

**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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**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**

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**First Steps**  
**Koyasan to Shikoku Island**

One must start the Pilgrimage by going to the sacred mountain temple complex of Koyasan. In the year 816, Kobo Daishi asked the Emperor permission to build on this remote plateau a center for the practice of his Esoteric meditations and rituals. What was until very recently an arduous climb can now be traveled by a thirty minute train ride direct from Osaka, followed by an incline cable car to the beginning of a long line of temples with facilities for overnight stays. On top of Koyasan one finds a Buddhist university, many shops selling religious articles, as well as historic pagodas, bell towers, halls filled with the images of the Shingon sect pantheon of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Wisdom Kings and devas, and the largest cemetery in Japan. All this has been designed with the purpose of aiding the pilgrim in his progress towards Buddhahood in this very lifetime.

At the end of a walk lined with enormous trees, surrounded by all sizes of funereal markers and stupas, one reaches the Oku-no-in, the resting place of the Saint. Indeed, his followers believe he is seated in deep meditation behind the closed doors of his tomb, awaiting the arrival of the future Buddha Maitreya. The Pilgrim starts his travels by announcing his intentions and prays for the Saint's help on the path.

That evening, I stayed in a temple with two floors of various sized tatami rooms. After a hot soak in the furo bath, I was invited upstairs to join a get together of Burmese students. I learned that there are a number of Japanese temples associated with Burma. Many priests had lived through the unpleasant experience of being soldiers at the Burmese Front during World War II, and felt the need to be part of the spiritual support of all involved there. Their story was partly related in a fine book and film "Harp of Burma". The party was animated and friendly, with videos of the Burmese New Year festivities where the girls tossed pails of water over young men riding on carts. I noticed the homesick expressions on the students, all of whom shared the uncertain future of returning to a country in turmoil.

At the party, I met a young Japanese monk who had completed the Pilgrimage the year before. Fujii-san lived at the Oku-no-in as one of the caretakers of that temple. He spent some time living in a temple in Bangkok Thailand. Many of the more spiritually inclined, more idealistic monks of Japan (where a priest can marry, eat meat, drink sake) want to experience the pure simple life of the Theravada monks of South East Asia where they are celibate and have few possessions. He was married to a Thai woman named Shoei who made an incredibly hot and sour soup that the students adored. He gave me the name of a priest at Temple #2 in Shikoku, who is also associated with Burma, and promised to call there to arrange a place for me to spend the night upon starting the walk.



**Koyasan Pilgrims**



Ten days later I sat on the ferryboat approaching Shikoku Island. Although it is one of the four main islands of Japan, it is little traveled by the foreign tourist. Indeed, even the Japanese don't place it very high on the list of places to visit, unless they long for the spiritual solace of the 88 temple pilgrimage. Recently Shikoku was connected by a series of bridges to the main island of Honshu, and the number of cars passing through increases each year.

At the railing of the ferryboat, I stared through my small binoculars for a glimpse of unknown mountains, and as their blue shapes separated from the haze of sea and clouds, I envisioned hidden ravines with paths winding through forests of moss covered tree trunks and the remnants of over a thousand years of Buddhist and Shinto communion with nature. It would be a place where I could feel at ease among the strangeness of a foreign country. I love walking in mountains, any mountains. They have been a fundamental part of me since I left the flat prairielands of suburban Chicago to study at the University of Colorado.

At the base of the foothills of Boulder, I found trails leading into silent, cooler spaces. Following them at random, I would end up overlooking the campus and rejoice in the sensation of being above it all. Other ways would take me deeper into the hills, where I'd become lost, only to stumble upon a road where I could eventually catch a car ride back, or even further into new territory. Soon I was spending all my time hitch hiking across Colorado in search of the ever more remote spot. It was a time of VW Beetles and painted minivans with friendly long haired worshippers of nature, whom you could count on to stop for you (after a couple of hours of counting the rednecks zooming by in shiny pickups). A friend from a small town in Western Colorado took me to a camping gear store, and helped me buy hiking boots, a down sleeping bag, a little gas cookset, and a backpack to put it in. Thus outfitted, we would cross country ski until finding suitable snow drifts, and dug caves into them to spend the night. At 30 below zero on a campout, I knew that I could always be at home in the Mountains.

The next years in between studying psychology, anthropology, and the philosophy of religions, I reveled in the freedom of the open, thinner air of alpine forests. Heading further afield, I discovered ruins of old Native cities among rocky cliffs in southwest Colorado. I began an intensive search for these sites. It is much easier to scramble up steep gravelly slopes than climb back down, and from my perch among broken pottery shards and dried corncobs, I would often have to repeat over and over my mantra "If you got all the way up here, you can get down the same way", never really asking myself what had driven me into the situation in the first place, the "What am I doing here? Why am I doing this?" type of questions.

I sometimes asked them the year I lived in Kyoto, but I was too busy climbing the hills surrounding the ancient capital, once again finding myself searching out paths and ruins of an older way of life. On my very first day in Japan, while strolling along the popular Philosopher's Walk at the eastern foothills, I spotted a trace of a path up into the brush, bounded across the stream and started uphill. Soon I discovered a world of trails, and after a time picking various branches and letting chance guide me, I met an American walking along the trail. He was a long time resident of Kyoto. He was shocked to see me among the trees, especially to hear that I'd only been in town a few hours! He showed me his favorite way down the mountain to a little-known temple. I learned that all the temples on the eastern mountains are connected by these

mountain trails. From then on, I spent a great deal of time searching out the varied pathways, surprising myself when I'd walk out of the trees through the back gate of Kiyomizudera or Nanzenji temples. I never had to pay an entrance fee again!

I discovered a great book by Oliver Statler, "Japanese Pilgrimage". It described a circular walk around the entire island of Shikoku. This sounded like the perfect way for me to get out of the intense stressful life of the Japanese city, to discover the more traditional, slower Nippon. I could improve my language skills, see more unusual places, and do what I loved best, hiking up hills finding ancient architecture.

On my second trip back to Japan, I was prepared with the necessary gear (Too much of it! So Heavy!), maps, guidebooks, and enthusiasm for two months of solid walking. I had a notion of the course ahead of me, thanks to a well detailed description in English by a California Buddhist priest, Taisen Miyata. In his book, he tells how the island circuit is divided into four parts, one for each prefecture. They are called Dojo (just as in the martial arts training hall), and go through a progression:

Awakening Faith → Religious Discipline → Enlightenment → Nirvana

Each part has its Gate and Nansho (difficult place). I heard a bit more about the walk from the monks on Koyasan.

