



ON DEPENDING ON ONE'S EXALTED VIRTUE, COMMITTING THE OFFENSE OF
HITTING A HUMBLE NOVICE, AND RECEIVING THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF A
VIOLENT DEATH (2:1)

Retired Emperor Shōbō-ōjin-shōmu [Shōmu, r. 724–749], who resided at the Nara Palace and reigned over the Eight Great Islands, in the first year of the Tenpyō era, the year *tsuchinoto-mi* [729], in the spring, on the eighth day of the Second Month, held a great Dharma meeting at Gangō-ji in the eastern sector of the capital and paid honor to the Three Treasures of Buddhism. Prince Nagaya,¹ Chancellor of the Senior Second Rank, was directed by edict to take charge of serving food to the monks. At that time, there was a novice who brazenly went to the place where the food was being served and held up his bowl for some. The prince, observing this, to punish him struck the novice on the head with his ivory writing tablet, hard enough to draw blood. The novice, wiping the blood from his head and wailing pitifully, immediately disappeared. No one knew where he had gone, but both the clergy and the lay members of the gathering whispered in secret, “An ill omen—not good!”

Two days later, a man, acting out of envy, went to the emperor with false accusations, saying, “Prince Nagaya is plotting to overthrow the state and usurp the throne!” The emperor, angered, called up the troops and sent them against the prince.

The prince thought to himself, “I am falsely charged and about to be taken into custody. That means I will surely be put to death. Rather than being killed by another, better to kill myself!” After administering poison to his children and grandchildren and seeing them strangled, he took poison himself. The emperor ordered their bodies to be thrown out of the capital, burned to ashes, and cast into the river that flows to the sea. Only the prince’s bones were exiled to Toba province, where many people were sent to die. The people, fearful, petitioned the officials, saying, “All of us in this province will die because of the prince’s angry spirit!” Hearing this, the emperor, so that the bones might be nearer the capital, moved them to an island off the coast of Hajikami in the Ama district of Kii province.

Ah, how pitiful! However widely known in the capital and beyond for his wealth and good fortune, when misfortune fell on him, he had nowhere to

turn, but perished in a day. Truly we learn that taking pride in his high virtue, he struck a novice in punishment, and because of this, defenders of the Law frowned on him and the good deities hated him. We should respect those who wear the surplice, humble though they may seem, for there are sages hidden among them. The Kyōman-gyō says: “Even among the high ranking, those who accidentally stepped on Śākyamuni’s head with their boots on were guilty of offense.”² Needless to say, then, that those who strike one who wears the surplice are guilty of error!



ON OBSERVING LICENTIOUS BIRDS, RENOUNCING THE WORLD, AND PRACTICING GOOD (2:2)

Meditation Master Shingon was originally Chinu no agatanushi Yamatomaro, governor of the Izumi district of Izumi province in the reign of Emperor Shōmu. By the gate of his house, there stood a big tree in which crows roosted, gave birth to their young, and raised them. Once, the male bird flew off to search for food, leaving his mate to shelter the chicks. While he was away looking for food, other crows constantly came around, seeking companionship. The wife took up with one of them, soaring high into the sky with her new friend, heading north, and flying off without a thought for her chicks. In time, the male bird returned, bringing food, but found that his mate had vanished. Taking pity on his chicks, he looked after them tenderly, not going off to look for food, and so several days passed.

The governor, noticing this, had a man climb the tree and look into the nest. He found the crow still harboring the chicks, but the father and all the chicks were dead. The governor, seeing this, was moved to great pity. With the example of the female crow’s infidelity before him, he renounced the world, left his wife and family, gave up his official position, and became a follower of the Most Venerable Gyōgi,³ practicing good and seeking the Way. His religious name was Shingon. He always declared, “If I die together with the Most Venerable, I am sure to be reborn in the Western Paradise!”

The wife of Shingon was also of the Chinu no agatanushi family. After her husband left her, she remained faithful to him, showing no bitterness but remaining warm and loving. When her son contracted a disease and was on the point of death, he said to her, “If I drink my mother’s milk, it will prolong my life!” She accordingly gave her breast to him to suckle. As he

suckled it, he lamented, saying, “Alas, I must abandon the sweet milk of my mother to die!” When he died, she too, sorrowing for her son, renounced the world as her husband had done, devoting herself to learning and practicing the good Way.

Meditation Master Shingon, however, did not have good fortune but died before the Most Venerable Gyōgi. Lamenting, the master composed the following poem:

Are you a crow,
a big liar,
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When we make a fire, we must first have fatty pine wood. When it rains, the slate has been moistened beforehand.⁴ Seeing the licentious behavior of the crows, the governor’s heart was moved. To show us the right path, the pain of acting otherwise, and then point the Way: Is this not how it is done? The varied creatures in the world of desire have their base ways.⁵ Those who hate them turn away from it; those who are foolish follow along.

In appraisal we say: How right it was of the governor, observing the wickedness of the crows, to hate the ways of the world, to turn from the vain flowers of transience and seek for eternal purity. He worked to do good, praying for the righteous commands, his heart yearning for comfort, hoping for release. Such are those who seek a land far different from the one we know.



ON THE EVIL DEATH VISITED IMMEDIATELY ON AN EVIL AND PERVERSE SON WHO, OUT OF LOVE FOR HIS WIFE, PLOTTED TO KILL HIS MOTHER (2:3)

Kishi no Homaro was from the village of Kamo in the Tama district of Musashi province. Homaro’s mother was Kusakabe no Matoji. In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, Homaro was appointed by Ōtomo (exact name unknown)⁶ to serve for three years as a frontier guard in Tsukushi.⁷ His mother accompanied him to see to his needs, while his wife remained in Musashi to look after the house.

At that time Homaro, separated from his wife, was filled with

unbearable longing for her, and hit on a perverse scheme, thinking, “If I murder my mother, I will be obliged to tend to her funeral and will be excused from duty and can go home. Then I can be with my wife!”

His mother by nature thought only of doing good deeds, and so the son said to her, “In the hills east of here, there is to be a meeting devoted to seven days of lectures on the Lotus Sutra. Why don’t you go listen to them?” Deceived by these words, the mother set her mind on listening to the sutra. Having bathed in hot water and purified herself, she set off for the mountains in company with her son.

The son, glaring at his mother with ox-like eyes, said to her, “Kneel down on the ground!” Gazing at her son’s face, the mother said, “Why do you speak to me like that? Has some demon taken possession of you?” But the son unsheathed a long sword and prepared to cut off his mother’s head.

Kneeling before her son, the mother said, “We plant trees in hopes of gathering the fruit and resting in the shade they give. And we raise children in hopes of gaining their help and in time being taken care of by them. But now the tree I have counted on lets the rain leak through! Why has my child turned from his usual thoughts and now wants to do me harm?”

The son, however, paid no heed to her. Then the mother, giving up all hope, took off the clothes she was wearing and put them in three piles. Kneeling before her son, she made this dying request: “Wrap these up as a memento of me. One pile of clothes goes to you, my eldest son. One pile please give to my second son, and one pile to my youngest son.”

But when the perverse son stepped forward, preparing to cut off his mother’s head, the ground opened and he fell into it. The mother leaped up, ran forward, and seized hold of her son’s hair as he fell. Looking up at the heavens, she cried out this plea: “My son is a victim of possession. He does not really mean to do this! Please pardon his offense!” But though she clung to the hair, struggling to save him, in the end he sank into the ground.

The loving mother returned home with the son’s hair. Holding a Buddhist service in his memory, she put the hair in a box and placed it before an image of the Buddha, reverently requesting monks to recite scriptures before it.

Because the mother felt profound compassion, she was moved to take pity on her evil and perverse son and to do good on his behalf. Truly one should understand that sins of unfilial conduct meet with immediate requital, and that evil and perverse offenses never go unpunished.



ON A CONTEST BETWEEN TWO WOMEN OF EXTRAORDINARY STRENGTH (2:4)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, there was a woman of extraordinary strength at Ogawa Market in the Katakata district of Mino province. She was a big woman named Mino Kitsune (the fourth generation of the one whose mother was long ago named Kitsune of Mino province). Her strength equaled that of a hundred men. She lived in the marketplace of Ogawa and took great pride in her strength, making a living by browbeating the merchants who came and went there and seizing their goods.

At that time, there was another woman of great strength in the village of Katawa in the Ayuchi district of Owari province. She was small in size (a granddaughter of the Venerable Dōjō, who once lived at Gangō-ji).

Hearing about how Mino Kitsune forced the people of Ogawa to give up their goods, she thought that she would challenge her. She loaded up fifty *koku* of clams on a boat and anchored it near the market. In addition, she brought along on the boat twenty pliant whips made of vervain fiber.

Kitsune came to the boat, seized all the clams, and began to sell them. “Where did you come from?” she asked the owner of the clams.

The owner did not answer. She asked once more, but still no answer. When she continued and was on her fourth inquiry, the woman replied, “I don’t know where I came from.”

Kitsune, finding this insulting, got up to hit her. The other woman thereupon seized her with both hands and gave her a lash with one of her whips. The whip cut into the flesh. Then she gave her a lash with another whip, which also cut into the flesh. Before long, she had used ten whips, all of which cut into the flesh.

“That’s enough!” said Kitsune. “I was wrong; I’ve learned my lesson.” Thus she admitted that the power of the other woman was greater than her own. The owner of the clams said, “From now on, you can’t go on living in this market. If you try it, I’ll end up beating you to death!” Kitsune gave in, no longer living in the market and no longer seizing people’s goods. All the people in the market delighted in the restoration of safety.

There is always someone who is strong enough to maintain order and keep the peace. Truly we know that it is because of good causes in the life of their ancestors that they have such strength.



