

Fri, 2 Nov 2007

7:22 AM

Nachi (Pilgrim Mountain)

The foothills came almost to the beach near the station where the old man got off the train. He watched it as the doors closed and it started off towards its destination. Then he turned to the bay, walked down to the shoreline, and reached down to wet his fingers in the water. Luke warm. It was a warm day.

Turning, he stared up at the mountains that rose before him. It was impossible to see which one he was going to climb, but he knew how to find it. There was a river, and all he had to do was walk to where it flowed into the ocean, and turn right to follow it up. This he did. It didn't take long, not more than fifteen minutes at the most. Beside the road for cars there was a path for pedestrians. He waited for the light to change, and watched a couple of tourist buses three or four taxis, and several cars and trucks go by.

He was at the edge of a small coastal town that thrived on fishing and kelp, sculpting a quartz-like stone, and pilgrimage. The old man was here for the latter. In his hand he held a long staff, and on his back was a pack that looked like it weighed about 25 pounds. It's contours said clothing, but considering the times, it's also possible that it contained a small lap top computer.

Walking slowly he followed the pedestrian path for half a mile or so, then took a narrower path that branched off to the left and disappeared into the forest. This was the ancient pilgrim's road, a sign explained. In a few minutes the sounds of the highway disappeared, replaced by the occasional murmur of a stream, or of the wind through the pines and the cedars towering above him. Breathing heavily, he stopped relatively often as the path got steeper. Soon he heard the sound of the waterfall, and it encouraged him to go further up the path towards it.

The path was basically dirt, although stones had been laid centuries ago for pilgrims to step on as they made their way up through the forest. His mind was filled with thoughts of them as he walked. There was no one else around. Birds sang at some distance from him. Occasionally he heard the cry of a hawk, far above him. The gurgle of the river, the roar of the distant waterfall.

Nachi. Sacred shrine, sacred temple. Here where nature and man and god fused into one. According to tradition, here well over one thousand years ago, a Buddhist priest had arrived from India. His boat had been lost in a storm, and he had ended up near the mouth of the river, and followed it up to the waterfall. Near it he had built a small meditation hut. Today there is a shrine, with a lookout directly across the river from the base of the waterfall. Close enough for the spray to gently splatter his face. He imagined trying to stand under the waterfall, with tons of water hitting his shoulders every second. Impossible. He wondered what the truth about the "Naked saint," as the founder of the temple was known to posterity.

Staring into the waterfall, the old man's mind traveled into the past. He was tired, and he sat on a wooden bench gazing at the waterfall, and fell asleep.

Security: Public

Location: Not Specified

Mood: Not Specified

Music:

Sat, 3 Nov 2007

10:14 PM

Pilgrim Mountain

Pilgrim Mountain Nachi¹. The foothills came almost to the beach near the station where the old man got off the train. He watched it as the doors closed and it started off towards its destination. Then he turned to the bay, walked down to the shoreline, and reached down to wet his fingers in the water. Luke warm. It was a warm day. Turning, he stared up at the mountains that rose before him. It was impossible to see which one he was going to climb, but he knew how to find it. There was a river, and all he had to do was walk to where it flowed into the ocean, and turn right to follow it up. This he did. It didn't take long, not more than fifteen minutes at the most. Beside the road for cars there was a path for pedestrians. He waited for the light to change, and watched a couple of tourist buses three or four taxis, and several cars and trucks go by. He was at the edge of a small coastal town that thrived on fishing and kelp, sculpting a quartz-like stone, and pilgrimage. The old man was here for the latter. In his hand he held a long staff, and on his back was a pack that looked like it weighed about 25 pounds. It's contours said clothing, but considering the times, it's also possible that it contained a small lap top computer. Walking slowly he followed the pedestrian path for half a mile or so, then took a narrower path that branched off to the left and disappeared into the forest. This was the ancient pilgrim's road, a sign explained. In a few minutes the sounds of the highway disappeared, replaced by the occasional murmur of a stream, or of the wind through the pines and the cedars towering above him. Breathing heavily, he stopped relatively often as the path got steeper. Soon he heard the sound of the waterfall, and it encouraged him to go further up the path towards it. The path was basically dirt, although stones had been laid centuries ago for pilgrims to step on as they made their way up through the forest. His mind was filled with thoughts of them as he walked. There was no one else around. Birds sang at some distance from him. Occasionally he heard the cry of a hawk, far above him. The gurgle of the river, the roar of the distant waterfall. Nachi. Sacred shrine, sacred temple. Here where nature and man and god fused into one. According to tradition, here well over one thousand years ago, a Buddhist priest had arrived from India. His boat had been lost in a storm, and he had ended up near the mouth of the river, and followed it up to the waterfall. Near it he had built a small meditation hut. Today there is a shrine, with a lookout directly across the river from the base of the waterfall. Close enough for the spray to gently splatter his face. He imagined trying to stand under the waterfall, with tons of water hitting his shoulders every second. Impossible. He wondered what the truth about the "Naked saint," as the founder of the temple was known to posterity. Staring into the waterfall, the old man's mind traveled into the past. He was tired, and he sat on a wooden bench gazing at the waterfall, and fell asleep. Sinking deep into meditation the Naked Yogi did not realize he was slipping slowly along the rock towards the pool below. Perhaps it was the force of the waterfall hitting his shoulders and back, perhaps the sound, perhaps the chill that had brought his body temperature down. When two young acolytes jumped in to save him, and brought him to the side of the pool, he chastised them. I'm in the middle of very serious meditation, why are you disturbing me? They only stared at him in wonder—should they have left him there, under the water, in his deep trance? They apologized, and promised not to disturb him again. The old man woke from his dream, feeling the light touch of spray upon his face. He bowed towards the waterfall, looked up towards the top of it, and tried to imagine where it was that the Kazan, the retired emperor, had had his meditation hut. Images arose in his mind. They spread throughout him, giving him peace, restorative energy. He prayed, then turned and walked back up to the main path, then continued on to Seiganto-ji. The temple was filled with a different kind of noise. The roar of falling water has been replaced by the chanting of pilgrims, by the sound of their bells, of their staffs on the wooden floor of the temple, scuffling, people talking in low tones, movement, a great deal of slow-motion movement. A woman behind a stand asked him if he wanted to buy a pilgrim's record book – a page for each temple, a place for the warden of the temple to sign, giving proof of the visit, adding the

