



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.

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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.)



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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!



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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



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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



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:

Who asked you to be a bride,
Yorozu-no-ko of Amuchi-no komuchi?
Namu, namu.
Mountain ascetics chanting formulas,
Bring us wine
Lots and lots of it!⁵⁵

At that time, there was a wealthy man who lived in the eastern part of the village of Amuchi in the Tōchi district of Yamato province. His surname was Kagamitsukuri no miyatsuko. He had a daughter named Yoroze-no-ko. She was unmarried, a virgin, and of beautiful appearance. But although men of high rank proposed to her, she refused them all, and so the years went by.

There was one man who repeatedly sent presents, including three wagonloads of dyed goods. Seeing these, her heart was moved and she agreed to be friendly with him. Eventually she accepted his proposal, and they entered the bedroom and became husband and wife.

That night, there was a voice heard from the bedroom, saying three times over, “It hurts!” Her father and mother, hearing this, talked it over, but said, “It hurts because she’s not used to it yet!” They decided to ignore it and went back to sleep.

The next day at dawn, the mother knocked on the door but surprisingly got no answer. Wondering at this, she opened the door—to find only the woman’s skull and the bones of one finger remaining, all the rest of her having been eaten. Her father and mother stared, shocked and grieved at what they saw. When they looked at the dyed goods sent to the bride, they found them all turned into animal bones, and the three wagons that had brought them had changed into silverberry wood. People from all quarters, learning of what had happened, gathered around to stare, and there were none who were not filled with wonder. Her skull was placed in a beautiful Korean box and put in front of the Three Treasures of Buddhism, where on the first of the seventh-day mornings it was served a vegetarian feast.

We suspect, therefore, that an omen must have preceded the calamity. The song was the omen. Some say that it was the mysterious work of a deity, while others say that she fell foul of a demon. On reflection, however, we know that this was payment for some deed in her past. This was a miraculous event.



ON AN ORPHAN GIRL WHO PAID RESPECTS TO A BRONZE STATUE OF
KANNON AND RECEIVED RECOMPENSE IN A MIRACULOUS MANNER (2:34)

In a village near the Uetsuki Temple in the western sector of the capital of Nara there lived an orphan girl who was as yet unmarried; her family and given names are unknown. When her father and mother were alive, the family possessed great wealth, built numerous houses and storerooms, and cast a bronze image of Bodhisattva Kannon, two feet five inches in height, erecting a sanctuary some distance from the main house in which the statue was enshrined and worshipped. But in the time of Emperor Shōmu, the young woman's parents passed away, the servants ran off, and the horses and oxen died. The former wealth vanished, the household was reduced to poverty, and the young woman, all alone in her empty mansion, did nothing but sigh and shed sorrowful tears day and night. Hearing that pleas addressed to Bodhisattva Kannon were likely to be answered, she tied a cord to the arm of the bronze statue, and, taking it in her hand and making offerings of flowers, incense, and lamps, she prayed for good fortune, saying, "I am an only child, an orphan without father or mother, living alone in a poor house without wealth or means to support myself. I pray you to grant me a happy lot! Grant it quickly, send it soon!" she said, weeping and imploring day and night.

In the same village, there lived a rich man who had lost his wife. Seeing the girl, he dispatched a matchmaker to arrange for her to become his bride. But the girl said to the matchmaker, "I am now impoverished and do not have so much as a cloak to cover my naked body! Where would I get a veil for my face so that I could appear before him and speak in his presence?"

The matchmaker returned and reported this to the man, who, on hearing it, replied, "I am perfectly aware that she is poor and has no proper clothes. But will she marry me or not?" The matchmaker conveyed his words to the girl. She persisted in her refusals, but the man went and forced his way into the house, coaxing her until her heart softened and she consented to sleep with him.

The following day, it rained, and the rain continued so that the man was unable to return to his own home and had to remain at the young woman's house for three days. Growing very hungry, he said, "I'm starving! Bring me something to eat!"