PREFACE

If we survey the history of the early period, we see that in the time before Emperor Senka, people followed non-Buddhist methods in inquiring about the gods. But from the reign of Emperor Kinmei on, people honored the Three Treasures of Buddhism and believed in the correct doctrine. To be sure, there were some ministers to the throne who burned temples and cast away Buddhist images.¹ But there were other ministers to the throne who built temples and worked to spread the Buddhist teachings. Among the latter was Retired Emperor Shōhō-ōjin-shōmu, who built a colossal statue of the Buddha and established the long-lasting propagation of the Law. He shaved his head, put on the surplice, received the precepts, and dedicated himself to the good, governing the people according to what is right. His mercy extended to animals and plants, and his virtue excelled that of all past ages. He attained the One, governing accordingly; he communicated with the Three,² bringing rest to the spirits. Through his fortune and virtue, even insects flying in the sky gathered sacred grass to thatch the temple roofs, while ants crawling over the Earth brought grains of gold to build a pagoda. Banners of the Law were raised on high, fluttering in eight directions. The bark of enlightenment floated lightly on the water, its sails reaching to the ninth level of the sky. Flowers of good fortune opened in rivalry, filling cities and towns. Good and evil appeared as immediate karmic retribution, signaling fortune or misfortune. Therefore, he was called Retired Emperor Shōhō-ōjin-shōmu, which means “Superb-treasure-corresponding-sacred-might.” But the records of good and evil and of their results are very many for the reign of this emperor, which are due to his holy virtue. They are, in fact, so numerous that to record them ...³ I have put down here only those that I have heard of. Were we to examine the record thoroughly, the mind would ...

... provide us with a suit of iron, while those who love the good are clothed in pearl-studded robes of gold. For example, although you push them away, they come all the closer; although you try to drag them toward you, they move farther off. Grasp, and they retreat; cease, and they crowd around. Some there are who eat the seeds of millet or cast away treasures like Zhu Ming; who wash their ears like Xu You and lead their oxen like Chao Fu.⁴ Are they any different? Some there are who, when they die,

return, like cartwheels revolving, to the threefold world; who, once born, pass through the six realms like a floating water plant.⁵ Then, having died, they are born again, and they suffer all the ten thousand pains of life. Weighed down, as with a yoke, by evil causes, they meet with suffering; helped on by the power of good deeds, they are led into favorable circumstances. With nurture and love, they lie down at the foot of tigers; due to loving kindness, they soar on high with the birds. Meng Chang's seven good things, Duke Gong of Lu's three transformations—these are all within their power.⁶

But I, Kyōkai, was not blessed with a keen nature, and my mouth is not skilled in speaking. My spirit is dull, like a blade made of lead; I string out my lines of characters, but alas, they do not flower. I'm one with the man who notched the boat;⁷ I write, yet cannot get my phrases into order. But such is my desire to do good that I cannot cease from wasting good paper. Reflecting on my errors, I can only feel ashamed, my face red, my ears burning. Those of you who peruse the results, please forget how they may offend Heaven and insult the reader, and bear with me. Make a master of your mind, never the mind your master.

May the virtue in my work on the right fly on the wings of good fortune, ascending to the heights, and on the left burn with the torch of wisdom, climbing the peak of the Buddha nature, dispensing alms to all living beings, until we all attain the Buddha Way.⁸

1. This refers to those at court who opposed the introduction of Buddhism to Japan.

2. The One is enlightenment; the Three are Heaven, Earth, and humankind.

3. The ellipses represent words that were lost or are unintelligible in the text.

4. Zhu Ming was famous for giving away his wealth to his younger brothers; Xu You, a sage of antiquity, for washing out his ears to cleanse them from the stain when he was offered the rulership of the empire; and Chao Fu, for leading his oxen.

5. The threefold world is the world of desire, the world of form, and the formless world. The six realms are those of Hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras* (demons), human beings, and heavenly beings.

6. Meng Chang's seven good things have not been identified. Duke Gong of Lu's three transformations are conditions brought about by his good governance: insects do not profane the Earth, his influence reaches to the birds and beasts, and perverse children develop kindly hearts.

7. When someone accidentally dropped a sword over the side of a moving boat, a man put a notch in the gunwale of the boat where it fell so it could be found.

8. The last paragraph is in the form of a Buddhist prayer.



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ON WORSHIPPING CHINESE GODS, KILLING OXEN AS A SACRIFICE, BUT
ALSO DOING GOOD BY SETTING FREE LIVING CREATURES, HE RECEIVED
BOTH GOOD AND EVIL REWARDS (2:5)

Once in the province of Settsu, the district of Himugashinari, in the village of Nadekubo, there lived a master of a rich household. His name is not known, but the time was the reign of Emperor Shōmu. This rich man worshipped Chinese gods and used to pray to them and make offerings. Each year he would slaughter an ox as a sacrifice.⁸

At the end of seven years, having killed seven oxen, he was suddenly seized with a severe illness that lasted for seven years. The doctors tried various remedies, but to no effect. The rich man summoned diviners and magicians to perform charms and exorcise the evil, but his illness only grew worse. Thinking that his malady had perhaps come about because he had taken life, the man—from the time he first took to his bed—observed without fail the six fast days of each month and set free all his living creatures. When he learned that anyone else was taking the lives of living beings, he immediately ransomed them at whatever price was asked, and he sent men here and there to buy all living creatures in captivity and free them. At the end of seven years, he knew that his time had come and he summoned his wife and children and said to them, “After I die, set my body aside for nineteen days before you cremate it.”

Accordingly, his wife and children laid his body away and waited for the end of the nineteen days. But when only nine days had passed, the man returned to life and told them this story:

“There appeared to me seven beings who had the heads of oxen and the bodies of men. They tied ropes to my hair and dragged me along with them. As we went, I saw a palace with tall towers. ‘Whose palace is that?’ I asked, but the creatures only looked at me with eyes full of hatred and pushed me on, saying, ‘Hurry up!’

“When we had entered the gates of the palace, they announced, ‘We have summoned him!’ and I realized that this was the palace of Yama, the king of Hell. The king asked the demons, ‘Is this your enemy, the man who killed you?’ ‘This is he!’ they answered and brought out a carving board and small knives. ‘Give your judgment quickly, we pray, for we wish to carve him up and eat him the way he did us!’ they said.

“But just then, a host of over a thousand or ten thousand persons appeared and untied the ropes that bound me, saying, ‘This man is without blame! He did injury only because of the gods he worshipped.’ Then they

placed me in the middle, and every day the seven demons and the multitude of men argued and contested back and forth like fire against water. King Yama tried to arrive at a decision but could not determine which side was in the right. The demons pressed their case with fury, saying, ‘It is perfectly clear! This man made himself our master, cut off our four legs, and prayed in the hall of worship for his own profit. He chopped us to bits and ate us up. We ask only that now we be allowed to butcher and eat him in the same way!’ But then the great multitude would plead with the king, saying, ‘We know perfectly well that this man is without blame. The blame rests with the gods and spirits he worshipped!’

“The king pondered and decided that the evidence rested with the majority, and on the evening of the eighth day he issued his royal command: ‘Tomorrow come again before me!’ On the ninth day, in obedience to his order, we all again came together and King Yama announced his decision: ‘Justice has been made clear. We shall abide by the evidence of the majority.’

“When the seven oxen heard this, they began to lick their lips and drool, making motions of chopping something and devouring it. With wrathful looks, they raised their knives and cried, ‘Will you give us no recompense for our wrong? We will not forget it, and someday we will have our revenge!’

“Then the great host of people surrounded and protected me and led me out of the palace. They placed me in a carriage and lifted it on their shoulders, raising banners and bearing me onward; they saw me off with shouts of praise and knelt in reverent farewell. All the members of this multitude were alike in appearance, and I said to them, ‘Honored sirs, who are you?’ They answered, ‘We are the living creatures that you ransomed and set free. We have not forgotten your goodness, and now we have come to repay you.’”

After the rich man had returned from the halls of King Yama, he made a vow that he would no longer in any way serve the strange gods and spirits but would put all his faith in the Three Treasures of Buddhism. He tied a holy pennant to his rooftop and converted his house into a temple, placing an image of the Buddha within, practicing the Law, and setting free living creatures. From this time on, his house was known as the Nade Hall. His illness never returned, and he lived to be full of years, dying at the age of over ninety.

The Binaya-kyō says: “Because Karudai was once a priest and sacrificed a sheep, he was killed, even though he had attained arhatship, the revenge being carried out by a Brahmin wife.”⁹ And the Saishōō-kyō gives

the following passage: “Rusui Elder set free ten thousand fish, which were reborn in Heaven and repaid his kindness by presenting him with forty thousand gems.”¹⁰ This is what these sutras mean.



ON COPYING THE LOTUS SUTRA WITH UTMOST DEVOTION AND WITNESSING
AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT (2:6)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, there was a man in the Sagara district of Yamashiro province who made a vow. His family and personal names are not known. He copied the Lotus Sutra in order to repay the four kinds of blessings¹¹ and sent messengers to the four quarters in search of white sandalwood and black sandalwood to make a box for the scrolls of the scripture. Eventually, they found some in the capital of Nara, which he purchased for the price of one hundred *kan*.¹² Then he asked a skilled craftsman to measure the new scrolls and fashion a container. But when it was done, he found that the scrolls were too long, the box was too short, and they would not fit together.

He was bitterly disappointed, for he did not see how he could find such materials again. He made a vow, held a service as directed by the scriptures, invited monks to confess offenses for three times seven days, and, wailing, pleaded, “Please let me find such wood again!” After fourteen days had passed, he tried fitting the scrolls into place. The box seemed to have grown a little bigger, but the scrolls still would not fit in it.

He redoubled his efforts to discipline himself and repent his misdeeds, and at the conclusion of the twenty-one days, he tried again. This time, they fit. Wondering greatly at this, he exclaimed, “Have the scrolls gotten shorter, or has the box gotten bigger?” But when he compared the new scrolls with the old ones, he found that they were no different in length.

Truly we know that this was due to the miraculous power of the Mahayana sutra and a test of the profound faith of the one who made the vow. There can be no doubt about it.



ON A WISE MAN WHO, OUT OF ENVY, ABUSED AN INCARNATED SAGE
AND, AS AN IMMEDIATE PENALTY, VISITED THE PALACE OF KING YAMA AND

UNDERWENT SUFFERING IN HELL (2:7)

Shaku Chikō was a monk of Sugita Temple in the Asukabe district of Kawachi province, his native land. His secular name was Sugita no muraji, later changed to Kami no suguri. (His mother was of the Asukabe-no-miyatsuko family.) He was innately intelligent and ranked first in knowledge. He wrote commentaries on the Urabon-kyō, Daihannyakyō,¹³ Hannyā Shin-gyō [Heart Sutra], and other works, and lectured on Buddhist teachings to many students.

