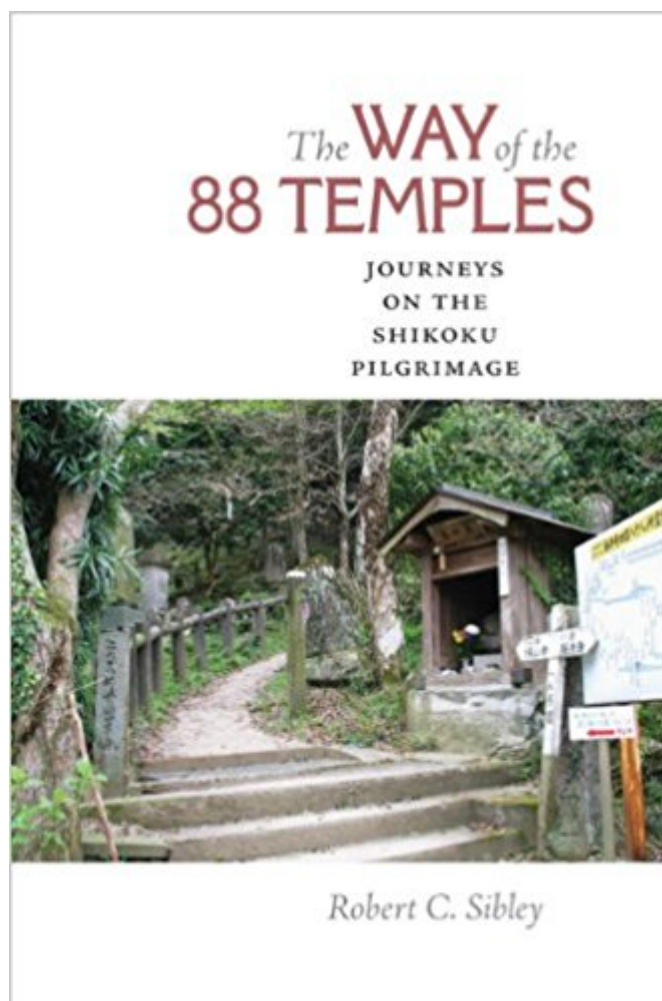


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The Way Of The 88 Temples: Journeys On The Shikoku Pilgrimage



Synopsis

Compelled to seek something more than what modern society has to offer, Robert Sibley turned to an ancient setting for help in recovering what has been lost. The Henro Michi is one of the oldest and most famous pilgrimage routes in Japan. It consists of a circuit of eighty-eight temples around the perimeter of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands. Every henro, or pilgrim, is said to follow in the footsteps of Kōbō Daishi, the ninth-century ascetic who founded the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Over the course of two months, the author walked this 1,400-kilometer route (roughly 870 miles), visiting the sacred sites and performing their prescribed rituals. Although himself a gaijin, or foreigner, Sibley saw no other pilgrim on the trail who was not Japanese. Some of the people he met became not only close companions but also ardent teachers of the language and culture. These fellow pilgrims' own stories add to the author's narrative in unexpected and powerful ways. Sibley's descriptions of the natural surroundings, the customs and etiquette, the temples and guesthouses will inspire any reader who has longed to escape the confines of everyday life and to embrace the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of a pilgrimage.

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Customer Reviews

A veteran of the well-trodden Camino de Santiago (The Way of the Stars) pilgrimage route, Canadian journalist Sibley explores the spirit of religious journey on a two-month trek around Japan's Shikoku island. This traditional route, the "Henro Michi," links 88 temples associated with Kobo Daishi (Kukai), founder of the esoteric Shingon school of Buddhism. Sibley describes the

870-mile walk as often brutally difficult, yet as he encountered stunning Pacific vistas, had his "nokyochō" (book) stamped at each temple, and accepted offerings ("settai") from residents, he found himself slipping into "pilgrim mind." Early in the trek Sibley unexpectedly acquires two walking companions who provide both assistance and complications, prompting some ambivalence on the part of the author, who prizes solitude. Sibley's acute psychological observations are interwoven not only with vivid details but historical and cultural contexts of the ancient Shikoku pilgrimage. Throughout his journey, Sibley asks himself-and the travelers he meets-why walking the path is important. While he finds no one answer, this accomplished narrative demonstrates that the impulse to seek inner change through a physical journey, if mysterious, is enduring.

Sibley shows vividly how this extraordinary pilgrimage can grip even the most agnostic participant. The book says a lot about how deep-binding friendships can be made on the road, and how important the sense of karma can be for those who have walked--and suffered--together. It also shows how pilgrimages are never over, but are often just the start of something else. (Ian Reader, Lancaster University, author of *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku*) In this wise and compassionate book, Sibley vividly captures life on the Buddhist pilgrim's road of Shikoku, Japan. As we walk beside him through these pages, we hear of the origins of the sacred route, its history, and its rituals. More important, though, Sibley's trials and triumphs, his sorrows and joys, with those of his fellow travelers met on the journey, teach us volumes about how to care for ourselves and others as we sojourn through life. (Hank Glassman, Haverford College, author of *The Face of Jizō...: Image and Cult in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*) Sibley's acute psychological observations are interwoven not only with vivid details but historical and cultural contexts of the ancient Shikoku pilgrimage. Throughout his journey, Sibley asks himself--and the travelers he meets--why walking the path is important. While he finds no one answer, this accomplished narrative demonstrates that the impulse to seek inner change through a physical journey, if mysterious, is enduring. (Publishers Weekly)

Robert Sibley's *The Way of the 88 Temples: Journeys on the Shikoku Pilgrimage* is a fascinating and moving account of the author's pilgrimage on the Japanese island of Shikoku. The Henro Michi, the traditional pilgrim's route, is nearly 900 miles long and includes 88 Buddhist temples associated with Kobo Daishi, the 9th Century founder of Shingon Buddhism. Sibley is one of the relatively few non-Japanese (and non-Buddhist) pilgrims and his descriptions of being in a very foreign culture and dealing with the Japanese language, customs, etiquette, and food are both

interesting and entertaining. However what really makes the book special is the Sibley's developing relationships with three Japanese pilgrims he meets on the pilgrimage - a father and his son and a recently retired businessman. The four men develop unusually close friendships and decide to do the pilgrimage together. This deepens the experience for all of them - as well as for the reader. The ending is unexpectedly dramatic and was powerful and very moving, at least for this reader. In addition, the author is very good when writing about the personal impacts of pilgrimage. He has experience as a pilgrim and it shows in his careful thinking and writing about his experiences (his book on his pilgrimage in Spain is *The Way of the Stars: Journeys on the Camino de Santiago*). Sibley's book is superb and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the Henro Michi or in the more general topic of pilgrimage.

A fascinating, well told story of a pilgrimage to the Buddhist temples of Shikoku with the additional benefit of describing the personal relationships that the Canadian author develops with the Japanese fellow pilgrims. A great insight into the intersection of eastern and western beliefs and traditions, and the mutual understanding that can be achieved by participants in each. I feel as though I have undertaken the Henro Michi pilgrimage.

I have walked the 88 temple pilgrim trail and know full well what the author experienced. His account is factual and enlightening - plus the added side-story of the trials and tribulations of his fellow pilgrims makes for an extra-special book. Highly recommended.

The leader of a bicycle trip around Shikoku suggested we read this book before the trip, and I dutifully did. The author's friendships formed along the way are a lovely story, leading to a touching finale, but I found the book lacking in real information about Shikoku and its temples. And, along with the author of another book I read, I was amazed at both authors' footwear.

I read the book to prepare for my own HeNro Michi (Pilgrimage) I got what I wanted : information, advise and insight . I really enjoyed it.

Excellent read for any would be pilgrim or those just looking more closely at what is the thing we call "human spirit/soul".

An insightful personal journey with honest comments on shortcomings and friendships forged. The

book catalysed my own metacognition and prompted the question - what and how would I feel if I were to make the same journey.

Loved reading this book. I have walked this trip myself and it is always so exciting to read how others experienced it.

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