As the ferry approached the harbor, I opened up a small notebook to start a journal:

Kobe to Tokushima City: 3 ½ hours...

"It furthers one to cross the great waters", says the I Ching. I am about to step onto Shikoku Island.

Will I complete the Pilgrimage?

Among my concerns now are: Heavy pack, lack of practice in speaking Nihongo. Hopefully the weather will be good, the people helpful, the costs of staying overnight reasonable.

Shingon Buddhism is so complex, almost like magic. I don't want to be a magician. I want to become a simple hermit wanderer Dharma Bum on an old pilgrim road.

What will be my Onegai/wish for fulfillment? Pure life, spiritual grace, understanding of Japan and Asia (including its language), a successful life after the pilgrimage earning my living well...Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo! Dogyo Ni-nin! Two of us on the path together...Help me Daishi-sama, communicate will with the people of Shikoku, and achieve whatever is in my Destiny and Higher Self! Open me to inner guidance, ability to listen to others, and to respond in peace and love!

Reaching the island, I took a short train to the starting place of the Henro Michi, The Pilgrim Road. In the dim evening light I walked the short ways to Temple #2, Gokurakuji, preparing my little speech of introduction ("I'm Koyasan no Fujii no tomodachi..." etc). I walked through the Niomon demon gates to the reception area. As I readied myself to knock at the doors, they slid open, with the pleasant surprise of "Marc-san desu ka? Fujii-san called us....."

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**At Temple #2**  
**A Lucky Encounter**

“Marc-san desu ka? Fujii-san called to tell us that you would be arriving...we had expected you last week.” I was warmly welcomed at the Shukubo Temple Lodging of Gokurakuji, the Temple of Pure Land Heaven, the second stop on the Pilgrimage. A young woman showed me inside, where I took off my brand new hiking boots and stepped up to the tatami covered hallway. Yes, I had planned on an earlier start, but I had lounged around my Osaka apartment a few more days “getting up my energy” and buying a few more things to add to my overloaded pack. Today had seemed like the proper time to wake up at dawn and rush to the early ferryboat to Shikoku island.

“An American woman came here too!” my hostess excitedly told me. “Right, I know about her”, I replied as I lugged my gear up the stairs. “I read about her in the Koyasan newspaper. She did half the walk last spring, accompanied by a priest and his dog...” I was shown to a small room sparingly furnished with a low writing table, some flowers in a vase, and a painting on the wall. The door of the next room slid open with a rush of energy. Standing before me was a tall strongly built foreigner, whom I recognized immediately as the same Sara Oechsli from the newspaper photos! She had returned to Japan, and that very afternoon had finished walking the second half of the Pilgrimage. She was spending her last night at the temple where I, through the good fortune of that chance meeting with Fujii-san at Koyasan, was to begin my stay on the island. It was an auspicious start!

What questions to ask her first? I was overwhelmed with all the stories and information Sara could give me. She pulled out maps and addresses, and we were looking over her notes together, when someone invited us to have dinner with the Jushoku (Abbot/Temple Head Priest) downstairs in the family dining room. At a large table and chairs set Western style was sitting Aki Shoken. He smiled kindly as he sat there taking in my rising excitement. We were all surprised and pleased at our meeting. Daishi-sama was already looking out for me! We talked a long time, in both English and Japanese. Over coffee and cake, Aki-san told how he had traveled many times to Burma, helping out the Buddhist temples there. His family was very nice, and not put out by the two lively Gaijin (foreigners) at their table.

Aki’s wife gave me a Henro jacket as my first Settai Offering. It was short white cotton “Happi-coat” style, with a mandala design on the back. She showed me how to wear it, left side over right. On the way to the baths, I passed by an area displaying many different styles of these jackets, as well as all the other Henro Pilgrim gear: Boxes of incense, candles of all sizes, strings of rosary beads, walking sticks, handbags, guidebooks and maps, hanging scrolls, prayer books, as well as postcards, teas, toys, and other tourist items. I wanted to buy it all!

After a good soak, I went back to my room. There was a futon with a thick down comforter laid out for me, and on the table alongside, a thermos of hot water and a teapot, with rice crackers for a late night snack. I went to sleep immediately, ready to awaken at 5:30am for my first day of walking.

It was still dark as I got dressed and went out to the Hondo main sanctuary where Aki-san and his son were lighting candles to start the service. There were also three men there, two pilgrims and their taxi driver/guide, who were also beginning their circuit of Shikoku. After the prayers, the priest gave a good short talk about the Hannya Shingyo, the Heart Sutra, and the Henro Pilgrimage. I managed to understand a good part.

Afterwards, I wandered around the temple precincts in the dark, visiting the sacred “Long Life” cedar tree, so-called because Daishi-sama planted it over 1200 years ago. It is known for its powers of granting easy childbirth. In another area, after twenty one days of reciting the Amida Sutra, Kobo Daishi carved a statue of Amida Buddha. Its halo emitted a light so bright that it scared away the fish in the bay miles beyond. The frustrated fishermen built up a small hill in front of the main sanctuary to block this radiance. This was the first of many of the Daishi Legends I was to encounter along the Pilgrim Road.

**NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO!**

## **Seven Weeks on the Henro Michi Steps along the Shikoku Island 88 Temple Pilgrimage**

**Marc Pearl**

### **At Temple #2 Final Instructions- Starting Out**

After breakfast, I went with Sara to Temple #1, Ryozanji, Sacred Mountain Temple. In front of the sanctuary, we reviewed the brief Pilgrim's prayer service. Sara, now finishing her Henro Pilgrimage now had a Deshi student to teach! The ritual is simple. One lights a candle and places it in the glass enclosed candle rack set up before the building, then lights three sticks of incense, placing them in the ashmound in the large stone urn next to the candles. Passing through the purifying smoke, a few steps lead to the veranda of the sanctuary. The prayers are usually recited in front of the screened doorway, as the interior is often darkened, with slight glimmers reflecting off the gilded altar decorations. By the opening are three boxes. One is for depositing hand copied Buddhist Sutra prayers, an exercise long believed to grant "merit", good Karma. Another box is for receiving the Pilgrims "O-Fuda", which is a type of calling card on which the Pilgrim writes his name, address, date, and the reason for which he is making these prayers on the Pilgrimage. Indeed, another name for these temples is O-Fuda-sho, O-Fuda Place. On mine I wrote for "Health for my family, a happy successful future with my wife, and the strength to complete the entire Henro Michi hike" (a walk of 850 miles ahead of me!) and put the slip of paper in the box. In the third box, one tosses a few coins, the more money, the more sincere and better received is the request, it is said!

