



**INTERNATIONAL SHUGENDO ASSOCIATION**

**国際修験道協会**

**Affiliated with KORYU SHUGEN HONSHU**

*Under the direction of Shokai Koshikidake,*

*Soke (Headmaster) of the Mt. Koshikidake Tradition of Shugendo*

**MEMBER HANDBOOK**

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## 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)**  
**Color 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.

## ISA MEMBER RANKS

Here are detailed the ranks that Shugendo practitioners may attain through practice in our organization:

### Guest Practitioner

- These are participants who join our public activities. They are not required to become members of ISA.

### Official Practitioner

Persons who have:

- Joined ISA, and are members in good standing for a minimum of one year.
- Completed the preliminary practices of 1000 Heart Sutra Recitations and 1000 prostrations with Furai Shingon.
- Begun to practice using online and other ISA resources.
- Become proficient in practice of the Daily Recitation Service.
- Participated in official in-person training activities, such as Mountain Training, at least 3 times.
- These members may learn important foundational practices like Gachirinkan, Ajikan, and Fudo Nenju Ho.

### Intermediate Practitioner

Members in good standing who have fulfilled the previous conditions, and:

- Learned the Senko Goma prayer ritual, practiced it at least 100 times, been examined, and received certification of proficiency in it.
- Participated in official in-person training activities, such as Mountain Training, at least 5 times.
- These members may then apply for tokudo (ordination).
- After tokudo, they must master the ritual manners connected to it, for example takigyo, the segaki offering, etc.

### Teaching Practitioner

Members in good standing who have fulfilled the previous conditions, and:

- Continued to participate regularly in official in-person training activities, such as Mountain Training.
- Learned three or more of the gosenpo rituals (the goma of Fudo, Juichimen Kannon, Daikokuten, Bishamonten, and Yakushi Nyorai), been examined, and received certifications of proficiency in these.
- Been authorized to organize a practice group for beginners to study the preliminary practices and Daily Recitation, and done so, with regular activity ongoing.
- They may be authorized to instruct other practices on a case-by-case basis.

- They are expected to continue their training toward full transmission (kesa gashira) and beyond: learning and practice must never cease.

### Sendatsu

Members in good standing who have fulfilled the previous conditions, have sufficient experience and knowledge to conduct many aspects of our training, and will serve as good representatives of our tradition.

They must:

- Continue to participate regularly in our official in-person training activities, such as Mountain Training, and also demonstrate ability to contribute to leadership of these events.
- Organize, or assist with organizing, official ISA events.
- Actively instruct, lead regular practice and prayers for others, and work to support the mission of ISA as exemplary practitioners.
- Be recommended by the board of ISA.

### Regional Director

These are members in good standing appointed by the ISA board to take responsibility for organizing ISA activities in a particular region or country.



## ISA MEMBER RULES

“International Shugendo Association is a sangha for people who want to study Shugendo. Shugendo is a religion, but in Japan it has been playing a key role in Japanese culture and lifestyle as a whole, even when people follow different faiths. Shugendo teaches the structure of the world which arises according to the cosmic dual forces (in/yo, or yin/yang) and the five elements. It shows us how we can connect to this world. Shugendo is a bridge to reach our spiritual homeland as human beings.

Shugendo principles are expressed through diverse ritual, meditation, and practice in nature. There are many things you can study. You will find what you seek – religion, spirituality, meditative practice – according to your interest. But still, proper practice cannot be unregulated. We have therefore created rules to guide our practice. Please follow these, as they show the right way to cross the bridge to a new world.

The main point is that you must not denigrate the dignity of Shugendo. As long as you belong to ISA, please observe this. You should know also that with increased rank as a Shugenja, your responsibility also grows. In order to avoid confusion, we therefore establish these basic rules.”

-Shokai Koshikidake, Headmaster, Koryu Shugen Honshu

1. First, all new ISA members should carefully read the documents “Getting Started in Shugendo” and “Entering the Shugen Gate” by our Headmaster (contained in this handbook). These explain the general principles of our training and the curriculum of study.

