



## The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei

*John Stevens*

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## **The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei** John Stevens

This account of the "walking" or "marathon" monks of Mount Hiei in Japan, who have been performing an extraordinary mountain pilgrimage for over 1000 years, describes their rituals of chanting, meditation and exercise, culminating in walks of over 1000 miles and nine days without food or sleep. The book also examines the history and teaching of these Tendai Zen monks and profiles some of their leaders. John Stevens has also written "Abundant Peace" and "Zen and the Art of Calligraphy".

## **The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei Details**

Date : Published 1989 by Rider (first published 1988)

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Author : John Stevens

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## From Reader Review The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei for online ebook

### Christopher Barry says

Written in an academic style (because it was originally for academic purposes), this matter-of-factly presents a history of Tendai Buddhism and then the 1000 day marathon that some undertake. The most interesting section are the last few pages recounting what is known about the handful of modern finishers, who are considered saints and living Buddhas.

The ultra-distance runner in me wanted an entire volume dedicated to the last 100 days of their devotion: 52 miles a day for 100 straight days.

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### Todd Dowler says

So much info that is amazing! A must read for any ultra runner.

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### Shaun says

Didn't really tell me more than a news article did 6 years ago.

First half is the history of Tendai and Mount Hiei and it's founders. Pretty boring. The second half was about

the marathon monks and what they go through - which was the newspaper article. I wish there was more to part 2.

Quick read with full page photos sprinkled in.

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### **Jason says**

Fascinating book provides background information on Japanese Tendai Buddhism, a complete description of the marathon practice itself, and biographical sketches of the "running Buddhas" who have accomplished the seemingly impossible. Fun reading, and lots to chew on.

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### **Ta0paipai says**

As a runner living in Japan, the legendary marathon monks of Hiei Mountain sparked my imagination. These men were said to run hundreds of kilometers a day, praying and starving themselves on the path to living-Buddhahood and, if lucky, enlightenment.

Intriguing as that sounds, the real story isn't so interesting. Stevens presents the information in a purely academic way. Although the result is extremely informative, it does little to get the adrenaline pumping. Although pictures are littered throughout the book, the dark, black and white printing leaves a lot to the imagination.

Add a long introduction on the foundations of Buddhism in Japan to the content and we are left with a short treatise on the actual subject of marathon monks.

But the book does what it sets out to do - I learned about Buddhism, Mount Hiei and the marathon monks. Those interested in the subject should check it out. But those looking for a bit of excitement, intrigue and possibly motivation for your next marathon should look elsewhere.

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### **Algernon says**

This is a fascinating study of a Buddhist sect in Japan that practices an extremely athletic regimen consisting of marathon running, fasts, and extensive asceticism. Stevens goes over the history, the training regimen and its grounding in Buddhist tradition, and the personal stories of two of these "marathon monks."

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### **Rachel Carr says**

Not about running, more about Buddhism. Interesting, though.

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### **Jeff Buddle says**

Well, it isn't what I was expecting. The first half of the book is a short-but-dense history of Buddhism in Japan and the evolution of the Tendai school. The second half is about the Marathon Monks themselves and the practice of the kaihōgyō, a 1,000 day running challenge for which the monks run approximately 52.5 miles every day to become enlightened in the here-and-now. Fascinating stuff, but since the tone of the book is academic it holds the reader at arm's length rather than getting into the nitty-gritty. I guess I was hoping for a more journalistic account, something that would bring the experience of these incredible people to life. The book is more for those with interest in Japanese Buddhism than in long distance running.

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### **Monica Hansen says**

I'll read anything of his. It was an easy read and gave me some insight to him personally which I liked.

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### **Chalky says**

Fascinating topic but a bit of a dull read.

The topic is treated rather academically and much more from a historical and Buddhist perspective rather than their athletic feats. My second gripe, although the paperback has only just been released in past few months the pictures were taken about 30 years ago and the "current marathon monks" referred to are the same ones, so visually the book is dull and outdated too. This is not to knock the author for his immense scholarship but it will possibly offer more to those interested in Tendai Buddhism than Marathon Monks.

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### **Matt Leiv says**

"All intercourse with the world is cut off; one robe and the thinnest bedcover suffice for the monk, summer and winter, in the heatless hall, and he subsists on leftovers-watery soup and plain rice-and three hours of sleep a day."

The ultimate combination of physical and spiritual, these monks run a marathon a day for many years in a row with almost no rest. The most extreme practitioners run 2 a day.

This book details some of their practices on running, as well as others that are just as extreme. They do all of this on meager food and rest. It is truly remarkable what someone can do when dedicated in mind and body and soul.

"Leaving behind the cacaphony of the restless, relentless world, the monk isolates himself to live every day as if it were his last."

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### **Fred says**

A decent book, but honestly you can just skip it and read the wikipedia entry and watch the 15 minute documentary on youtube. It is a thin book, half Buddhist history and philosophy, and half description of the walking and prayer regimen.

For runners, this really doesn't have much for you. They actually walk, so maybe it has something for the ultra-marathon crowd. The achievements of the monks are interesting, but there just isn't a whole lot in this book for modern runners. The monks take 6 hours to do 18 miles, and up to 20 hours to do the 55. So doing that every day for months is impressive, but unless you are independently wealthy there is nothing here to help you train. The pictures are poor quality black and white, and actually quite few for being a large format paperback. Was hoping for more pictures or better writing.

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### **Joe says**

Wow. One heck of a run schedule.

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### **Jasmin Martin says**

This is a fascinating insight into a little known branch of Buddhism that combines physical training (athleticism) with spiritual training (harmony, discipline, and balance). I really like this concept. What these monks can do is probably incredible for the average person who sits at an office desk all day, but I am quite sure that anyone can do this, if they apply and train themselves in the same way as these monks have. It does take a lot of dedication, mindfulness and effort, and it is indeed incredible what the human being is able to achieve when she/he pushes their boundaries and tests the established truth.

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