These preliminaries quickly done, the Pilgrim opens his "Kyohon", a prayer book made of a long strip of paper folded accordion style between two slim cardboard covers, about 7 ½ by 3 inches. All the sects use this basic format. On the cover is written in Japanese "Order of Prayers to be read before the Buddha". The prayers are commonly called "O-Tsutome", "Diligent Work". The opening prayers are nearly the same in all the sects. First is a poem:

"Unsurpassed, profound and Wonderful Law  
Difficult to encounter in hundreds of thousands of eras  
Now we can see, hear, receive and benefit from it,  
We vow to attain the true understanding of the Buddha!"

Next is Repentance:

"I have, since the ancient past, committed evil deeds  
All caused by beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance  
These acts of body, speech, and thought  
I now completely confess and repent."

We then take refuge in the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of his followers, and vow to observe his ten precepts: Not to kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, exaggerate, slander, equivocate (speak two ways of the same thing), covet, get angry, or hold wrong views (harmful to others and the teachings).

The prayers that follow these opening words vary from sect to sect, and on different Pilgrimages and holidays. The Western Japan 33 Kannon Temple Pilgrimage includes the Kannon chapter from the Lotus Sutra for example. In the Shingon Sect founded by Kobo Daishi, many mantras of Sanskrit words are recited. These are modified to resemble Japanese pronunciation:

“On Boji shitta Bodahadayami”

(“Om, I generate the mind/heart of Enlightenment”)

“On Sammaya Satoban”

(“Om, You are the One Samadhi Enlightenment”)

The focus of these prayers is the short Heart of the Perfect Wisdom Sutra, in Japanese the Bussetsu Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyo, commonly called the Hannya Shingyo. It is a compact description of the Buddhist philosophy of mind, and is considered by many to have great magical powers as well. It gives us a description of Kannon-sama who, while in a state of deep meditation, perceived that our sensations and psychological states are all relative and in a constant flux that cannot be separated from all other life, that they are “empty” of independent existence. Thus the famous phrase “Form is no other than Emptiness, Emptiness no other than Form”. The sutra ends with the recital of a Sanskrit mantra phrase “Gyate, gyate, hara gyate, hara so gyate, Boji Sowaka” meaning “Gone, gone, gone to the other side (of wisdom beyond petty discrimination) to the state of Endless Bodhi Heart, so be it!”

The closing lines include the mantra for the Buddha enshrined in the temple sanctuary, also the Mantra of Bright Light, and the mantra for Kobo Daishi, the founder of the Pilgrimage, “Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo! Hail to the great teacher, spreading the Diamond Light!”. Finally, closing with the prayer:

“May the merit we have gained by these words bring us,

Together with all Beings, further along the path to Buddhahood”

Each temple also has a Founder’s Hall dedicated to Kobo Daishi, where the above ritual is repeated. The entire set of prayers can be completed in fifteen minutes or so, but on the first day I struggled through reading the unfamiliar words, marveling at Sara’s fluidity in chanting. I would become more proficient, too, she told me, because there are 87 more temples ahead!

Although I am not a follower of any organized religion, and knew very little about the details of Buddhist ritual, I decided that since I was making the effort of walking the entire pilgrimage and visiting the temples, I might as well dress the part and wear the Henro outfit, and pray in the manner of the Pilgrimage. Perhaps some deeper understanding would evolve this way. The sight of a bearded Gaijin, a foreigner, was so unusual to the Japanese, that my dressing the part of the Pilgrim would not be many strangers for them! It could even be of benefit among these islanders accustomed to floods of tourists in Pilgrimage chartered buses!

Sara and I entered the temple reception area, the Nokyocho. There for a fee of 200yen, the priest would stamp the official Temple Seal in your Pilgrimage Book. This includes a stamp with a Buddhist symbol, the name and number of the temple, all in red ink. In beautiful flowing brushstrokes, the page is then covered with a Sanskrit letter representing the Honzon (Buddha) of

the main sanctuary, the name of the Honzon, and the temple name. Pilgrims can also ask for the seal to be placed on the back of their white jackets, or on a special hanging scroll. The jacket is worn by the Pilgrim at his funeral, the book placed in his coffin, thus accompanying him on his final journey to the Pure Land. Until that time, he can pray at his Butsudan (home altar) in front of the hanging scroll, truly a wonderful sight with its 88 temple stamps.

I bought one of these books, a smaller size to fit into my pack, so I could begin my collection of Nokyo seals. Sara bought me a little bell to tie to my pack. This bell is to awaken the Pilgrim to a mindful state of awareness, but we suspected that it serves more as a signal to the locals that a stranger is approaching! I decided to buy the rest of my gear at Temple #2, since they were so helpful and kind. In addition to the Henro jacket, Aki-san had given me a hanging scroll to take along. The scroll is a sheet of silk with a paper backing on which the spaces for 88 seals is marked. In the middle of the scroll is a painting of Kobo Daishi. After the scroll is complete with seals it can be taken to a shop where the paper backing is replaced by an elaborate border and tassels, making a first rate work of art.

We walked to a small coffee shop, where Sara gave me more tips and names of places to stay. On the return to Temple #2, we stopped at a store to make copies of detailed maps she had gotten from a man in Matsuyama City who had placed guide plaques along the entire hiking trail. Back at Gokurakuji, I got the rest of my Henro gear:

- Incense and small candles in a plastic case with space for matches

- Book shoulderbag, to carry prayer, stamp, and guide books

- Sugegasa Straw Hat

- Wagesa(prayer ribbon to wear around neck)

- O-Fuda slips

- Kongo-Tsue the Pilgrims Walking Stick, inscribed with the Heart Sutra

In addition, Aki-san gave me some Telephone cards with the temple's picture. These are used when making long distance calls, each card worth a number of call units. He also gave me his calling card (Meishi), with a short message written on the back. It said "Marc-san is my friend from America, please extend to him any courtesies and help he might need on his Pilgrimage". We sat down and over a last cup of tea, he gave me more details on the ritual and prayers, then he stamped my book and scroll, and wished me a safe journey. I stopped at the well by the main gate and filled my canteen, and with a wave and a bow to the gate's protector demons at 1:30 in the afternoon, I was finally on my way, walking stick clacking down the driveway.

**NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO!**







**Henro Outfit includes:**

**Book bag, to carry prayer, stamp, and guide books**

**Sugegasa Hat**

**O Izuru White jacket**

**Wagesa Surplice (ribbon around neck)**

**Nenju Rosary Beads**

**Kongo-Tsue the Pilgrims Walking Stick, inscribed with the Heart Sutra**

**Little Bell**

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

**The Settai Offering**  
**(Temples #7- #11)**

The Settai Offering is a fundamental aspect of the Henro Pilgrim experience. Offerings and services of all kinds are given to the Pilgrim as he makes his way along the island paths. Meals, snacks and cups of tea, items necessary to the Henro such as incense sticks and candles and coins, as well as places to spend the night, are donated by the kind people of Shikoku. Although the Henro is a stranger traveling but briefly through the neighborhood, he is greeted as a friend, and invited to sit on the veranda or inside the front genkan entrance, leaving the hot sun and dusty road for some moments to relax and share a few words.

During my second day of walking, between Temples #7 and #8, I got caught in a gentle sunshower, so I stood under the eaves of a house alongside the road. From the open doorway of the genkan, a grandmother motioned me inside. We sat quietly and drank green tea and nibbled some crackers while we watched the rain and talked about the Pilgrimage. In Spring and Summer there are a lot of chartered buses whizzing by her door, she told me. In the fall, it was calmer. She doesn't see very many walking pilgrims nowadays, not like the old days after the war when, for a lack of jobs or anything else to do, many people would do the Pilgrimage, before they had cars or those fancy taxis and buses. As I looked out at the fields across the road, she pointed out rice, napa cabbages, grapes, kaki persimmons, and tobacco plants. Once it was popular to grow one's own favorite tobacco.

As the drizzle let up, I gave her a Fuda Pilgrim's slip with my name and date, and "Chicago USA" for my address, and thanked her for the tea. She called out for a grandchild to bring her purse, and pulled out a Y100 coin as my first money settai. I told her I would pray for her at the next temple, and I bounced back to the road quite pleased by the new connection with this special place. I resolved to save all future money settai to send to the children and young monks at the Drepung Monastery of Tibetan refugees in India, thus sharing the kindness of the wealthier Japanese with their fellow Buddhists across Asia.

At Temple #8, the priest gave me a map of Shikoku as Settai. From there I walked five kilometers, reaching Temple #9 at noon. The priest's wife at the reception hut gave me back the Y500 I had paid for the temple stamps in my book and hanging scroll, and pointed out a small canopy with a table and bench in a corner of the courtyard. Use the money to try the famous Temple sweets, she suggested. The Meibutsu Yamaimo Kusa Mochi was made of sweet rice balls with bits of sweet potato leaves mixed inside, not bad with enough tea to wash it down.

The skies had gotten cloudy after I walked the 5 ½ km to the long stairway up the hill to Temple #10, so I stopped at a store at the foot of the hill and bought a Pilgrim's straw hat. This essential part of the Henro gear provides shade from the hot glaring sunlight, as well as some protection from the rain with the addition of a rugged plastic covering that clung to the hat with

an elastic ribbon. I discovered another useful aspect a day later, on an overgrown path through a forest. The wide brim of the hat kept the spiderwebs and their large leggy owners from entangling in my hair and beard! The hat, called Sugegasa, has written on it with large calligraphy the mystic Sanskrit sound YU, representing Miroku, the future Buddha, as well as the Pilgrim statement of faith in Kobo Daishi, “Do Gyo Ni-nin” (“two on the path together”). A poem fills out each section of the hat, in four lines from top to brim:

“In confusion the three worlds (Past, Present, and Future) are limiting, in Enlightenment the ten directions are Empty. Originally there was no East or West, where can there be South or North?”

The friendly shopladies told me to leave my pack and gave me an umbrella. Good thing, too, for it was a long walk up those stairs in the rain! There was a great view of the valley from the temple veranda, but I was huffing and puffing and amazed that a busload of old people managed to climb up with me.

Back at the shop, the ladies gave me tea and cookies while I bought a small change purse to store my coins for the temple offering boxes. The bag had a nice drawing of Kobo Daishi dressed in his mountain hiking robes. Incredible the varieties of Pilgrim souvenirs at the store: postcards and books, amulets of every shape and material from paper to wood to plastic.

The sun came out for the remainder of the afternoon’s walk, 10 km to Temple #11, Fujiidera, Wisteria Well Temple. It was starting to get colder as I finished my prayers after 5:00. The priest’s wife at the Nokyosho Reception Hut was pleased to see a foreigner interested in the Henro Pilgrimage. She said that the old people know about it and do all the rituals, but the young just run up and take a look around. She gave me back my stamp money too.

There were no places to spend the night near the quiet temple. The kind woman called the closest Ryokan in the town below. It was closed on Sunday. The next one was filled. A few minutes later, one called back, said they would arrange something for me, and drive over to pick me up. As we waited together, I mentioned that as I had two months of walking ahead of me, I’d have to budget myself carefully for all my meals and rooms. When I got my things together for the ride back into town, I found an envelope with the temple name, and inside it was a Y5000 note! Use it for your lodgings, dinner and the taxi ride back the next morning, and continue your Pilgrimage, I was warmly advised.

So many different Settai in one day! It was an auspicious start. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of so many different people. How had this tradition of donations and offerings become such an important aspect of the Shikoku Pilgrimage?

The word “Settai” is composed of two Kanji characters:

Setsu “touch, contact, encounter, experience, draw near, receive visitors”

and Tai “to wait, expect, depend on, deal with, treat”.

Combining together, the character dictionary defines Settai as “reception, welcome, serving (food)”. Although the word is commonly used in daily social situations, in Shikoku it refers to the help given to Pilgrims as they travel the hardships of the Henro Michi roads. In this sense,

the definitions “ contact, encounter, experience, deal with” strike me as remarkably similar to the subject matter of a certain movie dealing with Extraterrestrials.

Every Spring there is an invasion of strangers flooding through the small towns and rice fields of the island. The prearranged stops of the chartered buses deposit 40,000 energetic and eager Pilgrim/Tourists with their loaded pocket-books before temples, restaurants, souvenir shops, and hotels, which are staffed by a rural, thus simpler, calmer, less stressed out people. It is as impressive an economic and cultural encounter as when the same Tokyoites land in Micronesia or New Guinea, cameras and videorecorders and matching outfits flashing in the tropical sunlight.