2. Second, all members must observe these community guidelines established by our headquarters in Japan:

- To maintain a clear environment for practice, Koryu Shugen Honshu prohibits discrimination and harassment.
- Koryu Shugen Honshu prohibits any discrimination on the basis of race or religion.
- Koryu Shugen Honshu prohibits sexual harassment. Even jokes of this nature are prohibited. We must respect each other regardless of gender.
- Practitioners should refrain from physical contact and touching the possessions of others. Practitioners should bow to each other instead of hugging or shaking hands.
- The exchange of information online should take place in public spaces such as our Facebook pages. Koryu Shugen Honshu does not prohibit the exchanging of private messages between members, but this may not be done persistently if undesired, or involve any immorality.
- Koryu Shugen Honshu does not spread Shugendo forcibly and unilaterally. Practitioners from other denominations are our important guests, and should be treated politely.

3. The following rules apply to all members:

- Shugendo practitioners must behave ethically and benefit their communities. Shugendo is not something to benefit only yourself. Do not apply to study unless you are deeply interested in Shugendo as a path of spiritual awakening and service to others.

- Shugendo practitioners treat each other with friendship. We climb the mountain of our training together, always helping each other. Members should interact harmoniously.
- Shugendo is a tradition with many hidden teachings that are only imparted face-to-face within a long-term teacher-student relationship. To study the complete path, it will be necessary to apply for tokudo (ordination).
- It is not possible to learn Shugendo from home: even though some online instruction and resources are given, traveling to events in Japan, N. America, or Europe will be necessary if you wish to learn. Serious practitioners should expect to expend effort, time, and expense in study.
- Shugendo is not cosplay, or something to build up your personal identity. Before receiving tokudo, members should not discuss Shugendo publicly. They should not call themselves yamabushi, or (for example) post photos on social media of themselves wearing practice clothing and using ritual tools. Of course, all members may share official ISA announcements or photos of ISA events.
- Recently there are some organizations teaching fake Shugendo or mikkyo. If you participate in the activities of such groups, we must decline your membership.
- There is a modern fiction that Shugendo is a mystical system used by ninja warriors. In fact, Shugendo is an ancient religion. Its purpose is not connected to martial arts. If you belong to a group that promotes such views, we may hesitate to accept you.
- Shugendo practitioners should refrain from sectarian thinking, or criticizing other religions. Members are not prohibited from also following other legitimate spiritual traditions, for example other Buddhist sects, or another world religion. But they should not mix the practices and teachings of these together with ours. Members must keep the Shugendo practices they learn intact and unaltered, as received from the teacher.
- Above all, members must behave in a manner that contributes to our mission: preserving the precious Shugendo teachings for the future, to benefit all beings. Join your mind and effort with this mission, and we will succeed together!

## ISA FEES

International Shugendo Association is a not-for-profit organization incorporated in the state of Washington, USA. These fees allow ISA to sustain its activities, conduct events internationally, and contribute to our Honzan (headquarters temple) in Japan.

Fees are paid to ISA unless otherwise noted at the time.

- One-time member entrance fee, includes Daily Recitation book: \$150
- Monthly member donation: \$25
  
- Fee for instruction of each major ritual, including textbooks: \$350
- Examination and certificate fee for major rituals that require this: \$150
  
- Tokudo fee: \$800
- In some cases, a portion of the tokudo fee may be waived depending on other event and travel expenses, for example if tokudo is taking place in Japan. This is purely by decision of the Honzan, and notification will be given at that time if applicable.
- Note that tokudo also requires purchase of priest clothing made to order in Japan; please inquire at that time regarding cost.
  
- Event fees: variable, please see the information for each event.
  
- Purchase of various ritual items used in our practice is the responsibility of each practitioner. ISA may be able to provide some things for sale to members only (for example, nenju and wagesa). For other items, we can often recommend suppliers. Please speak to senior practitioners when the time comes to purchase these things.