

**Seven Weeks on the Henro Michi  
Steps along the Shikoku Island 88 Temple Pilgrimage  
Marc Pearl  
Fall 1989**



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Dedicated to:

Fujii Ryusho – Hokke-ji, Wakayama-ken  
Hattori Kosho – Jizo-ji, Tokushima-ken  
Aki Shoten – Gokuraku-ji (Temple#2), Tokushima-ken

The following people whose guidance and information about the Henro-michi was indispensable:

Sara Oeschli, Miyazaki-san (Mr Henro Michi-Shirube)  
Oliver Statler, Taisen Miyata, H. Tanaka – writers of excellent books on the Pilgrimage

The fine people of Shikoku

And Mitie

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Prologue

First Steps (Koyasan to Shikoku Island)

A Lucky Encounter – Final Instructions – Starting Out (At Temple #2)

The Settai Offering (Temples #7- #11)

Day 6: A Walk through Tokushima City in the Rain (Temples #17- #18)

Days 7/8: Night Time on a Lonely Mountain (Temples #18- #21)

Days 8/9: Bad Feet at the Temple of the Medicine King (Temple #23)

Days 12/13: Entering the Shugyo-no-Dojo Path of Discipline at Cape Muroto (Temple #24)

On the Road: Shugyo, the Path of Religious Discipline

Days 19/20 Kochi City towards Cape Ashizuri (Temples #33- #36 and beyond)

Day 21: Walking the Wheel of Life (Rokudo) to Kubogawa (to Temple #37)

Days 23/24: Rainy Day Conversations at Cape Ashizuri (Temple # 38)

Day 26: Kariya-san at the Gate to Bodai-no-Dojo, the Path of Enlightenment

Days 30/31/32: Steps along the Path to Enlightenment (Temple #43 towards #44)

Day 33: Mountain Paths to Temple #45 (see Prologue)

On the Road: Thinking about Food

Days 38/39: Bukkyo Keizei: The Business of Japanese Buddhism

Days 40/41: Meeting Kobo Daishi on the Road? (Temples #64- #65)

Day 42: Entering Nehan-no-Dojo, the Path of Nirvana (Temples #66- #71)

Day 43: A Visit to Kobo Daishi's Birthplace (Temples #71- #78)

Day 44: A Strange Occurrence in the Dark Forest (Temples #79- #82)

Days 46/47: Finishing the Pilgrimage (Temples #85- #88 and back to Temple #2), Return Home  
To Koyasan to Thank Daishi-sama

Epilogue: The Shikoku Pilgrimage: Walking the Mandala as a Map of Consciousness

Appendix I: Night Stay-over Places

Appendix II: O-Settai (Gifts along the Pilgrim Road)

Appendix III: O-Mamori (Amulets and Talismans acquired in Shikoku)

Maps and Charts of distances and altitudes of the 88 Temples (courtesy H. Tanaka)

**Seven Weeks on the Henro Michi**  
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**Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo!**

**Prologue**  
**Fall 1989**

I was walking along a ridgeline of a mountain path high above forested gorges on the island of Shikoku in Japan, following the trail of a 1200 year old Buddhist pilgrimage, when the sun dropped suddenly behind the treeline. Within moments, I could barely see beyond my feet. Bits of gravel slid down the slopes on either side of me as I slowed my pace. I still had a few kilometers to walk down to the next temple with its village. Headed down the trail, taking advantage of the little light remaining. I tramped faster through the open areas, but soon I was surrounded by trees, and could not go further unaided. I dug out the small flashlight from my pack, but it got dimmer with every few paces. I could only rely on my walking stick, the pilgrims' Kongo-tsue. All the Pilgrim gear is infused with symbolism, and the Tsue has written on it the Heart Sutra ("All Form is Emptiness, All Emptiness is Form..."), as well as "Do Gyo Ni Nin" ("Same Path, Two Persons") which is the declaration of faith in the founder of the Pilgrimage, the Sainted Kobo Daishi. When I walk with the Kongo-tsue, the Daishi is with me at every step, comforting to believe as I made my way descending the dark trail. At that point, it was certainly difficult to distinguish between Form and Emptiness! The white Pilgrim's jacket I wore was the same as that worn by a corpse on its final journey, and the top of the Tsue is a small replica of a Japanese wooden Tomb Marker. One false step, and I'd go tumbling down. Toss some dirt over me, plant my Kongo-tsue in the mound, and I'd be ready for the Western Pure Lands of Paradise.....