Imagine the confusion created by the bearded Gaijin! Definitely a close encounter of the farther-out kind!

In the 1150 years of the Shikoku Pilgrimage, only the last twenty or so have been commercially developed to this extent. Where other types of Pilgrimage, most notably the Edo Period Pilgrimage to Ise Shrine, have always had large numbers of organized travelers, Shikoku with its extensive 1400 kilometer walk amid remote and less developed areas has been a more solitary and dangerous undertaking. Even the usual term “Junrei” meaning “to go praying in order of one temple to the next” is replaced by “Henro”, “everywhere on the path”. The walking is not only the means to visit temples, it becomes the end itself, that of the experience of Self in the sacredness of Nature. The Shikoku Henro Path is a circle. Originally it had no numbering of temples, and here are many more than 88 sacred places on the route. One can sit atop a mountain, stroll along a sandy beach, pick herbs in a forest, or meditate in a cave, finding the Buddha Nature in every moment. The ten directions are limitless, there is no East or West.

In olden days the religious wanderer was looked upon with both respect and dread. His sacred endeavor was recognized, and the Pilgrim would often be called upon to use his “good spiritual energy”, acquired through religious austerities, to bless crops and pray for the sick. In return, he would be given a warm meal and a place to sleep. This evolved into Settai Offerings of new sandals, uncooked rice, fruits, and (as Statler mentions) the islanders would even give haircuts, shaves, and massages to the passing Henro. Buddhists regard this as a way of accumulating “Merit”, the good Karma necessary to help gain a higher rebirth.

By helping the Henro fulfill his vows, the man tied to his small farm can become part of the Pilgrimage. The Henro in turn will pray for his benefactors. In this, I was reminded of the Corn and Rain Dances of the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest. The Pueblos welcome crowds of people to their dances as the more participants in the scene will provide more energy for their prayers. The Pueblos even provide huge banquet tables of food for their guests. When the visitors are respectful of the proceedings, there is no longer any division between Dancer and Watcher. All are participating in the great prayer.

There is also the belief that the Sainted Kobo Daishi walks along the path with the Henro. “Do Gyo Ni-nin...two on the path together”. Anyone on the road could be Daishi-sama. Treat everyone as if he is the Saint. Thus, every encounter can bring us closer to Enlightenment.

As the Shikoku Pilgrimage grew more popular, however, the types of Pilgrim changed. People came to the island in search of a spiritual cure for awful diseases, or for any number of needs. Ill-prepared Pilgrims would get caught in the fierce weather of rain or snow or typhoons, they might fall while walking along a precipitous mountain path, or simply collapse for lack of food and sleep. Japanese have a deep fear of strangers upsetting their orderly society. The thought of a stranger dying in one's rice field was of the utmost of horrors. The spirit of the corpse, having no relatives to pray for it, would become a Muenbotoke, a wandering ghost\*. No one wanted the blood of such a being flowing through his crops.

By giving food and a safe place to sleep, the farmer could prevent disaster, for the stranger would have the energy to continue along the next morning. Here we discover the dark side of the Settai. The Zenkonyado, the Tsuyado, and the Henro Koya sleeping huts were preventative measures. The Pilgrim's Ofuda Slips, presented to the temples and in exchange for Settai, have the Pilgrim's name, birthday, and most importantly his address, thus aiding in identifying the stranger along the lonely road.

Those days are long gone. Along the road, I cherished the memories of old women running after me calling out "Ohenro-san, here's a little help for you", pressing a coin into my hand, or the high school girls who nervously giggling, would ride their bicycles past me only to return minutes later to hand me a bottle of juice or an apple. In the weeks ahead I would be graced by many gifts and surprises as Settai.

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

\* Mu-en-botoke: although the meaning is that of "Wandering Ghost", the characters actually say "Connection-less/Karma-less Buddha"...a much nicer way of looking at these troubled spirits.

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

**A Walk through Tokushima in the Rain**  
**Synchronicity on the Path**  
**(Temples #17-#18)**  
**Day 6**

Woke to heavy rains splattering off the rooftiles of the tiny temple reception hut. The day before, I had reached Temple #17, Idoji Temple of the Well, late in the afternoon, only to find the temple lodgings closed for the season. Although I had chosen the Autumn season for my walk, supposedly the driest time of the year (after the constant Tsuyu rains of Spring and the typhoons of late Summer), I had overlooked two major seasonal factors. With each passing day, I would have earlier sunsets and shorter walking times. Each night would be colder than the last, especially as I left the southern beaches for the northern mountainous second half of the Henro Michi. I would have to find a place to stay each night, as it got too cold and windy to sleep outside (Nojuku). Now I discovered the power of tradition in the creation of the Henro Tourist Season! The chartered buses filled the springtime roads, despite the tsuyu, and those temples lucky enough to have been included on the circuit of the 88 made their fortunes accommodating groups of elderly Pilgrims in their immaculate and complete Henro costumes. Tossing coins into the box in front of the Buddha statues, earnestly praying to clean up their Karma and acquire merit, grandmas and grandfathers then diligently paid a fee for the official Temple stamp and calligraphy to be entered into their Kakejiku hanging scrolls. They bought O-Mamori amulets and talismans, O-Mikuge fortunes, Te-nuki hand towels, posters, candles and incense, telephone cards and all the other Henro gear the creative priest could dream up. Thus the older generations assured themselves a place in Paradise.

When the priest saw the look of dismay on my face, he must have felt a twinge of pity, for he offered me the use of the small hut for the night. Without another word (or the offer of a cup of tea, or a bath, or dinner I grumpily noted) he vanished for the night, locking up the Hondo main sanctuary and the other buildings. I really needed to wash up, and started to wander through the rice fields to the main roads in search of a Sento bathhouse. I put on a few extra kilometers in an attempt to find the sento the neighbors thought was “only a little further along”. I really wanted to soak my sore legs! Finally I gave up, ate a big bowl of udon noodles, and made my way back to the temple grounds. Behind the buildings, I found a modern public lavatory, washed my hair over a sink, went to my little hut, and passed out.

