

INTRODUCTION

Haruo Shirane

The *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan* (*Nihon ryōiki*, ca. 822), compiled in the early Heian period (794–1192), is Japan's first major collection of anecdotal (*setsuwa*) literature and, as such, had a huge impact on the formation of Japanese literature. It is also the first collection of Buddhist anecdotal literature, establishing a major precedent for this genre, which would come to be popular throughout the medieval period. *Setsuwa* (anecdotes), a modern term that literally means “spoken story,” are stories that were orally narrated and then written down. These recorded stories were often used for oral storytelling, resulting in new variations, which were again recorded or rewritten. The result is that *setsuwa* frequently exist in multiple variants, with a story usually evolving over time or serving different purposes. In being told, written down, retold, and rewritten, *setsuwa* presume a narrator and a listener, but not necessarily a specific author. The author of the *Nihon ryōiki*, Keikai or Kyōkai (either reading is acceptable, but for the sake of consistency I follow the latter, which is the variant used in the translation that follows), was in fact more of an editor and a collector than an author in the modern sense.

Premodern *setsuwa* survive only in written form, sometimes (as in the *Nihon ryōiki*) in Chinese-style (*kanbun*) prose, providing a glimpse of the storytelling process but never reproducing it. The following example is titled “On Mercilessly Skinning a Live Rabbit and Receiving an Immediate Penalty” (1.16):

In Yamato province, there lived a man whose name and native village are unknown. He was by nature merciless and loved to kill living creatures. He once caught a rabbit, skinned it alive, and then turned it loose in the fields. But not long afterward, pestilent sores broke out all over his body, his whole body was covered with scabs, and they caused him unspeakable torment. In the end, he never gained any relief, but died groaning and lamenting.

Ah, how soon do such deeds receive an immediate penalty! We should consider others as we do ourselves, exercise benevolence, and never be without pity and compassion!

In a manner typical of the genre, the *setsuwa* is compactly written (usually

no more than one or two pages), is plot and action driven, turns on an element of surprise or wonder, and is didactic (teaching karmic retribution, for the sin of killing animals, and urging compassion). In contrast to the later vernacular tales (*monogatari*), which admit to being fiction, the *Nihon ryōiki*, like subsequent *setsuwa* collections, insists on the truth of the stories it includes—however miraculous they may be.

The *setsuwa-shū*, or collection of *setsuwa*, which can be very long, was inspired in part by Chinese encyclopedias (*leishu*). In contrast to the *setsuwa*, which had its roots in oral storytelling, the *setsuwa-shū* was a literary form that provided a structured worldview (in this case, centered on karmic retribution). Often the same *setsuwa* appear in a number of collections. Indeed, many of the *setsuwa* in the *Nihon ryōiki* reappear in later collections, including *Notes on the Three Treasures* (*Sanbōe kotoba*, 984), *Biographies of Japanese Reborn in the Land of Bliss* (*Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, 985–987), and *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari shū*, ca. 1120). The *setsuwa* in the *Nihon ryōiki* were probably collected and edited as a supplementary sourcebook for sermons by Buddhist priests who preached to commoner audiences that could not read *kanbun*. They also reflect Kyōkai's desire to demonstrate the different ways in which the law of karmic causality is manifested.

Little is known about the author of the *Nihon ryōiki*, except that he was a *shidosō* (self-ordained priest), as opposed to a certified priest affiliated with a major temple and ordained by the state. At some point (probably between 787 and 795), he became affiliated as a low-ranking cleric with the Yakushi-ji temple in Nara (one of the great centers of Buddhism at the time). At the time, the central (*ritsuryō*) state attempted to keep a tight control on the priesthood and cracked down on private priests, who took vows without official permission. A recurrent figure in the *Nihon ryōiki* is Gyōgi (Gyōki, 668–749), a self-ordained priest from the early Nara period, who gained a wide and popular following and was consequently prosecuted by the government before he accepted an invitation from Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–749) to build the large statue of the Buddha at the Tōdai-ji temple in 741. The prominent position of Gyōgi in the *Nihon ryōiki* indicates that he represents an ideal for Kyōkai, who was likewise an active private priest before eventually joining the Yakushi-ji temple. One of Kyōkai's own accounts of himself in the *Nihon ryōiki* states that in 787, he realized that his current poverty and secular life were the result of evil deeds he had done in a previous life, and so he decided to become an ordained priest.

Kyōkai edited the *Nihon ryōiki* sometime in the early Heian period (around 822 or earlier), but the stories themselves are set in the Nara period

(710–784) and earlier. In Kyōkai's time, during the reigns of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–796) and his son Emperor Saga (r. 809–823), the country was rocked by considerable social disorder, famine, and plagues. It was a particularly hard time for farmers, many of whom fled from their home villages. Some of these refugees were absorbed into local temples and private estates, and others became private priests like Kyōkai. Unlike the officially ordained clergy in the major temples in the capital, who were of aristocratic origins, these self-ordained priests attracted a more plebian following, and many of the stories in the *Nihon ryōiki* are about poor commoners and farmers. The *Nihon ryōiki* deals at times with high-ranking aristocrats such as Prince Shōtoku, but most of the stories concern commoners on a much lower level of society. Kyōkai sought to teach Buddhist principles to society as a whole. In this regard, the *Nihon ryōiki* differs significantly from the elite literature being produced at this time, such as *Nostalgic Recollections of Literature* (*Kaifūsō*, 751) and *Collection of Literary Masterpieces* (*Bunka shūreishū*, 818), two noted collections of Chinese poetry and refined Chinese prose written by aristocrats. Instead, the *Nihon ryōiki* is written in a rough, unorthodox style of Chinese-style prose that gives us a glimpse of the underside of society and the reality of everyday commoner life.

Eighty percent of the stories in the *Nihon ryōiki* take place in the Yamato region (in and around the capital of Nara), but the place-names come from almost every part of the country—from Michinoku (in northeastern Honshū) to Higo (in Kyushu)—strongly suggesting that the private priest may have preached at a certain village, gathered stories, and then told them at another village. In contrast to the compilers of the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*, 720), who combined local and provincial myths and legends into a larger state mythology, itinerant Buddhist priests absorbed and transformed local folk stories into Buddhist anecdotes; they included folk tales about animals and serpents, which often take on allegorical or symbolic functions.

Kyōkai arranged these stories, which were drawn from a variety of sources, in such a way as to demonstrate the Buddhist principle of karmic causality, as reflected in the full title of the compilation, *Miraculous Stories of the Reward of Good and Evil from the Country of Japan* (*Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki*). Kyōkai seems to have been inspired by a Chinese work, the *Mingbaoji* (Jp. *Myōhōki*; *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution*). Deeds in the course of a lifetime, whether good or evil, have a direct consequence in this life or in the next existence (in which one can be reborn, depending on one's deeds, in paradise or as a nonhuman animal,

such as a cow, which represents a lower rung of existence). The compiler sought to gather stories that illustrate this concept, particularly those that show an immediate retribution for good or evil conduct. Other stories demonstrate the miraculous powers of Buddha, the bodhisattvas, sutras (particularly the Lotus Sutra), and Buddhist paintings or sculptures.

The *Nihon ryōiki* is also notable for its portrayal of a Buddhist Hell presided over by King Yama, who metes out just punishment (see 2:5). (The Western Paradise is assumed to exist, but there is no description here.) In the early chronicles, such as the *Nihon shoki*, the underworld (called Yomi) is a place marked by pollution where bodies decompose. By contrast, the *Nihon ryōiki* depicts a terrifying Buddhist Hell where past actions are met with extreme physical punishment. In the ancient period, sin was the result of transgressing the communal order, usually agricultural violations or pollutions, but in the *Nihon ryōiki*, sin takes on new meaning as a moral and social violation, with the individual responsible for his or her own actions. In the early chronicles, disease was cured by communal means, by purification and cleansing. But here, disease, which figures prominently, is the punishment for sin, the result of previous karma.

The *Nihon ryōiki* contains 116 stories and is divided into three volumes, which are arranged in a roughly chronological order, beginning, in volume 1, with the description of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan from the Korean state of Paekche. The first four stories are from the pre-Nara period: from the reigns of Emperors Yūryaku (r. 456–479), Kinmei (r. 539–571), Bidatsu (r. 572–585), and Suiko (r. 592–628), respectively. This rough narrative of Buddhism in Japan reaches its height in volume 2, which focuses on the Tenpyō era (729–749) and on the reign of Emperor Shōmu, who built the great temple of Tōdai-ji, with its colossal image of the Buddha, and, after abdicating from the throne in 749, declared himself to be the “slave of the Three (Buddhist) Treasures.” Priest Gyōgi—who represents an ideal for the editor and who was active in the Tenpyō era—figures prominently in this volume (see, for example, 2:7, 2:12, and 2:30). Volume 3 focuses on stories from the post-Tenpyō era, primarily from the reign of Empress Kōken (r. 749–758). As he notes in the preface to this volume, Kyōkai regards this time (which includes the period in which he lived) as an age of Buddhist decline (*mappō*), the last of the three ages of the Buddhist Law, in which Buddhist teachings are gradually abandoned. In Kyōkai’s view, the principles espoused by *Nihon ryōiki* are all the more necessary in such a degenerate age, in order to save people from their many sins.



Volume

I

PREFACE

If we inquire into the matter, we find that the inner, or Buddhist, writings and the outer, or non-Buddhist, writings were first transmitted to Japan in two groups. Both of them came from the country of Paekche,¹ the latter in the reign of Emperor Homuda [Ōjin, r. 270–312], who resided at the Toyoakira Palace in Karushima, and the former in the reign of Emperor Kinmei [r. 539–571], who resided at the Kanazashi Palace in Shikishima. However, it was customary for those who studied the non-Buddhist writings to denigrate the Buddhist Law, while those who read the Buddhist writings made light of the other works. But they are ignorant and foolish, embracing fatuous beliefs and disbelieving in the consequences of evil or good action. People of true wisdom regard both types of writing with seriousness and have faith in and are fearful of karmic causation.²

Among the successive emperors, there was one who, ascending a high hill, was moved to compassion and, content to live in a palace where the rain leaked in, brought succor to his people.³ Or another who was born with great ability and knew the direction things were taking. He could listen to ten men expounding without missing a word. When he was twenty-five, at the request of the emperor, he lectured on a Mahayana sutra, and his commentaries on the scriptures have long been handed down to later ages.⁴ Or there was an emperor who, making great vows, reverently created a Buddhist image. Heaven assisted his vows, and the earth opened up its treasure.⁵

And among the great monks, there were those whose virtue led them to the ten stages of bodhisattvahood and whose Way transcended that of the two lower levels of voice-hearer and *pratyekabuddha*.⁶ Grasping the torch of wisdom, they lit the dark corners; riding in the boat of compassion, they rescued the drowning. Because of their pursuit of difficult actions and bitter practices, their fame spread to foreign lands. As to the truly wise men of our time, we cannot as yet tell how great is their accomplishment.

Now I, Kyōkai, a monk of Yakushi-ji in Nara, observe the people of the world carefully. There are those who, though possessing ability, are petty in their actions. Greedy for treasures, they outdo a magnet that attracts an iron-rich mountain and pulls out its iron; eager for others' goods, stingy

with their own, they are harsher than a grinder that splits each millet seed and sucks out its core. Some covet temple property and are reborn as calves to repay their debt; others speak evil of the doctrine or of monks and meet with calamity in their present lives. But some seek the Way, pile up practice, and gain recognition in their present existence, or are deeply faithful, practicing good in their lives, and are showered with blessings.