"I will prepare something at once," his bride replied. She built a fire in the stove, set the empty rice steamer on it, and crouched beside it, pressing her hands to her cheeks; she wandered this way and that through the empty

rooms, sighing loudly. Then she rinsed her mouth, washed her hands, went to the statue, wept, and said, "Do not let me be put to shame! Send me some wealth right away!" When she had finished speaking, she left the sanctuary and returned to the kitchen, squatting before the empty stove as before, her hands pressed to her cheeks.

The same day, around four in the afternoon, there was a sudden rapping at the gate and the voice of someone calling. When the young woman went to see who it was, she found the wet nurse from the rich family next door. The nurse was carrying a large wooden box filled with a hundred different things to eat and drink, every conceivable delicious flavor and aroma, all in vessels of metal or lacquer. Handing the box to the young woman, she said, "We heard that you had a guest, and so the mistress next door fixed these things to bring to you. Just be good enough to return the dishes when you're finished."

The young woman was delighted beyond measure, and, her heart overflowing with gratitude, she took off the black cloak she was wearing and gave it to the nurse, saying, "I have nothing but this grimy cloak to offer, but I hope you will be kind enough to accept it." The nurse took the cloak, put it on, and hurried off home. When the young woman served the dishes to her husband, he looked at the food in astonishment and then, taking his eyes from the food, stared at the face of his bride.

The following day, the man took his leave and later sent his wife ten bolts of silk and ten bales of rice, saying, "Sew the silk into robes as soon as you can and quickly make some wine from the rice." The young woman went to the rich house next door to tell them of the happiness in her heart and express her thanks and respect, but the mistress of the house said, "Have you gone mad, child, or are you perhaps possessed by devils? I have no idea what you are talking about!" The nurse added, "Neither have I!"

Scolded thus, the young woman returned to her house and, as was her custom, went to the sanctuary to pay her respects. There she saw the black cloak that she had given to the nurse draped over the bronze statue, and for the first time realized that it was Kannon who had aided her. As a result, she came to believe in the law of karmic retribution and, doubling her devotions, treated the statue with even greater respect and reverence than before. Thereafter, she regained the wealth that her family had once possessed and was freed from hunger and fret. She and her husband, spared from illness, lived in health to a great old age.

This, indeed, was a wondrous affair.



ON HITTING A MONK AND INCURRING THE IMMEDIATE PENALTY OF DEATH (2:35)

Prince Uji was innately evil and put no faith in the Three Treasures of Buddhism. During the reign of Emperor Shōmu, this prince happened to be traveling through Yamashiro, accompanied by eight men, on his way to Nara. It chanced that the monk Taikyō of the Shimotsuke Temple was traveling on foot from Nara to Yamashiro, and was passing through the district of Tsuzuki. He chanced to come upon the prince so suddenly that there was no place for him to move out of the way. He lowered his hat, hiding his face, and stood at the side of the road.⁵⁶ Seeing this, the prince halted his horse and prepared to administer punishment. Although the monk and his attendants ran into the rice paddies to escape, the men followed them there, administering blows, and broke open the sutra boxes they were carrying and scattered the contents. Seeing this, Taikyō cried out, “Is there no protection for the Dharma?”

The prince had not had time to proceed far on his way when he was suddenly seized by a serious illness. He let out a loud cry and leaped two or three feet off the ground. His attendants, observing the prince’s distress, begged the monk Taikyō to lend his aid, but he refused. Two or three times they repeated their request, all in vain. “Is he in pain?” asked the monk. “Yes, very great pain!” was the answer. To which the monk said, “Let the miserable prince suffer a thousand times, ten thousand times the pain!”