date. She was young, had a pleasant smile, and answered his questions about it. Yes, it was official, and yes, the first temple had already been filled in – all he would need to do would be to take the book to the temple office, where they would add the date. He bought it, and took it with him as he went up the steps and into the temple. Behind him he heard her invite someone else to make a similar purchase. The old man bowed before the image of Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and Mercy. He lowered his head and repeated the mantra for this particular form of Kannon. Then moved over to the side where he wouldn't be obvious, sat with his back to one of the temple pillars, and continued. He added the mantra for Nyoirin Kannon to his own, repeating them again and again, silently, and seemed unaware that his body was slowly rocking back and forth. This lasted for about half an hour. When he went up to the images to look at them more closely, the head priest came over and they talked briefly. Then the old man bowed, and left the temple. He walked over to the Nachi Shrine, and prayed there as well, then looked down once more at the waterfall in the distance, and decided to head on to the next temple. The old pilgrim's road is ancient. More than a thousand years of pilgrims have set out upon it. The old man started out on it, heading up into the forest. However, reaching a fork in the path, stopped and read the signs. Suddenly he turned off to the left, and his pace quickened. It was already mid-afternoon, and he would have to hurry if he would reach his new goal for the day: the summit of the mountain.

Security: Public

Location: Not Specified

Mood: Not Specified

Music:

Tue, 13 Nov 2007

9:56 AM

1 Nachi

Pilgrim Mountain

Nachi

1.

The foothills came almost to the beach near the station where the old man got off the train. He watched it as the doors closed and it started off towards its destination. Then he turned to the bay, walked down to the shoreline, and reached down to wet his fingers in the water. Luke warm. It was a warm day.

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The peak is called Myoho - which means Mysterious Law. Mt. Mysterious Law. The name had drawn itself to him ever since he had first seen it on the map. The path was covered with last year's leaves, and leaves of the years before. Sometimes, on one of those jaunts into a little valley, there would be traces of where a stream had once flowed, but there was no water today. There were times when he had to jump from rock to rock. Times when he slipped, and

caught himself, watching small rocks bounce down the valley.

He paused and had a drink of water at a small temple close to the peak. A sign by the temple gate identified it as a nunnery started in the ninth century AD by the famous Buddhist priest Kukai. He had founded Koyasan, for men only, and wanted to provide a place for women who wanted to devote themselves to the path of Buddhism as well.

It was late afternoon when he finally reached the peak. Here, legend had it, a priest had buried a copy of the Lotus Sutra, and thus the name of the mountain, "Myho" -- the first part of the Japanese title of that sutra, "Myoho renge kyo" the "Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Mysterious Law."