The rewards of good and evil are like a shadow following a form; the recompense of suffering and bliss is comparable to a valley echo following a sound. Those who observe such occurrences shrink in alarm, but forget them in a moment's time. Those who are shamed by them with draw in perturbation, but soon lose all memory of them. If the disposition of good and evil were not known, how could we straighten these tangles and make clear the right and wrong of them? And how, without evoking karmic causation, could we mend evil hearts and advance the path of goodness?

Long ago in the land of China, the *Myōhōki* [Ch. *Mingbaoji*; *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution*] was compiled; and during the great Tang dynasty, the *Hannyagenki* [Ch. *Bore yanji*; *A Collection of Stories on the Kongō-hannya-kyō (Diamond Sutra)*] was written.⁷ But why should we respect only these records of foreign countries and not credit the miraculous stories that occur in our own land? Since these events occurred here and I saw them with my own eyes, I cannot let them go unrecorded. After pondering them for a long time, I can no longer remain silent. Therefore, I have written down what I have chanced to hear, entitling it *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* [*Miraculous Stories of the Reward of Good and Evil from the Country of Japan*], compiling it in these three volumes and handing it down to future times.

I, Kyōkai, however, am not blessed with a wise nature, but one muddled in content and hardly clear. Like a frog in a deep well, my understanding goes astray when sent on distant wanderings. I'm like a clumsy craftsman working on a piece carved by a master, only afraid that I will suffer long-standing injury to my hand. My work is no more than one pebble from Mount Kunlun.⁸ But my sources in the oral tradition are so vague that I fear there is much I have left out. In my zeal to attain the finest product, I fear that I have let even inept flute players play.⁹ May the wise men of later times not laugh at my efforts. My prayer is that those who read these strange accounts will shun what is wrong, enter the right, refrain from various evil practices, and carry out all that is good.¹⁰

1. Paekche (18 B.C.E.–660 C.E.), located in southwestern present-day Korea, was one of the three kingdoms of Korea, along with Koguryō (37 B.C.E.–668 C.E.) and Silla (57 B.C.E.–935

- C.E.).
2. According to karmic causation, evil acts or karma beget evil, and good acts or karma beget good, although they may take considerable time to do so.
 3. Emperor Nintoku (r. 313–399).
 4. Prince Shōtoku, who lectured on the Lotus Sutra.
 5. Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–749), who had difficulty completing his huge statue of Rushana Buddha until, in 749, gold was discovered in Japan.
 6. In the Mahayana teachings, both the voice-hearers, or Hinayana believers, and the *pratyekabuddhas*, or “private buddhas” or self-enlightened beings, were regarded as being inferior to believers.
 7. Tang Lin, comp., *Myōhōki*, in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 51.no. 2082; Meng Xianzhong, comp., *Kongō-hannya-kyō jikkeiki* (718), 3 chaps., in *Dainihon zokuzō-kyō*, part 2, *otsu*, case 23:1.
 8. Mount Kunlun was the source of fine jade.
 9. A reference to King Xuan of Qi, a state in ancient China, who was so fond of playing the flute that he allowed even inept players to take part in his orchestra.
 10. The last two clauses are a popular Buddhist maxim.



ON CATCHING THE THUNDER (1:1)

Chiisakobe no Sugaru was a favorite attendant of Emperor Yūryaku (called Ōhatsuse-wakatakeru no sumeramikoto, who reigned for twenty-three years at the Asakura Palace in Hatsuse).¹

Once, when the emperor was living at the Iware Palace, he and the empress were sleeping together in the Ōandono and were intimately engaged. Unaware of this, Sugaru walked in, whereupon the emperor, embarrassed, stopped what he was doing. At that moment, there was a clap of thunder in the sky.

The emperor then ordered Sugaru, saying, “You—invite that clap of thunder to come here!”

“I shall do so,” replied Sugaru.

The emperor said, “Yes—invite it here.”

Sugaru, leaving the palace, wore a red headband on his forehead and carried a halberd with a red banner.² Mounting his horse, he galloped past the heights of Abe and past the road to Toyura-dera until he reached the crossroads of Karu no Morokoshi. There he called out in invitation, “You god of the echoing thunder of heaven, the emperor invites you!” Then, as he turned his horse around and headed back, he asked himself, “Even though it’s the god of thunder, why wouldn’t it accept the emperor’s invitation?”

On the way back, between Toyura-dera and Iioka, lightning struck. When he saw this, Sugaru called for priests to place the lightning in a portable shrine and take it to the royal palace, where he announced to the emperor, “The god of thunder accepts your invitation!”

At that moment, the god gave off a brilliant blast of light that dazzled and frightened the emperor. He made many offerings to it and then had it sent back to the place where it had struck, which is now called Thunder Hill. (It is situated north of the Oharida Palace in the old capital.)³

Later, Sugaru died. The emperor issued a command that his corpse remain in its coffin for seven days and seven nights, in recognition of his loyalty and good faith. Then he had a grave built where the lightning had struck, with a memorial pillar that said, “The grave of Sugaru, who brought the thunder.” But this enraged the thunder, which struck the pillar and stomped on it. In destroying the pillar, however, its feet became caught in the splinters. When the emperor heard of this, he freed the thunder so it did

not die. The thunder remained in a confused state for seven days and seven nights. When the emperor's envoy erected a new pillar, he inscribed it, "This is the grave of Sugaru, who in both life and death ensnared the thunder."

This is said to be the origin of the name Thunder Hill in the time of the old capital.



ON TAKING A FOX AS A WIFE AND PRODUCING A CHILD (1:2)

This took place long ago in the reign of Emperor Kinmei (Emperor Amekuni-oshiharaki-hironiwa no mikoto, who resided at the Kanazashi Palace in Shikishima). A man of the Ōno district of Mino province set out on his horse in search of a good wife. At that time in a broad field, he came on an attractive woman, who responded to him. He winked at her and asked, "Where are you going, pretty miss?" She answered, "I am looking for a good husband." "Will you be my wife?" he then asked. She replied, "I will." So he took her home, and they married and lived together.

After a time, she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. At the same time, on the fifteenth day of the Twelfth Month, their dog gave birth to a puppy. The puppy constantly barked at the wife and threatened to bite her. She became so frightened that she asked her husband to kill the puppy, but in spite of her request, he would not do so.

Around the Second or Third Month, when the annual quota of rice was being hulled, the wife went to where the female servants were pounding rice to give them some refreshment. The puppy ran after her, trying to bite her. Startled and frightened, she changed into a fox and jumped on top of a hedge.

The husband, seeing this, said, "You and I have together produced a child. Therefore, I can never forget you. Whenever I call, come and sleep with me." Thus, following the husband's word, she came and slept with him. (Hence she is called a *kitsune* [meaning both "fox" and "come and sleep"].)

At that time, his wife, wearing a red dyed skirt (what now would be called peach-flower color), would move slowly and gracefully, trailing her skirt as she went. The husband, gazing at her figure, sang a love song that went

Love fills me
completely.

But after one moment,
a fleeting gem,
that one—she's gone!

Therefore, they named the child who they had produced Kitsune, which became his surname: Kitsune no atai. The child was famous for his great strength and could run as fast as a bird flies. He is the ancestor of the Kitsune-no-atai family of Mino province.



ON A BOY OF GREAT STRENGTH WHO WAS BORN OF THE THUNDER'S
REJOICING (1:3)

Long ago in the time of Emperor Bidatsu [r. 572–584] (who was named Nunakura-futotama-shiki no mikoto and resided at the Osada Palace in Iware), there was a farmer living in the village of Katawa in the Ayuchi district of Owari province. He was preparing his rice fields and flooding them with water when a light rain began to fall. Accordingly, he took shelter under a tree and stood there holding a metal rod.⁴ Presently, it began to thunder. Frightened, the man held the rod over his head, whereupon the thunder dropped down in front of him, taking the form of a young boy who bowed politely.

The man was about to strike him with the rod, but the thunder said, “Please don’t harm me! I will repay you for your kindness!”

“How will you repay me?” the man asked.

“I will repay you by seeing that a son is born to you,” the thunder replied. “So you must make me a boat out of camphor wood, fill it with water, and float bamboo leaves in it.”

When the man had done as the thunder asked, the thunder said, “Don’t come any closer!” and withdrew to a great distance, rising into the sky in a cloud of mist. Later, a child was born who had a snake twined twice around his neck, born with the head and tail of a snake hanging down behind.

When the boy had grown to be ten years and more, reports spread of a man at the imperial court who was very strong. Thinking that he would like to try challenging him, the boy made his way to the emperor’s palace.

At this time, there was a prince of the royal family who excelled in strength and was living in separate quarters by the northeastern corner of the imperial palace. At the northeastern corner of his quarters was a stone that

measured eight feet around. The strong-man prince came out of his quarters, picked up the stone, and threw it some distance. Then he returned to his quarters, shut the gate, and did not admit anyone.

The boy, observing this, thought to himself, “This must be the strong man I’ve heard about!” That night, when no one was looking, he picked up the stone and threw it one foot farther than the prince had done. The prince, seeing this, rubbed his hands together, picked up the stone and threw it, but was unable to throw it any farther. The boy then threw the stone two feet farther than before. The prince, seeing this and hoping for greater success, threw it again, but did no better than before. When the boy picked up the stone and threw it again, his heels dug three inches into the ground and the stone went three feet farther. The prince, seeing the marks where the boy had stood, thought, “This must be where the boy is!” and ran after him, but the boy ducked through the hedge and fled. The prince leaped over the hedge in pursuit, but the boy turned and fled back to the other side of the hedge. The prince, mighty as he was, was never able to catch him, and realizing that the boy surpassed him in strength, he gave up the chase.

Later the boy became an apprentice at Gangō-ji temple.⁵ At this time, the boys who rang the bell in the bell tower were being killed night after night. The boy, learning of this, said to the monks, “I will catch the ogre, kill him, and put a stop to this plague of death.”

When the monks agreed to this, he had four men stationed with lamps at the four corners of the bell tower, and told them, “When I seize the ogre, remove the shades from your lamps!” Then he took his stand by the door of the bell tower.

In the middle of the night, a huge ogre appeared but, spying the boy, withdrew. Later in the night, it came again. The boy seized hold of the ogre’s hair and began to pull; the ogre pulled to get away, the boy pulled toward the inside of the bell tower. The four men who had been stationed in the tower were so terrified that they could not lift the shades from the lamps. The boy then pulled the ogre to each of the four corners of the tower and was thus able to uncover the lamps. When dawn came, it was found that the boy had pulled out the ogre’s hair by the roots and the ogre had fled. The next day, they followed the trail of the ogre’s blood to see where it would lead. It led to a crossroads where a wicked servant of the temple had been buried. Thus they knew that the ogre was the ghost of the wicked servant.⁶ The hair from the ogre’s head is preserved to this day in Gangō-ji and is looked on as a treasure of the temple.