At that time, the relatives of the prince submitted a report to the emperor, stating, “Monk Taikyō has put a curse on Prince Uji. He should be seized and put to death!” But the emperor did not allow this to happen. Three days later, Prince Uji died, his body turning as black as ink. Once more, the relatives appealed to the emperor, saying, “One suffered death, so the other must die! Since Prince Uji is already dead, Taikyō should be arrested and pay the penalty of death!” But the emperor issued a decree, saying, “I am a monk, and Taikyō is a monk. How can a monk inflict death on a monk? Taikyō is not responsible for the disaster that befell Prince Uji.” The emperor himself had shaved his head, received the precepts, and become a follower of the Way. Therefore, he showed special favor and refused to kill Taikyō.⁵⁷

The insane Prince Uji was extremely evil in nature and was punished by the guardian of the Dharma. The guardian of the Dharma is ever at hand. How can you not believe this?



ON THE WOODEN IMAGE OF KANNON THAT REVEALED GODLIKE POWER (2:36)

In the reign of Retired Emperor Shōmu,⁵⁸ the head of the image of Kannon, the attendant image on the east side of the Amida in the Shimotsuke Temple in the capital of Nara, fell off for no apparent reason.

The patron of the temple, observing this, decided that he would repair it on the following day and, meanwhile, left it as it was for a day and a night. On the morning of the following day, however, when he looked, he found that the head had returned to its original position on its own. Not only that, but now it gave off a light.

Truly we know that the Dharma body of wisdom always exists.⁵⁹ This is a miraculous sign to bring the unbelieving to a realization of this.



ON A WOODEN IMAGE OF KANNON THAT SURVIVED FIRE AND REVEALED GODLIKE POWER (2:37)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, in the Izumi district of Izumi province, in a mountain temple, there was a wooden image of Bodhisattva Shōkanjizai that was enshrined and venerated.⁶⁰ Once, a fire broke out and consumed the entire hall. But the wooden image of this bodhisattva moved about thirty steps out of the burning hall, and then lay down without sustaining any damage.

Truly we know that the Three Treasures of Buddhism, although they have no visible form or mind and cannot be seen by the eye, yet possess divine power. This is the first of all wonders!



ON REBIRTH AS A HUGE SNAKE BECAUSE OF AVARICE (2:38)

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, there was a monk who always lived in a mountain temple in Maniwa in the capital of Nara. When he was on the

verge of death, he said to his disciples, “After I die, you must not open the door to my room until three years have passed!”

But after he died, when only seven times seven days had gone by, a huge snake appeared, lying at the door to the room. The disciples, knowing the reason it had come, obtained its permission and then opened the door. They found thirty *kan* of coins that had been secretly stored away there. They took the money, used it to commission the recitation of sutras, practiced good, and secured great benefit for the dead man.

Truly we know that, because of his deep attachment to his store of hidden money, he was reborn in the form of a huge snake that had come to guard it. There is a saying, “Even though you may see the top of Mount Sumeru,⁶¹ you cannot see the top of Mount Desire!” This is what it refers to.



ON THE WOODEN IMAGE OF YAKUSHI BUDDHA, WASHED AWAY IN WATER AND BURIED IN SAND, THAT SHOWED AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGN (2:39)

Between Suruga province and Tōtōmi province, there flows a river called Ōigawa. Beside the river is the village of Uda, which is in the Harihara district of Tōtōmi province. In the second year of the Tenpyō hōji era of the reign of Emperor Ōhi [Junnin, r. 758–764], who reigned at the Nara Palace, the year *tsuchinoe-inu* [758], in the spring, the Third Month, a voice was heard coming from the sand on the beach at the village of Uda, crying, “Get me out! Get me out!”

At that time, a monk was traveling through Tōtōmi province, and when he passed the spot he heard these ceaseless cries of “Get me out!” He responded to the cries from the sand, and, supposing that some dead person buried there had come back to life, he dug down to see. He found a wooden statue of Yakushi Buddha,⁶² six feet five inches in length, with both ears missing. Weeping, he paid homage to it, saying, “My Great Master, what caused you to fall victim to the flood? Since I have been destined by karma to find you, please allow me to repair you.”