There was at this time a monk named Gyōgi. His secular name was Koshi no Fubito, and he came from the Kubiki district of Echigo province. His mother was of the Hachida no kusushi of the Ōtori district of Izumi province. He gave up lay life, freed himself from desire, and spread the Law, converting the deluded masses. He was highly intelligent and seemed to be guided by inborn knowledge. Although outwardly he appeared as a monk, on the inside were the workings of a bodhisattva.

Emperor Shōmu was so impressed with his keen virtue that he had great respect for and confidence in Gyōgi, and all the people of the time honored him by calling him a bodhisattva.

In the sixteenth year of the Tenpyō era, the year *kinoe-saru* [744], in the winter, the Eleventh Month, Gyōgi was made great chief executive.¹⁴

Dharma Master Chikō, envious at heart, spoke ill of him, saying, “I am the wise one; Gyōgi is a mere novice! Why does the emperor ignore my wisdom and put faith only in this novice?” At that time, he retired to Sugitadera, where he resided, and immediately developed a digestive ailment. After a month, he felt that his end was near and, calling together his disciples, he warned them, “If I die, do not be in a hurry to cremate my body. Wait for a period of nine or ten days. If a student comes asking about me, say that I am away on business. Tell him to wait and serve him meals, but do not let him know that I have departed!”

His disciples did as instructed and closed the door to his death chamber, letting no one know what had happened. Grieving in secret, they guarded the door day and night, waiting for the appointed day to arrive. If students came asking after him, they replied as they had been told, asked them to wait, and provided them with meals.

Meanwhile, two messengers from King Yama came to Master Chikō to escort him, and they set out for the west. Along the way, they saw a golden palace. “Whose palace is that?” asked Chikō. “You are a famous wise man of the country of Ashihara,” they said.¹⁵ “How is it that you do not know? You should know that that is where Bodhisattva Gyōgi will reside when he

is born here!”

On both sides of the gate were two divine men, their bodies clad in armor, and on their foreheads they wore red bands. The messengers knelt and said to them, “We have brought him.” They said to Chikō, “Are you the Venerable Chikō from the land of Mizuho in Toyoashihara?”

Chikō replied, “Yes, I am.” Then they pointed north and said, “Go along this road!” Accompanied by the messengers, he went along the road. Although he could see no light of a fire, there was intense heat beating down on his body and face. But in spite of the great heat that plagued him, he felt a desire in his heart to go forward. “Where does this heat come from?” he asked. “This is the great heat of Hell that is intended to burn you up!” was the reply.

As they went forward, they came to an extremely hot pillar of iron.

“Embrace it!” commanded the messengers. When Chikō embraced the pillar, all his flesh melted away, and he was left with nothing but bare bones. After three days, the messengers swept the pillar with a worn broom, saying, “Let him live, let him live!” With this, his body was restored to its original form.

Again they started northward, and they came to a copper pillar that was much hotter than the one before. But once again, he seemed drawn to it by evil and felt a desire to embrace it. “Embrace it!” commanded the messengers, and he did so, and all his flesh was melted away. After three days, when the messengers brushed the pillar and said, “Let him live, let him live!” his body was restored as before.

Once again, they started northward. The scorching heat was so intense that birds fell out of the sky. As he faced the burning heat, he asked, “What place is this?” “This is the Avichi Hell, which is here to burn you up!” was the reply.¹⁶ And as he went forward, he was seized and dragged into the flames and burned up. Only when he heard temple bells ringing did he feel any cooling, and he found a little rest. After three days, when he heard the messengers knocking at the gates of Hell and saying, “Let him live, let him live!” he came alive again.

Then they led him back to the gate of the palace, where, as before, they said, “We have arrived.” The two men at the gate said, “The reason that you were called here was that you spoke ill of Bodhisattva Gyōgi of the country of Ashihara. You have been summoned in order that you may atone for your guilt. When his time in the land of Ashihara is finished, the bodhisattva will be born in this palace. Now we are waiting for him, for the time has almost come. You must not eat any of the food cooked in the land of the dead. Go back now as quickly as you can!” He went back east in the company of the

messengers, and when he returned, he realized that it had been exactly nine days.

When he awoke, he called to his disciples. Hearing his voice, they all gathered around, weeping for joy. But Chikō was deeply grieved, and he told them exactly what had taken place in the land of Yama. With a look of profound concern, he said, “I must confess that I spoke slanderously of a man of great virtue!”

Bodhisattva Gyōgi, in the meantime, had been building bridges, digging canals, and constructing wharfs for ships in Naniwa. After Chikō had recovered a little, he went to Gyōgi’s place. When the bodhisattva saw him, he used his divine power of intellect to discover what Chikō had in mind. Smiling and showing his affection, he said, “I’ve wondered why our meetings are so infrequent.” Chikō, for his part, frankly confessed his wrongdoing and regret, saying, “Out of a jealous heart, I have slandered you, saying such things as, ‘I am an old monk of great virtue, whereas Gyōgi is of poor judgment and does not observe the precepts. Why, then, does the emperor praise only Gyōgi and cast me aside?’ For these sins of my mouth, I was summoned before King Yama and made to embrace the iron and copper pillars. After nine days, he said that I had atoned for my offenses of slander. But I am afraid that other sins of mine will affect my future life, and so I am making this plea. Please help me to become free of sin!”

At this, the Most Venerable Gyōgi looked compassionate, but said nothing. Chikō continued speaking, saying, “I saw the place where you will be reborn. It is in a palace made of gold!” Gyōgi, hearing this, said, “How delightful! What an honor!”

Truly we know that the mouth is a gate to invite disaster to harm the body, and the tongue a sharp ax to chop up the good. Thus the Fushigikō bosatsu-kyō says: “Because he spoke of the faults of Bodhisattva Kenten, Bodhisattva Nyūzai was destined for ninety-one *kalpas* to be constantly born in the womb of loose women, and having been born there, to be cast aside and eaten by foxes and wolves.”¹⁷ This is what the passage means.

From this time on, the Venerable Chikō put his faith in Bodhisattva Gyōgi, realizing clearly that he was a sage. As for Gyōgi, he sensed that his time had run out, and in the twenty-first year of the Tenpyō era, the year *tsuchinoto-ushi* [749], in the spring, on the second day of the Second Month, at around six in the evening, he left his clerical form on Mount Ikoma, and his compassionate spirit moved on to the golden palace.¹⁸ As for the Venerable Chikō, he spread the Dharma, passed on the teachings, converted the ignorant, and taught what was right. In the time of Emperor Shirakabe [Kōnin, r. 770–781], this font of wisdom left his shell in the land

of Japan, and his wondrous spirit moved on to a world unknown.



ON SAVING THE LIVES OF A CRAB AND A FROG, SETTING THEM FREE, AND
RECEIVING AN IMMEDIATE REWARD (2:8)

Okisome no omi Tahime was the daughter of a nun named Hōni, the presiding officer of the nunnery of Tomi in the capital of Nara. She was utterly devoted to the Way and was careful to preserve her chastity, constantly collecting herbs and every day without fail presenting them to the Most Venerable Gyōgi as an offering.

Once, going into the mountains to collect herbs, she saw a large snake about to swallow a large frog. “Please give me that frog!” she pleaded, but the snake went on swallowing the frog. Once more she pleaded, “I will become your wife, so please give me that frog!” The snake, listening this time, raised up its head, peered into her face, and spat out the frog. She said to the snake, “Come to me seven days from now!”

When the appointed day came, she shut up the house, plugging up all the entrances, and waited inside as securely as possible. The snake came as expected and pounded on the wall. The next day, the woman, terrified, went to the mountain temple of Ikoma, where her master, the Most Venerable Gyōgi, resided, and reported what had happened. “You cannot go back on your word,” he said. “Just make certain that you are faithful to the precepts!” She affirmed her fidelity to the Three Treasures and the five precepts, and then went home.¹⁹

On the way, she met an old man she had never seen before who was holding a large crab. She said to him, “Who are you, old man? Please give me that crab you are holding.” He replied, “I am from the Uhara district of Settsu province, and my name is Tsukumono Kanimaro. I am seventy-eight years old and have no sons to look after me. In Naniwa, I happened to get this crab. But I have promised it to someone, and so I cannot give it to you.”

The woman took off her robe and offered it to him, but he would not take it. Then she took off her skirt and offered it, too. The old man took it, exchanging it for the crab.

She brought the crab to the Most Venerable Gyōgi, requesting that he set it free. “How noble, how good of you!” he exclaimed in admiration.

On the evening of the eighth day, the snake came again, climbing onto the roof, tearing a hole in the thatch, and coming in. The woman, frightened,

heard something flapping around in front of her bed. When she looked the following day, she saw a big crab and a big snake that had been chopped into bits.

Thus we know that the crab that had been set free repaid the debt it owed. And we also know that this was due to the power of preserving the precepts. Although she tried to discover just what had happened by asking the old man, she could never find out who he was. Surely he was an incarnation of a saintly being. This was a miraculous event!



ON BUILDING A TEMPLE AND THEN USING ITS GOODS FOR PRIVATE PURPOSES, HE WAS REBORN AS A LABORING OX (2:9)

Ōtomo no Akamaro was the governor of the Tama district of Musashi province. On the nineteenth day of the Twelfth Month in the first year of the Tenpyō shōbō era, the year *tsuchinoto-ushi* [749], he died and was reborn on the seventh day of the Fifth Month, in the summer of the second year, the year *kanoe-toru* [750], as a calf with black spots. It had an inscription on its back that said, “Akamaro selfishly used the goods of the temple he himself founded and died without paying for them. In payment for these goods he has been reborn as an ox.”

Both his family and his associates felt extremely sorry about this and, reflecting on it in their hearts, declared, “One should beware of doing wrong! How can this sin be atoned for? It is bound to call forth a penalty hereafter!” Therefore, on the first day of the Sixth Month of that year, they announced what had happened to all the people, so that even those who were without fault might see it, have a change of heart, and do good.