The boy later became an *upāsaka* [lay brother] and continued to live at Gangō-ji. The temple was preparing its rice fields and getting ready to flood

them with water. But some princes of the royal family cut off the water supply to the fields, so they became parched. The boy said, “I’ll see that the water gets into these fields,” and so the monks agreed to leave things to him.

The boy had a plow handle made so large that it required more than ten men to carry it. Then he picked it up like a staff, carried it to the sluice gate, and stuck it there. But the princes pulled out the plow handle and threw it away, so the sluice gate was once more blocked and no water flowed into the temple fields. The boy then brought a stone that was so big it would take more than a hundred men to carry it and propped open the sluice gate, allowing the water to flow into the temple fields. The princes, awed by his strength, no longer attempted to stop him, and as a result the temple fields did not dry up but produced an excellent crop.

Because of this, the monks agreed to let the boy become an ordained monk with the name Dharma Master Dōjō. When people of later times tell of Dharma Master Dōjō of Gangō-ji and his feats of strength, this is who they mean, and it is right that they should speak so. No doubt he performed many good and powerful acts of karma in his previous lives and thus was able to acquire this kind of strength. This was a wonderful event that occurred in the land of Japan.



ON IMPERIAL PRINCE SHŌTOKU’S SHOWING UNUSUAL SIGNS (1:4)

Imperial Prince Shōtoku was the son of Emperor Tachibana-no-toyohi, who resided at the Ikenobe-no-namitsuki Palace in Iware. He became prince regent for Empress Suiko,⁷ who resided at the Owarida Palace.

He had three names: Umayado no toyotomimi, Shōtoku, and Kamitsumiya. Umayado, or “stable door,” because he was born in front of the stables. Toyotomimi, or “intelligent ears,” because he was born by nature so wise that he could attend to ten men arguing legal claims at the same time without missing a single word. And because he not only was scrupulous in his conduct like a monk, but also wrote commentaries on the Shōman-gyō [Śrīmālā Sutra] and the Hoke-kyō [Lotus Sutra], spread the Way, brought profit to the nation, and was so well versed in the Chinese classics that he instituted the system of court ranks and honors, he was called Shōtoku, or “Sacred Virtue.” And because his residence was above that of the palace of the empress, he was called Kamitsu-miya, or “Prince of the Upper Palace.”

When the prince was living at the Okamoto Palace in Ikaruga, he had occasion to leave the palace and go for a pleasure ride. When he reached the village of Kataoka, he came on a beggar lying sick beside the road. Seeing this, the prince got down from his palanquin, questioned the beggar, and, taking off his cloak, placed it over the man. Then, his visit concluded, he returned to his palanquin and went on his way.

On his way back, he saw his cloak hanging on the limb of a tree, but the beggar was gone. When the prince put on the cloak again, one of his ministers said, “Are you so poor that you have to wear a dirty cloak worn by a beggar?” The prince replied, “It’s all right—you wouldn’t understand.”

The beggar, meanwhile, went someplace else and died. When the prince heard of this, he held a temporary burial for him, and then had a grave made in the village of Okamoto, in a corner of Mount Moribe, northeast of Hōrin-ji, and placed the body in it. It was called the Hitoki Grave. Later, a messenger he sent to the grave found that the door could not be opened and no one could go inside. Only beside the grave door was a poem that read:

The little stream of Tomi
in Ikaruga—
should it dry up,
only then would the name of My Lord
be forgotten!

On his return, the messenger reported this. The prince, hearing it, remained silent and said nothing. Thus we know that a sage recognizes sagely worth, but an ordinary individual does not. The eyes of an ordinary man saw only a humble person, but to the keen eyes of a sage, his hidden identity was apparent. This was a miraculous event.⁸



Also, Master Ensei, a disciple of Dharma Master Ai, was a national preceptor of Paekche. He lived in the Takamiya Temple at Kazuraki in Yamato province. At that time, there was a monk living in the northern lodge of that temple whose name was Gangaku. This monk would always leave at dawn, go to the village, and come back in the evening—always in the same manner. When an *upāsaka* [lay brother], a disciple of Ensei, reported this to his teacher, Ensei said, “Don’t say anything about this—just keep quiet!”

The lay brother secretly bored a hole in the wall of Gangaku’s room to spy on him and found the room filled with a dazzling light. Again, he

reported this to his master, who replied, “That’s why I warned you to keep quiet about him!”

Not long after, Gangaku suddenly died. At that time, Ensei told his disciple to cremate him and bury the ashes, and this was done. Later the lay brother came to live in Ōmi. At that time, he heard someone say, “The monk Gangaku lives here.” When he went to see, he found that it really was the monk Gangaku. Gangaku said to him, “It’s been a long time since I saw you, but I’ve been thinking of you all along. How have you been?”

Thus we know that he was incarnated as a sage. Eating the five kinds of strong herbs is forbidden in the Buddhist precepts,⁹ but if a sage eats them, it does not count as an offense.



ON HAVING FAITH IN THE THREE TREASURES AND GAINING AN IMMEDIATE REWARD (1:5)

Lord Ōtomo no Yasunoko no muraji of the Great Flower Rank was an ancestor of the Ōtomo no muraji in Uji, in the Nagusa district of Kii province.¹⁰ He was endowed by Heaven with a clear mind, and he revered the Three Treasures.¹¹

According to the annals, in the reign of Emperor Bidatsu, sounds of musical instruments were heard off the coast of Izumi province. There were sounds of flutes, *shō* [panpipes], and various types of stringed instruments, or others that sounded like rolls of thunder. They were heard in the daytime, and at night a bright light spread to the east.

Lord Ōtomo reported this to the emperor, but he was silent and disbelieving. When it was reported to the empress, however, she said, “You—go and find out!” He accordingly went to see and found that it was just as reported. While there, he came on a camphor-tree log that had been struck by lightning. On his return, he reported to the empress, “While I was at the beach at Takashi-no-hama, I found this log. I humbly request permission to make Buddhist images out of it.” The empress replied, “Your request is granted.”

Yasunoko, delighted at this, announced the imperial decree to Shima no Ōomi [Soga no Umako, sixth century], who, in great joy, commissioned Ikebe no atai Hita to carve three bodhisattvas. They were placed in the Toyura Hall to inspire awe and reverence. However, Lord Mononobe no Yuge no Moriya no Ōmuraji addressed the empress, saying, “These

Buddhist images should not be displayed in our country. Put them away somewhere far away!” Hearing this, the empress said to Lord Yasunoko no muraji, “Quickly hide these images!” Thereupon, he had Hita no atai hide them among the rice sheaves. Lord Yuge no Ōmuraji eventually set fire to the hall and had the images thrown into the canal at Naniwa. He upbraided Yasunoko, saying, “The cause of our present trouble lies in keeping unauthorized images sent from a nearby country to our own land. Throw them away at once and let them flow back to the land to the west!” (“Unauthorized images” means “Buddhist images.”) But Yasunoko firmly refused. Yuge no Ōmuraji, his mind deranged, began to plot rebellion, looking for a chance to carry out evil. But Heaven disliked him, and Earth too hated him. In the reign of Emperor Yōmei, he was at last overthrown, and the Buddhist images were brought into the open and handed down to later ages. At present, the image of Amida enshrined at the Hiso Temple in Yoshino and casting out its light is one of them.

In the first month of spring in the year with the cyclical sign *mizunoto-ushi* [593],¹² the empress was enthroned at the Owarida Palace and reigned for thirty-six years. In the first year of her reign, in the summer, the Fourth Month, the month *kanoe-uma*, on the day *tsuchinoto-u*, Prince Umayamado was appointed prince regent, and Yasunoko no muraji was made his personal attendant. In the thirteenth year of her reign, the year *kinoto-ushi* [605], in the summer, the Fifth Month, the month *kinoe-tora*, on the day *tsuchinoe-uma*, the empress gave him the Great Faith Rank, saying, “Your distinguished services shall long be remembered.” In the seventeenth year, the year *tsuchinoto-mi* [609], in the spring, the Second Month, the prince regent bestowed on him 273 acres of rice fields in the Iibo district of Harima province. When the prince regent died at the Ikaruga Palace in the twenty-ninth year, the year *kanoto-mi* [621], Yasunoko no muraji expressed a desire to leave lay life and become a monk, but the empress would not permit this.

In the thirty-second year, the year *kinoe-saru* [624], in the summer, the Fourth Month, a high monk took an ax and struck his father. Seeing this, Yasunoko no muraji immediately petitioned the throne, saying, “Monks and nuns should be examined and a presiding officer appointed to regulate them. If there are any found guilty of evil, they should by all means be discharged.” The empress gave her assent to this proposal. Yasunoko no muraji’s proposal revealed a total of 837 monks and 579 nuns. The monk Kanroku was appointed Daisōjō, and Yasunoko no muraji and Kurabe no Tokosaka were appointed Sōzu.¹³

In the thirty-third year, the year *kinoto-tori* [625], in the winter, on the

eighth day of the Twelfth Month, Yasunoko no muraji died suddenly at his home in Naniwa. His corpse gave out an unusually fragrant odor. The empress decreed that it be retained for seven days in honor of his loyalty. But on the third day, he came back to life and spoke to his wife and children. “There was a five-colored cloud,” he said, “like a rainbow stretching to the north. I was walking along it, and that cloud was fragrant, as though fine incense were there. At the end of the road, I could see a golden mountain, which, when I reached it, dazzled my eyes. There the Imperial Prince Shōtoku, who has departed this life, was waiting for me and together we climbed the golden mountain. On top of the golden mountain was a *bhikshu* [monk], who bowed to the prince and said, ‘I am a servant in the Eastern Palace. In eight days you will encounter a sharp sword. Please drink this elixir of immortality!’ The monk then handed the prince a goblet in which a jewel had been dissolved, which he drank. Then the monk said, ‘Recite three times the words “Homage to the Bodhisattva of Miraculous Power,”’ after which he withdrew. The prince then said, ‘Go home at once and prepare for the making of a Buddhist image! When I have finished the rite of repentance, I will come to your place to make it!’ So I came back here along the road I’ve mentioned. And so, to my surprise, I’ve returned to life!”

Accordingly, people called him the “Returned-to-Life Muraji.” In the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Kōtoku, the year *kanoe-inu*, in the autumn, the Ninth Month, he was granted the rank of the Great Flower, Upper Grade, and died at over the age of ninety.

In appraisal we say: “How praiseworthy, this member of the Ōtomo family! He revered the Buddha, honored the doctrine, was pure in nature, and valued loyalty. He was blessed by both heredity and good fortune, living a long life without fault. His military might was boundless, and his filial piety has passed to his descendants. Truly, in his devotion to the Three Treasures of Buddhism, he was aided by the protection of the good deities.”¹⁴

Looking back, it is apparent that the sentence “In eight days, you will encounter a sharp sword” refers to the rebellion raised by Soga no Iruka. “Eight days” means “eight years.” By “Bodhisattva of Miraculous Power” is meant Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. The “jewel” that he drank refers to the medicine that allowed him to avoid danger. The “golden mountain” is Mount Wutai in China,¹⁵ and the “Eastern Palace” is Japan. When he was told “go home at once and prepare for the making of a Buddhist image,” this was made manifest by the birth of Emperor Shōhō-ōjin-shōmu [Shōmu, r. 724–749], who was from Japan, built a temple, and fashioned a statue of the Buddha. The Most Venerable Gyōki, a contemporary of Emperor Shōmu, is

an incarnation of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. This was a miraculous event.



