

The Dharma of Kaihogyo

Sōdō (831-918), the recognized founder of kaihogyo, was a Tendai monk who spent years in ascetic practice on Mount Hiei, located outside modern day Kyoto. Sōdō had a strong affinity for the Fudō. According to his biography, the diety appeared to Sōdō in waterfall surrounded by raging fire. Soo jumped into the waterfall to embrace and instead emerged with a log from a katsura tree. It is believed that he crafted the log into the three images of Fudo, one for each of the temples he founded.

Fudo continues to serve as the dharmic center of the kaihogyo. Monks participating in the kaihogyo are consider a living form of Fudo. The unusually shaped hat, or *higasa*, is considered to be Fudo Myoo himself and is treated with the highest respect. The monk carries with him a rope and daggar much like the diety, though they receive emphasis because of their other purpose: tools for the monk to end his life if he fails at any point to complete the kaihogyo.

While many focus on the 24,000 miles walked or one thousand walks, it is important to remember the kaihyogo is a pilgrimage around Enryaku-ji. The concept of pilgrimages was likely borrowed from India and China. Buddhist texts of the eighth century stated that, “Mountain pilgrimages on sacred peaks is the best of practices.” As early as 831, academic research has found that Tendai monks pursued mountain pilgrimages in search of mystic powers and enlightenment. Pilgrimages on Mount Hiei formalized in the following years among its Three Pagodas and many associated temples. Rules for the kaihogyo further solidified with a standardization of dress and routes. By 1387, the length of the course and the number of days are detailed in religious texts. These practices resemble the kaihogyo as it is practiced today.

While the *gyoja* walks the course, he moves in time with his continually chanting of:

“No-maku Samanda Bazara (da) Senda Makaroshada Sowataya (um) Tarata Kanman”

This is a mantra to Fudo that translated reads:

“Homage to the all-pervading Vajras! O Violent One

of great wrath! Destroy! hūm trat hām mām”.

The intensity of the 1000 days of kaihogyo is inseparable from the what Fudo represents. Nothing must deter the gyoja from the task. They must cut through the delusions of what is possible. The lay confraternity that supports the Mt. Hiei kaihogyo take their name from the japanese word *sokusho* or “ending/stopping obstacles.” The practioner is expected to devote seven years of their life to the practice and end their life should they not complete the requirements.

Death is more than a threat to the gyoja and he is reminded every day of the kaihogyo. Rather than traditional black robes, the kaihogyo monks wear white, the color representing death in Japanese culture. A coin is placed in the higasa to be used the monk should die and need ferry passage across the mythological-*sanzu* river, separating life from death. As Ajari Tanno Kakudo describes:

“I dress in the clothes of the dead. I put on my sandals in the house. The Japanese never wear shoes indoors. So, putting them on inside means you’ve no intention of returning. At a funeral, the corpse has its shoes put on inside the house. This means that every day I leave on a pilgrimage of no return.”

On the 700th day of the kaihogyo, the gyoja starts the doiri, a nine day fasting retreat where no food, no water, no rest or sleep are allowed. While in the temple, the monk sits behind a folding screen which is arranged upside down, a tradition used during funerals. The monk again invokes Fudo throughout chanting the same mantra from his walks 100,000 times.

Hakozaki Bunno wrote this haiku to his student Sakai Yusai after he narrowly survived an attack from a wild boar during his kaihogyo:

The path of practice:
Where will be
My final resting place?

Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei



GENSHIN FUJINAMI, PHOTOGRAPHED AT TENDAI MONASTERY AFTER COMPLETING A 37-MILE LEG OF HIS NEARLY 25,000-MILE WALKING MEDITATION

Source: Planet

“The mountain itself is a mandala. Practice self-reflection intently amid the undefiled stones, trees, streams and vegetation, losing yourself in the great body of the Supreme Buddha.”

—attributed to Sōdō, 831 (the “kaihōgyo patriarch”)

Kaihogyo Practice of Mount Hiei

At the Tendai temple of Enryaku-ji, outside of Kyoto, monks engage in a practice of daily pilgrim-age. Over seven years and 1000 days, the gyoga travel 24,000 miles in the search for enlightenment.

Year One	March 28		18.6 mile circuit for 100 days	All monks hoping to serve as abbots at Enryaku-ji must complete hyaku-nichi, 100 days on the prescribed course. Each year, five or six monks complete the endeavour and earn the title ‘shingyo’.
	July 5			
Year Two			18.6 miles circuit for 100 days	Few monks continue onto the kaihogyo, or ‘practice of circling the mountains’.
Year Three			18.6 miles circuit for 100 days	Monks must petition senior leaders to continue onto the 1000 day kaihogyo. If their petition is accepted, they have one week to prepare.
Year Four	April		18.6 miles circuit for 200 days	Monks start at 2am and walk for five to six hours, visiting over 250 stops including Buddhas, ponds, bodhisattvas, trees, and patriachs of Tendai.
	October			
Year Five			18.6 miles circuit for 200 days	After completing 700 days of the kaihogyo, a monk goes through the doiri , an extreme nine day retreat with no food, no water, no rest or sleep. The monk will recite a mantra to Fudo 100,000 times.
Year Six			37.3 miles circuit for 100 days	
Year Seven			52.2 miles circuit for 100 days	Upon completing 1000 days of the kaihogyo, the monk takes the title of Daigyomon Ajari or ‘Sainly Master of the Highest Priest.’