A short time later, I awoke when two cars entered the courtyard. Nearby, under the temple belltower sat a young couple flirting. Lots of gabbing, no sounds of kissing....I lay half dozing, reviewing my day. I thought this young priest would at least be curious as to why I was doing this walk, and since the “hotel” was closed, he had time to chat....As eldest son, these guys inherit the family business, although they don’t always like it. This temple was famous for a well that was dug by Kobo Daishi himself. The legend in the book said that if you could see your face reflected in the water, you would have good luck. If not, you would have an accident

in a short time. After one look inside the dark room housing the well, I was afraid to peek over the edge and look into the well. I also passed on the chance to buy a bottle of the magic well water.

As I continued these musings, sounds of drumming nearby aroused me to get dressed and investigate. At the Jinja shrine next door some kind of practice session was on. Entering, I saw a group of ten year old boys and girls sitting on the floor banging away at small drums. Two men supervised them, while little brothers and sisters played games nearby. The playing children ran to surround me. We talked small talk while they folded origami cranes in exchange for my writing their names in “English” for them. They wanted my name too, and eagerly shook my hand. Returning to my hut, I slept deeply until morning.

I went to the Hondo to recite my prayers under the dripping eaves of the sanctuary veranda. Back at the hut, as I prepared my pack, the priest came by with a plate of Texas Toast. I gave him my book and scroll to stamp as I waited around for a Henro bus or taxi to come by. I didn’t want to carry my pack for 20km in the rain. I was able to give it to a bus driver to leave at the next temple.

I set off in a real downpour! So much for avoiding the “rainy season”. I had on my raincoat, my straw Henro hat had its own plastic cover, and my feet felt dry. I lost track of the Henro Michi signs early on. At that point, one can only follow along busy city streets. I got a soaking from the puddles splashing from passing cars. Reaching Tokushima city, I stopped in a bakery, bought a sweet roll and the grandmother gave me one more, and pointed out the right direction. Happily munching along in the drizzle, I headed down the wrong fork in the road, passed over a river not marked on the map, and kept going until I got to a highway with street signs indicating that I was heading East instead of South. I caused quite a stir as I entered the Prefecture office and tried to get the correct information from the girls at the front desk. I showed them my rain-smearred map, repeating “Temple #18, Onzanji, which way, where’s the road South?” to no avail, as they couldn’t stop nervously giggling to give me any answer. Looking in one of my books, I saw that I could get back on track, but would have to head South on the major Kokudo Highway for six miles instead of walking along the hills.

It was still raining steadily. I was working up a good pace without my pack, although disappointed at not being on the quieter road. A VW Beetle pulled over to give me a ride. I prepared a speech... “No, I’m a walking Henro, thank you anyway.....”. A bald man in robes got out, a Bosan Priest, and from the other door emerged Fujii-san, the monk I had met at Koyasan! He was visiting with his friend Hattori from nearby Komatsushima city’s Temple Jizoji.

If I had been walking on the other road, we never would have met each other! They were as surprised as I was, because they thought I had started out a week earlier, and expected that I was across the island by that time. They drew me a map to Jizoji, and we made plans to meet there for dinner. After walking the rest of the way to Temple #18, totally waterlogged, I picked up my pack, said my prayers, and hitched my way to Jizoji. I would get a ride back to #18, and start my next day’s walking where I had stopped. At the temple, I was warmly welcomed, and at last had the long awaited Furo Bath. I especially enjoyed the ultramodern toilet seat, so nicely

heated that I almost regretted leaving it. I was afraid of reading the instructions incorrectly, so I passed up getting the full toilet seat comforts of a warm spray of soapy water followed by a drying blast of air.

Over a great dinner, Fujii-san explained that he had given a speech that evening about C.J. Jung, but no one had understood it. He said that the temple system will change soon, and not be so money oriented. The younger priests are striving for a more spiritual outlook. The three of us were the same age “of the Woodstock generation” as he called it. We are interested in a different view of things, one that includes Buddha and Jung, ancient Japanese oracles and modern California “spirit channelers”, Koto and Shamisen as well as Blues and Dobro guitars. “Tonight is truly a night of Synchronicity, to meet each other in such a way” he added.

In my warm futon bedding, in a room permeated with the smell of sandalwood incense from the altar on the other side of the thin shoji paper screen wall, I contemplated the events of the day in terms of Jung’s “Synchronicity”, the joining together of seemingly random events into a meaningful pattern. I had started this Pilgrimage with little knowledge beyond that of a few guidebooks and some slight background from classes about Buddhism, with a total lack of understanding of the Shingon Sect and its techniques and rituals. I was learning as I walked along, the innocent and ignorant foreigner in search of confirmation of a mysterious faith that “everything will work out in the end”. Perhaps in this age old religious setting, synchronicities take over when those techniques and knowledge are lacking. An article in the Koyasan Shingon newspaper had said to “Recite NAMU DAISHI in times of trouble on the path”, and so I did.

The “reckless” hiker, the purposeful choosing of the tougher lesser known trails, the walking past sundown in dark forests in a faraway country with its strange culture and language, stretches the limits of one’s ability to learn and develop from some deeply rooted, unconscious Karmic seedlings. As I was walking, I searched within myself for the reasons for choosing this Pilgrimage. I could not recollect any moments in my youth that triggered an interest in Japan, or in Buddhism, or for that matter, in hiking. The influences for those three aspects evolved out of experiences in very different periods and places in my life that somehow threaded together to bring me to that incense filled room. I could only surmise that the seeds did exist deep within one’s being, that impel us to resolve unfulfilled past life events. Earlier on the trail, I had passed a small Bodhisattva statue. As I stared at the moss covered stone, thinking of the kindness of the Shikoku people, I had a brief glimmer of my quest. Perhaps I had once, hundreds of years ago, walked the Henro Michi, in an age when few people completed the entire circuit of temples. Was I once a monk who, in frustration, cried out “Kobo Daishi, bring me back to try one more time!” as he lay dying on some dark forest path? Or perhaps, less dramatically, my Past Life Monk had indeed walked the entire Pilgrimage, and yearned to see the sacred sites of Shikoku once again.

In this life, as a 35 year old white middle class male, I now had the resources, time, energy, and determination to fulfill this deep spiritual compulsion. These glimpses of unknown motivations can be accepted only for lack of any more “sensible” reasons.