ON GAINING AN IMMEDIATE REWARD FOR FAITH IN BODHISATTVA KANNON
(1:6)

The Venerable Monk Gyōzen, when he was in lay life, was a member of the Tatebe family. In the reign of the sovereign who resided in the Owarida Palace, he was sent to Koguryō for study.¹⁶ When that country was overthrown, he was forced to wander.¹⁷ Suddenly he came to a river, but the bridge had been destroyed and there was no boat, so he had no way to get across. Standing on the broken bridge, he began to meditate on Kannon. As he did so, an old man in a boat came along, greeted him, and ferried him to the other side of the river. But after he got over and was on the road ready to set out, both the man and the boat disappeared. Then he began to wonder if the man had been an incarnation of Kannon. Immediately, he made a vow to fashion an image of Kannon and worship it.

Eventually, he made his way to Tang China, where he fashioned an image, to which he paid devotion day and night. He was known as Dharma Master Riverside. He excelled by nature in the practice of the virtue of forbearance and was revered by the Chinese emperor. In the second year of the era Yōrō [718], he returned home to Japan with the party of the Japanese envoy to China. He lived in Kōfuku-ji temple and continued to venerate the image of Kannon until his death. Indeed, we know that Kannon possesses powers that are difficult to fathom.

In appraisal we say: The Venerable Monk went far away to study, met with trouble, and could not return. Having no way to escape, he rested on the bridge, meditating on the Sage or Bodhisattva. He depended on the power of the heart, and this caused the appearance of the old man, who disappeared suddenly once they had parted. In time, he made an image and always paid it honor, never ceasing his devotions.



ON PAYING FOR AND FREEING TURTLES AND BEING REWARDED
IMMEDIATELY AND SAVED BY THEM (1:7)

Meditation Master Gusai [Universal Salvation] was a native of the country

of Paekche. When that country encountered a period of troubles, an ancestor of the governor of the Mitani district of Bingo province was put in charge of reinforcements and sent to Paekche.¹⁸ At that time, the present governor's ancestor vowed to build a temple to the deities of Heaven and Earth if he returned home safely. Eventually, he escaped harm and thereupon invited Meditation Master Universal Salvation to return to Japan with him. Mitani Temple, as well as other temples, were founded by him, and he was looked on with reverence by monks and lay folk alike.

Once, in order to create a Buddhist image, he went to the capital to purchase supplies. Having bought gold and paints and other supplies and paid for them, he returned to the port of Naniwa. At that time by the sea, he saw people on the beach offering four large turtles for sale. He ordered them to be bought and set free.¹⁹ Then he rented a boat belonging to some men, and he and his two acolyte companions set out to sea.

When it grew late and the dark of night had fallen, the sailors manning the boat began to plot. And when they reached the area of Kabane Island in Bizen, they threw the two acolytes into the sea. Then they said to the meditation master, "You, too, quick—into the sea!" He tried to reason with them, but they refused to listen. Then, after making a vow, he jumped into the water.

When the water came up to his waist, he felt something like a rock under his feet, and when dawn came, he saw that he was being carried by the turtles. They left him on the beach of Bitchū, after nodding to him three times. The turtles that had been ransomed and set free, it appeared, had come to repay their debt to him.

Eventually, the guilty sailors, six men in all, came to his temple to sell the gold and paints they had stolen. The patron of the temple first came out to make an estimate, followed by the meditation master himself. Seeing him, the sailors were completely dumbfounded, not knowing what to do. But he forgave them for their crime and exacted no penalty. Instead, he fashioned a Buddhist image, placed it in the pagoda of the temple, and performed rites before it. Later he lived by the seaside, where he preached to those who passed by. He died at the age of over eighty.

Even beasts do not forget an act of kindness, but are careful to repay it. How, then, can human beings fail to have a sense of gratitude?



ON A DEAF MAN WHOSE HEARING WAS RESTORED IMMEDIATELY, OWING

TO HIS FAITH IN A MAHAYANA SUTRA (1:8)

In the reign of the sovereign who resided at the Owarida Palace, there was a man named Kinunui no tomonomiyatsuko Norimichi, who suddenly became seriously ill. He lost the hearing in both ears and suffered from skin disease all over his body. And these ailments never healed. He said to himself, “These are the result of past karma, and there is no hope they will end soon. Rather than living a long life and being hated by others, it is better to do good now and quickly die!” Therefore, he swept the ground, decorated the hall, and summoned a monk who was well read in scriptures. Then, after purifying himself with holy water, he devoted himself to listening to a reading of a Mahayana sutra.²⁰

Then he had a strange feeling. He said to the monk, “I am hearing the name of a bodhisattva in one of my ears. So I beg you, Most Venerable Master, to continue the reading!” The monk continued the reading, whereupon the hearing in one ear was completely restored. Norimichi was overjoyed and pleaded with the monk to go on. When he did so, the hearing in both of Norimichi’s ears was restored.

All those both near and far who heard of this were filled with wonder and amazement. So we know that tales of a mysterious correspondence are not false.²¹



ON A BABY CARRIED AWAY BY AN EAGLE AND REUNITED WITH HER FATHER IN ANOTHER PROVINCE (1:9)

In the reign of the sovereign who resided at the Itabuki Palace in Asuka Kawara, in the year *mizunoto-u* [643],²² in the spring, around the Third Month, there was a man in a mountain village who had a baby girl. She was crawling in the courtyard when an eagle seized her, flew into the sky, and headed toward the east. Her father and mother, startled and shocked, grieved and tried to run after her, but it was impossible. Therefore, they held a Buddhist memorial service for better luck in her next existence.

Eight years later, in the reign of the sovereign who resided at the Nagara-no-Toyosaki Palace in Naniwa, the year *kanoe-inu* [650],²³ in the autumn, the Eighth Month, the latter part of the month, the father whose child had been seized by an eagle, having business in the area, happened to put up for the night in the Kasa district of Tamba province. When the little daughter

of the family went to the village well to draw water, the man, wishing to wash his feet, went with her.

Around the well were gathered some girls of the village, who snatched away the pail from the daughter of the family and would not allow her to draw water. The other girls joined together in speaking insultingly to her, saying, “You—you’re something that the eagle wouldn’t eat! Why don’t you have any manners?” They abused her and hit her, so she went home crying.

When the head of the family with whom the man was staying asked her why she was crying, the man described to him in detail what had happened at the well, including the fact that the other girls had abused and hit her and called her “something that the eagle wouldn’t eat!” He asked why they said that.

The head of the family replied, “Some years ago, on such-and-such day of such-and-such month, I had climbed into a tree to catch some doves when an eagle with a baby girl in its talons came flying from the west and dropped the baby into its nest for the young eagles to eat. The baby was terrified and crying. The eaglets looked at her but were too surprised and frightened to peck at her. When I heard the baby crying, I took her from the nest, climbed down the tree, and raised her as a daughter.”

When the two men compared the dates of the events, they found that they agreed, and that this was clearly the daughter of the traveler.

For his part, crying bitterly, he told in detail how the eagle had made off with his child. The other man, recognizing the truth of his words, relinquished all claim to the girl.

Ah, this father—he stayed by chance with a family that had a daughter, and in the end it came to this! Thus we know that, through the help of Heaven and its pitying, the bond between a father and his child is deepened. It was a miraculous event!



ON A MAN'S STEALING FROM HIS SON, BEING REBORN AS AN OX, AND
SHOWING AN UNUSUAL SIGN (1:10)

In the central village of Yamamura in the Sou district of Yamato province, there was once a man called Lord Kura no Iegimi. In the Twelfth Month, he decided to atone for his past sins by having a Mahayana sutra recited. Therefore, he said to his servant, “Go and call a monk!”

The servant asked, “What temple should I go to in order to find a

monk?”

The master replied, “You don’t have to go to a temple. You can invite any monk you happen to meet.” The servant, following these instructions, brought home a monk he happened to meet on the way. The master, satisfied with the arrangement, made offerings to the monk.

That night, after the monk had performed his service and it was time to go to bed, the host spread quilts for him to sleep under. The monk thought to himself, “Rather than waiting to see what kind of offerings I get in the morning, it would be better to make off with these quilts!” Then he heard a voice saying, “Don’t steal those quilts!”

The monk, greatly startled, looked around the house for someone who had spoken. But all he could find was an ox that was standing in a shed beside the house. When the monk approached the ox, it began to speak. “I am the father of the master of this house. Some years ago, I stole ten sheaves of rice belonging to my son without telling him what I was doing, in order to give them to someone else. Because of that, I was reborn as an ox in payment for that deed. You have become a monk—how dare you even think of stealing these quilts? If you doubt the truth of my words, make a place for me to sit down. I will sit in it, so you will know I am really his father!” The monk was filled with shame and went back to bed.

The next morning, after he had completed his religious service, he said to his host, “Please have the other people withdraw.” Then, summoning the members of the immediate family, he told them what he had heard. The host, his heart full of grief, got up and went to where the ox was. Spreading a seat of rice straw, he said, “If you are really my father, come sit down here!” The ox knelt down and lay on the seat. All the family members began weeping bitterly and saying, “He really is our father!” Then the host stood up, bowed politely, and said to the ox, “I will cancel all the accounts in your former life!” The ox, hearing this, wept great tears and heaved a sigh; the same day, around four in the afternoon, its life came to an end. Afterward, the host presented the quilts and other goods to the monk as an offering and did many good works for the sake of his father.

How can we fail to believe in the law of karmic causality?



ON A LIFETIME OF CATCHING FISH IN A NET AND THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY
GAINED (1:11)

The Most Venerable Jiō, a monk of Gangō-ji in the capital, at the invitation of a patron of the temple, went on a summer retreat to lecture on the Lotus Sutra at No-no-o Temple in the Shikama district of Harima province. In the neighborhood, there was a fisherman who had been netting fish for a long time, from childhood to the present. Then one day, he suddenly crawled in among the mulberry bushes, crying in a loud voice, “The flames are about to devour me!” When his family tried to help him, he called out to them, “Don’t come near me! They’re about to burn me up!”

Meanwhile, his father rushed to the temple and begged the Most Venerable Jiō to help them. When Jiō recited spells, the man was eventually rescued from the flames, though the breeches he was wearing had been scorched. Thoroughly frightened, he went to the temple and, before the congregation, confessed his crime and promised to reform his ways. He made an offering of clothing and other articles to the temple and had sutras recited. Thereafter, he never did any evil deeds.

It is just as the *Yanshi jiaxun* [*Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*] says: “Once there was a man who belonged to the Liu family of Jiangling, who made his living by selling stewed eel. Later, he had a child born to him who had the head of an eel but from the neck on down had a human body.”²⁴ This demonstrates the same principle.



ON A SKULL THAT WAS SAVED FROM BEING STEPPED ON BY MEN AND
BEASTS, SHOWING AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN AND REPAYING THE
BENEFACTOR IMMEDIATELY (1:12)

Dōtō, a Buddhist scholar of Koguryō, was a monk of Gangō-ji. He came from the Eman family of Yamashina province. In the second year of the Taika era, the year *hinoe-uma* [646], he built the bridge at Uji. Once, when he was passing through the valley in the Nara hills, he saw a skull that had been trampled on by men and beasts. Sorrowing at the sight, he had his attendant Maro hang it on a tree.