He invited his friends to join him, enlisted a sculptor to make a new pair of ears, and installed the statue in a hall in the village of Uda, where it was properly venerated. This is what is now called Uda Hall. This statue of the Buddha gave miraculous signs, giving off light and responding to the requests of those who appealed to it.

In this respect, it resembles the sandalwood statue made by Uten,⁶³

which stood up to pay homage to Buddha, or the wooden image of Ding Lan's mother,⁶⁴ which was said to have moved as though alive. This is what it means.



ON AN EVIL-LOVING MAN WHO GOT AN IMMEDIATE PENALTY, BEING
KILLED BY SHARP SWORDS AND SUFFERING AN EVIL DEATH (2:40)

Tachibana no asomi Naramaro was a son of Prince Kazuraki [d. 757]. With overweening ambition, he plotted to usurp the throne, gathering around him a band of disaffected persons for that purpose. He had a monk's figure painted and used it as a target, trying to shoot out its eyes. He loved to do evil deeds, none more evil than this.

Once a lackey of Naramaro went to the Nara Hills with a hawk to hunt birds. Finding many foxes there, he caught one and skewered it with a stick, leaving it stuck in the ground at the opening to the fox hole.

This man had a baby child. The mother fox, seeking revenge, changed herself into the likeness of the baby's grandmother. Taking the baby in her arms, she carried it to the entrance to the fox hole, where she threaded it on a skewer. She left it stuck at the entrance to the hole as the man had done to her child.

Even humble animals know how to take revenge for an evil deed! Immediate penalty lies close at hand. You must never do heartless acts, for if you do, you will call down heartless punishment. Not long after, Naramaro roused the ire of the emperor and suffered the extreme penalty.

Thus we know that the death inflicted earlier on the baby was an omen of the fate that awaited Naramaro. This, too, was a miraculous event!



ON A WOMAN WHO WAS VIOLATED BY A LARGE SNAKE BUT SURVIVED,
DUE TO THE POWER OF DRUGS (2:41)

In the village of Umakai in the Sarara district of Kawachi province, there lived a daughter of a wealthy family. In Emperor Ōhi's reign, in the third year of the Tenpyō hōji era, in the summer, the Fourth Month of the year *tsuchinoto-i* [759], the girl climbed a mulberry tree in order to pick the leaves. A large snake crawled up the tree after her. A passerby, seeing this,

warned her, whereupon, frightened, she fell to the ground. The snake, too, fell to the ground and, taking advantage of her unconscious state, entered her vagina.

Her father and mother, seeing this, sent for a doctor and, placing her on some bedding, with the snake inside her, brought her home. There the doctor burned three sheaves (this means a bundle three feet high) of millet stalks and put the ashes into hot water to get fourteen gallons of liquid. This he then boiled down to nine gallons and added ten bunches of chopped boar's hair. Then the people hung her on stakes by her head and two feet, and poured the mixture into the vaginal opening. When they had poured in five gallons of the brew, the snake came out and was killed and thrown away. The snake's eggs were white, like frogs' eggs, and had boar's hair stuck to them. About two and a half gallons of them came out of her opening. By the time the people had poured in nine gallons of brew, all the snakes' eggs had come out.

The girl, who had fainted, woke up and began to speak. Replying to her parents' inquiries, she said, "I felt as though I were dreaming, but now I am awake and all right." Since drugs can have an effect like this, we cannot but be cautious in their use. As for the girl, three years later she was again violated by a snake and died.

If there is deep affection between husband and wife or between parents and their child, when the time for death comes, one will speak in a loving way, saying, "When I die, I know we will be together again in a future life!" But the spirit of that person, following the dictates of karmic causality, may in fact be reborn as a snake or a horse, a cow, a dog, or a bird. If the conditions are unfavorable, one may be loved by a snake or may be reborn as a mere creature. Love and affection do not ensure a favorable form of rebirth.