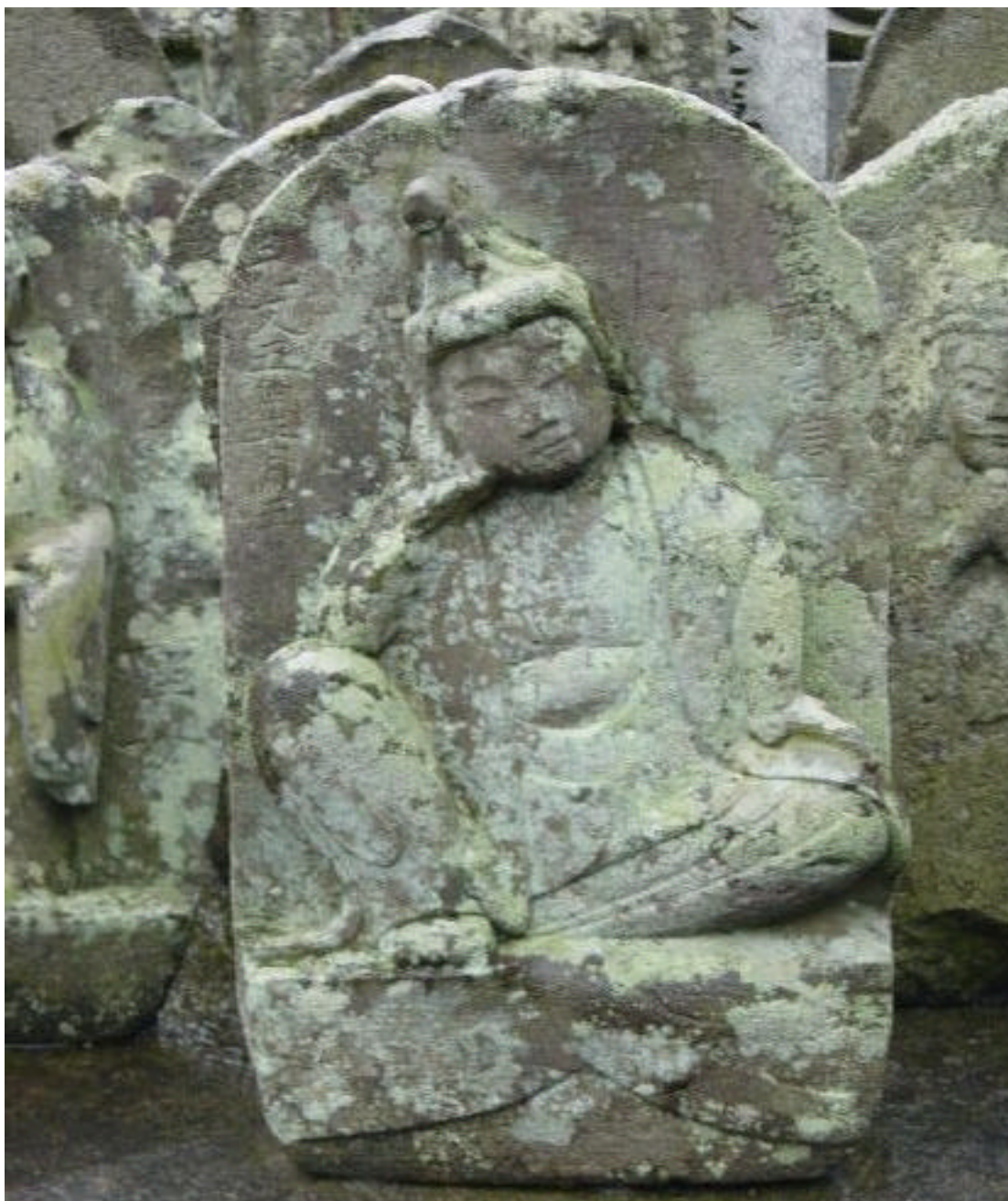
Synchronicities on the road in the rain, a warm bed among friends of like mind, gave me a sense of belonging in an alien world. I could fall asleep satisfied that the Sainted Kobo Daishi



was indeed looking out for this Gaijin Pilgrim, and hope that through the upcoming weeks, I would grasp some of the missing threads of the evolving pattern of my life.

Thank you Daishi-sama for such good friends and for all your help!

**NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO!**



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

**Nighttime on a Lonely Mountaintop**  
**The Brotherhood of the Sangha**  
**(Temple #19- Temple #21)**  
**Day 7/8**

I didn't leave Jizoji until noon. While Shoei-san and Hattori's wife washed my Henro coat and yesterday's soaked T-shirt and socks, I had a good breakfast watching the news on TV with Hattori and his family. Passing each other plates of rice, nori seaweed, pickles, and miso soup, we talked of the road ahead of me, and Fujii-san, who had walked the Pilgrimage the Spring before, wrote tips in my guidebook. He commented on everything from temples where I might be invited to stay, as well as priests who wouldn't welcome even a monk from Koyasan Pilgrimage center like himself. He even checked off the temples with the best self-serve coffee. I enjoyed being part of the household scene, stumbling over kids' toys, looking at rare Kakejiku hanging scrolls, and sitting on the veranda looking out at the courtyard as I went through my overloaded backpack.

I repacked my bag and left some clothes and my camera and binoculars at the temple. I kept a complete change of clothes and several pairs of stockings, as well as my thin foam sleeping pad, poncho, sweater and hat, windbreaker, my guidebooks and pocket English-Japanese dictionary. Hattori-san gave me a T-shirt from his temple. It had a cute drawing of a priest and a little boy, with "Terakoya Komatsushima" written above them. Shoei-san brought my Henro Jacket, neatly pressed, and I put it on with my purple Pilgrim Surplice and prayerbeads around my neck, round bamboo hat and walking stick completing the picture as we stood together on the steps of the Honzon Sanctuary.

We crowded into the white Volkswagen Beetle to drive to Temple #18, where I had ended my walk the day before. On the way, we listened to a tape of Bluegrass music. I was surprised to learn that in his younger days before becoming a monk, Fujii-san was once "one of the three best Dobro players" in Japan. I had no idea how Country and Bluegrass, as well as the Grateful Dead, was so popular with the Japanese of my generation.

At the foot of Temple #18, we posed under a Pilgrimage signboard and took parting photos. I pointed off into the distance smiling in anticipation of the adventures on the long road ahead. It was really nice to have my new friends "see me off" with cheers and wishes for a safe journey.