On New Year’s Eve of the same year, a man came to the gate of the temple, saying, “I would like to see the Venerable Dōtō’s attendant Maro.” When Maro came out, he said, “Thanks to the pity of your master, I have gained the blessing of a peaceful existence. And only on this one evening am I able to repay your kindness.” Then he took Maro to his home.

Passing through the closed gate, they entered the back part of the house,

where they found plentiful food and drink prepared. The man divided up the fare with Maro, and they ate together.

Later, when night had fallen, they heard voices, and the man said to Maro, “Go quickly! Here comes my elder brother, the man who killed me!” When Maro, wondering at this, asked what it meant, he replied, “Long ago, when my elder brother and I were traveling on business, I came into possession of forty catties of silver.²⁵ My brother, out of envy and hatred, killed me and took the silver. For many years now, my skull has been trampled on by men and beasts passing by. But now, thanks to your master, I’ve been freed of that wrong. Therefore, in remembrance of that debt, I have repaid you tonight.”

At that time, the man’s mother and elder brother entered the room to pay their respects to the various deities. Seeing Maro, they were surprised and alarmed and asked how he happened to be there. When he told them what he had just heard, the mother said accusingly to her elder son, “Ah—it was you who killed my beloved boy! It was not someone else’s doing!” Then she expressed her thanks to Maro and insisted that he eat and drink more. On his return, Maro reported all this to his master.

Even a spirit of the dead or a skeleton repays an act of kindness. How, then, can a living person forget such a debt?



ON A WOMAN WHO LOVED PURE WAYS, ATE SACRED HERBS, AND FLEW TO HEAVEN ALIVE (1:13)

In the village of Nuribe in the Uda district of Yamato province, there lived a very unusual woman. She was a concubine of Nuribe no miyatsuko Maro. She practiced Heaven-approved ways, had gained enlightenment, and possessed a pure heart.²⁶ She gave birth to seven children, but being extremely poor, she had nothing to feed them. Having no means to raise them, she wove vines to clothe them. Every day, she would bathe her body, clean it, and put on ragged clothing. And when she went abroad, she always gathered herbs, and at home was careful to keep her house clean. When she had gathered a mess of herbs, she would call her children, have them sit up straight, and remind them, “Eat this food reverently!” This was how she always conducted herself, so that in her manner she resembled a dweller in Heaven.

In the reign of the emperor who resided at the Nagara no Toyosaki

Palace in Naniwa,²⁷ in the year *kinoe-tora* [654], her extraordinary ways prompted a response from the gods and spirits. When she went to the spring fields to gather herbs, she flew up to Heaven.

Truly we know that, although one does not practice the Buddhist Law, those who love such ways can communicate with those who drink the elixir of immortality. As the Shōjin nyomon-kyō says: “Even though you live the life of a layperson, if you sweep the garden with a pure heart, you will gain five kinds of merit.”²⁸



ON A MONK WHO RECITED THE SHIN-GYŌ AND, RECEIVING AN IMMEDIATE
REWARD, SHOWED AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (1:14)

Shaku Gigaku was originally from Paekche,²⁹ but when that country was overthrown, in the reign of the sovereign who resided in the later Okamoto Palace,³⁰ he came to our country and lived at the Kutara Temple in Naniwa. He was seven feet tall, well read in the Buddhist scriptures, and particularly skilled in reciting the Hannya Shin-gyō.³¹

Egi, a fellow monk at the same temple, happened to go out alone one night around midnight. He found a bright light coming out of the room where Gigaku lived. Thinking this strange, he secretly poked a hole in the paper panel and peered in. He saw Gigaku sitting up straight and reciting the sutra, and light was pouring out of his mouth. Being very startled and frightened by this, the next day he confessed what he had done to the congregation of monks.

Once Gigaku was talking with his disciples, and he said, “One evening, when I had recited the Shin-gyō a hundred times, I found that, when I opened my eyes and looked at the walls of the room, I could see right through all four walls and could see into the garden. Thinking this very strange, I then went out of the room and walked around outside, but when I looked, all the walls were closed up. When I stayed outside and recited the Shin-gyō, however, they once more became transparent. This shows you the extraordinary power of the sutra!”

In appraisal we say: How great is this child of Śākyamuni! He has heard much and expounds the teachings. When he recites the sutra in a closed room, his mind expands and moves abroad. It manifests itself in extreme quietude: What motion could it know? Yet when it passes through the walls of the room, it shines everywhere around!



ON A WICKED MAN WHO PERSECUTED A BEGGING MONK AND GAINED AN
IMMEDIATE PENALTY (1:15)

Long ago, in the time of the old capital, there was a foolish man who did not believe in the law of karmic causality. Once, seeing a monk begging for food, he grew angry and tried to stop him. The monk fled into the water in a rice field, but the man chased after him and caught him. The monk, not knowing what else to do, put a spell on him. The man went completely wild, running about in every direction. The monk, meanwhile, ran far away and could not be found.

This man had two sons. In order to free their father from the spell, they went to the temple and asked the meditation master to come and see their father. When the meditation master learned what had happened, he at first refused to go. But the two sons begged and pleaded, asking him to save their father, until at last he agreed. He had barely finished reciting the first passage of the chapter of the Lotus Sutra on Kannon when the man was released from the spell. Thereafter, he had a great awakening of faith, turned from wickedness, and did only good.



ON MERCILESSLY SKINNING A LIVE RABBIT AND RECEIVING AN IMMEDIATE
PENALTY (1:16)

In Yamato province, there lived a man whose name and native village are unknown. He was by nature merciless and loved to kill living creatures. He once caught a rabbit, skinned it alive, and then turned it loose in the fields. But not long afterward, pestilent sores broke out all over his body, his whole body was covered with scabs, and they caused him unspeakable torment. In the end, he never gained any relief, but died groaning and lamenting.

Ah, how soon do such deeds receive an immediate penalty! We should consider others as we do ourselves, exercise benevolence, and never be without pity and compassion!



ON SUFFERING DAMAGE IN WAR, SHOWING FAITH IN AN IMAGE OF
BODHISATTVA KANNON, AND GAINING AN IMMEDIATE REWARD (1:17)

Ochi no atai, ancestor of the governor of the Ochi district of Iyo province, was sent to Paekche with the Japanese expeditionary forces.³²

He was taken prisoner by Tang Chinese soldiers and brought to China. There, with other Japanese, eight men in all, he lived on an island. They acquired an image of Bodhisattva Kannon and worshipped it with deep devotion. Secretly, they worked together to cut down a pine tree and fashion a boat. Placing the Kannon image reverently in the boat, they made their vows to it and set off, their thoughts fixed on Kannon. They caught a wind from the west and proceeded directly to Tsukushi.³³

When word of this reached the court, they were summoned to report on the affair. The emperor, deeply moved, agreed to grant their wishes. Ochi no atai said, "I wish to serve by establishing an estate." The emperor granted his wish. Thereafter, he established the district of Ochi and built a temple in which to place the image of Kannon. From that time until the present, his descendants have followed his example in worshipping and honoring it.

It was surely Kannon's power that brought about this remarkable display of faith. Even a wooden image of Ding Lan's mother appeared to be alive, and the woman in a picture loved by a monk responded with sympathy.³⁴ How, then, is it possible for the Bodhisattva not to respond?



ON REMEMBERING AND RECITING THE LOTUS SUTRA AND GAINING AN
IMMEDIATE AND WONDERFUL REWARD (1:18)

In the Kazuraki upper district of Yamato province, there was once a devotee of the Lotus Sutra. He was a member of the Tajihi family. Even before he was eight years old, he could recite the Lotus Sutra, but with the exception of one character that always escaped his memory.

Even when he was in his twenties, it continued to escape him.

He prayed to Kannon, confessing his offense, and had a dream. In it, a man said to him, "In a previous existence, you were a child of Kusakabe no Saru of the Wake district of Iyo province. At that time, while reciting the sutra, you burned one character with a lamp so that you could not read it.

Now, go and see!”

When he awoke, he was filled with wonder. He said to his parents, “I have urgent business—I want to go to Iyo!” His parents gave their consent.

Setting out, in time he reached Kusakabe no Saru’s house and knocked on the door. A woman answered, and then reported to the lady of the house, “There’s a visitor here who looks exactly like your deceased son!” On hearing this, she came to the door and found that the man was indeed the image of her dead son. Then the head of the house, Kusakabe no Saru, appeared and, wondering, asked, “Who are you?” The man replied, giving the name of his district and province. Then he asked the same question, and Kusakabe no Saru gave his full name. It thus became apparent to the man that these had been his father and mother in a previous existence. He knelt down in a gesture of respect, but Kusakabe no Saru greeted him warmly, invited him in, and, seating him in the parlor, asked respectfully, “Are you the spirit of our deceased son?” The man then described in detail the dream that he had had, exclaiming, “You elderly couple are my former parents!”

Kusakabe no Saru then began reminiscing, saying, “My former son was named such-and-such. He lived in the room over there, recited sutras, and used that water pitcher.” The man, hearing him, entered the room, picked up the copy of the Lotus Sutra, and examined it. He found that the character he could never remember had been burned by a lamp and was missing. Once he had repented of this accident and had repaired the text, he was thereafter able to recite it without fault. Both the parents and the son looked on this with wonder and rejoicing, and the man never failed to honor this parent–child relationship.

In appraisal we say: How happy, the members of the Kusakabe family! He read the sutra and sought the Way in two lives, past and present, reciting the Lotus Sutra! He was filial to two fathers, his fine reputation handed down to posterity. This was extraordinary, surely not commonplace. Truly we know the authority of the Lotus Sutra and the wonderful workings of Kannon! As the Zen’aku-inga-kyō [Sutra on the Effects of Good and Evil] says: “If you want to know past causes, look at present effects. If you want to know future effects, look at present causes.”³⁵ This is what it means!



ON RIDICULING A RECITER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA AND GETTING A TWISTED
MOUTH AS AN IMMEDIATE PENALTY (1:19)

Long ago in Yamato province, there was a self-ordained monk. His family and given name are unknown. He used to play *go* incessantly. One day when he was playing *go* with a white-robed layman, a beggar came along, reciting the Lotus Sutra and asking for alms. The monk laughed scornfully at him, and then purposely twisted his mouth around in imitation of that of the man. The layman was shocked, saying with each play of the game, “How disrespectful!” He won every time at the game, while the monk lost. But while this was going on, the monk’s mouth became twisted. No medicine could cure it, and in the end it never mended.

The Lotus Sutra says: “If anyone disparages or laughs at that person,³⁶ then in existence after existence he will have teeth that are missing or spaced far apart, ugly lips, a flat nose, hands and feet that are gnarled or deformed, and eyes that are squinty.”³⁷ This is what it means. It is better to be possessed by evil devils and talk nonsense than to abuse the devotees of the Lotus Sutra. Remember that the mouth is often the source of evil.



ON A MONK WHO GAVE AWAY THE WOOD USED TO HEAT THE BATH, WAS
REBORN AS AN OX, AND LABORED UNTIL AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN
APPEARED (1:20)

Shaku Eshō was a monk of Engō-ji. Once, in the course of his daily life, he gave a bundle of wood to be used to heat the bath to someone else and then died. At that temple, there was a cow that gave birth to a male calf. When the calf grew up into an ox, it was tied to a cart and put to work, endlessly pulling a load of firewood.

One day, as it pulled the cart into the temple grounds, there was a strange monk at the temple gate who said, “Monk Eshō was good at reciting the Nirvana Sutra, but he’s no good at pulling a cart!” The ox, hearing this, burst into tears, gave a long sigh, and abruptly died. The driver of the ox berated the monk, saying, “You put a curse on it!” and reported him to the officials. When in the course of investigation they called in the monk, they were surprised at his unusually noble appearance and radiant body. They took him to a better room and invited painters to paint him, saying, “This monk is to be painted exactly as he is, without any mistake!” The painters agreed to do so. And when they brought their efforts to the official lodge and the officials examined them, all of them were depictions of Bodhisattva Kannon. The monk, meanwhile, had suddenly disappeared.

Surely there can be no doubt—that monk was none other than an incarnation of Kannon. It is better to starve and eat dirt than to steal food meant for the daily needs of the monks! When the Daihōdō Sutra says, “I can save those who commit the four offenses or the five crimes, but I will not save those who steal from the monks!”³⁸ this is what it means.



ON MERCILESSLY DRIVING HORSES WITH A HEAVY LOAD AND GETTING AN
IMMEDIATE PENALTY (1:21)

Long ago in Kawachi province, there was a man named Ishiwake who sold melons. He would saddle a horse with a far greater load than the horse was capable of pulling, and then, when the horse failed to move, would whip it angrily and drive it forward. The horse would strain at the heavy load, tears pouring from its eyes. Once he had sold all his melons, he would kill the horse. After Ishiwake had killed a number of horses this way, he happened to peer into a cauldron of boiling water, whereupon both his eyes fell into the water and were boiled.

How swift is the penalty for evil deeds! We must believe in the law of karmic causality. Even looking at beasts, we see that they may have been our father and mother in past times. The six paths and the four forms of birth—they are the house we live in.³⁹ Therefore, we cannot be without pity and compassion.



ON WORKING DILIGENTLY TO STUDY THE BUDDHIST LAW, SPREADING THE
TEACHINGS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL, AND, AT THE TIME OF DEATH,
RECEIVING AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (1:22)

The late monk Dōshō belonged to the Fune family of Kawachi province. Under imperial auspices, he went abroad to study Buddhism, journeying to Tang China.⁴⁰ There he met and became a disciple of Tripitaka Master Xuanzang.⁴¹ The master said to his other disciples, “This man, when he returns home, will convert many people to Buddhism. You should not look down on him but treat him well.”

Once his studies were completed, he returned home and founded a

temple called Zen'in-ji, where he resided. He excelled in the keeping of the precepts, and his wisdom shone like a mirror. He traveled widely, spreading the teachings and converting others. In his later days, he lived in the temple and lectured to his disciples, summing up for them the essential doctrines of many sacred texts.

When he felt that his end was near, he bathed, put on a clean robe, and sat upright facing west. A brilliance filled the entire room. He opened his eyes and asked his disciple Chijō, “Do you see the light?”

Chijō replied, “Yes, I see it.” The master warned him, saying, “Do not speak incautiously about this!” In the latter part of the night, the light emerged from the room, moved to the area around the pine trees in the garden, and then, after a long time, went away to the west. All his disciples were struck with wonder, and at that moment the master, sitting straight up and facing west, died.⁴² We may be certain that he went to the Pure Land for rebirth!

In appraisal we say: This distinguished member of the Fune family journeyed far in search of the Buddhist scriptures. He was a saint, not an ordinary person. In the end, he died in a burst of light.



ON A BAD MAN WHO NEGLECTED TO PAY FILIAL DUTY TO HIS MOTHER AND GOT THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF AN EVIL DEATH (1:23)

In the Sou upper district of Yamato province, there once lived a man whose family name is unknown; his personal name was Miyasu. In the reign of the emperor residing at the Naniwa Palace,⁴³ he became a student of the classics. He spent all his time with books and neglected to take care of his mother.

His mother had borrowed some rice from him and was unable to return it. Miyasu grew angry and pressed her for repayment. At that time, the mother was kneeling on the floor, while Miyasu sat on a sleeping mat. When his visitors saw this, they could not remain silent but said, “Good man, why do you go against the rules of filial duty? Other people establish temples, build pagodas, make Buddhist images, or copy sutras for the benefit of their father and mother, or invite monks to a retreat for their sake. You are rich and are fortunate to have much rice to lend. Why do you go against what you have learned and fail to treat your dear mother in a filial manner?” But Miyasu dismissed their complaints, saying, “That’s none of your business!”

The visitors paid the mother's debt out of their own money, and all hurried away.

The mother then bared her breasts and, weeping, sadly said, "When I was bringing you up, I never rested day or night. I have seen how other children repay their parents for the care they received, but when I thought I could rely on you, I got nothing but opposition and disgrace. I was wrong to count on you. If you demand repayment of the rice I borrowed, I will now demand repayment for the milk I gave you. Our mother-child relationship is severed from this day on. May Heaven and Earth take cognizance of this. How sad, how pitiful!"

Without saying a word, Miyasu stood up, went into the back room, and, returning with the pledges his mother had signed for the rice, burned them all in the yard. Then he went off into the mountains, to who knows where, his hair disheveled, his body bleeding, wandering wildly this way and that. He returned to his home but was unable to stay there. Three days later, a fire broke out suddenly, and all his houses and storerooms were burned. In the end, his wife and children were left with no means of support, while he himself, with nowhere to turn, died of hunger and cold.

An immediate penalty is not far off—how can we fail to believe this? Therefore, the sutra says: "The unfilial are destined to fall into Hell; those who take care of father and mother go to the Pure Land."⁴⁴

This is what the Thus Come One preaches,⁴⁵ the true teaching of the Mahayana.



ON AN EVIL DAUGHTER WHO LACKED FILIAL RESPECT FOR HER MOTHER AND GOT THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF A VIOLENT DEATH (1:24)

In the old capital there lived a wicked woman whose name is unknown. She had no feelings of filial respect and did not love her mother.

Once, it being a day for fasting,⁴⁶ the mother cooked no rice at home but went to her daughter's place, thinking to eat there. But the daughter said, "Today my husband and I are fasting. So there's just enough for the two of us—nothing left over for you!"

At that time, the mother had a little child. As she and the child returned home, she happened to notice a packet of boiled rice that someone had left by the roadside. She picked it up, ate it hungrily, and then fell asleep exhausted. Late at night, someone came to the door, reporting, "Your

daughter says that she has a nail in her chest and is about to die! Come at once and look at her!” But the mother was so tired that they could not wake her or get her help, and, in the end, the daughter died without seeing her.

It is better to give our portion to our mother and starve than to die without showing her filial respect!



ON A LOYAL MINISTER, SATISFIED AND WITH FEW WANTS, WHO WON
HEAVEN’S SYMPATHY AND WAS REWARDED BY A MIRACULOUS EVENT
(1:25)

The late Middle Councillor Lord Ōmiwa no Takechimaro, of the Junior Third Rank awarded posthumously, was a loyal minister of Empress Jitō.⁴⁷ According to the records, in the seventh year of the Akamidori era, the year *mizunoe-tatsu* [692], an imperial order was given to the officials telling them to prepare for the empress’s visit to Ise on the third day of the month. The Middle Councillor, fearing that the visit would interfere with agricultural work, presented a memorial attempting to dissuade the empress. She dismissed this, however, saying that she would go anyway. He then took off his official cap and in court repeated his remonstrance. “Now, when people are busy with farm work, you should not go!” he said.

Another time, in a period of drought, he closed off the water to his own fields and directed it to the fields of others, leaving his own fields to dry up. But the gods of Heaven responded with sympathy and ordered the dragons to send down rain. It rained on only his own fields, however, and not on those of others. Yao’s clouds gathered for him, and Shun’s rains fell.⁴⁸ Truly he was a model of loyalty, a man of great humaneness and virtue.

In appraisal we say: This praiseworthy man of the Ōmiya family from childhood loved to study, was loyal and benevolent, his actions pure, never unclean. He looked kindly on the people, bestowing blessings on them, directing water to their fields, shutting off his own, until the sweet rain fell—his fame will last for long!



ON A MONK WHO OBSERVED THE PRECEPTS, WAS PURE IN HIS
ACTIVITIES, AND WON AN IMMEDIATE MIRACULOUS REWARD (1:26)

In the reign of Empress Jitō, there was a meditation master of Paekche named Tara. He always lived in Hokiya Temple in the Takechi district, following a life of strict discipline. He specialized in caring for the sick and the dying, who were restored to life through his art. When he recited a spell for a sick person, there was a miraculous result.

Once, when he was climbing a slope with the use of a staff, he stuck a second staff onto the first one, so that the two supported each other without falling, but acted like a chisel.⁴⁹

The empress respected him greatly and constantly made offerings to him, and the people put faith in him and paid him constant reverence. This was because his virtuous way of life caused his fame to be known far and wide. The power of his pity and compassion will long be praised.



ON AN EVIL NOVICE, NAME UNKNOWN, WHO TORE DOWN THE PILLAR OF
A PAGODA AND GAINED A PENALTY (1:27)

The *shami* [novice] of Ishikawa was a self-ordained monk who had no clerical name; his secular name, too, is unknown. He was called the Ishikawa novice because his wife came from the Ishikawa district of Kawachi province. Although he had the appearance of a novice, his heart was set on thieving. Once he falsely told people that he was collecting funds to build a pagoda, but then he and his wife privately spent the money on personal items. Again, when he was living in the Tsukiyone Temple in the Shima-no-shimo district of Settsu province, he tore down a pillar of the pagoda and burned it—he was extremely wicked in this way, having no respect for the teachings of Buddhism.

In the end, when he had reached the village of Ajiki in the Shima-no-shimo district, he was suddenly taken ill. He cried out in a loud voice, “I’m burning up, burning up!” and jumped one or two feet off the ground. People gathered around to look, asking, “Why are you doing that?” He replied, “The fires of Hell are burning up my body! When I’m suffering like this, why do you ask such questions?” On that day, his life came to an end.

Ah, how sad! We know that punishment for wrongdoing is no fiction: Why, then, do we not reflect on this? The Nirvana Sutra says: “If a person does good works, his name will be noted among heavenly beings; if he does evil, his name will be noted in Hell. Why? Because retribution is sure to

come.”⁵⁰ This is what the sutra means.



ON LEARNING THE CHANT OF THE PEACOCK KING AND THEREBY GAINING
EXTRAORDINARY POWER TO BECOME A SAINT AND FLY TO HEAVEN IN THIS
LIFE (1:28)

E no ubasoku, or E the Layman, was of the Kamo-no-enokimi family, presently the Takakamo-no-asomi family. He came from the village of Chihara in the Kazuraki upper district of Yamato province. He was wise by nature, had studied widely, and had attained the One.⁵¹ He put his faith in the Three Treasures of Buddhism and made this his life work. His constant desire was to ascend a five-colored cloud, fly off to the vast blue, visit as a guest in the palace of the immortals, sport in the gardens of eternity, and lie among their blossoms and suck their nectar to nourish his vital force.

