



## GETTING STARTED IN SHUGENDO

*Adapted from Kannon-ji's introductory material by our headmaster Shokai Koshikidake.*

Shakamuni, the Buddha of our age, left clear teachings for followers, no matter their culture.

There is a cause, and the effects of that cause may have many unintended consequences. The Buddha thought about the challenge of humanity's existence in terms of cause and effect.

Ignorance is a root poison, as well as Aversion and Attachment. These cloud the mind and mystify our ability to clearly perceive things as they really are. Since all people must suffer from the afflictions of sickness, old age, and finally death, our existence can be considered filled with a kind of constant unease. Though the word suffering is included in this equation, it may be more useful to consider suffering as a catch all term describing a range of experiences from ordinary dissatisfaction to extraordinary despair.

The Buddha taught that all beings can extinguish the three poisons by realizing the Buddha nature deep within. He also advocated maintaining a religious practice as a means to further clarify and refine that understanding. Shakamuni encourages us to show courage and to practice the Noble Eight-fold Path. The Buddha's teaching valued the twin methods of study and practice.

Your body, mind, and spirit are the Foundation of your practice. Treat these supports well. You should not look for others to be the Foundation of your practice. Make the Dharma an island, and cling to it like a castaway. Buddha's teaching is the Law that becomes a vessel that allows practitioners to traverse the river of confusion and arrive at Wisdom. But it is a means to an end; please do not confuse it for the destination itself. The fundamental feature of Buddhism is to become a Buddha.

Sometimes people of the Book misunderstand the Buddhist context of the word God. A god in Buddhism is not the Omnipotent, Omniscient creator of the Universe as described in the Bible, Koran, or Torah. It is completely different. When the teachings admonish followers to realize their Buddha nature, they are being requested to bring forth their potential and realize the law of nature in the act of daily living, whatever form that takes. They are not being requested to supplant any other religion's God or Gods. Moreover, all traditions should be respected, whether or not one believes. In Buddhism, every practitioner should strive to realize their Buddha nature in this very life.

Regarding the root teacher or religious preceptor, the quest of becoming Buddha involves other people and different relationships.

It is necessary to be led to the teachings. It is necessary to practice the teachings in one's life. It is necessary to be guided in one's practice to avoid pitfalls and maximize successes. Therefore, Buddhism is a religion that values training and practice a great deal.

Shakamuni was a man not a God, who like other men was born to die. Religious training will have to be completed through great effort, great persistence, and great curiosity. Assisting in the process is the Religious Preceptor or Teacher. The Senior teaches and recommends the road and the method to the Junior.

Over the millennia, many different methods and approaches have manifested on how to realize one's Buddha nature. Religious thought and methods have developed differently within cultural contexts. So diverse views arose on how best to realize one's Buddha nature. One method that developed in Japan is known as Shugendo.

Shugendo is a religion that values encounters with gods and Buddhas in the context of mountain training. The Gyoja (ascetic) goes into a deep valley or goes up to the mountain top, and trains. The training naturally erases the three root poisons of desire, ignorance, and anger, and as a result, the spirit is purified. Shugendo is an original mountain religion. Elements of the Faith are based on ancient teachings of Shintoism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Onmyodo. Shugendo is a special religion with influences from India, China, Korea, and the ancient folk religions of Siberia. Shugendo may well become a major religion of the future when the symbiosis of man and nature can no longer be ignored. At once ancient and modern, Shugendo is a religion unique to Japan.

The founder of Shugendo is En no Gyoja. Many Japanese people think of him as a Second Buddha. Like Shakamuni Buddha, En no Gyoja was born and died. Records state he was born in 634 and died in 706. The superhuman results of his prayer gave birth to a lot of legends. Nevertheless, for all the fanciful tales of magic, En no Gyoja was a flesh and blood human being.

En no Gyoja attracted people's attention as an expert of petitionary prayer. Modern day people have the choice to look at the legends as symbolically true or literally true. Because of the power of En no Gyoja's prayer, legends arose regarding supra-normal abilities, such as flying through the air and so on. Nevertheless, to this day, people visit the mountains of Yoshino and Katsuragi where En no Gyoja lived and trained. These places are venerated as the birthplace of Shugendo

In Shugendo, the ascetic takes En no Gyoja as his role model. The Gyoja enters into the mountains for severe training. This training originates from the tradition that though En no Gyoja was left for dead on the mountain, through embracing mountain training, he was saved. For the Gyoja, this legend implies the death and rebirth. The training is called Jukkai Jo. The aim is to purify and renew the disciple through the medium of severe training, and ultimately, for the extra-ordinary practitioner, to realize the Buddha nature in this very life. Jukkai refers to the ten worlds coexistent within the Buddhist universe. The ascetic will experience ten worlds by virtue of Jukkai training in the mountains. By treading the road of realization through the ten worlds outlined above, Shugendo reaffirms itself as a religion which affects change in the personal by utilizing spiritual forces provided by the landscape of the mountains.

In the modern age, Shugendo was abolished with the establishment of national Shintoism of the Meiji era government in 1872. The horrendous excesses of the edict of Shunbutsu Bunri, have yet to entirely heal. However, Shugendo is reviving powerfully now. Shugendo addresses all level of Japanese belief, from the ancient worship of Shinto nature gods, to the philosophically challenging concepts of the Madyamika doctrines such as the Pranaparamita. The Spirit of the Shugendo that worships nature and seeks for human harmony in connection with the natural world is a vital message for the global environmental and the protection of the world's resources for the future. Shugendo maintains the vitality of traditional knowledge, and also points the way forward for living in harmony for tomorrow's world. Shugendo is a unique expression of man's spirituality.