With my load lightened, I marched off to the next temple, a five kilometer walk along rice fields. Reaching Temple #19, Tatsue-ji, I realized that I had left my Temple Stamp Hanging Scroll at the house, and called to ask for it. Hattori-san arrived in minutes, before I had finished my Hondo prayers. He joined me for the prayers in front of the Daishi-do. Chanting together, I felt at one with the great Buddhist Sangha Brotherhood, stretching across the centuries and around the planet. Any differences between us were of no importance in the shared words generating the mind of enlightenment. “Gone, gone, gone to the other shore of Bodhimind...may my efforts lead all beings to a state of Compassionate Buddhahood....”

We parted once again, and I headed down the road into a hot, muggy afternoon. My shoes hadn't completely dried, and although the foot powder and moleskin helped, I got a couple of very sore blisters. The way to Temple #20 was a six kilometer walk up to 1600 feet. The Henro Michi trail was half that, but it led straight up the mountain. I didn't want to go that way, thinking of the muddy results of the heavy rains earlier, so I struggled up the endlessly zigzagging paved road. Making several stops to rest, it was more difficult each break to get up the energy to continue. I sweated through my shirt and thin cotton Henro Jacket. After reaching Temple #20, Kakurinji Temple of the Crane Forest, there was barely time to light my candle and incense before the evening darkness obscured the outlines of the temple buildings.

The Jushoku Head Priest was impatient to close up for the day. He began slamming shut the sliding doors around the main sanctuary as I finished my prayers. I didn't have a chance to look around the temple. I approached the reception window to get my temple stamps and asked for a room at the lodgings. They were closed for the season! There was nothing else on the mountaintop besides the temple grounds! I begged him to allow me to sleep under any veranda roof. Although he spoke politely, he informed me that the only place I could stay was in an old Jinja Shrine about 4 kilometers down the mountain trail behind the lodgings. “It's only a half hour walk”, he claimed as he locked up the office and put out the candles I had lit for my prayers, disappearing into the darkness.

Left in confused disappointment and growing anger, I walked out of the courtyard to the lonely parking lot. The only light came from a telephone booth nearby. Leaning against a wooden railing next to it, I tried to think up my next move. I pulled out my journal and pen, to capture the feelings of the moment. “So much for the Brotherhood of the Sangha!” I bitterly considered as I wrote:

“Alone in the evening silence of a mountaintop temple. Clouds of moths and bugs of all sizes are competing for the small circle of light around me. It doesn't feel very cold yet, and the moon is almost full, but it may well rain. The days are getting shorter, the nights getting longer! I hadn't thought of that when I decided to start my trip in Autumn. I've got twelve hours to blow until dawn! Where to sleep if it rains? I don't even want to consider that! Sleep standing up in the phone booth? Wish I had a pack of cigarettes! Might even chase away the bugs!”

I got my telephone card and called Hattori-san. His wife answered, and told me the prediction was for a dry night, and wished me luck. Hattori-san had thought that the Jushoku there would have given me a place to stay, but he didn't know him very well. Some of the Head

Priests were inconsiderate, more interested in the money aspects of the Pilgrim business. Hopefully that was changing with a newer, more spiritual generation of priests, he said.

I called Osaka next, and left a sad message on the answering machine at home. Not too sad actually—more ticked off at the temple priests! I sat around the booth for what seemed forever, and resolved to check out the trail to the old Shrine.

The moon was bright and clear as I found the start of a stone stairway downhill behind the temple, so I followed it, pocket flashlight in hand. Slowly descending through the forest, I saw a bright neon green spot next to the path. I squatted down close to the ground to discover a tiny worm type creature. The whole way since Temple #19 had been very quiet and beautiful, I reflected. Great mountains, lots of little crabs scurrying across the path, ferret like animals running through the bushes, ancient moss covered statues of Jizo-sama, and old stone markers with carvings of hands pointing the way to the next temple. The old markers weren't much use, though, because when they fell they would be reset in any direction. My thoughts became more peaceful as I concentrated on the winding path downhill.

I reached the Jinja O-Do around 10:30. It was an old rustic structure in a small clearing, remnants of farming equipment and carts scattered around the area. At first I thought to sleep in a canvas covered wooden wagon, but decided to check out the building. The sliding door was unlocked, so I peeked inside. From the small entry genkan, I could see the wooden floor was raised two feet from the ground. Under it were old bales of rice straw. The floor was covered with thin mats, and I took off my shoes, stretched out my foam pad, and quickly fell asleep.

In the early dawn, I set out through the wooded path, passing sheds, and then small cultivated fields, as the path became a dirt road eventually meeting up with a highway, which I quickly crossed. The Henro path followed a river in the quieter forest below the paved road. Rounding a bend, I was surprised to meet up with a figure in white pilgrim's clothes, walking towards me. He looked poor, and was loaded down with an old fashioned knapsack, and grinning broadly, revealed a mouthful of bad teeth. We stopped, facing each other.

With only the two of us in the remote stillness of our shared spiritual path, I felt an instant bond with the man before me. I took out a bag of mikan tangerines and offered him some. He reached inside a pouch hanging from his shoulder and pulled out a handful of strange looking sweets. They were brownish balls covered with coarse sugar, and very hard and chewy, with a furusato (homemade) taste of dried fruit. As I rolled a piece around in my mouth, my fellow Pilgrim explained that he was from Hiroshima, and starting out from the ferry terminal near Matsuyama City Temple #51 Ishiteji, clear over the other side of the island, was walking the Pilgrimage in reverse order. This is called "Gyaku-uchi", said to be a more difficult, thus more meritorious undertaking. We talked very briefly about the path ahead of us, then parted, wishing each other a safe and successful conclusion to our endeavors. As my new friend vanished into the morning mist, I wished I had asked him more about his experiences, why he was doing the Henro walk.

Two of us on the Path Together. Dogyo Ninin, “Same Path, Two Persons”, is the basic call to faith of the Shikoku Henro Pilgrim. It is written on our hats, walking sticks, purple neck ribbons, and white jackets. It means that wherever we walk, the Sainted Kobo Daishi walks with us, making the trip safer and smoother, hearing our prayers and helping us reach our goal of self awareness and compassion, keeping us on the Bodhisattva Trail.

Two white robed people meeting for a brief moment on an unknown path, far from homes and family, sharing sweets and words of encouragement. Two people from different lands, languages, and races, both waving sweaty, heart felt farewells. An encounter with the Daishi-sama within each of us on a road traveled by others of like mind over a thousand years. The Brotherhood of the Sangha.

**NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO!**

