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Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei

The film "Marathon Monks of Mt. Heiei", follows the journey of monks completing a quest to reach enlightenment. Tendai Buddhism believes that followers can achieve the ultimate goal of becoming a buddha in a single lifetime. To achieve this goal, monks must participate in a 7-year journey involving 1,000 marathons and 27,000 miles of marching to sacred sites along Mount. Hiei. Buddhists believe that only by meditation could one find themselves and discover their divine being, the buddha from within. Walking is a form of meditation where one could achieve the quest for enlightenment. The marathon illustrates the concepts of hierophany and the role of human finitude as the monks embark on a strenuous journey to become a buddha, a living saint.

Hierophany is the manifestation of becoming sacred. The film follows the journey of Tando Kakuro, as he completes the quest of becoming a buddha. The quest takes place on Mount Hiei in Central Japan. This mountain exemplifies the concept of hierophany as it is a deeply sacred place for monks. To reach enlightenment, monks must complete a marathon or pilgrimage to 270 sacred sites including multiple temples and tombs of saints. Along their journey, they have received a secret handbook that informs the marathoner of routes and various rituals that must be completed at each site. These rituals performed at each site brings the monks into intimate contact with significant figures to Tendai Buddhism. Therefore, the marathoner must visit each site and perform every ritual as it is significant in order to reach their enlightened form.

Human finitude is another important concept in order to reach one's enlightened form. The monks undergo extreme conditions to reach enlightenment. During the completion of the marathon, they are required to wear traditional white funeral clothing. In addition, in the Buddhist culture, it is disrespectful to wear their shoes inside houses. However, when completing the marathon the monks wear their shoes inside as it shows that they have no intention of returning. The marathon is an extensive process where it puts a strain on the individuals' body and mind. The marathon is a 27,000-mile pilgrimage that causes the defeat of a majority of the participants. The marathoners also have a restricted diet. The monks are only served 3 meals a day including 2 bowls of miso soup, rice, tofu, seaweed, and a glass of milk. In total, the monk only consumes about 1,450 calories a day. This diet is not sufficient enough to fuel the body for their journey. After the monk completes the marathon, they are required to complete a fast that gets the monk as close as possible to death. The fast deattaches the individual from physical existence and brings them closer to your own inner buddha. However, since there is human finitude the monks believe that in reaching for that finitude they will then be able to become a buddha.

The monks' journey is a perfect encapsulation of the close tie of human finitude to hierophany. In reaching their goal they test their finitude while also testing their hierophany. In doing this it is a test of endurance and faith.