Even if you suffer from want and are pressed by need, though you may be forced to drink molten copper, never touch the temple’s goods! There is the old folks’ saying, “Sweet dew now will bring an iron ball in the future!” This is what it means.

Truly we know that the law of causality never fails to function. Should we not be fearful? Therefore, the Daijuk-kyō says: “Those who steal the goods of the monks commit a sin greater than the five offenses.”²⁰



ON CONSTANTLY STEALING BIRDS’ EGGS, AND BOILING AND EATING THEM,

HE SUFFERED AN IMMEDIATE AND EVIL PENALTY (2:10)

In the village of Shimoanashi in the Izumi district of Izumi province, there lived a young man whose name is unknown. He was inherently evil and did not believe in the law of karmic causation, but constantly looked for birds' eggs to boil and eat.

In the sixth year of the Tenpyō shōbō era, in the spring, the Third Month of the year *kinoe-uma* [754], a strange soldier came to him and announced, "I was sent by a provincial official!" He had a formal document four feet long fastened at his waist. They went off together, and when they came to the village of Yamatae in Hitada district, they made their way into a field several acres in size that was filled with wheat more than two feet tall. When the young man looked, he saw that it was all in flames, with no place to put his feet. He began racing around the field, crying out, "I'm burning, I'm burning!"

At that time, one of the villagers had gone up into the hills to collect firewood. Seeing the young man racing around the field and crying, he came down from the hills and tried to drag him out of the fire, but the young man would not move. He struggled with him until he had dragged him out beyond the hedge that bound the field, where the young man fell over on the ground.

He lay on the ground, moaning but saying nothing. Then, after a while, he recovered his senses and began crying, "Oh—my feet!" The villagers asked him why he said that. He replied, "There was a soldier who summoned me and brought me to this fire and forced me to walk in it. My feet felt as though they were being boiled! Wherever I looked, I was surrounded by hills of fire. There was no way out of the flames, and so I was racing around!" When the villagers heard this, they pulled open the garment the young man was wearing and looked at his legs. All the flesh had been burned away, and only the bones were left. The next day he died.

Truly we know that Hell exists in our present world and that we should believe in the law of karmic retribution. We should not be like crows that take loving care of their own chicks but eat those of others. Without compassion, a person is no better than a crow! The Nirvana Sutra says: "Though men and beasts differ in degree of respectability, they are alike in prizing life and regarding death gravely."²¹ And the Zen'aku-inga-kyō [Sutra on the Effects of Good and Evil] says: "He who in his present state cooks the little chicks, in death will fall into the Hell of the River of Ashes!"²² This is what it means!



ON CURSING A MONK AND COMMITTING A LUSTFUL ACT, HE SUFFERED AN
EVIL RESULT AND DIED (2:11)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, the nuns of Sayadera in Kuwahara in the Ito district of Kii province vowed to hold a service and invited a monk of Yakushi-ji on the West Side of Nara, Dharma Master Daie (popularly known as Dharma Master Yosami because his secular name was Yosami no muraji), to perform the rite of repentance before the statue of the Eleven-Headed Kannon.

At that time in the village, there lived a very wicked man. His surname was Fumi no imiki (his popular name was Ueda no Samurō). He was evil by nature and did not believe in the Three Treasures of Buddhism. The wife of this wicked man was a daughter of Kaminotsuke no kimi Ōhashi. She observed the eight precepts for a day and a night,²³ and went to the temple to participate in the rite of repentance along with the others of the congregation.

When her husband came home, he could not find her. He asked one of the servants where she had gone. The man replied, “She has gone to the rite of repentance.” Hearing this, he became very angry and went to the temple to fetch her. The officiating monk saw him and tried to explain, giving reasons of doctrine, but he refused to listen. “It’s no use explaining!” he said. “You’re trying to seduce my wife! You should be knocked in the head, you worthless monk!” His language was too vile to describe in detail. He called his wife to go home, and when they got there, he violated her. But an ant bit his penis, and he died in great pain.

No penalty was applied, but through his own evil action in using abusive language and daring to misuse his wife, he brought on an immediate punishment.

Although you may have a hundred tongues in your mouth and speak ten thousand words, never abuse a true monk! For you will meet with swift disaster.



ON SAVING THE LIVES OF SOME CRABS AND A FROG AND FREEING THEM,
SHE GAINED AN IMMEDIATE REWARD FROM THE CRABS (2:12)

In Yamashiro province, in a community in the district of Kii, there was a

young woman whose family and personal names are unknown. Tenderhearted by nature, she believed firmly in the law of karma, observed the five precepts and the ten good deeds,²⁴ and never deprived any living thing of life. In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, some of the cowherds in the village where she lived caught eight crabs in a mountain stream and were about to roast and eat them. The young woman, seeing this, pleaded with the herd boys, saying, "Please be so kind as to give me the crabs!" But the boys refused to heed her, replying, "We're going to roast them and eat them!" Earnestly she begged and entreated them, taking off her cloak and offering it in payment, and finally the boys handed over the crabs to her. She then requested Meditation Master Gi to perform prayers asking for merit and set the crabs free.

Sometime later, the young woman went into the mountains and came upon a huge snake about to swallow a large frog. She said to the snake imploringly, "If you will only give me that frog, I will present you with numerous offerings of woven goods!" When the snake ignored her and refused to listen, she promised to gather together even more woven goods and pray to him, saying, "I will worship you like a god if you will heed my pleas and release the frog!" The snake paid no attention, however, and went on swallowing the frog. Then she said to the snake, "If you will give me the frog, I will agree to be your wife, so please let it go!" With this, the snake at last took notice of her, lifting up its head, stretching out its neck, and peering into the young woman's face. Then it spat out the frog and let it go. The woman thereupon arranged an assignation with the snake, saying, "Come to me when seven days have passed."

Later, she told her father and mother all about the incident with the snake. They were distraught and said, "You are our only child! How could you have been so insane as to make impossible promises like that?"

At this time, the Eminent Monk Gyōgi was in residence at the Fukaosadera in the district of Kii, and so the young woman went and reported to him what had happened. When he had listened to her, he said, "Ah, what an astounding story! The only thing to do is to have faith in the Three Treasures!"

Having received his instructions, she returned home, and when the night for the assignation arrived, she shut the house up tight and prepared to defend herself, making various religious vows and placing her trust in the Three Treasures. The snake circled the house, slithering this way and that on its belly and pounding against the wall with its tail. Then it climbed onto the roof, chewed a hole through the thatch, and dropped down in front of the young woman. But before it could approach her, there was a sudden outburst

of noise, with sounds of scrambling, biting, and chewing. The next morning when the young woman looked to see what had happened, she found eight large crabs gathered there, and a snake that had been hacked and slashed into little pieces.

Thus we know that if even such lowly and unenlightened creatures know how to repay a debt of gratitude when they have incurred it, how can it be right for human beings to forget the debts they owe? From this time on in Yamashiro province, great honor was paid to the large crabs that live in the mountain streams, and it was considered an act of goodness to set them free.



ON MANIFESTING LOVE FOR THE IMAGE OF GODDESS KICHIJŌ, WHICH RESPONDED WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (2:13)

In a mountain temple of Chinu, in the Izumi district of Izumi province, there was a clay image of Kichijō-tennyo, Goddess Kichijō.²⁵ In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, a lay brother of Shinano province came to live at the temple. Attracted by the image, he fell in love with it and prayed to it passionately six times a day, saying, “Please send me a woman who is as beautiful as you!”

Once he dreamed that he had relations with the goddess. When he awoke the next morning, he found that the skirt of the image was stained with semen. Seeing this, he was deeply shocked and said, “I wanted a woman like you. But why did you go so far as to give your own self to me?”

He was shamed by what had happened and spoke of it to no one, but one of his disciples happened to learn of it. When the disciple was later scolded and expelled from the temple for disrespect to his teacher, he spoke ill of the teacher and revealed the whole affair. The villagers, hearing of it, went to the temple to find out if it was true, and they discovered the stain on the statue. The lay brother could not hide his guilt and confessed the whole affair.

Truly we know that deep faith never fails to gain a response. This was a miraculous event. As the Nirvana Sutra says, “A man of many desires feels moved even by a woman in a picture.”²⁶ This is what it means.



ON A DESTITUTE WOMAN WHO PRAYED TO THE IMAGE OF GODDESS
KICHIJŌ AND THE IMMEDIATE REWARD IT GAINED HER (2:14)

During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, twenty-three princes and princesses, being one in heart, got together to take turns giving banquets and providing entertainment. But there was one destitute princess among the group. After the other twenty-two had taken their turns in providing food and entertainment, she alone was left with no means of doing so. Filled with shame at her inability to respond, she went to the Hatoribe Hall on the East Side of Nara to pay her respects to the image of Goddess Kichijō, saying, “Because I planted the seeds of poverty in my previous existence, I am now rewarded with a poor fate. I went to the banquets and thoughtlessly ate the food provided by others, but I have no means to provide food in return. I beg you to please send me some wealth!”

At that time, her child came running in haste, saying to her mother, “Good luck! Someone has brought food from the old capital!” Hearing this, the woman ran out and found that it was her old wet nurse who had come. “I heard you had guests, and so I fixed some food and brought it,” she said. The food she brought was extravagant, replete with all kinds of delicious dishes. Nothing at all was lacking, nothing amiss, and it was all served in metal containers carried by thirty men.

All the guests came to the banquet and ate the food with delight. It was twice as delicious as the previous meals, and everyone praised it, saying, “She must be rich—if she were poor, how could she afford so much food? There’s even some left over—it’s much better than what we offered! And the songs and dances are as marvelous as the music of the gods!” Some doffed their robes in payment; others offered their skirts; while still others handed over coins, silks, cloth, cotton, or other goods. The princess, her joy unbounded, gave the robes and skirts to the wet nurse in thanks. But later, when she went to the temple to worship, she found the robes and skirts draped over the sacred image. Filled with doubt, she questioned her wet nurse. “I know nothing about this!” was her reply.

Truly we know that it was the bodhisattva who did this kind deed. So the princess acquired great wealth and was able to escape from the worries of poverty. This was a miraculous event.