Therefore, when he was in his forties and growing old, he went to live in a cave, wore vines, ate pinecones, bathed in the fresh spring water, and thus washed away the dirt of the world of desire. He practiced the chants of the Peacock King Sutra and, in this way, gained extraordinary arts and powers. So he was able to command devils and gods and make them do his will.

Once he summoned all the devils and gods and said, “Build me a bridge between the peaks of Kane-no-mitake and Kazuraki-no-mitake in the land of Yamato!” They were perplexed by this. In the reign of the emperor who resided at the Fujiwara Palace,⁵² Hitokotonushi no Ōkami of Kazuraki-no-mitake was possessed and slandered him, saying, “E no ubasoku plans to overthrow the emperor!” The emperor gave orders that he be seized, but because of his magical powers, this was not easy to do. Therefore, they seized his mother instead. To save his mother, he gave himself up.

He was exiled to the islands of Izu. At times, his body floated on the sea or seemed to climb the tall mountains. His form was at times ten thousand feet tall or flew like a soaring phoenix. In the daytime, he obeyed the emperor’s orders and remained on the islands, but at night he went to the heights of Mount Fuji in Suruga to practice his art. His desire, however, was to be pardoned from the punishment of the executioner’s ax and to be allowed to return to the vicinity of the ruler. Therefore, he lay down on the blades of a deadly sword and flew to Mount Fuji. Three years passed while he was suffering in exile on the islands, but in the first year of the Taihō era,

in the First Month of the year *kanoto-ushi* [701], he was allowed to return to the capital. In the end, he became an immortal and flew up to Heaven.

The Dharma Master Dōshō, a saint of our country of Japan, received an imperial order to go to Tang China to seek for knowledge of Buddhist Law. There he was requested by five hundred tigers to go to the kingdom of Silla in Korea, where, in the mountains, he lectured on the Lotus Sutra. There was a man among the throng of tigers who spoke to him in the Japanese language. “Who are you?” he asked, and received the reply “E no ubasoku!” The monk, supposing him to be a Japanese sage, came down from his seat, looking for him, but he was gone.

Hitokotonushi no Ōkami was bound by the spell put on him by E the Practitioner, and to this day he has not escaped. Many other miraculous deeds are attributed to him, but they are too numerous to mention. Truly we know that the workings of the Buddhist Law are great and far-reaching. Those who put faith in them will surely gain proof of this.



ON BEING AN UNBELIEVER, BREAKING THE BOWL OF A BEGGING MONK,
AND INCURRING THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF A VIOLENT DEATH (1:29)

Shirakabe no Imaro was a man from the Oda district of Bitchū province. He was evil by nature and did not believe in the Three Treasures of Buddhism.

One day a monk came to him, begging for food. Imaro offered him nothing, but on the contrary abused him, broke his begging bowl, and drove him away. Later, Imaro went on a trip to another province. On the way, he ran into wind and rain. He sought shelter in a storehouse and was killed when it was blown over.

Truly we know that retribution is close at hand in the present life. Why, then, are we not more careful? As the Nirvana Sutra says: “All evil deeds are caused by wicked minds.”⁵³ This is what it means. The *Daijōburon* says: “If you offer alms with a heart of compassion, your merit will be as great as the Earth. But if you do so for your own sake, your return in all cases will be as tiny as a mustard seed. To aid one person in trouble or danger is better than all the other kinds of offerings!”⁵⁴



ON TAKING GOODS FROM OTHERS UNJUSTLY AND CAUSING EVIL, GAINING

A PENALTY, AND SHOWING A MIRACULOUS EVENT (1:30)

Kashiwade no omi Hirokuni was an assistant governor of the Miyako district of Buzen province. In the reign of the emperor at the Fujiwara Palace,⁵⁵ in the second year of the Kyōun era, the year *kinoto-mi* [705], on the fifteenth day of the Ninth Month, the day *kanoe-saru*, he suddenly died. Three days passed, and on the fourth day, the Day of the Boar, around four in the afternoon, he came back to life and told the following tale:

“There were two messengers, one with the hairstyle of an adult, and the other with that of a child. They accompanied me, and we went about two stages.⁵⁶ There was a big river along the way, with a bridge that was painted in gold. When we crossed the bridge, we found ourselves in a very wonderful land. I asked the messengers, ‘What land is this?’

“‘This is the southern land,’ they said.

“When we reached the capital, we found that there were eight officers carrying arms and following us. Before us was a golden palace, and when we went in the gate, we saw the king sitting on a golden throne. He said to me, ‘I have summoned you because of a complaint brought by your wife.’ Then he called in a woman. When I looked, it was my wife, who had died long ago. Iron nails pierced her from top to bottom and ran from her forehead to the nape of her neck, while her four limbs were wrapped with an iron chain. Eight men carried her in.

“The king asked me, ‘Do you know this woman?’ I replied, ‘Indeed—she is my wife.’ Then he asked, ‘Do you know what offense you are accused of?’ I replied, ‘No, I do not.’ Then he asked the woman the same question. She answered, ‘I do indeed! He drove me out of the house, and therefore I hate him, loathe him, and still bear him a grudge.’ The king then said, ‘You are guilty of no real crime. You may go home. But take care that you do not speak rashly of the affairs of the land of the dead! If you want to see your father, go to the south.’

“When I went in the direction I had been told, I found my father. He stood, embracing an extremely hot copper pillar. His body was pierced by thirty-seven iron nails, and he was beaten every day with an iron rod, three hundred strokes in the morning, three hundred strokes at noon, and three hundred strokes in the evening—nine hundred strokes in all! I looked at him in sorrow and said, ‘Ah, how could I have known that you suffered such pain?’ As father and son talked together, the father said, ‘I brought on these sufferings. I don’t know if you know or not. In order to support my wife and family, I killed many living creatures, lent eight *ryō* of cloth and demanded payment of ten *ryō* in return, or lent a little measure of rice and demanded a

big measure in repayment. Or I took by force the goods of others or committed adultery with their wives. I did not take proper care of my father and mother or show respect for my elders, and, even when they were not slaves, abused them as though they were. Because of these offenses, I have thirty-nine iron nails driven into my body, little though it is, and daily receive nine hundred beatings with an iron whip. How painful, how unbearable! When will I escape from these penalties? When will my body ever find rest? Please, as quickly as you can, for my sake make Buddhist images and copy sutras to pay for the burden of my offenses. Never forget this! When I was starving, on the seventh day of the Seventh Month, I turned into a large snake, went to your house, and was about to enter the kitchen, but you used a stick to drive me away. Again, on the fifth day of the Fifth Month, I turned into a red dog and went to your house. But you called a big dog to chase me away, and I came back hungry and exhausted. When, on the first day of the New Year, I turned into a cat and went to your house, I was able to eat my fill of the offerings of rice and meat and other things and was thus able to make up for three years' lack of food. It was because I and my younger brothers got all mixed up and lost our proper relationship that all this happened. Therefore, I became a dog, eating foul things and fouling myself as well. And I suppose I will end up a red dog. But if you make an offering of one quart of rice, you will gain a reward of thirty days of food; and if you make an offering of one set of clothes, you will gain a reward of one year of clothing. Those who have sutras recited will live in the golden palace of the east and afterward will, in accordance with their wishes, be reborn in Heaven; and those who make images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be reborn in the Land of Eternal Life in the western direction; those who free living creatures will be reborn in the Land of Everlasting Life in the northern direction; and those who fast for a day will gain the reward of ten years of food.'

"Having heard all this talk of retribution for good or evil, I became frightened and decided to go. When I got to the bridge, the guards watching the gate stopped me, saying, 'You can't go out the gate after having once been inside!' I wandered around there for a while, when a child appeared. The gatekeepers, seeing him, knelt in greeting. The child called to me, led me to a side gate, opened the door there, and, pointing, said, 'Hurry out!' I asked him, 'Whose child are you?' He answered, 'If you want to know who I am, I'm the Kannon Sutra that you first copied when you were little.'⁵⁷ Then he went back inside the gate, and when I looked around, I had come back to life."

As Kashiwade Hirokuni had visited the land of the dead and observed

the penalties meted out for good or evil behavior, the results are recorded here for general circulation. The causes and conditions that bring about retribution for sins are just as they are generally expounded in the Mahayana sutras. Who could fail to believe them? Therefore, the sutra says: “The sweet dew of the present life is the iron ball of the future life.” This is what it means.

Hirokuni, for the sake of his father, fashioned Buddhist images, copied sutras, and paid honor to the Three Treasures of Buddhism, thereby repaying his debt to his father and atoning for the offenses he had committed. Therefore, he turned from aberrant ways and followed what is right.



ON EARNESTLY BELIEVING IN KANNON, PRAYING FOR HIS SHARE OF GOOD FORTUNE, AND IMMEDIATELY RECEIVING GREAT GOOD FORTUNE (1:31)

In the reign of Retired Emperor Shōhō-ōjin-shōmu, residing at the Nara Palace,⁵⁸ Miteshiro no Azumahito went to Mount Yoshino to practice the Buddhist doctrine and pray for good fortune. Three years passed, during which he praised Kannon’s name, reciting, “Hail to Kannon. Please favor me with ten thousand strings of copper coins, ten thousand bushels of white rice, and lots of pretty girls!”

At that time Awata no asomi of the Junior Third Rank had a daughter who was unmarried and a virgin. She suddenly fell ill at her home in Hirose. Her suffering was so great that there appeared to be no possibility of a cure. Her father sent messengers in all directions, seeking meditation masters and lay believers. Azumahito was among those called and asked to heal her by chanting spells. Through the power of his spells, she was cured of her illness. She fell in love with Azumahito and, in the end, gave herself to him. Her family seized him and shut him up in a room. This was more than the daughter could bear, and she cried out pleadingly and would not leave his side. On consulting together, the relatives decided to recognize the marriage, freed Azumahito, and established him and his wife in a house and put him in charge of her wealth. When this was reported to the throne, he was given the Fifth Rank.

After some years had gone by, she found that she was dying. She called her older sister and said, “I am going to die, but I have one wish. I wonder if you will heed it?” Her sister replied, “I will comply.” She said, “I have long shared the love of Azumahito, a debt to be long remembered. I would

like to have your daughter as a wife for him, so that she may carry on the household.” Faithful to her wish, her older sister gave her daughter to Azumahito to be in charge of the family fortune.

Azumahito received a rich reward in his present life. This was due to the power of his devotional practice and the generosity of Kannon. How can you not believe this?



ON HAVING FAITH IN THE THREE TREASURES, REVERING MONKS, HAVING
SUTRAS RECITED, AND GAINING AN IMMEDIATE REWARD (1:32)

In the fourth year of the Jinki era, the year *hinoto-u* [727], in the Ninth Month, Emperor Shōmu went hunting with his officers in the mountains in Yamamura in the Sou upper district. A deer ran into a farmer’s house in the village of Hosomi, and the people in the house, unaware of where it had come from, killed it and ate it. Later, when the emperor received word of this, he sent officers to arrest the people involved. There were more than ten men and women implicated in the affair, and they shook with fear, having no one to depend on. Their only thought was that nothing but the divine power of the Three Treasures could save them from their sorry plight.

