**Bodaitei Stairway**

Just beyond the Sanmon Gate is an ancient staircase built in 1652. The stairway is called the Bodaitei, which means “stairway to enlightenment.” It has 287 steps, and reaches a height of 104 meters.

In 1632, a Nichiren follower named Nizo arrived at Kuonji Temple with his mother. At the time, there was no staircase leading up the slope, so Nizo had to carry his elderly mother on his back to reach the temple. At the sanctuary, Nizo prayed for the means to build a stairway to make the pilgrimage easier for Nichiren devotees. It is said that Nizo was able to save enough money from his job as a fisherman and hoped to eventually return to Kuonji and build the Bodaitei. However, while on his way to Kuonji the second time, Nizo saw many people in Fujikawa suffering from famine. He believed that the lives of others, even strangers, were more important, so he gave them the money he had saved for the stairway.

Nizo returned to his home on Sado Island and went to work again to save money. After some time, he returned to Kuonji and erected a sign offering his hard-earned money for materials and labor to help build the Bodaitei. Soon, huge crowds of people gathered to help Nizo build the staircase, many grateful to be able to earn a small income and help contribute to the experience of visiting Kuonji.

While the true reason for the number of steps is unknown, one theory is suggested by the Lotus Sutra itself. The Lotus Sutra has 28 chapters and the chant *Namu myoho renge kyo* is made up of 7 Chinese characters. Therefore, 28 chapters and 7 Chinese characters put together would be 287.

Many people living in the vicinity of the temple climb the Bodaitei steps for exercise as well as to seek enlightenment. After passing through the Sanmon Gate, the path to the Bodaitei acts as a time and space for contemplation. Then, climbing the stairs serves as a final challenge to reach enlightenment.

Those who wish to reach the temple without climbing the stairs will find an elevator in the parking lot that goes up to the temple ground level.