What was I doing alone there in Japan, of all the countries in the world, why those mountains, and why was I about to break my neck in the middle of nowhere in Shikoku?

With those thoughts, I slowed my breathing to match my pace. Namu Daishi, Henjo Kongo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo...In the Name of Kobo Daishi, All Illuminating and Imperishable One...repeating mantras with each cautious move, as I stumbled over broken flagstones on the twisting way down. I realized that I was getting closer to the temple precincts. The trail turned into a stairway, as I felt my way with the Kongo-tsue. The way to this temple has always been one of the four major Nansho, dangerous places of the Shikoku Pilgrimage. Earlier in the afternoon at 3 pm, the priest at the previous temple had told me that it would take only two hours to hike the nine kilometers to Temple #45, with an arrival time well before dusk, but a short time after leaving there, I walked into an area with five men clear cutting the trees, obliterating all signs of the trail. I clambered over large fallen trees to talk to the men. One of them pointed out the way up the mountain, up a steep cliff. It seemed like hours before I reached the thin ridgeline with its great views, and I was satisfied and contented...until the sun disappeared!

But soon banners and little statues appeared alongside me. There were all kinds of smaller paths and forks in the area, and I had to back-track several times. I was descending the

mountain. I saw some kind of light as I rounded a bend. The remnants of candle offerings flared up to reveal a stone demon, twice my size, fiercely scowling down at me. In one hand he was holding a sword at readiness to slash out, in the other, a coil of rope to wind around the target of his wrath! The dancing shadows brought him to life, motion all around me in the dim evening fog. In total exhaustion, looking at those fangs and glaring eyes, I let out a long sigh...of relief. It was Fudo-sama, protector of mountain ascetics, guarding the rear approach to the temple. The candles were fading out, and there was a lingering scent of sandalwood incense from the late afternoon offerings. I considered laying out my poncho and sleeping at the foot of the altar, but I needed to call home that evening to leave word of my whereabouts. So with the clacking of my Tsue accompanying me, passing prayerflags and caves, moving through crevices and groupings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I set off to find the main sanctuary.

Found the temple office, everything now in darkness. I heard someone coughing inside and called out. The priest opened a window. It was only 6 PM! I apologized for disturbing him after the temple had closed for the day, told him of my misadventures on the trail, and asked him if I could sleep under a roof nearby. Offering me a room at a small inn below, he telephoned down as he turned on the lighting along a very long staircase. I set off to the village, a hard descent of 15 minutes, finding an old lady waiting for me with a great dinner: small fish, veggies, sunomono, soup, tofu, fruits, and a big pot of tea. I ate every bit of it, even three bowls of rice! She showed me to an antique bath. It was a big cauldron with a wood fire burning under it below the floor...just like the cartoons of natives cooking the great white hunter!

As I returned to my room, with a futon and warm quilt set out for me, the grandmother asked me if I was a “believer”. It was a question that until then nobody during my long weeks of walking had asked me. I thought over my response, reviewing the events of the day, and all the other encounters and coincidences and happy surprises on the Pilgrim Henro-michi trail.

“Every day, my belief grows and grows” I could honestly reply.

Thinking through it all as I fell asleep, I knew that it was a miracle that I didn’t tumble off the path a dozen times over! I was really amazed. The Daishi-sama was definitely watching over my carefree empty head today!

### **NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO!**

This was a typical day on the Henro Michi, The Shikoku Pilgrim Path, a 1400 kilometer (850 mile) walk around the Japanese island of Shikoku. One walks through rice fields, forests, mountains, and along coastline cliffs and beaches. Situated around the circular route like beads on a rosary are various sacred sites, including 88 Buddhist temples which the faithful have visited since the lifetime of Kobo Daishi over a thousand years ago. What was once hidden and dangerous dirt path is now often modern asphalt highway, but there are still rugged trails and places of great calm and beauty. And everywhere, the Pilgrim encounters the kindness of the people of Shikoku who recognize and support his efforts. In the autumn of 1989 I walked this path. It took me seven weeks. I stayed in temples, youth hostels, small inns, and slept in forests. I spoke only in Japanese, having conversations with temple priests, shop owners, and fellow pilgrims, learning from them about the world of enlightenment through walking. Here is the story of my walk through the Mandala of Consciousness that is the Shikoku Henro Michi.



**Fudo Sama**  
**Dharma Protector of Mountain Ascetics**