Sources (highlights denote best starting points):

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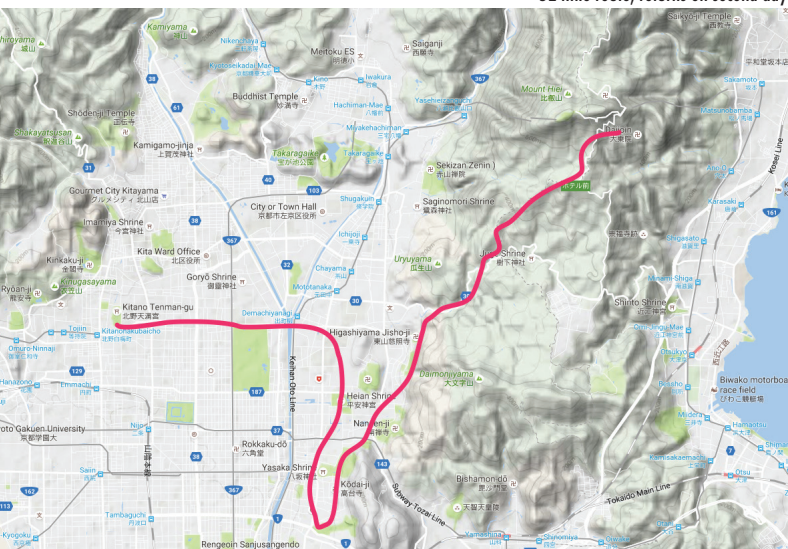
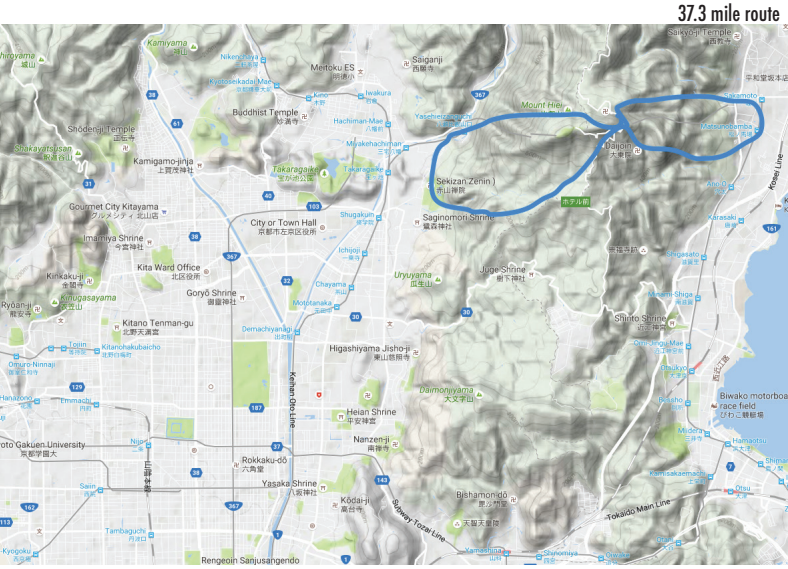
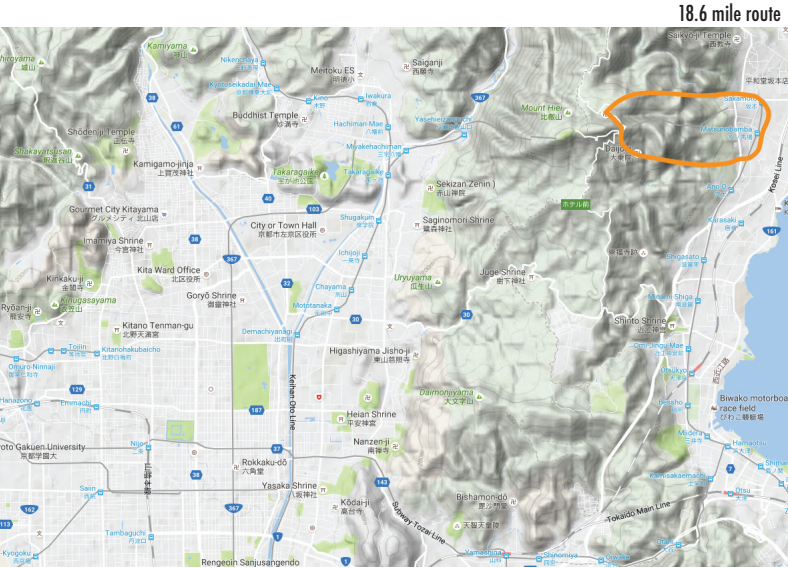
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Note: routes drawn are approximate based on source descriptions

In Their Own Words...

“If you are not afraid of death, you can achieve anything. Put your life on the line and great enlightenment will be yours.” – Hakozaaki Bunno

“It is only when a person is completely determined to achieve something that he can being to realize his inner power.” - Utsumi Shunsho

“You learn how to see your real self. You learn to understand what is important and what isn’t.” – Genshin Fujunami

“To others it seems to be about pain and suffering, But I get really great joy and satisfaction. Every day I return feeling alive and well.” -Tanno Kakudo

“The message I wish to convey is, please, live each day as if it is your entire life. If you start something today, finish it today; tomorrow is another world. Life live positively.” -Sakai Yusai

“The hope is in each of us. It’s no longer in the government, or world powers, but in each individual – we, you and I, are the hope.” - Uehara Gyosho

“Everybody thinks they’re living on their own without help from others. This is not possible. I really think that others have done something for me, and I have a feeling of gratefulness to other people.” – Endo Mitsunaga



Source: Anthony Kuhn/NPR