They had heard that the Sixteen-Foot Buddha of Daian-ji would respond to peoples’ prayers. They sent a man to the temple with a request that sutras be recited. They also sent a request, saying, “When we are taken to the court, please open the southern gate of the temple so that we may pay homage to the Buddha. Also, we ask that you ring the temple bell incessantly, so that its sound will follow us when we are in court.”

The monks, heeding their request, recited sutras and opened the gate as they had asked. Meanwhile, the people had been escorted to the court and confined in a guardroom. It happened, however, that an imperial prince was born, and, accordingly, the emperor granted a general amnesty and did not punish them. On the contrary, he bestowed alms on the people, and their joy knew no bounds.

Truly we know that this was due to the mercy of the Sixteen-Foot Buddha and the merit of reciting sutras.



ON A WIFE WHO HAD A BUDDHIST PICTURE PAINTED FOR HER DECEASED

HUSBAND THAT, AS AN IMMEDIATE REWARD, MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED THE
FLAMES (1:33)

In Hata Temple in the Ishikawa district of Kawachi province, there is a painted image of Amida. The villagers say that a virtuous wife once lived in the neighborhood of the temple, though her name is not known. On the day her husband was dying, she vowed to have a Buddhist image created. But because of her poverty, many years went by with the vow unfulfilled.

Each autumn she gleaned the fields, and then she asked a painter to help her make an offering to the dead, weeping tears of sorrow. The painter, moved to join in her devotion, completed a beautiful painting. A ceremonial feast was held, after which the painting was consecrated in the golden hall of the temple, where it was constantly treated with honor.

Later, a thief set fire to the temple and the hall was completely burned, but this painting of a Buddha alone survived undamaged. Was this not an act of mercy designed to comfort the widow and the others?

In appraisal we say: What a good wife she was, holding a memorial ritual for her husband! She held it at the end of autumn. Truly we know the measure of her devotion. Even burning flames could not destroy her sacred image. The help of Heaven above is beyond our comprehension!



ON GETTING BACK SILK ROBES THAT HAD BEEN STOLEN THROUGH A
PETITION TO BODHISATTVA MYŌKEN (1:34)

In front of the temple called Shinobu-dera in the Ate district of Kii province, there was once a house. When ten silk robes were stolen from the owners of the house, they prayed earnestly for their recovery to Bodhisattva Myōken at the temple. However, the robes were sold to a merchant in the town of Kii.

Before seven days had passed, a violent wind suddenly arose. The robes wrapped themselves around the body of a deer, which carried them south and left them in the garden of the owners, who exclaimed, “A gift from Heaven!” When the man who had bought them learned that they had been stolen, he did not ask for them back, but let the matter rest. This was a miraculous event!



ON A NUN WHO, IN GRATITUDE FOR THE FOUR KINDS OF BLESSINGS,
GAINED THE POWER TO SHOW AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (1:35)

In the village of Yuge in the Wakae district of Kawachi province, there lived a well-disciplined novice nun. Her name is unknown, but she lived in a mountain temple at Heguri. She organized an association of devotees and painted a Buddha image with a picture of the six realms of existence in order to give thanks for the four kinds of blessings.⁵⁹ After the dedication ceremony, it was enshrined in the temple, where it helped to show to all the various circumstances of birth. But the Buddha image was stolen, and though she wept and searched for it, she could not find it.

Meanwhile, leading the members of her association, she thought to free living creatures,⁶⁰ and they traveled as far as the marketplace of the city of Naniwa. There they saw a basket hanging in a tree, and they heard the voices of various living creatures crying in the basket. They waited for the owner to return, because they thought there must be creatures in the basket and wanted to set them free.

After a while, the owner returned. The nun and her group said, “We heard the sound of living creatures in your basket. We would like to buy them—that’s why we were waiting for you.” The owner said, “No—there are no living creatures!” But the nun and the others begged him and would not stop. The merchants in the marketplace said, “You should open the basket!” The owner, growing fearful, abandoned the basket and ran away. When they opened the basket, they found that it contained the Buddha image.

They were overjoyed. Their tears streaming down, they exclaimed in delight, “We lost the image and have spent days and nights longing for it. Now, by chance, we have found it again. Ah—what happiness is ours!” When the people of the marketplace heard this, they gathered around in congratulation.

The nun and the others of her group set living creatures free and thus attained good fortune. The image was restored to the temple, where clergy and lay members alike paid it reverence. This was indeed a miraculous event.

1. Throughout the stories, the text in parentheses is Kyōkai’s explanations, comments, or interpretations.
2. The color red indicated an imperial messenger.
3. The “old capital” refers to the site of the pre-Nara capital.
4. The metal rod presumably was some kind of farm implement.
5. Located at this time in Asuka, Gangō-ji later moved to Nara and became one of the seven great

temples of Nara.

6. Persons who had died unfortunate deaths were buried in a roadway, that the feet of people traveling the road could prevent their spirits from moving around and causing harm.
7. Empress Suiko (r. 592–628) was Prince Shōtoku’s aunt.
8. For a slightly different version of this story, see *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), chap. 22; and *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, trans. W. G. Aston, Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society of London, suppl. 1, 2 vols. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896), 2:144–145.
9. The strong herbs are garlic, scallion, onion, ginger, and leek.
10. Muraji was a hereditary title for high-ranking administrators.
11. The Three Treasures of Buddhism are the Buddha; the Dharma, or doctrine; and the Order, or community of believers.
12. From very early times, the Chinese have used a combination of two sets of signs, the so-called Ten Stems and Twelve Branches, to form a sixty-term chronological sequence that, when it ends, begins again. This may be used to designate years, months, or days. When the Japanese adopted the use of the sixty-term cycle, they read the terms in the Japanese equivalents of the Chinese names.
13. Both Daisōjō and Sōzu are high officers charged with the regulation of the clergy.
14. This appraisal section, in four-character phrases with occasional rhyme, is in imitation of similar sections in Chinese histories such as Ban Gu’s *History of the Han*. It was also used in Chinese Buddhist works, which is probably from where Kyōkai took it.
15. Mount Wutai, one of the four sacred mountains in Chinese Buddhism, is devoted to the worship of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.
16. Probably in the reign of Empress Suiko. Koguryō (37 B.C.E.–668 C.E.), located in northern and central present-day Korea, was one of the three kingdoms of Korea, along with Paekche (18 B.C.E.–660 C.E.) and Silla (57 B.C.E.–935 C.E.).
17. Koguryō was invaded and overthrown in 668 by Tang China.
18. Paekche was attacked in 660 by forces from both Tang China and neighboring Silla. It was invaded and overthrown in 663.
19. The practice of buying captive fish, birds, or other animals and setting them free was highly recommended in Buddhism.
20. Hōkō-kyō, or the sutras of the Correct and Equal period, is a term designating the third of Zhiyi’s classification of the sutras, the introductory Mahayana sutras. But here it may mean the Lotus Sutra.
21. The “mysterious correspondence” is between Buddhas and sentient beings.
22. The second year of the reign of Empress Kyōgoku (r. 642–645).
23. The first year of the Hakuchi era of the reign of Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645–654).
24. Written by Yan Zhitui (531–590), this Chinese work, which presents a synthesis of Buddhist and Confucian teachings, was popular in Japan in the Nara period (710–784).
25. A catty is a unit of weight that equals 1.5 pounds, so this would be 60 pounds of silver.
26. Although not a Buddhist, she followed practices that allied her to Buddhist modes of conduct. There is a strongly Daoist flavor to this tale.
27. Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645–654).
28. The identity of this work is highly obscure.
29. Shaku, short for Śākyamuni, indicates a follower of Buddhist teachings—that is, a monk.
30. In 660, in the reign of Empress Saimei (r. 655–661).
31. The Shin-gyō, or Hannya Shin-gyō, known in English as the Heart Sutra, is a very short work. See *Taishō* 8.nos. 250–255, 257.
32. There are two possible dates for this: 660 and 663.
33. Tsukushi refers to the island of Kyushu in Japan.
34. According to the *Xiaozizhuan* (*Biographies of Filial Sons*) by Liu Xiang, when Ding Lan was

- fifteen years old, he lost his mother. He made a wooden image of her and cared for it as if it were alive. The story behind the second part of the sentence is unknown.
- [35.](#) The quotation is not from this sutra, but is in another text, the *Shokyō yōshū* (*Essential Passages from Various Sutras*). See *Taishō* 59:53c.
 - [36.](#) “That person” refers to one who accepts and upholds the sutra.
 - [37.](#) *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), chap. 28, “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy,” 324.
 - [38.](#) Daihōdō is a shortened form of Daihōdō-darani-kyō. See *Taishō* 13:397. The four offenses are killing, stealing, licentiousness, and lying. The five crimes are killing one’s father, one’s mother, or an arhat; injuring the body of a Buddha; and causing dissension in the Order.
 - [39.](#) The six paths are the realms of Hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras* (demons), human beings, and heavenly beings. The four forms of birth are birth from the womb, from eggs, from dampness or moisture (as worms), and by transformation.
 - [40.](#) Dōshō went to China in 653, returned to Japan in 661, and founded the Hossō (Consciousness Only) school of Buddhism.
 - [41.](#) A famous Chinese monk and translator of Buddhist scriptures, Tripitaka Master Xuanzang (602–664) traveled to Central Asia and India and brought back numerous images and texts. He is the author of *The Record of the Western Region*, an account of his seven-teen-year journey.
 - [42.](#) West is the direction in which the Gokuraku jōdo (Pure Land), the realm of Amida Buddha, is located.
 - [43.](#) Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645–654).
 - [44.](#) The quotation has not been located, but it represents typical Mahayana doctrine.
 - [45.](#) Thus Come One is Śākyamuni Buddha.
 - [46.](#) Days for fasting are set aside in Buddhism for the laity to eat vegetarian fare and observe various practices.
 - [47.](#) Empress Jitō (r. 686–697) was Emperor Tenmu’s consort.
 - [48.](#) The clouds and rain fell in response to the ancient Chinese sage-rulers Yao and Shun.
 - [49.](#) Some kind of stunt? The meaning escapes me.
 - [50.](#) Nirvana Sutra, Northern Version, vol. 12. See *Taishō* 12:524b.
 - [51.](#) That is, he had gained enlightenment, but the expression is Daoist in nature, as is much of this account.
 - [52.](#) Emperor Monmu (r. 697–700).
 - [53.](#) Nirvana Sutra, vol. 35. See *Taishō* 12:573c.
 - [54.](#) The *Daijōbu-ron* is one of the texts in the compilation *Shokyō yōshū*. See *Taishō* 59:53c.
 - [55.](#) Emperor Monmu (r. 697–707).
 - [56.](#) One *umaya* (stage) was about twelve miles.
 - [57.](#) The Kannon Sutra, which is chapter 25 of the Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra, describes the salvational power of Bodhisattva Kannon, or Kanzeon. It is often treated as a separate sutra.
 - [58.](#) That is, in the reign of his daughter and successor, Empress Kōken (r. 749–758).
 - [59.](#) The six paths are the realms of Hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras* (demons), human beings, and heavenly beings. The four kinds of blessings are those bestowed by parents, lords, all sentient beings, and the Three Treasures of Buddhism.
 - [60.](#) The practice of buying captured fish, birds, or other animals and setting them free was highly recommended in Buddhism.