A sutra describes it like this: "Long ago, when the Buddha and Ānanda were walking through a graveyard, a man and his wife were presenting offerings of food and drink at a tomb and bewailing the dead. The man was lamenting the loss of his mother, while the wife was bewailing the death of a little child. The Buddha, hearing the cries of the wife, joined in the sound of lamentation. Ānanda asked him, 'Why are you lamenting?' The Buddha replied to Ānanda, 'This woman in a previous existence bore a male child whom she dearly loved. She was so attached to him that she kissed his penis. After three years, she suddenly contracted a disease. As she was dying, she caressed him, kissing his penis and saying, "In my future existences, I will always be born with you!" She was reborn as the daughter of a neighbor and eventually became the wife of her own son. She is now

lamenting over the ashes of her husband. Since I understand the chain of causation that brings these things about, I am lamenting.”⁶⁵ This is what the passage means.

And in another sutra it is written: “Long ago, there was a child who was very light in body and could run as fast as a flying bird. His father constantly loved and cared for him, as though he were his own pair of eyes. Once, observing the child’s agility, he exclaimed, ‘Excellent, my son! You are as swift as a fox!’ Then the child died and later was reborn as a fox. You should think only of good analogies! For if you think of bad ones, your words may come true.”⁶⁶



ON AN EXTREMELY POOR WOMAN WHO IMploRED THE THOUSAND-
ARMED KANNON, ASKING FOR AID, AND RECEIVED GREAT GOOD FORTUNE
(2:42)

Amanotsukai Minome lived at the juncture of Ninth Street and Second Avenue on the East Side of the capital of Nara. She had given birth to nine children and, being extremely poor and having no means to support them, was having great difficulties. She had been praying for nearly a year to the Thousand-Armed Kannon of Hozumi Temple for a share of good fortune.⁶⁷

In the reign of Emperor Ōhi, in the seventh year of the Tenpyō hōji era, in the winter, on the tenth day of the Tenth Month of the year *mizunoto-u* [763], quite unexpectedly her younger sister happened to visit her and left a chest made of leather. Its legs were soiled with horse manure. Her sister said, “I will come again soon. Meanwhile, would you please keep this for me?” But the sister did not come again. The woman asked her younger brother about it, but he said, “I know nothing of the matter!”

Wondering what was in it, she opened it and found that it contained a hundred *kan* in coins. When, as usual, she bought flowers and incense and oil and went to pay her respects to the Thousand-Armed Kannon, she noticed that its feet were soiled with horse manure. Then she began to wonder if the chest had not been a gift from the bodhisattva. Three years later, it was discovered that the sum of a hundred *kan* in cash was missing from the construction fund donated to the Thousand-Armed Kannon. Thus it became evident that the money had been the work of Kannon.

In appraisal we say: How good was the longtime mother of the Amanotsukai family! In the morning, looking at her starving children, she

wept tears of blood, while in the evening she burned incense and lights, imploring Kannon's aid. In response, she was given money, putting an end to the trials of poverty. She was blessed with the enjoyment of the holy one's favor, a font of riches that flowed down to her. She was given all that was needed to raise her children, and when the clothes were removed,⁶⁸ its source became known. She loved her children and brought them good fortune; buying incense truly had its merits.

As the Nirvana Sutra puts it, "The mother loved her children and she was therefore reborn in the Brahma Heaven."⁶⁹ This is what it means. This was a miraculous happening!