The peak was a narrow area, taken up mostly by a small one-room temple. In front of it was a bench, which looked out over the mountains to the west, but it was also possible to see the rugged seacoast to the south, and the mountains rippling off to the east and north. There was no one else there. As it would soon be sunset and there was no electricity at all, he doubted that anyone else would be coming.

The sunset held him spellbound. He sat in full lotus on the bench to watch it, and repeated his mantra as fast as he could while staring at the sun as it passed through the clouds, sending colors and beams off in different directions as it slid slowly down below outline of mountains far on the eastern horizon.

The wind rose, after the sun set, reflecting the change in temperature. He shivered slightly, and turned to look around him. It was simply too dangerous to attempt to descend the mountain in the dark, and he expected that he was meant to stay right where he was anyway.

The wind steadied, and the chill wore off. Whisps of clouds only made the Milky Way dance more brightly. As he watched his mind went back over the Lotus Sutra. Composed of 28 chapters, it is an important sacred text of Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches the doctrine of the bodhisattva, the person who has awakened to the truths of enlightenment, but who refuses to enter into final nirvana until all sentient beings have been saved. The question, then becomes how to awaken people to an awareness of what it is that causes the suffering in their lives, to an awareness that it is possible to break through the chain of causation which is at the core of the continuation of suffering, and that there is a path which can be followed to do just that.

The Lotus Sutra contains many stories, seven of which have been selected and identified as the Seven Parables of the Lotus Sutra. The old man thought back through each of these, and as he did his mind strayed to the story of a young man who travels from master teacher to master teachers, from enlightened being, to bodhisattva, to supernatural beings, on and on, a huge variety of people, searching for an answer to the problem of how to bring to enlightenment those who do are not aware, or who do not see their lives as suffering, or who enjoy their way of living even though they know it will only bring pain to themselves and others in the end this is the story of the Kegon-kyo, the Flower Garland Sutra (Avatamsaka Sutra), and as his mind ranged across its many stories of the young man's search, he saw himself on the pilgrimage, doing much of the same thing. He smiled when he remembered that the last of the thirty-three temples on the pilgrimage was named for the Kegon-kyo, and the image of flowers figured in both.

The temple doors were locked, but it was possible to crawl under the porch and thus get protection from the wind, curl up, and go to sleep. He dreamed of an old man? a man much older than he himself was, although his own beard was quite white. He man in his dream aid nothing, but images flowed from his eyes, through his head , and his heart, as it were. The images were from stories in the Lotus Sutra, of pilgrims who had made the journey here over the centuries, and of the suffering of millions and millions of people around the world, and of the life of the old pilgrim who was curled up under the porch of the small one-room temple. It was not so much sleep as it was meditation lying down.

When dawn approached, the man got up, went back over to the bench, and sat down upon it, again in full lotus position, to watch the day grow. When it was light enough to see, he started down the mountain, hoping that he would find some place where he could pause to enjoy the sunrise.

About fifteen minutes later he came to a small lookout, from which he could make out the waterfall far below him in the distance. A map on a sign indicated that it was possible to see Mt. Fuji from there, on a clear day. It was clear, but his eyes were too weak to make out anything that might be like that sacred mountain on the distant horizon. He sat and enjoyed the sunrise through the scattered clouds, feeling the ripples of light flicker across his body, teasing his mind with a fantastic array of images. He thought of the concept of compassion and love for all sentient beings, and of how it must be based on an uncompromising understanding of the realities of the world. He sighed, realizing his own failures, and his own great distance from anything even vaguely resembling enlightenment. Knowledge of religion is not the same as being religious, he reminded himself, and being religious is not the same thing as being holy. Nor is being holy the same thing as being enlightened.

When he returned to the shrine where he could again feel the spray of the waterfall of Nachi it was still at least an hour before the temple would be open for tourists or pilgrims. He was, however, able to sit on a bench and watch the waterfall. A priest brought him a cup of hot tea, and he accepted it gratefully, realizing how many hours it had been since he had had anything to eat or drink. He would have to get some breakfast before he started off on the long journey to the second temple.

Walking back up to Seiganto-ji, he prayed at that temple, and then walked over to the Nachi Siring, and worshipped there as well. He had successfully made it up to the peak of Mt. Myoho and back, and he was grateful for the experience. He prayed for the safety of the people at the temple and the shrine, for the safety and well-being of his fellow pilgrims, and for the relief of all those who were suffering, wherever and whoever they were.

By the time he finished, the little restaurant catering to pilgrims and tourists had opened, and he was able to get a bowl of noodles for breakfast. Then he started up the Old Kumano Road towards the second temple, at least a week's walk away. 2316

Security: Public

Location: Not Specified

Mood: Not Specified

Music: