

Reciting Sutras

Reciting sutras at the main and Daishi halls of each temple is an important part of the Shikoku Pilgrimage for devout Buddhists. This act and its alternative, the offering of a written copy of the same sutras, are referred to as nokyo (“dedicating sutras”). The word appears in many contexts in relation to the pilgrimage, including in the name of the nokyocho notebook, which pilgrims present to be stamped and decorated with calligraphy after praying at the requisite two halls. Strictly speaking, the signing and stamping of the nokyocho is done to prove its owner has dedicated sutras at the temple in question. Those who would like to try reciting sutras and are able to read Japanese can purchase a sutra book, in which the lines to be spoken are written in order. The books also make it clear how the sutras differ depending on whether one is praying at the main or the Daishi hall.

The key sutras recited at the main hall are the Heart Sutra, the mantra of the temple’s principal deity, and the Mantra of Light. As the mantra of the principal deity is nearly always written in hiragana characters on a board at the main hall, pilgrims new to reciting sutras can start by speaking only these characters, preferably three times in succession. At the Daishi hall, the sutras to be recited are the Heart Sutra, the Mantra of Light, and the mantra of Kobo Daishi, the founder of the pilgrimage. First-time pilgrims may want to start with the last of these, which contains only four words: namu daishi henjo kongo. The mantra of Kobo Daishi is usually repeated at least three times.