1. Prince Nagaya (684–729) was a grandson of Emperor Tenmu and a distinguished literary figure.
2. The source of this quotation has not been identified.
3. Gyōgi (Gyōki, 670–749) was a celebrated Buddhist prelate of the Nara period (710–784). He assisted Emperor Shōmu in completing the great Buddha image of Tōdai-ji.
4. The meaning of this sentence is uncertain.
5. The world of desire is the six realms into which unenlightened beings are born and reborn: Hell, hungry ghosts, animals, *asuras* (demons), human beings, and heavenly beings.
6. Throughout the stories, the text in parentheses is Kyōkai's explanations, comments, or interpretations.
7. In Kyushu, Tsukushi was where forces were stationed to guard against possible attacks from China or Korea.
8. In 791, the government issued an order prohibiting the use of oxen as a sacrifice in the worship of Chinese gods, so the cult was apparently fairly widespread. Animal sacrifice was almost certainly foreign to Japan and was, of course, particularly abhorrent to Buddhists.
9. Vinaya-kyō 9, quoted in the *Shokyō yōshū* (*Essential Passages from Various Sutras*) 14. See *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 59:53c.
10. Konkōmyō saishō-kyō 1. See *Taishō* 16:352b–353c.
11. According to one source, the four blessings are indebtedness to mother, father, the Buddha, and monks; another gives indebtedness to parents, all fellow beings, the king, and the Three Treasures of Buddhism.
12. One *kan* is a monetary unit consisting of one thousand *mon* or coins.
13. The Urabon-kyō and Daihannya-kyō are no longer extant.
14. He was named Daisōjō, the highest clerical rank. Other sources give the date as 745.
15. Ashihara and Mizuho in Toyoashihara were old names for Japan.
16. The Avichi Hell, or the Hell of Incessant Suffering, is the hottest and most terrible of the eight Buddhist Hells.
17. Quoted in the Bonmō-kyō koshakki. See *Taishō* 40:706b.
18. Gyōgi was cremated at Mount Ikoma in present-day Osaka prefecture.
19. The Three Treasures are the Buddha; the Dharma, or doctrine; and the Order, or community of believers. The five precepts are for laypersons to refrain from taking life, stealing, engaging in indecent acts, telling lies, and drinking alcoholic beverages.
20. Quoted in the *Shokyō yōshū*. See *Taishō* 13:397. The five offenses are killing one's father, one's mother, or an arhat; injuring the body of a Buddha; and causing dissension in the Order.
21. Nirvana Sutra, vol. 20. See *Taishō* 12:484b.
22. Zen'aku-inga-kyō. The Hell of the River of Ashes is one of the sixteen subhells in the eight Hells of Heat.
23. The eight precepts are to refrain from taking life, stealing, committing adultery, telling lies, drinking