Deshi (students) come from all walks of life. There is no discrimination based on age, gender, religion, ability etc. However, candidates should not desire to pursue religion as a career.

Religion should not be a business. The role model for modern shugenja is En no Gyoja. Our ideal is a traditional householder, who is at once part of the secular world as well as the sacred realm at the very same time. Full time priests should not apply unless they are willing to change their occupation. Living in samsara involves becoming polluted, yet one cannot spiritually assist or aid others without knowing the trials and tribulations of everyday life through one's own

experience. By knowing the joys and miseries of the human condition directly, the shugen practitioner then recognizes the necessity for spiritual assistance and training, especially purification and repentance.

Finally, religion should never be used as a way of making money. Any candidate with this intention should not apply. Our path is not for you.

**ENTERING THE SHUGEN GATE (入門の条件)**  
**Colour your life with prayer (祈りで人生に彩りを)**  
**By Shokai Koshikidake**

**Getting Started (入門を許します)**

Koshikidake Shugen-shu is an independent religious organisation; it is religious activity and not a fellowship or a club. If you want to learn Shugendo seriously, we will accept you as a novice. Shugendo is a 'practice religion' to be incorporated into your home and daily life. There is no room to make a living economically, unlike family temples. However, if you want to serve and praise the Gods and Buddhas, and live a spiritually fulfilling life, we promise you the road.

The Honshu does not solicit forcible introductions (recruiting). Practicing the road of Shugendo is not something you ask for, so if it does not suit you, you may quit at any time on the way. If you want to learn in earnest, get started and become a disciple of one of the Sendatsu. After discussing what you want to do, we can decide what you will learn. And you only have to learn at your own pace, as a pleasure of life.

Anyone can pray. This is not the patent of a monk or master. Serving the Gods and Buddhas and protecting them, devoting yourself to Shinto and the Dharma with all your heart. This is a path of service to others, your friends and family and to mourn your ancestors.

Well, the Honshu has a scripture which requires hard work. This is the beginning. The Honshu is made up of a group of homes, with normal people who are not professional monks. Shugendo is a above all a practice religion. Remember you are free to enter and leave.

**Lifestyle of Yamabushi (山伏という生き様)**

However, if you want to go a step further and learn properly, we will teach you bits of the daily worship practices as a gyaku-ho/shingyaku (客峰 meaning a guest in Shugendo). If you feel that the waters of the Honshu are suitable, consider this in earnest. As an ordained practitioner, a dharma name and the name of Yamabushi are given, and you will begin learning systematically. The Yamabushi way is to extend yourself to the point of correct training, and we hope to bring joy in interacting with Kami and Buddhas. Don't overdo it. No matter how motivated, the prayers you can practice are limited by your purpose. If you do it for economic or personal gain, it will not last. We understand that a little overkill is just the right amount of training, and we will help you to have a fun life interacting with Kami and Buddha. The main manners are as follows, but you do not need to learn all of them. However, you cannot learn the most difficult manners first. Everything has an order and pre-requisites.

**Koshikidake Shugen Honshu Practice (修験本宗勤行作法)**

Establishing a connection to Gods and Buddhas, we first perform prostrations (raihai-gyo).

In addition, there is a liturgy book for the daily services, morning and evening. This is the daily work that is the basis of the Honshu. You must first study these Sutras and Norito daily, incorporating their truths into your heart-mind. If you are proficient, you can read it all in 35-40 minutes. The minimum chanting time is about 10 minutes. As mentioned earlier, it is also a prayer (kaji-kito) manner. Even this daily work practice alone is sufficient for serving the Gods and Buddha.

Once mastery is reached you will begin learning manners that build to meditation practices and the **Incense Goma method (線香護摩)**.

It is a manner of burning incense and reading Sutras. This manner can be used for a wide range of reasons, from exorcism to memorial (kuyo). In addition, by adding various manners, it can be transformed into an advanced performance.

### **Next, the Great Bodhisattva Rite (行者大菩薩法)**

This is a manner in which the founding ascetic En'no Gyoja is taken as principal image (Honzon). This manner introduces and builds on practices combining Esoteric-Buddhist and Shinto rites. The prerequisite for learning this technique is that you must be proficient in the basic manners of the Honshu, the preliminary practices, and receive ordination.

### **Aji-kan and Nenju-ho (阿字觀)**

Meditation practices on Mahavairocana and Acalanatha-Vidyaraja.

### **The Great Five (五尊法)**

Post ordination rites lead to studying the Law of the Great Five (Gosonpo) and the flow of Ka-ji (加持). These form the basis of the Goma Kito-Ho practice. These are Laws of  
Dainichi Daisho Fudo-Myo-o  
Daikoku-Ten  
Yakushi-Nyorai  
Bishamon-Ten  
and Juichimen Kanjizai Bosatsu.

### **Jingi-Saho methods (神祇作法)**

In the methods of Shugendo, you will learn a variety of contents related to Jingi, from daily worship to full-fledged Kagami prayer.

### **Hashiramoto-Shimpo (柱源神法)**

This is a unique rite of Shugendo, representing highest wisdom.

There are also various ritual methods with various Honzon, funeral manners, local folk-religious practices, divination rites, mountain practices, advanced esoteric practices, Shinto practices, and trials. We provide information as needed. Contact for further information.