practice centered on Zazen. Dogen Zenji had passed away 23 years earlier.

The Bun'ei War soon followed.

At a time when the nation was shaken and uneasy, Keizan Zenji formally ordained. He was thirteen years old.



In 1276, he was mentored by Ejo Zenji and other senior disciples of Dogen Zenji.

As a young monk in training, Keizan Zenji went on a journey around the country to experience monastic practices.

Through numerous encounters, studying, and intensive practice, he became determined to "Save and lead all people as Kannon had done". He resolved to devote his whole life to this great vow.

At the age of twenty-eight, he entered Jomanji determined to bring relief to the people. He continued to transmit the true Dharma teaching to all, regardless of gender, and regardless of whether they were lay or ordained.

It is said that after visiting Hokyoji in Echizen, he also visited several masters at Manjuji and Tofukuji in Kyoto, Mt. Hieizan, and Kokokuji in Kii Province.

“Whether male or female, if one is willing to learn and practice the teachings of the Buddha, that person should be revered.”



In 1291, he became the abbot of Jomanji, a temple in Awa (present Tokushima Prefecture).

One day his teacher Gikai Zenji asked Keizan Zenji to explain the connection between our mind and enlightenment.

He answered in this way.

“When tea is served, drink the tea, when meals are served, eat the meal.”

When you drink tea, you should wholly concentrate on drinking the tea. When you eat a meal, you should wholly concentrate on eating the meal.



In 1295 he received Dharma Transmission from Gikai Zenji and became the first Shuso (the leader of trainee monks) in Daijoji Temple.

“Completing the ordinary things we do every day, one by one, with all our heart, is enlightenment itself.”

With these words, Gikai Zenji acknowledged that Keizan had attained the heart of the Buddha Dharma, and bestowed the Kesa (formal robe) on him, which had been passed down from generation to generation from Dogen Zenji.

Thus, he passionately transmitted the teachings of the Buddha, which had been passed on by successive generations, to many of his disciples.

He later founded Yokoji Temple, and a large number of people seeking these teachings gathered around.

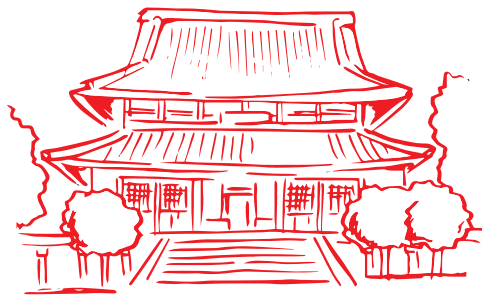


Keizan Zenji’s distinguished teaching and personality attracted many outstanding disciples to study under him, such as Gazan Joseki and Meiho Sotetsu.

One morning Keizan Zenji dreamed that he was guided by Kannon Bodhisattva to a vast temple where he was welcomed by many monks. Later, a temple was donated to him, and the dream became reality.

That temple is Sojiji.

Over the years, Sojiji has developed into a large monastery for the transmission of the true Dharma and has become a leading factor in the growth of the Soto Zen Buddhist religion.



The character 總持 (Soji) means "to hold on to virtue and not lose it. If one holds wickedness within, it will not arise." In other words, to hold on to the Buddha teachings and to not forget them.

The book describing the history of the founding of Sojiji is called "Kannon-do Engi (How it came about in the Kannon hall)" [also known as "Sojiji Chuko Engi"].

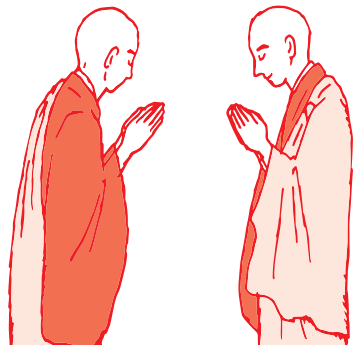
The name of the book reflects the memory of Keizan's mother who devoted herself to worshipping Kannon.



It is known that Keizan Zenji founded Sojiji, Yokoji, and Jomanji, as well as Jojuji, Enzuin, Ho-oji, Kokoji, and Hoshoji.

At the end of the Kamakura period, Keizan Zenji entrusted Sojiji to his disciple Gasan Zenji.

The way Keizan Zenji lived, vowing to relieve all people through the Buddha Dharma, was handed down to Gasan Zenji and his disciples. It has spread all over Japan.



In 1324, Keizan Zenji established the rules for monastic practices and observances of Sojiji. He then handed the position of abbot over to Gasan Zenji.

“Sojo. Inheritance and transmission.”

The word Sojo means to receive, practice, and transmit the teachings of the Buddha.