- alcoholic beverages, eating at the wrong hours, engaging in worldly amusements, and wearing ornaments.
24. The ten good deeds are to refrain from taking life, stealing, committing adultery, telling lies, using immoral language, engaging in slander, equivocating, coveting, giving in to anger, and holding false views.
 25. Kichijō was the goddess of fortune and beauty, originally a figure in Indian mythology. In Japan, prayers for peace and agricultural fertility were offered to her.
 26. *Taishō* 12:515c.
 27. The Hannya dharani is the brief spell, or *dharani*, in Sanskrit that appears at the end of the similarly brief Hannya Shin-gyō, which means: “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone entirely beyond—so be it.”
 28. The text appears corrupt at this point, as the word “master” must have dropped out.
 29. Empress Suiko (r. 592–628).
 30. *Taishō* 12:901c.
 31. The name may also be read as Eijō.
 32. Most games were forbidden to monks, but an exception was made for *go*.
 33. No such passage is found in present texts of the Lotus Sutra.
 34. Nirvana Sutra, vol. 12. See *Taishō* 12:434c.
 35. Konjū-ji was the old name of the Hokke-dō of Tōdai-ji.
 36. Konjū is better known as Rōben (689–773). In 733, Emperor Shōmu founded Konshō-ji for him, and later expanded it into Tōdai-ji. He was put in charge of Tōdai-ji and became one of the most distinguished monks of the Nara period.
 37. Originally a Vedic deity, Vajradhara Shūkon was taken over and worshipped as a protector of Buddhism.
 38. The four necessities are shelter, clothing, food and drink, and flowers and incense.
 39. In Konjū’s youth, the light of his Buddhism in the east part of Nara kindled the flame of faith; in Konjū’s later years, the emperor in the west part of the city responded to it with fervor.
 40. Bodhisattva Miroku is Maitreya, who resides in the Tuṣita Heaven and will descend to Earth to teach the Law at the end of the world.
 41. This was a considerable sum of money.
 42. The Four Guardian Kings are the four deities who guard the four quarters of the world; in Japanese they are Tokoku (east), Zōchō (south), Kōmoku (west), and Tamon (north).
 43. Dou Dexuan was a high minister who lived in the reign of Gaozong (650–683).
 44. As is often the case, the heading covers only the first part of the action.
 45. Although the text says to fix a feast for the messenger, the one who did so, Kinume of Yamada, lost her body, whereas the one who did not ended up with two sets of parents and two inheritances. This is one of the puzzles of the *Nihon ryōiki*.
 46. Narayana is an Indian deity noted for his great strength.
 47. One *kan* is a monetary unit consisting of one thousand *mon* or coins.
 48. At Daian-ji, there were five seminar groups: Shutara, Sanron, Betsusanron, Ritsu, and Shōron. Each had its own office, treasury, and officers.
 49. That is, in the period before the meeting moved to the capital at Nara.
 50. This is not an exact quotation but a summary of a passage in the Shūchō-gyō. See *Taishō* 6:425. The passage tells of two brothers, one who chose to become an arhat, and the other, to remain a layman who would never listen to his brother’s preaching. Once, the arhat met his brother, who had been reborn as an ox and loaded with a burden. The arhat told the driver of the ox that his brother had been reborn as an ox because of his debt of salt to the driver.
 51. *Shari*, from the Sanskrit *śarira*, refers to relics of the Buddha’s body, which were believed to be the source of miraculous power.
 52. The temple made loans of rice and had people brew rice wine, which was lent again to gain interest for medical expenses.

- [53.](#) Salt was used to cure the boar's flesh.
- [54.](#) Harivarmin, *Jōjitsu-ron (Treatise on the Establishment of Truth)*, chap. 6. See *Taishō* 32:301.
- [55.](#) The interpretation of the song, particularly the latter part, is highly tentative.
- [56.](#) According to article 19 of the *Sōni-ryō* (Articles for Monks and Nuns), monks and nuns are equal to persons of the Sixth Rank. When meeting with someone of the Fifth Rank or higher, if mounted, they are to dismount, salute, and retire; if on foot, they are to retire. Since the prince belonged to the Fifth Rank, a rank higher than the monk Taikyō, who was on foot, Taikō was required to retire or hide himself.
- [57.](#) Emperor Shōmu received the Mahayana bodhisattva precepts from the Chinese Buddhist monk Ganjin (Jianzhen, 688–763) and retired from the throne in 749.
- [58.](#) The meaning is the same as “In the reign of Emperor Shōmu.”
- [59.](#) The *dharmakāya*, or world of the Dharma as the embodiment of truth and wisdom.
- [60.](#) Bodhisattva Shōkanjizai is the Kannon of the Lotus Sutra and many other Mahayana sutras, in contrast to various Tantric variations of Kannon.
- [61.](#) Sumeru is the lofty mountain that stands at the center of the Buddhist universe.
- [62.](#) Yakushi Buddha is Bhaiṣajyaguru, or the Medicine Master Buddha.
- [63.](#) Uten is Udayana, king of Kushan and patron of Buddhism.
- [64.](#) *Shokyō yōshū* 15. See *Taishō* 54:74.
- [65.](#) The source of this quotation has not been identified.
- [66.](#) The source of this quotation has not been identified.
- [67.](#) The Thousand-Armed Kannon has forty arms in addition to the regular two, each with twenty-five spheres of existence; hence the figure of one thousand.
- [68.](#) The “clothes” refer to the cloth covering the feet of the statue.
- [69.](#) The Heaven of the god Brahma is the lowest of the four *dhyana* (meditation) heavens.