ON COPYING THE LOTUS SUTRA AND MAKING AN OFFERING OF IT, HE

MADE CLEAR WHY HIS MOTHER HAD BEEN REBORN AS A COW (2:15)

Takahashi no muraji Azumahito was a man of the village of Hamishiro in the Yamada district of Iga province. He was very wealthy and had many possessions. For the sake of his deceased mother, he copied the Lotus Sutra, making a vow, saying, “I want to get a monk to comply with my vow and bring her salvation.” He arranged to hold a religious service the next day and gave orders to a servant, saying, “The first monk you meet will do to officiate at the service. If he looks as though he can conduct it, do not bother whether he is an expert or not.”

Following these instructions, the servant went out the gate and walked through the village of Mitani in the same district. There, he saw a beggar, whose head was shaved and who had a bag for a begging bowl at his elbow, drunk and sleeping in the road. His name is not known. For a joke, someone had shaved his head and placed a robe around him like a surplice, though, being drunk, he was unaware of this. Seeing him, the servant woke him, greeted him, and asked him to accompany him to his master’s house.

When they got there, the master greeted him cordially and kept him secluded for a day and a night, during which time he hastily made a clerical robe and gave it to him to put on. “Why are you doing that?” the man asked. The host replied, “I want you to expound the Lotus Sutra.” “I have no learning,” the man replied. “I simply recite the Hannya dharani and beg for food, and in that way have managed to stay alive!”²⁷ The host, however, repeated his request. The man thought that the best way to escape was to sneak away. But the host, aware of his intentions, had him watched.

That night, the man had a dream. A red cow came to him and spoke, saying, “I am the mother of the master of this house. Among his cattle there is a red cow, whose child I am. Once, in a previous existence, I stole goods from my son, and as a result I was reborn as a cow in payment for that deed. Tomorrow, you are going to preach on a Mahayana sutra for my benefit, and therefore with all respect and sincerity I tell you this. If you wish to know whether what I say is true, tomorrow, in the back of the hall where you preach your sermon, prepare a seat for me and I will sit in it.”

When the man who had been appointed to speak woke from his dream, he was greatly startled. The following morning, when he ascended the expounder’s seat, he said, “I have no knowledge of Buddhism. It is only at the earnest request of the master of this house that I have consented to take this seat. But I want to tell you a revelation that came to me in a dream.” He proceeded to relate in detail the dream he had had. The host then stood up, prepared a seat, and called to the cow, which came and lay down in the

seat. Bursting into tears, the host said, “This really is my mother! I did not know her in the past, but now I forgive her misdeed!” When the cow heard this, it sighed deeply, and after the service was over, it died. All the members of the congregation cried heartily, the hall echoing with the sound. Since that time, nothing that has happened is stranger than this! The son, for the sake of his mother, continued to do good deeds.

Truly we know that this wonderful event occurred because of the son’s deep faith, and that the beggar’s efficacious actions were the result of the holy spell that he recited.



ON FREEING CREATURES, BUT GIVING NO ALMS, AND THE GOOD AND BAD RESULTS THAT IMMEDIATELY APPEARED (2:16)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, in the village of Sakata in the Kagawa district of Sanuki province, there lived a rich man. Both he and his wife belonged to the Aya no kimi family. Next door to them lived an old man and an old woman who were widowed, having lost their children. They were very poor, possessing only clothes enough to cover their nakedness and no food to keep them alive. They came to the Aya no kimi household day after day without fail to beg for their evening meal. Once, the master of the Aya no kimi household tried getting up late at night and cooking rice for his household to eat, but still they came to beg, which all of his family thought very strange.

The mistress said to her husband, “This old widowed couple are too far along in age to work. Why don’t we show them compassion and take them in as members of our family?” The master replied, “Let’s share our food with them. From now on, we’ll divide our own rations and feed the old widower and widow. Among meritorious actions, to sacrifice your own needs to save the lives of others is the most laudable. Our deeds will call forth merit.” Following the master’s suggestion, the members of the household divided their rations and fed the old couple.

But there was one servant who, despite the master’s words, refused to go along, hating the old couple. And gradually, the other servants came to hate them, too, and begrudge them their share. The mistress, therefore, fed them secretly from her own portion. The troublesome servant, ever discontented, lied to the master, saying, “The mistress reduces our allowance and feeds the old couple. Therefore, we do not have enough to

eat and, hungry and exhausted, we cannot do our work and are forced to neglect it!” The mistress continued to feed them, however, in spite of his slanders.

One day, the master²⁸ and the disgruntled servant went out on the sea to fish with a man who had a creel and fishing tackle. On the fishing line, the master saw ten oysters and said, “I would like to set those oysters free.” The fisherman refused to listen. The master pleaded with him, citing the teachings of Buddhism, saying, “People in a position build temples. Why won’t you let them go?” The man finally agreed, saying, “Ten oysters—that will cost you five bushels of rice!” The master agreed to this and, inviting a monk to give a blessing, had the oysters returned to the sea.

The master, who had freed the oysters, accompanied by a servant, went one day into the mountains to collect firewood. He climbed a dead pine tree, fell from a branch, and died. His spirit, which took possession of a diviner, said, “Do not cremate my body immediately. Wait until seven days have passed!” Following the diviner’s instructions, they carried his body down from the mountains and set it aside to wait for the appointed day.

When seven days had passed, he came back to life and spoke to his family, saying, “There were five monks who went before me and five lay brothers behind. We went along a broad and level road, like one used for transporting goods. Holy banners were ranged to left and right, and in front was a golden palace. I asked, ‘What palace is this?’ The lay brothers whispered among themselves and then said, ‘This is where your mistress will be reborn. It has been built because of her merit in taking care of the old widowed couple. And do you know who we are?’ I replied, ‘No, I don’t.’ ‘You should know us. We ten men, monks and lay brothers, are the ten oysters that you set free.’

“On either side of the palace door stood men with a single horn on their heads. They carried huge swords and threatened to cut off my head. But the monks and lay brothers pleaded with them not to do so.

“Delicious food was served to the gatekeepers on either side of the gate, everyone feasting happily. But during my seven days among them, I was so hungry and thirsty that my mouth was in flames. I was told, ‘This is the penalty you pay for the sin of refusing food for the hungry old widow and widower!’ Then the monks and lay brothers escorted me back, and in an instant I came alive again.”

After that, the man was as generous in freeing living creatures as a fountain spouting water. The reward for saving living beings returns to the doer, while that of failing to do so appears in the form of hunger and thirst. Good and evil never fail to have their reward.



ON BRONZE IMAGES OF KANNON THAT SHOWED, BY THEIR
TRANSFORMATION INTO THE FORM OF A HERON, AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN
(2:17)

In the nunnery of Okamoto, in the village of Ikaruga in the Heguri district of Yamato province, there were twelve bronze images of Kannon. (In the past, in the reign of the empress at the Owarida Palace,²⁹ it had been the residence of Prince Regent Kamitsumiya, who made a vow and turned it into a nunnery.) During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, six of the bronzes were stolen. A search was made, but they could not be found, after which many days and months passed.

To the west of the stage house in Heguri, there was a small pond. One summer, in the Sixth Month, some men were herding cows in the vicinity of the pond when they noticed something like a wooden stake sticking up in the pond. On top of the stake, a heron had alighted. Seeing it, they gathered rocks and stones and tried throwing them at it, but it did not fly away. Tired of that, they waded into the pond to catch it, but they had barely reached it when it dove into the water. Looking closely at the stake on which it had been seated, they saw that it had golden fingers. When the stake was pulled out of the water, it turned out to be the bronze images of Kannon. Because of Kannon, the pond was thus named Pond of the Bodhisattva.

The herdsmen told everyone about their find, and eventually word of it reached the nunnery. Hearing of it, the nuns came and found that they were in fact their images, though the gilt had come off in the water. Surrounding the images and weeping with pity, the nuns said, “We lost our precious images, and mourned day and night. And now they have by chance come back to us. What sin were our Masters guilty of, that they should have met with the fate of being stolen?” Then they prepared a palanquin, placed the images in it, and returned them to the temple. Clergymen and lay believers agreed that they must have been stolen by men who forged coins, but finding them of no use, had abandoned them.

Truly we know that the heron, though it looked like a real heron, was an incarnation of Kannon. There can be no doubt of it! The Nirvana Sutra states, “Although the Buddha may pass away, his Dharma body remains.”³⁰ This is what it means.



ON SPEAKING ILL OF A MONK RECITING THE LOTUS SUTRA AND GAINING
THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF AN EVIL DEATH (2:18)

In the Tenpyō era [729–749] in the Sagaraka district of Yamashiro province, there once lived a layman whose name is unknown. At Koma Temple in the same district, there was a monk named Yōjō³¹ who used to recite the Lotus Sutra constantly. It happened that the monk and the layman had been playing *go* for some time.³² Whenever the monk put down a stone, he said, “This is the Venerable Yōjō’s game of *go*.” When he did so, the layman would mock him, deliberately twisting his mouth and saying, “This is the Venerable Yōjō’s game of *go*.” He went on and on in this way, never stopping. Suddenly, the layman’s mouth became distorted. In fear, he left the temple, holding his chin in his hands. He had not gone any distance when he fell over on his back and immediately died.

People observing this said, “Though he did not actually persecute the monk, mocking him got him a twisted mouth and sudden death. If one with a vengeful heart actually persecuted a monk, how much greater must the penalty be!”

The Lotus Sutra says: “A wise monk and a foolish monk cannot be compared in standing. Further, a long-haired monk is to be counted wiser than a layman who does not shave his head. They must not be served the same dishes. If one does so, he will be forced to swallow an iron ball that has been heated on red-hot copper and ashes and will fall into Hell.”³³ This is what the passage refers to.



ON A WOMAN DEVOTEE OF THE SHIN-GYŌ VISITING THE PALACE OF KING
YAMA AND THE FOLLOWING EXTRAORDINARY EVENT (2:19)

The laywoman Tokari no ubai was from Kawachi province. Her surname was Tokari no suguri, and hence she was called the laywoman Tokari. She was innately pure of heart and put her faith in the Three Treasures of Buddhism. She constantly chanted the Shin-gyō as a form of religious devotion. Her chanting of the Shin-gyō was so beautiful that she was beloved by both clergy and laity.