Today, 700 years later, the circle of this Sojo continues to open to all kinds of people regardless of ethnicity, gender, or age, and beyond the borders of the nation.

It is our role to pass it on to the next generation.

With gratitude to all those who have handed Sojo down to us.

On August 15, 1325, Keizan Zenji’s last sermon was given at Yokoji just before he passed away.

常に大慈大悲に住して 坐禅無量の功徳を
一切衆生に回向せよ

Always have compassion and mercy in your heart and let the limitless benefits of zazen be extended to all sentient beings.



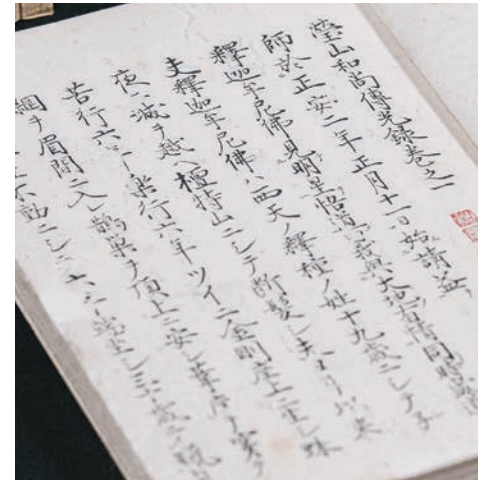
Eiheiji Head Monastery

Fukui Prefecture

Keizan Zenji intimately learned the teachings of Dogen Zenji through his encounters with the 2nd abbot of Eiheiiji, Ejo Zenji, and others.

徒らに他人門上の霜をのみ管して、
自己屋裡の宝を忘るること勿れ

Do not, while pointlessly heeding only the frost atop another person's gate, forget the jewel in the interior of the house of your own self.



Denkoroku

Record of the Transmission of Light

One of the representative scriptures of Soto Zen Buddhism. It describes how the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni were handed down through the lineage (Sojo) of Venerable Mahakasyapa and Bodhidharma to the Japanese Zen ancestors Dogen Zenji and Ejo Zenji.

恩力を受け来ること多時なり

We are sustained by so many various things, from which we have received countless blessings.



Gorocho

Yokoji, in Ishikawa Prefecture

This is where the relics of Nyojo Zenji, Dogen Zenji, Ejo Zenji, Gikai Zenji, and Keizan Zenji are entombed. It is a sanctuary where one can encounter the authenticity of ancestors.

多聞を好むこと勿れ 直に勇猛精進すべし

You must not be satisfied in just hearing many teachings: It is important that you actually strive to practice and put it into effect.



Sojiji Head Monastery

Yokohama, Tsurumi

As one of the leading temples in the development of Soto Zen Buddhism, Sojiji's influence has spread widely. Even today, the monastery continues to be a place where Keizan Zenji's teachings are taught and practiced by monks in training.

師檀和合して 親しく水魚の昵づきをなし
来際一如にして 骨肉の思いを致すべし

Those who teach and those who receive the teaching should unify their minds and establish a close and intimate relationship, like fish in water, and become united for eternity, with trust and deep compassion like a family bound by blood.



Keizan Zenji and his two divine feet

Left: A statue of Keizan Jokin
Upper right: A statue of Gasan Joseki
Lower right: Statue of Meiho Sotetsu

Always approaching people with a mind of harmony, the teachings of Keizan Zenji were transmitted to many distinguished disciples and became the foundation for the spread of Soto Zen Buddhism throughout Japan.

たとひ難値難遇の事有るとも
必ず和合和睦の思いを生ずべし

Even if we encounter hardships and difficulties, we should always be united in one mind and be willing to walk hand in hand through it all.

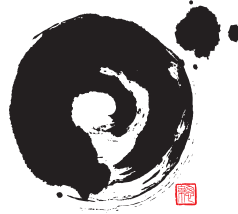


Expanding the Circle of Sojo

Keizan Zenji who lived in a very tumultuous age, left us numerous teachings that guide us in our hearts and minds. His teachings are assuredly taught in Soto Zen temples in cities and towns near you.

Buddha Shakyamuni is the One.
He continues to preside in the present.

— Denkoroku, Record of the Transmission of Light



相承

SOJO

大いなる足音が聞こえますか



<https://www.sojiji.jp/english/>

2-1-1, Tsurumi, Tsurumi-ku, Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa-ken, 230-0063, Japan
Tel: +81(0)45-415-0052 (office) / Tel: +81(0)45-415-0054 (for tours) / Fax: +81(0)45-415-0053

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