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, this laywoman went to sleep one night

and, without being ill, died suddenly and went to the palace of King Yama. The king, seeing her, stood up and spread a seat for her, saying, “I have heard of how fine is your recitation of the Shin-gyō. I thought that I would like to hear it for myself, and so I brought you here for a little while. Please let me hear your recitation. I long to hear it!” She complied, and, hearing it, the king rose from his seat, knelt down, and said, “How wonderful—just as I had heard it was!”

When three days had passed, the king said, “Now it is time you went back home!” and he escorted her out of the palace. At the gate were three men dressed in yellow clothes. They greeted her delightedly, saying, “We met only once before and have not met since. Therefore, we thought of you with longing. How lucky, that we meet again! Hurry on home, and three days from today we will without fail see you again at the east market of the capital of Nara!” Then she left them, returned home, and suddenly woke up.

On the morning of the third day, in accordance with what she had been told, she went to the east market of the city. There she waited all day, but the men did not come. Only a poor-looking man came into the market from the east gate, walking around and selling Buddhist scriptures, saying, “Who will buy my sacred texts?” He passed by her and was about to go out the west gate, when she decided that she wanted to buy some scriptures and sent for him to come back. When she opened the texts, she discovered that they were the two volumes of the Bonmō-kyō and the one volume of the Shin-gyō, both of which she had copied in the past. Before she even had a chance to use them, she had lost them and, for many years, had searched for them unsuccessfully. Now, with joy in her heart, she knew that this man had stolen them, and, with an attitude of forgiveness, she asked, “How much are they?” When he replied, “Each scroll is five hundred *mon*,” she bought them at that price.

Then she realized that the three scrolls were the three men who had promised to meet her at the market. She held a service for the reading of the scriptures and deepened her faith in the law of causality. Day and night without ceasing, she recited the texts devotedly.

Ah, what a miracle! As 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.”³⁴ This is what it means.



ON A MOTHER WHO, HAVING HAD A BAD DREAM, HAD SCRIPTURES

RECITED WITH TRUE FAITH AND SAVED HER DAUGHTER BY AN
EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (2:20)

In the village of Yamamura in the Sou upper district of Yamato province, there lived an aged mother whose name is unknown. She had a married daughter who had two children. Her son-in-law was appointed provincial magistrate, and accordingly he took his family to his post. Several years passed.

The wife's mother had stayed in the village to look after the household. Suddenly, she had a dream that portended ill for her daughter. She was greatly disturbed and thought, "I must have a sutra recited for my daughter!" But, being very poor, she had no money to do so. Having no other course, she took off her robe, washed it clean, and offered it in payment for the recitation of a scripture. But the evil signs continued, more sinister than before. Growing more fearful, the mother took off her skirt and, washing it too and offering it in payment, had another scripture recited.

Meanwhile, her daughter was living in the official residence of the provincial magistrate at her husband's post. Her two children were playing in the courtyard, while she was in the back quarters. The children saw seven monks sitting on the roof and reciting a scripture. The children said, "There are seven monks sitting on the roof and reciting a scripture. Hurry—come out and see them!" The monks' chanting sounded like bees humming all together. The mother, wondering at this, got up and came out of the rear building. She had no sooner done so than the wall of the building collapsed. At the same moment, the seven monks suddenly disappeared.

The woman was terrified, thinking to herself, "Heaven and Earth have saved me from being crushed by the falling wall!" Later, however, she received word from her mother, who sent to tell her about the evil omens that had appeared and that she had had scriptures recited to avert them. When she learned this, she was deeply frightened and impressed with her mother's faith, and believed more firmly than ever in the Three Treasures of Buddhism.

Thus we know that the sequence of events was due to the power of reciting scriptures and the protective force of the Three Treasures.



ON THE CLAY IMAGE OF A GOD-KING FROM WHOSE LEGS EMANATED A
LIGHT, AND WHOSE SUPPLICANT RECEIVED AN IMMEDIATE REWARD (2:21)

On the hill east of the city of Nara, there was a temple named Konjū-ji.³⁵ In that mountain temple lived a man who was called Konjū because he made his residence there.³⁶ That temple later became known as Tōdai-ji. During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, the practitioner Konjū constantly lived there and followed the ways of Buddhism. In the temple was enshrined a clay image of Vajradhara Shūkon.³⁷ The practitioner took hold of a rope tied to the legs of the image and prayed to it day and night without ceasing.

It happened that light emanating from its legs reached the palace of the emperor. In surprise and wonder, he dispatched a messenger to discover its origin. The messenger traced the light back to the temple, where he found practitioner Konjū. Grasping the rope tied to the legs of the image, the layman paid honor to the Buddha and confessed his sins. The messenger quickly returned and reported what he had found.

The emperor summoned the practitioner and asked, “What are you praying for?” He replied, “I am praying that I may become a monk and may study and practice the Law of the Buddha.” He was accordingly granted permission to join the clergy and given the name Konjū. The emperor praised his practice of the teachings and provided him with a generous amount of money to cover the four necessities.³⁸ The people of the time, praising his discipline, called him Bodhisattva Konjū. The image of Vajradhara Shūkon that sent forth the light still stands by the north door of the Kensaku Hall of Tōdai-ji.

In appraisal we say: How good he was—the practitioner Konjū! He kindled the flame in spring in the east, and it burned brightly in autumn in the west.³⁹ The light from the legs helped the fire to burn, and the emperor reverently displayed the sign of his faith.

Truly we know that there is no vow that goes unanswered. This is what it means.



ON A BRONZE IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA THAT WAS STOLEN BY A THIEF AND REVEALED HIS IDENTITY BY A MARVELOUS SIGN (2:22)

In a part of the Hine district of Izumi province, there was a thief. He lived near the highway, but his name is unknown. He was inherently evil, killing and stealing for a living, and did not believe in the law of karmic causation. Constantly, he stole metal from temples, made it into strips, and sold it.

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, he stole a metal image of the Buddha from a temple named Jin'e-ji in the district. At that time, there happened to be a man passing along the road. When his horse passed the north side of the temple, he heard a voice crying and saying, "It hurts, it hurts!" Hearing the voice, the man supposed that someone was being attacked and spurred his horse ahead, but as he did so, the voice gradually died out. Halting his horse and listening, all he could hear was the sound of metal being hammered. He accordingly spurred his horse past the place. As he went farther along, however, he heard the same sound as before. He could not simply ride on, but turned around again. Once more, the cries ceased and there was only the sound of hammering. Suspecting that there had been a murder or some foul scheme, he wandered around for some time and sent his servant to peer into the building. The servant saw a man cutting off the arms and legs of a bronze Buddha image that had been laid on its back and using a chisel to pry off its head.

He seized the culprit at once and asked, "What temple does this Buddha image belong to?" "This is the Buddha of Jin'e-ji," was the reply. He sent a message to the temple and found that, indeed, its Buddha had been stolen. The messenger reported the whole affair in detail. The monks and parishioners, hearing of this, came to the spot and, surrounding the broken Buddha, wailed and lamented, crying, "How pitiful, how terrible! Our Master! What fault has he committed, to be treated by a thief like this? If the sacred image were still at the temple, we would honor it as Our Master! Now that it is broken, what shall we revere as Our Master?"

The monks purified a palanquin, placed the broken image in it, and, weeping, held a ceremony at the temple. The thief they let go without inflicting any penalty. But the man who caught him had him turned over to the authorities, who put him in prison.

Truly we know that the Buddha performed this miracle to put a stop to evil. Utter sincerity is a fearful thing—the Buddha's spirit cannot but respond to it. Thus in chapter 12 of the Nirvana Sutra, the Buddha tells us: "I have a high regard for the Mahayana scriptures. If I hear the Brahmins speak slanderously of them, I will cut off their lives. And for doing so, I will not as a consequence fall into Hell." And in chapter 33 of the sutra, it says: "Those of the category of *icchantika* [persons of incorrigible evil] shall perish forever. If you kill so much as an ant, you will be accused of the sin of killing. But if you kill an *icchantika*, you will not be accused of the sin of killing." This is what it means. (Because these persons slander the Buddha, the doctrine, and the community of monks; fail to preach the Law for all living beings; and lack a sense of gratitude, killing them is not a sin.)



ON A BRONZE IMAGE OF BODHISATTVA MIROKU THAT WAS STOLEN AND
REVEALED THE THIEF THROUGH A MIRACULOUS SIGN (2:23)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, an imperial messenger went around the city at night. At midnight, he heard wailing emanating from the field of smartweed south of the Kazuraki nunnery in the capital of Nara. It made a sound like “It hurts, it hurts!” Hearing the sound, the messenger proceeded in the direction of the cries. He found a thief breaking up a bronze image of Bodhisattva Miroku,⁴⁰ using a stone. When he caught and questioned the thief, he replied, “Yes—this is the bronze image of the Kazuraki nunnery.” The image was returned to the nunnery, and the thief was handed over to the authorities, who put him in prison.

The Buddha in his Dharma body has no flesh or blood. Why, then, did it suffer pain? This took place only to show that Dharma exists constant and unchanging. It, too, is a miraculous event!



ON THE DEVILS, MESSENGERS OF KING YAMA, WHO ACCEPTED THE
HOSPITALITY OF THE ONE FOR WHOM THEY HAD BEEN SENT AND REPAID
IT (2:24)

Nara no Iwashima lived on Fifth Avenue and Sixth Street, on the East Side of Nara—that is, in the village west of Daian-ji. During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, he borrowed thirty *kan*⁴¹ from the Shutara fund of Daian-ji, went to the port of Tsuruga in Echizen, purchased goods, and loaded them on a ship he had bought to bring them home. On the way home, he was suddenly taken ill. Leaving the ship, he decided to go on alone and hired a horse to do so.

When he reached Shiga-no-karasaki in the Takashima district of Ōmi province, he saw three men running after him. They were about half a furlong away. By the time he reached the Uji Bridge in Yamashiro, they had caught up and went along with him. Iwashima asked them, “Where are you going?” They replied, “We are messengers from King Yama who have been sent to summon Nara no Iwashima.” “That’s me!” said Iwashima. “But what

am I summoned for?” The devil messengers said, “We went looking for you at your home, but were told, ‘He has gone on a business trip and has not yet returned.’ So we went to the port, hoping to catch you there. But the messenger from the Four Guardian Kings⁴² asked us to desist, saying, ‘Leave him be, since he has a loan from the temple and is on temple business!’ Therefore, we let you go free for a time. We’ve spent so many days trying to catch you that we’re hungry and exhausted. Do you have any food?” Iwashima replied, “All I have is dried rice,” and he gave that to them. The devil messengers said, “You’ll be made sick by our spirits, so don’t come any closer to us. Otherwise, you have nothing to fear.”

When he at last reached home, he fixed a feast for the devil messengers. They said, “We are very fond of the taste of beef. Therefore, if you would fix beef, that would be fine. We are the devils who catch cows.” Iwashima told them, “I have two brindled cows. If I serve you these, will you let me go?” The devils replied, “We have eaten a great deal of your food. But if in exchange for that we let you go free, we will be accused of a grave sin and beaten a hundred times with an iron rod. Do you know anyone who was born in the same year as you?” “No, I don’t,” replied Iwashima. Then one of the devils asked, “What year were you born in?” Iwashima replied, “I was born in the year *tsuchinoe-tora* [678].” The devil said, “I have heard that there is a diviner at the shrine of Izagawa who was born in the same year as you. He can be your substitute. We will call him instead. However, so that we may escape whipping for the sin of accepting your offer of a cow, you must recite the Diamond Sutra one hundred times, invoking our names. The first name is Takasamaro, the second name is Nakachimaro, and the third name is Tsuchimaro.” With that, they left at midnight.

The next day, when Iwashima looked, he found that one of his cows had died. He went to the Nantō-in of Daian-ji and asked Novice Nin’yō (at that time not yet ordained) to recite the Diamond Sutra one hundred times. According to his request, Nin’yō spent two mornings reciting it. After three days had passed, the devil messengers appeared and said, “Due to the power of the Mahayana scriptures, we escaped the penalty of one hundred strokes, and in addition we were given half a bushel more rice than the usual ration. How happy and wonderful! From today on, on every holy day, practice virtue and hold a service for our sake!” Then they suddenly disappeared.

Iwashima was over ninety when he died.

Just as Dou Dexuan of Tang China,⁴³ because of the power of the Diamond Sutra, escaped from the messenger of King Yama, so did Iwashima

of Japan, because he was engaged in business with a loan from the temple fund, escape the summons of the devil messengers from King Yama. The same moral will be found in the story of a woman who sold flowers who was born in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven or of Kikuta, who had once wanted to poison the Buddha but whose good heart was restored by the Buddha's omniscience.



ON THE DEVIL, MESSENGER OF KING YAMA, WHO ACCEPTED THE
HOSPITALITY OFFERED HIM AND REPAID THE KINDNESS (2:25)

In the Yamada district of Sanuki province, there lived a woman named Nunoshi no omi Kinume. In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, this woman suddenly fell ill. At the time, she prepared a splendid feast and placed it to the left and right of her doorway as an offering for the god of the dead.

A demon messenger came from King Yama to summon her. The messenger was tired, and, casting a covetous look at all the delicacies, he accordingly helped himself. Then he said to the woman, "I have accepted your delicious meal, and hence owe you some reward. Is there anyone who has the same name as you?" The woman replied, "Yes—there is. She, too, is named Kinume and lives in the Utari district of the same province." Thereupon, he took the first Kinume to the house of the second Kinume in Utari and confronted her. Taking out a one-foot-long chisel from his red bag, he drove it into the forehead of the second Kinume and summoned her to King Yama. He secretly dismissed the first Kinume and allowed her to return home.⁴⁴

When King Yama had had a chance to examine the action, he said, "This is not the person I sent you to summon! There's been a mistake! However, leave things as they are for now, and go and summon the Kinume of Yamada district!"

As his attempt to hide her had failed, the devil's messenger then went to the house of the first Kinume to summon her as well. When King Yama saw her, he said, "This is the Kinume I summoned!" With this, he allowed the second Kinume to return to her home.

But three days had elapsed, and Kinume of Utari found that her body had already been cremated. Returning to the court of King Yama, she complained bitterly, saying, "I have no body to return to!" King Yama asked, "Is the body of the Kinume of Yamada district in existence?" "It is," he was

told. “In that case, take that for your body!” he replied. Accordingly, Kinume of Utari came back to life in the body of Kinume of Yamada.

But she said, “This is not my home! My home is in Utari!” Her father and mother said, “You are our child—why do you say such things?” But the woman would not listen, and, going to the home of the woman of Utari, she declared, “This is my real home!” Her father and mother disclaimed her, saying, “This is not our child! Our child has been cremated!” Then she explained to them in detail the orders that King Yama had given to her. The parents of the two families, having listened sincerely to her words, allowed her to inherit the fortune of both houses. This is how this one Kinume came to have two sets of parents and to possess two inheritances.

Fix a feast for the devil messenger of the dead—it will not be in vain.⁴⁵ If you have something on hand, offer it as a bribe. This, too, was a miraculous event!



ON A LOG, INTENDED FOR BUDDHA IMAGES, THAT WAS ABANDONED BUT
SHOWED AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (2:26)

Meditation Master Kōdachi, whose secular name was Shimotsukeno no asomi, was a man of the Muza district of Kazusa province. (Some say that he was from Ahiru district.) During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, he went to the mountain called Kane-no-mitake in Yoshino, where he walked around underneath the trees, reciting scriptures and seeking to practice the Way of Buddhism.

At that time, there was a horse-chestnut tree in the village of Tsuki in Yoshino district. This tree was cut down with the intention of making Buddha images, but was abandoned for many years. At that place, there was a river called Akikawa. The log that had been cut for Buddha images had been placed across this river so that men and beasts could go back and forth over the river.

Once Kōdachi had occasion to go to that village, and he crossed over the log. As he did so, it made a sound, saying, “Ah, don’t tread so heavily on me!” Kōdachi, hearing this, looked to see if someone had spoken, but there was no one there. He hesitated for a long time, unwilling to try crossing it again, and then he picked up the log and examined it. He saw that the log had been intended for use in making Buddha images, but that this had never been done. Greatly startled, Kōdachi enshrined the log in a sacred

area, wept tears of contrition, and paid homage to it, giving voice to this vow, “I have come upon this as a result of dependent causation. Therefore, I will see to it that you are made into images!”

He took the log to an appointed place, called on the people to gather around, and had images of Amida Buddha, Bodhisattva Miroku, and Bodhisattva Kannon made from it. They are now enshrined in the Oka-dō in the village of Koshibe in Yoshino district.

A log such as this does not have a mind. How, then, can it cry out? This was nothing but the work of the Buddha’s holy spirit! There can be no doubt about it.



ON A WOMAN OF GREAT STRENGTH (2:27)

Owari no sukune Kukuri was the governor of the Nakashima district of Owari province in the reign of Emperor Shōmu. His wife came from the village of Katawa in the Aichi district of the same province (a granddaughter of the Venerable Dōjō of Gangō-ji). She was faithful to her husband and as gentle and compliant as silk cloth that has been glossed. Once, she wove fine hemp for her husband’s sake. Its color and pattern were beyond compare.

At that time, the ruler of that province was Wakasakurabe no Tau. When he saw the beauty of the robe the governor was wearing, he took it away from him, saying, “It is too good for you to wear!” and refused to return it. When the district governor’s wife asked what had happened to it, he replied, “The ruler of the province took it away!” “And do you miss that robe?” asked his wife. “Very much indeed!” he replied.

Thereupon, the wife went to see the ruler of the province and begged him, saying, “Give me that robe!” The ruler of the province said, “What a woman! Get her out of here!” Then, with only two fingers, she picked up the bench the ruler was sitting on and carried it outside the ruler’s office with the ruler on it. She tore the hem of his robe into pieces, all the time crying, “Give me back the robe!” The ruler was so frightened and embarrassed that he returned the robe. She took it back home, washed and cleaned it, and folded and put it away. She could crush a piece of bamboo into strips as fine as silk thread.

The parents of the governor, seeing this, were greatly afraid and said to their son, “Because of your wife, you have aroused the enmity of the ruler of the province, and we fear that you are headed for big trouble! If she treats

even the ruler in such a way, where will it end? What shall we do? We can't even sleep in peace or go about our business!" Then they sent her back to her own parents and had nothing further to do with her.

After that, she went back to her native village. There, she was once washing clothes in the Kayatsu River when a merchant happened to pass by in a large boat loaded with merchandise. The captain of the boat, seeing her, began to banter with her in a provocative manner. "Be quiet, you!" she said. "Those who are rude to others get a swift slap on the cheek!" The captain, hearing this, grew angry, stopped the boat, and hit her. She did not feel the blow, but pulled the boat halfway up on the beach, leaving its stern sunk in the water. Hiring some men from the neighborhood of the ferry to unload the boat, he then had it reloaded.

The woman, for her part, said, "Because he spoke to me in such a rude manner, I pulled the boat up! Why do people always treat a poor woman in a mean manner like this?" She then proceeded to drag the boat, fully loaded, for half a furlong. At this, the men in the boat, thoroughly frightened, knelt down and said, "We were wrong—we admit our fault!"

Therefore, she forgave them. As a matter of fact, five hundred men all pulling could not have moved the boat, so it is obvious that she had the strength of over five hundred men!

As it is said in a certain sutra, "If you make rice cakes and offer them to the Three Treasures of Buddhism, you will gain the strength of a god like Narayana!"⁴⁶ And so we know it is true. Because in her previous existence she made a big rice cake for the ruler of the Three Treasures and the monks and communion of believers, she was able to acquire extraordinary strength such as this!



ON A VERY POOR WOMAN WHO TRUSTED TO THE BENEFICENCE OF THE
SIXTEEN-FOOT BUDDHA AND WON AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN AND GREAT
GOOD FORTUNE (2:28)

During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, there was a woman living in the village west of Daian-ji in the capital of Nara. She was extremely poor, having nothing with which to sustain life and, in fact, was starving.

Having heard that the Sixteen-Foot Buddha of Daian-ji responded to the vows of the community, she went as quickly as possible to present her pleas. She brought flowers, incense, and lamp oil and presented them before

the Buddha, voicing her pleas, saying, “I did not plant the seeds of good fortune in my past existence, and hence I am rewarded with extreme poverty now in my present one. Therefore, please grant me some wealth so that I may escape my dire want!” Such were her prayers day after day, month after month.

Once, she went as usual to pray for good fortune, offering flowers, incense, and oil, and then returned home to sleep. The next morning when she got up and looked, she found four *kan* of coins by the gate bridge.⁴⁷ There was a note attached that said, “This money is from the Dai-shutaraku fund of Daian-ji.”⁴⁸ The woman, frightened, sent the money back to the temple immediately. The monks of the Dai-shutaraku group checked the treasury and found that the seal had not been broken but that four *kan* of coins were missing. So they put them back in the safe.

The woman then went to pray to the Sixteen-Foot Buddha as before, offering flowers, incense, and oil, and then went back home to sleep. The following day, when she got up and looked in the garden, there were four *kan* of coins there, along with a note saying, “These are from the Daian-ji Jō-shutaraku fund.” The woman took them back to the temple.

When the monks in charge of the fund checked, they found that it had not been opened, but when they opened it, it was missing exactly four *kan* of coins. Wondering, they sealed it again.

As had been her practice, the woman once more went to pray for good fortune, and then returned home to sleep. The next day when she awoke, she found four *kan* of coins on her threshold, with a note attached to it saying, “This is money from the Jōjitsuron seminar of Daian-ji.”

When she returned the money to the temple, the monks of the seminar, checking their fund, found no sign that anything had been touched, but when they opened it, they discovered that four *kan* of coins were missing.

The monks in charge of all five seminars’ funds got together, wondering, and questioned the woman, saying, “What did you do?” She replied, “I did not do anything. But as I was very poor and had no money to live on, nowhere to turn, no one to look to, I came to this temple; offered flowers, incense, and oil; and prayed to the Sixteen-Foot Buddha for a share of good fortune.”

The community of monks, hearing this, pondered and then announced, “This is money that the Buddha has granted to her. Therefore, we will not continue to withhold it.” Accordingly, they gave her the money. She used the four *kan* of coins as a means to advance in the world, becoming very wealthy, living in ease, and enjoying a long life.

Truly we know that this was a demonstration of the wonderful power

of the Sixteen-Foot Buddha and the sincerity of the woman. It was a miraculous affair.



ON HOW THE MOST VENERABLE GYŌGI USED HIS DIVINE INSIGHT TO
EXAMINE A WOMAN'S HAIR AND SCOLD HER FOR APPLYING ANIMAL OIL
(2:29)

In the village of Gangō-ji in the old capital,⁴⁹ there was once held a splendid Dharma meeting at which, before the gathering of monks and lay members, the Most Venerable Gyōgi was invited to preach for seven days. Among those assembled to listen to the preaching of the Law was a young woman whose hair had been smeared with animal oil. When the Most Venerable Gyōgi saw her, he spoke admonishingly, saying, “This smell is highly offensive to me. Her hair smells of blood! Take her far away from here!” The woman was greatly astonished and left the congregation.

We ordinary mortals with our human eyes see only the color of the oil. But a saint with his penetrating eyesight can see the actual blood of the animal. This was the work of a sage who, a manifestation of the Buddha body, appeared in Japan. It was the Buddha in disguise!



ON THE MOST VENERABLE GYŌGI EXAMINING THE CHILD OF A WOMAN,
PERCEIVING THAT IT WAS AN ENEMY FROM PAST AGES, AND
RECOMMENDING THAT SHE THROW IT AWAY, RESULTING IN AN
EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (2:30)

The Most Venerable Monk Gyōgi opened up the Naniwa River Canal, set up ferry crossings, preached the Way, and converted people. Monks and laymen, eminent and humble, all gathered about him to listen to the Dharma. On one such occasion in the province of Kawachi, the district of Wakae, in the village of Kawamata, there was a woman who, carrying her child in her arms, went to take part in the religious meeting and listen to the Dharma. But the child began to wail and complain, so she could not hear the sermon. The child was already more than ten years old but had never learned to walk and did nothing all day but wail and scold, suck the mother's milk, and eat.

The Most Venerable Monk Gyōgi addressed the woman, saying, “Fie, young lady! You must take your child and throw it in the depths of the river!” When the crowd heard this, they put their heads together and began to whisper, saying, “The holy man is usually so compassionate—what possible reason would he have for making a pronouncement like that!” The woman, being of a loving nature, did not throw away the child but continued to hold it in her arms and listen to the sermon.

The following day, she came once more with the child in her arms to hear the Dharma, but this time the child wailed so vociferously that the entire crowd was prevented from hearing the sermon. The Most Venerable Monk Gyōgi berated the woman, saying, “Throw that child in the river!” The woman began to grow suspicious and, unable to put her doubts out of her mind, finally threw the child into the deepest part of the river. The child floated to the surface of the water, where it kicked its feet, flailed its arms, glared with wide staring eyes, and said in a tone of great disappointment, “What a pity! I wanted to keep on eating off you for three years more!”

The mother, more suspicious than ever, returned to the meeting to listen to the Dharma. “Have you thrown the child away?” the Most Venerable Gyōgi asked. The woman, in reply, told him all that had happened. “In a past existence,” he explained to her, “you borrowed something from that person and failed to pay it back, and so the person took on the form of a child and was trying to get back at you by eating so much. That child was none other than the owner of the goods!”

Alas, how shameful for the woman! One should never die without paying back one’s debts to others, for if one does, one will surely meet with some reprisal in a future existence.

Truly it says in the Shutchō-gyō: “Because of a penny’s worth of salt owed to the driver, he was reborn as an ox and driven hard to repay that debt to the driver.”⁵⁰ This refers to the same kind of thing.



ON THE BIRTH OF A GIRL WITH *SHARI* IN HER HAND, OWING TO HER
PARENTS’ VOW TO BUILD A PAGODA (2:31)

Niu no atai Otokami was a man of the Iwata district of Tōtōmi province. He made a vow to build a pagoda, but a number of years had gone by and he still had not done so. He always looked on this with regret.

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, Otokami, who was seventy years old,

and his wife, who was sixty-two, gave birth to a girl baby. At the time of birth, her left hand was clenched tight. Her father and mother, lamenting, wondering at this, tried to make her unclench her fist, but it was clenched tight and refused to open. Her father and mother, lamenting, said, “It is a shame that, at a wholly unlucky time, a defective child is born to us. We regard it as a source of great regret. But the karmic conditions were such, and therefore we gave birth to you.” They therefore did not neglect her, but raised her with loving care.

She grew into a very handsome child, and when she was seven years old, her hand unfolded and she showed it to her mother, exclaiming, “Look at this!” In the palm of her hand were two *shari*.⁵¹ In joy and wonder, the mother relayed the news to all the people around. Soon the rejoicing had spread until it reached to the government officials. The local officials, all delighting, banded together to form a group and proceeded to build a seven-story pagoda and place the two *shari* in it for proper recognition. This is the pagoda of Iwata Temple, which stands now in Iwata district. After the pagoda had been built, the child suddenly died.

Truly we know that no vow is ever left unfulfilled. Once the vow has been made, it will surely be fulfilled. This is what it means.



ON BORROWING MONEY FROM THE TEMPLE RICE-WINE FUND, FAILING TO REPAY IT, AND BEING REBORN AS AN OX AS A RESULT (2:32)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, villagers of Mikami in the Nagusa district of Kii province organized a devotees’ association to rotate the fund of Yakuō-ji (now called Seta Temple). At the home of Okada no suguri Obame, this medical fund was used to earn profits in a brewery.⁵²

One day, a spotted calf came onto the grounds of Yakuō-ji and lay down at the base of the pagoda. The men of the temple chased it away, but it came back again and lay down, refusing to be shooed away. The men, wondering at this, said, “Who does this calf belong to?” But no one admitted that it was his. The monks then caught it, tied it up, and proceeded to raise it. In time, it grew big and was driven into the fields and used in the temple work.

When five years had gone by, Okada no suguri Iwahito, a patron of that temple, had a dream. He said, “I dreamed that that calf chased me, butted me over, and trampled me with its feet. I was frightened and cried out. The calf

then said to me, ‘Do you know who I am?’ I answered, ‘No, I don’t.’ The calf then released me, stepped back, and in tears said to me, ‘I am Mononobe no Maro of the village of Sakura.’ (He was popularly called Shiozuki. When he was alive, he shot at a boar and thought that he had made a hit, though in fact he had missed. However, thinking that he had made a hit, he ground salt and took it to the spot,⁵³ to find not a boar but only an arrow stuck in the ground. The villagers laughed at him and called him *shiozuki* [ground salt], which became his popular name.) ‘In my previous existence I borrowed ten gallons of rice wine from the medical fund of the temple, but died without ever repaying it. Therefore, in my present existence I have been reborn as an ox and am driven hard to pay for my debt. The date of my service was set at eight years. I have already served for five years, so that leaves three years still to go. The temple people are merciless, beating me on the back and driving me on, and I have suffered greatly. But you are not without pity like the others, and so I am telling you this.’

“Iwahito asked, ‘How can I tell if your story is true?’ The ox replied, ‘Please ask Big Sister of Sakura village if it is true or not.’” (Ōmine [Big Sister] was Iwahito’s younger sister, a woman who was in charge of the rice-wine brewery.)

Wondering all the while, Iwahito visited his younger sister and related the details. She replied, “It’s just as he said. He borrowed ten gallons of rice wine from the fund but died without ever repaying it.”

When Jōdachi, a monk in charge of the temple household, and other patrons of the temple heard the story, they recognized that it was based on the law of causality. Their hearts overflowed with pity. They arranged for sutras to be read on his behalf. After eight years had passed and its term of service had ended, the ox disappeared and no one knew what became of it.

Hence we know that debts must be repaid, or there will be a penalty. Dare we forget that? Therefore, it says in the *Jōjitsuron*: “Those who borrow things and do not repay them will in their next existence fall among oxen, sheep, *kujika* deer, donkeys, horses, and such like. Such will be the reward for their deeds.”⁵⁴ This is what it means.



ON A WOMAN DEVoured BY AN EVIL DEMON (2:33)

During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, a popular song spread all over the country: