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TRANSLATION

The Tale of the Fuji Cave

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AMONG medieval Japanese literary works, few are as harrowing as *Fuji no hitoana sōshi* 富士の人穴草子, *The Tale of the Fuji Cave*. As the ghastly story of one man's tour of hell, it appears to be a relic of the vanished and largely undocumented world of late-medieval street-preaching and popular Buddhist entertaining. Two of the earliest extant *Fuji* texts are dated to the first years of the seventeenth century (1603 and 1607), but the work is known to have existed in some written form from at least 1527, because the Kyoto courtier Yamashina Tokitsugu 山科言繼 (1507–1579) records in a diary entry from that year that he presented a copy to a “new lady of the Handmaid's Office,” at her request.¹ The origins of *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* are obscure. Nishino Toshiko has proposed that the story circulated in the medieval period in the oral repertoires of both *zatō* 座頭 (blind minstrel priests), who are specifically praised within the work, and *etoki bikuni* 絵解き比丘尼 (picture-explaining nuns), some of whom are known to have preached using elaborate paintings of heavens and hells, and who may have been married to *zatō* (NISHINO 1971, 42a–43b). Koyama Issei has argued somewhat more persuasively that the *Fuji* narrative was recited by medieval *yamabushi* 山伏 (mountain ascetics) and, possibly, mendicant *miko* 巫女 (shamanesses, or shrine maidens) from the Fuji mountain region (KOYAMA 1983, 38 and 48–50). Whatever the case may have been, scholars agree that *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* is rooted in a medieval Buddhist storytelling and proselytizing tradition, as its vituperatively didactic contents so clearly suggest.

Within the fantastic world of Muromachi fiction, *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* is one of several lurid accounts of human travelers' inadvertent journeys to hell and back. The story was either inspired by a set of entries in the late Kamakura-period historical chronicle *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡 (The Mirror of the East), or else shares a common source with it. According to these records, the second Kamakura shōgun, Minamoto no Yoriie 源頼家 (1182–1204), sent his retainer Wada no Heida Tanenaga 和田平太胤長 to explore a “great cave” in a place called Itōzaki 伊東崎 in Izu province in the sixth month of 1203. Tanenaga is reported to have returned on the same day, after slaying what he said was a “huge snake” that tried to swallow him whole. Two days later, Yoriie is said to have given Nitta no Shirō Tadatsune 仁田四郎忠常 a precious sword and sent him to explore a different cavern, this one located on the side of Mount Fuji in neighboring Suruga province. Tadatsune led a party of six men, including himself; only two survived. As Tadatsune explained upon his return the following morning, after contending

1. *Tokitsugu-kyō ki* 言繼卿記, entry for the twenty-sixth day of the first month of Daiei 7 大永七年 (1527). Cited in ICHIKO 1998, 76b.

with darkness, bats, wet feet, and a passage “too narrow to turn around in,” the party came to a raging underground river. There they saw a mysterious apparition in the light of their torches, and four of Tadatsune’s men dropped dead. Tadatsune managed to escape by sacrificing his new sword. He claims to have thrown it into the river in response to the apparition’s demand. The *Azuma kagami* author concludes by quoting a wise old man (or men) who explain that the Fuji cave is the dwelling of the Great Asama Bodhisattva, the resident deity of Mount Fuji.²

For modern readers, *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* is intriguing both as a samurai adventure story, and for the light that it can shed on late-medieval conceptions of sin, death, and karma, as well as the cults of Jizō and the Great Asama Bodhisattva in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In its central section, which details Nitta no Shirō Tadatsune’s experiences passing through the realms of hell, animals, and hungry ghosts, *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* is a veritable catalogue of contemporary social transgressions and their imagined punishments, emphasizing, in particular, the purported sins and sufferings of women and bad priests. Its religious and social message is strikingly conservative, because in addition to advocating faith in Jizō and the practice of the *nenbutsu*, it admonishes listeners and readers to work hard, pay their taxes, honor their contracts, and “simply accept the world as it is.” Like *The Tale of the Heike* 平家物語, which chronicles the downfall of Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 and his clan, *The Tale of the Fuji Cave* proclaims the fleeting nature of wealth, power, and worldly fame. Taking up where the *Heike* epic leaves off, it describes the subsequent fall of the Genji, embodied in the figure of Minamoto no Yoriie, Yoritomo’s eldest son and heir, by attributing it to Yoriie’s own Kiyomori-like arrogance and recklessness: his purportedly disastrous obsession with the sacred Fuji cave.

The following translation is based upon an unillustrated manuscript from the former Akagi Bunko 赤木文庫 archives. According to a colophon at the end of the work, it was copied out by the priest Dōkyō 道暁, who is otherwise unknown, “on an auspicious day in the fifth month of Keichō 8 慶長八年” (1603).³

2. Entries for the first, third, and fourth days of the sixth month of Kennin 3 建仁三年 (1203), in KUROITA 2004, 602, and KISHI 1977, 78–79. The *Azuma kagami* entries for the third and fourth days are translated in TYLER 1993, 271.

3. The text is typeset in YOKOYAMA and MATSUMOTO 1983, 429–51. References to the Keiō, 1607, and 1627 *Fuji* texts in the notes to the translation are to (1) the undated Keiō University Library manuscript (late Muromachi period), in ISHIKAWA 1997, 31–44; (2) the Tenri Library manuscript, dated the thirteenth day of the fourth month of Keichō 12 慶長十二年 (1607), in YOKOYAMA 1962, 318–37; and (3) the woodblock-printed *tanrokubon* 丹緑本 in the former Akagi Bunko collection, dated the third month of Kan’ei 4 寛永四年 (1627), in YOKOYAMA and MATSUMOTO 1983, 452–75.

ON THE MORNING of the third day of the fourth month of Shōji 3 (1201), the shōgun Yoriie summoned Wada no Heida Tanenaga and spoke: “Listen, Heida. People are always talking about the Fuji cave, but no one’s ever seen it. I want you to explore it and tell me what mysteries you find.”⁴

Heida took in his master’s words. “My lord,” he replied, “if it were some bird of the sky or beast of the earth, I could catch it easily enough. But your request leaves me at a loss. Still, to disobey your instruction would be to invite the wrath of heaven. So for you I’ll give my one and only life.”

Leaving the shōgun, Heida immediately went to see his uncle Yoshimori, to whom he explained what had occurred.⁵ “You see,” Heida said, “our lord has given me this most unusual command.”

“It’s incredible!” Yoshimori said.

“Since I’m to explore the Fuji cave, it’s uncertain if I’ll ever return to Fuka-zawa. So this is my last chance to see everyone—until we meet in the world to come, that is.” Heida woefully made to take his leave.

Yoshimori wept and spoke: “I’m especially sad for you, because I raised you on my knee from when you were a little boy. But it’s got nothing to do with me, so there’s nothing that I can do. Now go earn some glory and come back soon.”

Heida stood to go, his eyes welling with tears. Asaina no Saburō Yoshihide saw what was afoot, and taking up his great sword, Teimaru, he drew it two or three inches from its sheath and glared at his cousin, Heida.⁶ “You stupid fool!” he said. “Getting all weepy-eyed in the presence of Japanese samurai—it’s a disgrace! Having someone like you in the family makes cowards of us all. If that’s what you are, then stretch out your neck and let me kill you myself!”

“I’m no coward,” Heida countered. “Stone, boulder, dragon or tiger’s lair, I’ll smash it open and stroll inside once or twice! There’s nothing weak about me. So long, Asaina.” Heida started to leave.

Asaina laughed at the sight of his cousin: “Spur a running horse,” he said, “or ‘dye a robe that’s been dipped a thousand times to make it redder still!’⁷ I’d like to join you myself, but since you’ve been given the job alone, there’s nothing that I can do. Be sure to preserve the family honor and make us all proud!”

Heida’s attire that day was extraordinarily splendid. He wore a small-sleeved robe of Chinese brocade over an unlined inner garment loosened at the sides.

4. Minamoto no Yoriie 源頼家 (1182–1204) was the second Kamakura shōgun. Wada no Heida Tanenaga 和田平太胤長 (1183–1213) was the son of Wada Yoshinaga 和田義長.

5. Wada Yoshimori 和田義盛 (1147–1213), a close personal retainer of the first Kamakura shōgun, Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝. The words “his uncle” are interpolated from the 1607 *Fuji* text.

6. Asahina no Saburō Yoshihide 朝比奈三郎義秀 (1176–?; also Asaina), third son of Wada Yoshimori. Asaina is known in legend for his great physical strength. The word “cousin” is interpolated from the 1607 *Fuji* text.

7. Asaina quotes a contemporary aphorism, *chishio ni somuru kurenai mo somuru ni yorite iro o masu* ちしおに染むる紅も染むるによりて色を増す.

The sleeves of his mist-patterned *hitatare* were hitched back at the shoulders,⁸ and on his head he wore a court cap tied securely under his chin. He carried a gilded fan together with a one-foot six-inch sword mounted with silver clasps. His other sword was adorned with copper-gold alloy fittings and a hardened leather guard. With the two blades at his side and a porter bearing a bundle of sixteen torches, he declared, “I’ll be back in a week,” and entered the Fuji cave.

“There’s nothing sadder than the plight of a warrior,” everyone said as they saw him off, and they all wept.

Some hundred yards into the cave Heida came upon a mass of striped snakes with mouths as red as if they had been daubed with paint. The scene was terrifying to behold. Being under orders, Heida had no choice but to proceed, and thus leaping this way and that over the heads of the serpents, he made his way another five hundred yards. He came to a place where a fishy stench wafted through the air, frightening beyond measure. Pressing further on, Heida saw a young woman, seventeen or eighteen years old. Dressed in twelve-layered robes and a long crimson trouser-skirt, she bore the thirty-two marks of perfect feminine beauty.⁹ Her locks were as delicate as the wings of a cicada, as richly hued as flowing ink. Perched at the foot of a silver loom, she wove with a golden shuttle. “Who are you to visit my abode?” she asked in the voice of a heavenly bird.¹⁰

“I am a retainer of the Kamakura shōgun,” Heida said. “My name is Wada no Heida Tanenaga of the Miura clan.”

“I don’t care whose servant you are,” the woman replied. “I won’t let you pass. And if you try to force your way through, I’ll take your life in an instant.”

Heida thought to himself: “There’s no point in doing something stupid. After all, what good is all the land in Japan if you’re dead?”

“You are eighteen years old this year,” the woman said. “In the spring of your thirty-first year, you’ll be killed fighting Izumi no Kosaburō Chikahira of Shinano Province.¹¹ Now leave here at once!” Heida was bitterly disappointed at not having seen the inner reaches of the cave, but given the woman’s words, there was nothing that he could do.

Returning to the capital, Heida appeared before the Kamakura shōgun and recounted the mysteries he had observed. Yoriie listened. That no one had

8. A *hitatare* 直垂 is a kind of matching shirt and pants worn under armor.

9. The “thirty-two marks [of feminine beauty]” (*sanjū-ni sō* 三十二相) suggests the thirty-two distinguishing characteristics of a buddha (also *sanjū-ni sō*).

10. The woman speaks in the voice of a *kalavinka* (Jp. *karyōbinga* 迦陵頻伽), a Himalayan bird renowned for its exquisite song. In the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, the *kalavinka* is depicted with the face of a beautiful woman and is said to reside in the Pure Land. NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 225a.

11. Wada Tanenaga (Heida) was indeed killed at the age of thirty-one as a result of his involvement in the so-called “Izumi Chikahira disturbance” 泉親衡の乱—a failed attempt in the second month of Kenpō 1 建保元年 (1213) to install the late Yoriie’s orphaned son as shōgun—but he was Chikahira’s ally rather than his opponent. The 1607 *Fuji* text quotes the woman as explaining that Tanenaga would take up with Chikahira and instigate a “groundless rebellion,” for which he would be arrested, exiled, and later killed.

plumbed the depths of the cave weighed upon his heart, and he made a further declaration: “I have four hundred *chō* of open land.¹² Anyone who aspires to a domain should explore the Fuji cave.”

The samurai of the various provinces grumbled among themselves. “Only the living want land,” they said. “What good is it when you’re dead?” and no one volunteered.

At that time there was a resident of Izu province by the name of Nitta no Shirō Tadatsuna, a twelfth-generation descendant of the Kamatari Minister and a thirteenth-generation descendant of the Shirotsumi Middle Counselor.¹³ “I have sixteen hundred *chō* of land,” Nitta thought to himself. “With the shōgun’s four hundred I could have two thousand, and then I’d be able to leave a thousand each to my sons Matsubō and Okubō.” Nitta thus made his way before the shōgun and announced his intention to explore the Fuji cave. Yoriei was exceptionally pleased, and he granted Nitta a deed for the four hundred *chō*.

After taking his leave, Nitta summoned his two children, Matsubō and Okubō. “Listen, boys,” he said. “I’m off to explore the Fuji cave for our Kamakura Lord. I’m doing it because I love you. The shōgun’s given me a deed for four hundred *chō*, so now I can leave you a thousand each.”

The boys tried to dissuade their father. “A thousand or ten thousand,” they said, “we don’t want them if they’re going to cost your life.”

“I’m not likely to die just by entering the Fuji cave,” Nitta said, comforting his sons, “not without some sign, at least. So take it easy. But if I do die, I don’t want you to grieve for me. Be good brothers and always get along. Stick together, no matter what, and serve your lord and keep up the family name.” As there was nothing that they could do, the boys withdrew.

“All those samurai must hate me now!” Nitta mused. “But there’s nothing for it—every father loves his sons. It’s for them alone that a man bothers to plant pines and cedars.¹⁴ There’s an old poem that goes,

<i>hito no oya no</i>	A parent’s heart
<i>kokoro wa yami ni</i>	is not mired in
<i>aranedomo</i>	darkness,
<i>ko o omou michi ni</i>	yet I wander lost
<i>mayoimuru ka na</i>	on paths of concern for my child.” ¹⁵

12. 980 acres, or approximately 397 hectares.

13. “Tadatsuna” is likely a mistake for “Tadatsune.” The historical Nitta no Shirō Tadatsune 仁田四郎忠常 (d. 1203) is best known for his participation in the assassination of Yoriei’s father-in-law, Hiki Yoshikazu 比企能員, upon the order of Hōjō Tokimasa 北条時政 on the second day of the ninth month of Kennin 3 建仁三年 (1203). The Kamatari Minister is Fujiwara no Kamatari 藤原鎌足 (614–669), founder of the Fujiwara clan.

14. Presumably because the trees would require a generation or more to mature.

15. This is a slightly alternate version of *Gosen wakashū* 後撰和歌集 1102/3, attributed to Fujiwara no Kanesuke 藤原兼輔 (877–933). According to *Yamato monogatari* 大和物語 (dan 45), Kanesuke composed it out of concern for his daughter’s fortunes at court.

Such were Nitta's thoughts.

Nitta's attire that day was exceptionally grand. He wore an unlined inner garment with a lattice design, loosened at the sides, and a finely woven silk *hitatare* with the sleeves hitched back at the shoulders. On his head he wore a court cap, laced on tight, and at his waist he carried a great Mōbusa sword,¹⁶ a short sword in a white ribbed sheath, and a crimson-edged fan. The Kamakura shōgun assigned him a retainer: a certain Kudō Saemon no Suke, whom Nitta had carry a bundle of sixteen torches. After declaring his intention to return at noon, seven days later, Nitta and his man entered the cave.

Nitta walked some hundred yards, but there was nothing to be seen, no lady weaving at a loom. Drawing the great sword from his waist, he brandished it in the four directions and continued on his way.¹⁷ After what seemed like six or seven hundred yards, Nitta came to a place where the moon appeared in the sky, just like in Japan. A multi-hued pine forest of blue, yellow, red, white, and black spread across the land. There was a small stream with footprints in the bed, from which Nitta surmised that someone had recently made his way across. Nitta traversed the stream, and he saw a succession of nine eight-ridged palaces with cypress bark roofs.

Nitta entered the palace grounds. Water dripped from the eaves with a sound like that of *ge-ke-shu-jō*—"the salvation of all sentient beings"—played upon a lute, and the rustling sound of wind in the pines was such as to awaken a person from the cycle of birth and death. Proceeding further inside, Nitta saw hanging strands of threaded jewels. Night and day were as one, distinguishable only by the periodic opening and closing of lotus blossoms. In one place Nitta found a lute left standing as if it had just been played. The ceilings were draped with sheets of red-ground brocade, and the pillars were wrapped in similar bolts of blue. The red and blue brocade was in turn adorned with gold and silver. When Nitta and his companion spoke, their voices echoed like the bells of Gion Shōja,¹⁸ beyond the heart to fathom or words to express. Supposing that he had arrived in the Pure Land, Nitta was overjoyed.

Exploring a road that ran to the northeast, Nitta found a lake with an island. There was a palace there that glowed with the radiant light of Jambu River gold.¹⁹ A bridge with eighty-nine sections connected the island to the shore, and for the eighty-nine sections there were eighty-nine bells. The first bell rang the name

16. According to the Keiō and 1627 *Fuji* texts, "a sword made by Mōbusa [Mōfusa]," who is otherwise unknown.

17. It was believed that by brandishing a sword, a traveler could expose hidden malevolent spirits.

18. The legendary bells at the Indian temple where Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have preached.

19. The word "palace" is interpolated from the 1607 *Fuji* text. The Jambu River runs through the great mango forest in northern Jambudvīpa, which, in Buddhist cosmology, is the island-continent at the foot of Mount Sumeru inhabited by human beings. The Jambu River is known for its purple gold. INAGAKI 1995, 403; NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 146d.

of the *Lotus Sutra*, after which the others rang out every syllable of the twenty-eight chapters of the eight-fascicle *Lotus*. In addition, the eighty-ninth bell rang the following prayer: “Tamon, Jikoku, Zōjō, Kōmoku, and you Ten Rakshasa Daughters: by the power of the *Lotus Sutra*, lead all sentient beings to the Pure Land of Nine Grades.”²⁰ It also rang, “May this merit be spread equally so that all alike will aspire to enlightenment and achieve rebirth in the Land of Tranquility and Bliss.”²¹

There was an eight-petaled lotus in the five-colored water of the lake. Nitta was enthralled, and when he approached it for a closer look, he noticed that the eastern garden of the palace was paved with silver. A husky voice called out from inside: “Who are you to visit my abode?” It was a snake with eyes like the sun and the moon, and a mouth so red that it seemed to have been daubed with paint. A full twenty fathoms long, it had sixteen horns and a hundred and eight eyes. Its flaming breath rose up a thousand feet in the air.²² The sight of it flicking its scarlet tongue was enough to make Nitta’s hair stand on end.

“Nitta,” the snake said, “who do you think I am? I am the Great Asama Bodhisattva of Mount Fuji. Luck has run out for the Kamakura shōgun Yoriie, ruler of Japan, now that you, his servant, have found me here.

“It causes me shame, but I’ll confess: my six sensory organs are wracked with pain three times every night and day.²³ Please feed me your sword.”

“Certainly,” Nitta said, and he drew his four-foot six-inch Mōbusa sword and offered it to the serpent. The Bodhisattva took the weapon and swallowed it point-first.

“Your short sword, too” the creature said. Nitta proffered his short sword, and the Bodhisattva swallowed that as well.

After awhile, the Bodhisattva spoke: “In exchange for your swords, I will show you the Six Realms and then send you home.”²⁴ Changing his appearance to that of a seventeen or eighteen-year-old boy, the Bodhisattva explained: “The people of Japan say that hell is frightening, but no one who’s been there has ever

20. The term “Nine Grades” (*kuhon* 九品) refers to the nine ranks of possible rebirth within the Pure Land. The words “eighty-ninth bell” are interpolated from the 1607 *Fuji* text. Tamonten 多聞天 (Bishamonten 毘沙門天), Jikokuten 持国天, Zōjōten 增長天, and Kōmokuten 廣目天 are the Four Guardian Kings (*shitennō* 四天王). Together with the Ten Rakshasa Daughters 十羅刹女, they are divine protectors of Buddhism.

21. This is a quotation from the preface to Shandao’s seventh-century *Commentary on the Visualization Sutra* (*Guan jing shu* 觀經疏), in T 37, 246a, lines 9–10. The “Land of Tranquility and Bliss” is the Pure Land.

22. The words “hundred and eight eyes” and “flaming” are interpolated from the Keiō text.

23. The six sensory organs (*rokkon* 六根) are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The term is often employed as a synonym for the body as a whole. NAKAMURA 2001, 3: 1777d–78a.

24. The Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道) are the six planes of existence through which unenlightened beings transmigrate according to their karma. They include the realms of heaven, humans, animals, *ashura* 阿修羅 (a world of never-ending battle), hungry ghosts, and hell.

returned. And they say that Paradise is wonderful, but no one's ever seen it. So I'm going to show you hell, and then send you back."

Taking Nitta under his left arm, the Bodhisattva declared that first he would reveal the Children's Riverbed Hell.²⁵ "Listen, Nitta" the Bodhisattva said. "The magistrates of hell are as follows: first, there's the Hakone Gongen; second, the Izu Gongen; third, the Hakusan Gongen; fourth, me; fifth, the Mishima Gongen; and sixth, the Tateyama Gongen of Etchū province. We're the six magistrates of the hundred and thirty-six hells, and we're all manifestations of Kannon. If you disregard us, you're doomed.²⁶ Now look here at the Children's Riverbed Hell."

Seven- and eight-year-old children held hands with three- and four-year-olds, all of them stricken with inexpressible grief. "What's the meaning of this?" Nitta asked, taking in the sight. The Bodhisattva explained: "These are children who died without compensating their mothers for the pain they caused them during their nine months in the womb. They're to suffer on the riverbed like this for nine thousand years." A blazing fire swept the expanse, and the stones all burst into flames. As the children had nowhere to run, they were burned up until only their ashen bones remained. Soon, a number of demons arrived. Shouting "Arise! Arise!" and beating the ground with iron staves, they restored the children to their former selves.

Looking toward the west, Nitta saw the Sanzu River, ten-thousand *yojanas* deep and wide.²⁷ An old woman was stripping passing sinners of twenty-five robes in accord with their twenty-five types of sin. Those without robes were stripped of their skin, which the old woman hung on the limbs of a *biranju* tree and made into celestial feather gowns. The old woman was a manifestation of Dainichi Buddha.²⁸

Crossing the river, Nitta and the Bodhisattva arrived at the Mountain of Death.²⁹ When the dead receive memorial services on the anniversaries of their passing, spirits come here to report it. Avoiding the mountain, they call out, "People are praying for you on your deathday! Quick, tell the birth companion

25. *Sai no kawara* 賽河原, a special hell reserved for small children.

26. This and the preceding three sentences are translated from the Keiō manuscript, which contains a clearer explanation of the six magistrates of hell than the 1603 *Fuji* text. *Gongen* 権現 is a term for a buddha or bodhisattva that has taken on a temporary manifestation as a Japanese deity in order to save sentient beings. NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 516a.

27. One *yojana* equals seven or nine miles, depending upon the interpretation.

28. The old woman is Datsueba 奪衣婆/脱衣婆, whose name is written with the characters for "clothes-snatching hag." The narrator of the *otogizōshi Chōhōji yomigaeri no sōshi* 長宝寺よみがへりの草紙, composed prior to 1513, explains that Datsueba "would strip evildoers of their burial robes and hang the garments in the branches of a *biranju* 毘蘭樹 tree. The robes of the most sinful were the heaviest, causing even stout branches to bend to the earth. 'Look at the weight of your crimes!' the old woman would shout, after which she would enumerate the evildoer's transgressions and interrogate the person in a manner that was most frightening to behold." ŌSHIMA and WATARI 2002, 422.

29. *Shide no yama* 死出の山, which, according to *Chōhōji yomigaeri no sōshi*, the dead are required to cross on the seventh day after they die.

deities!”³⁰ The birth companion deities receive the dead and seek to extirpate their eight billion kalpas of sin by interceding with Taishaku.³¹ They record the news of the services in their “good” tablets, enabling some of the dead to proceed to the Pure Land of Nine Grades.

To the side, Nitta saw demon wardens flogging a sinner who was burdened with a heavy stone. With cries of, “Climb! Climb!” demons were hounding countless others up the jagged sides of iron boulders. The Bodhisattva explained: “These are people who overloaded horses in the course of doing business. They reveled in their profits and callously worked their animals to death. They’ll suffer constantly like this for eighteen thousand years. Nitta, tell everyone in the human world: never overload a horse just because it can’t speak. You’ll go to hell if you do.”³²

Nitta saw some sinners being skewered upon the points of blades. With shouts of, “Climb! Climb!” demons were chasing them up the Mountain of Swords. Their flesh fell in pieces like shreds of deep-dyed crimson cloth. “These are people who didn’t repay their obligations to their masters and parents in the human world,” the Bodhisattva explained. “This is their punishment for failing to settle down, and for speaking badly of their masters and parents.”

To the west, Nitta saw a place where demons were forcing people through towering waves of fire and water. The demons were affixing iron shackles to the people’s wrists and ankles, and in one place, they were pounding nails into each person’s forty-four joints, eighty-three bones, and nine hundred million hair follicles. “What’s this?” Nitta asked, to which the Bodhisattva replied, “These are the punishments for judiciary officials. They’re doomed to suffer like this without relief. If there’s anything that a person should avoid, it’s becoming a judge.”

There was a high place to the east, and the Bodhisattva led Nitta there for a look. They could see a road running eastward to the Crossroads of the Six Realms, where a lone priest stood dressed in a monastic stole. A crowd of sinners had gathered before him. “Save us, Buddha!” the people cried in their despair. Demon wardens seized them and declared that they would drop them into the Hell of No Respite.³³ “Who’s that priest?” Nitta asked.

30. Birth companion deities (*kushōjin* 俱生神) are pairs of Buddhist deities that affix themselves to a person’s right and left shoulders at the time of a person’s birth and then record the person’s good and bad deeds upon “good” and “bad” tablets throughout the person’s life. When the person dies, the deities report their findings to Enma 閻魔, the king and judge of the afterworld. NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 334a.

31. A *kalpa* (*kō* 劫) is a measurement of time which Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250) described in his commentary *Daichidoron* 大智度論 as being greater than the time that it takes for a heavenly being to wear away a 40 *ri* 里 (one-hundred-square-mile) rock by brushing it with its delicate sleeve once every one hundred years. NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 423b.

32. According to the Keiō and 1627 *Fuji* texts, the abused horses will themselves become demons and torture their former owners in hell.

33. *Muken jigoku* 無間地獄 (Skt. *Avīci*), the deepest and worst of the eight burning hells, where evil-doers are tortured constantly without intermission. NAKAMURA 2001 3: 1615d.

“That’s Jizō Bodhisattva of the Six Realms,” the Bodhisattva explained. “He doesn’t help those who were only interested in fame and fortune in their former lives, and who didn’t chant his name, even if now they beg to be saved. Tell everyone back in the human world.”

The Bodhisattva further explained: “Those who want to go to the Pure Land should wash their hands at dawn every day and chant Jizō’s name one or two hundred times. Now listen closely, Nitta: the Six Realms are the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, *ashura*, humans, and heavens. First, I’ll show you the animal realm.”³⁴

The Bodhisattva led Nitta to a place where there were three snakes. Two of them were female, and together they wound around a third snake, which was male. The females sucked on the male’s eyes and mouth; their breath rose up a thousand feet in the air. “What’s happening here?” Nitta asked.

“The snake in the middle was a man who kept two wives in the human world, enraging them both. They’ll suffer together like this for seven thousand three hundred years.”³⁵

Looking in another direction, Nitta saw demons taking hold of a sinner, stretching his tongue out twelve feet, and pounding it full of nails. Other demons were gouging out people’s eyes, and in one place, iron dogs and crows were devouring mounds of flesh. “What’s this?” Nitta asked, to which the Bodhisattva replied, “These are punishments for people who spoke badly about their masters, parents, and teachers.”³⁶

There was a woman being sawn in half at the crotch. “This is a woman who fell in love with a man when she was already involved with another,” the Bodhisattva said. “She’ll be tortured like this without reprieve for four hundred five thousand years.”

In another place, Nitta saw a woman in twelve-layered robes standing on top of a boulder. She began ripping apart her own flesh, which several demons messily devoured. Her screams were terrible beyond belief. “That woman was a prostitute in her former life. She spent her days lusting after men, which is why she fell into the animal realm.”³⁷

There was a woman beside a standing oil lamp. Demons were peeling the skin from her face and dripping oil on the flesh underneath. “Now this woman

34. According to the Keiō and 1607 *Fuji* texts, the Bodhisattva says that first he will show Nitta the hell realm. “Animal realm” (*chikushōdō* 畜生道) may be a mistake here, considering that Nitta and the Bodhisattva are again said to visit the animal realm later in the tale.

35. “Seven thousand three hundred years” is from the 1607 *Fuji* text. The 1603 text states, “ten thousand three hundred, four thousand years,” which is an apparent copyist’s mistake. According to the Keiō and 1627 *Fuji* texts, the three snakes would suffer for 1,300 and 300 years, respectively.

36. The word “teachers” is interpolated from the Keiō and 1607 *Fuji* texts. According to the Keiō text, people can also have their eyes gouged out for stepping over their parent’s pillow.

37. In the 1607 *Fuji* text, the Bodhisattva gives Nitta the additional instruction to “tell the women of the human world never to take up prostitution. It has deep karmic implications.”

was naturally ugly, but because she wanted to be attractive to men, she tried to improve her looks. Such efforts are bound to fail. And even if they do succeed for a while, their consequences for the next life are severe. When a woman like this ends up distributing talismans and the like, people simply say, “how sad!” and don’t pay her any mind. This is the punishment for people like her who make up their faces with rouge and white foundation that they bought in secret from men. They’re bound to suffer in this way for fifty-thousand kalpas.”

Further on, Nitta saw a sinner being pulled toward him by thirty sets of iron chains. Looking closely, he saw that it was a disheveled nun. Nitta asked the Bodhisattva to explain. “This is the nun Usui from the Akatsuka estate in Kōzuke province. She envied others when they prospered, and rejoiced at their misfortunes. She was born the mistress of a wealthy house with as many as three hundred retainers. She wouldn’t feed them even salt or *miso*, but when it came to herself, she had them serve her lovely meals every morning and evening. In short, she had no compassion for those in her employ. Worse still, she didn’t make any offerings to monks or priests. Since she didn’t give the slightest bit of charity to anyone, the Ten Kings had nothing to say on her behalf.³⁸ ‘Drop her right into the Hell of No Respite!’ they declared. So now she’s going to be pushed down to the bottom of a boiling pot.

“Listen, Nitta. It’s true that both men and women fall into hell, but many more women do than men. Women’s thoughts are all evil. Still, women are forbidden to approach men on only eighty-four days a year.³⁹ Women don’t know their own transgressions, which is why they fail to plant good karmic roots. It’s a shame, you know.”

Nitta saw another woman being pulled toward him by thirty iron chains, and he asked the Bodhisattva to explain. “This woman was the master of an estate. She abused innocent farmers, causing them considerable consternation. Women like her will have nails pounded into their chests, and their breath will rise up a thousand feet in the air. They’ll all fall into hell for a very long time.”

Looking to the side, Nitta saw some demons hunting sinners with a pack of iron dogs. Calling the sinners “game” and “prey,” they set the dogs to chasing after them and devouring their flesh. “What kind of karma causes that?” Nitta asked.

“That’s the punishment for people who don’t like to farm, yet who envy others for the things that they produce. They’ll be tortured like that for fifty thousand kalpas.

“Listen closely, Nitta. Commoners should tend to their fields, pay their annual levy, and then use what remains to support their families and make offerings to monks and priests. If they do, they’re unlikely to fall into hell.”

38. The Ten Kings (*Jūō* 十王) are the ten judges of the dead.

39. During the seven days of a woman’s menstrual cycle, repeated twelve times a year.

Horse- and ox-headed demons had placed a sinner in a flaming carriage, where they were beating him with iron cudgels. After forty-four years he would be put in a stone cell from which there would be no release—not even if people in the human world prayed for him there. “Who’s that?” Nitta asked. The Bodhisattva replied: “He was a priest of Sodeshi Shrine in Tōtōmi province. He managed the shine lands, and he lavished their income on his own wife and children, rather than using it to perform services for the deity. He also failed to abstain from the proscribed foods or to read the *Heart Sutra*, which is why he’s being punished like that. He’ll spend a long time passing through the eighty-thousand different hells. If there’s one thing that a person should never become, it’s a *kan-nushi*, a Shinto priest. Even those who associate with them will fall into hell.”

There was a woman screaming as her tongue was being pulled out, and there was a woman upon whom demons were piling thirty iron roundweights. “These women made false accusations against their servants, causing them terrible distress. They’ll suffer constantly like this for seven thousand kalpas.”

Several demons were stuffing a seven-foot priest into a “dragon-mouth” waterspout.⁴⁰ They squeezed six-and-a-half quarts of greasy fat from his body in a single day. “This man became a priest, but he couldn’t read and he knew nothing of the sutras and sutra commentaries. He never offered incense or flowers to the Buddha; instead, he spent his life caring for his own family alone. People like him are doomed to suffer in this way for nine thousand years.”

Nitta saw a priest with robes around his waist. He was running around the perimeter of the Hell of No Respite. “This man also became a priest in his former life, but he was like an ocean fish that absorbs no salt; his Buddhist devotion was only for show.⁴¹ His heart was full of filth and desire, and he did nothing for the sake of others. Avaricious priests like him are bound to suffer in this way. Still, as a result of having taken holy vows, they’ll be spared from falling into the Hell of No Respite.”

In another place, Nitta saw demons pounding nails into a woman’s hips. They were also cutting her open with a sword. The woman’s belly was swollen like the Four Great Seas.⁴² “In the human world, this woman pretended to be young in order to make herself more attractive to men. Then, when she became pregnant, she caused herself to miscarry. She’ll suffer like this without relief for ten kalpas.”

A man who looked like a master was piling iron roundweights on a servant and pushing him into the Hell of No Respite. “This is the punishment for people

40. *Tatsu no kuchi* 龍の口, a metal spout that is cast in the shape of a dragon’s head so that water appears to pour from the dragon’s mouth.

41. Like a fish that swims in brine yet remains sweet to the taste, the priest remained unaffected by his monastic environment.

42. In Buddhist cosmology, the Four Great Seas (*shidaikai* 四大海) surround Mount Sumeru at the center of the world.

who sell themselves into bondage and then run away without honoring their contracts. They'll suffer constantly like this for eighty thousand kalpas. Nitta, tell everyone when you get back home: if you put something in writing, you can't just ignore it and behave as you will. It's a terrible crime if you do. It's also a crime if you don't return a contract when its term has expired."

Looking up into the sky, Nitta saw a woman with beautiful hair riding in a finely ornamented carriage. Golden flags fluttered in the merciful breeze. Twenty-five bodhisattvas played music, and Kannon and Seishi accompanied her as well. Nitta asked the Bodhisattva to explain. "She's a woman from the Kikuta district of Hitachi province. She was born into a wealthy family, and because of her kindness, she made offerings to monks and priests and looked after those who were alone in the world. She gave clothes to people who were cold, and in particular she favored *zatō*, blind minstrel priests.⁴³ Thanks to the goddess Benzaiten's compassion, her wealth increased day by day, year after year. You see, *zatō* are different from ordinary people, which is why Myōon and Benzaiten protect those who treat them kindly. This woman was always thinking of others, from the time that she was a child. There's a poem that goes,

<i>hotoke to wa</i>	Of the Buddha,
<i>nani o iwama no</i>	what shall we say?
<i>koke mushiro</i>	As a mat of moss in a rocky cleft
<i>tada jihishin ni</i>	cannot be "spread,"
<i>shiku mono wa nashi</i>	his compassion is beyond compare. ⁴⁴

Such was the depth of her compassion. Taishaku was informed, and Kannon and Seishi came to lead her to the Pure Land of Nine Grades. Nitta, spread the news in the human world: if you show wholehearted compassion to everyone—man, woman, and beast—then you're sure to attain the Pure Land."

Looking to the side, Nitta saw some sinners who were bound with an iron cable. A demon held them fast, torturing them all the while. Pressing against the cord, the sinners cried with endless grief. "This is the punishment for people who kill all kinds of living things. They'll suffer like this for five million kalpas."⁴⁵

In another place, Nitta saw a hundred demons piling and pressing rocks on the chests of sinners. "These are people who ate baby birds in the human world. People who selfishly eat whatever they please will suffer in this way for sixty thousand kalpas."

43. *Zatō* 座頭 are the blind *biwa*-playing raconteurs of *The Tale of the Heike* and other popular medieval narratives. They are traditionally associated with the goddess Benzaiten 弁財天 and the bodhisattva Myōon 妙音菩薩.

44. The poem depends for its effect upon the double meaning of *shiku* しく ("to spread" 敷く and "to be the equal of" 及く), and upon the overlapping syntax of *nani o iwa[mu]* 何をいわ[む] ("what shall we say?") and *iwama no koke mushiro* いわまのこけむしろ ("a mat of moss in a rocky cleft").

45. According to the Keiō and 1607 *Fuji* texts, the people were hunters and trappers in their former lives.

There was a Buddhist priest hanging upside-down, and demons were cutting strips of flesh from his head. Nitta asked the Bodhisattva to explain. “This one put on holy airs, but his heart was full of filth and greed. He thought nothing of the gods and buddhas. He never offered incense or flowers, and he didn’t even recite the *nenbutsu*. For him, being a priest was just for show.”

There was a demon stabbing a sinner in the eyes with an awl. “In the human world, this person hoodwinked and robbed other people. He’s bound to suffer like this for five million kalpas. Listen, Nitta. Those who read the founder Shakyamuni’s sutras are close to being buddhas. If you speak badly of a person who knows even just a little of a sutra, you’re sure to fall into the Hell of No Respite. And to know nothing of the sutras is the same as being blind. What’s more, people who expose their bellies to the sun or the moon, or who take off their clothes to be naked, are sure to fall into the Hell of No Respite.”

There were shivering sinners in the ice of the Crimson and Great Crimson Lotus Hells.⁴⁶ “These people were burglars, thieves, bandits, and pirates in their former lives. They robbed others and stripped them of their clothes. Their punishment is to be locked in ice like this for thirty-five thousand years.”⁴⁷

Next, Nitta saw a nun. She had shorn her hair when she was in her prime, and then later come to regret it. “If only I had my tresses,” she thought, “then a man might take me by the sleeve!” The sight of women who were loved by men made her rue the day that she took holy vows. Filled with envy, she longed for the past, murmuring her regrets at the sounds of the wind and the waves as if she were reciting poetry. Forgetting that she was a nun, she took leave of her senses, found a man, became pregnant, and gave birth to a child. Now a demon was pounding nails into her hips and cutting her apart with a sword. Blood poured from her eyes and nose. To regret her deeds at this point would do her no good. Dropped into the animal hell, she was being tortured with no respite.

Some demons had bound a woman with an iron cable. “You were crazy about men in the human world,” they said. “Let’s see how many!” They piled approximately three hundred iron roundweights upon the woman’s body. “You can try to lie about the number of your lovers,” they taunted, “but nothing’s a secret from the Ten Kings!” The woman would suffer like this for fifteen thousand years.

Nitta saw a demon pushing a woman’s face into an iron kettle. The kettle burst into flames, and the woman’s head was burned. The Bodhisattva explained: “In her former life, this woman would be chagrined to see a stranger approach at mealtime. She would turn red in the face and take her indignation out on some

46. *Guren jigoku* 紅蓮地獄 and *dai guren jigoku* 大紅蓮地獄, the seventh and eighth of the eight freezing hells. They are named after the splotchy red appearance of their inhabitants’ frostbitten skin, which is said to resemble the blossoms of a crimson lotus. NAKAMURA 2001, 1: 351C.

47. According to the Keiō and 1607 *Fuji* texts, sinners carry their clothes with them into the Crimson and Great Crimson Hells, but when they try to put them on, the clothes burst into flames.

blameless servant or child. Women like her will be burned and charred in this way for four hundred thousand kalpas.⁴⁸ If someone comes at mealtime and you give them food, it's the same as making a Buddhist offering. You'll earn enormous merit and become rich in the present life."

Looking in another direction, Nitta saw a woman with hair that was three hundred yards long. Demons were setting fire to the ends and burning it all up. "What's this?" Nitta asked.

"When she was in the human world, she used to wish for a thousand new strands of hair for every strand that she lost. Now she'll spend nine thousand years having her forehead burned with hot iron roundweights.⁴⁹

"It's an infinitely terrible sin for a woman to be childless, and it's a horrible sin for a woman with only one child not to bear any more. Also, it's very bad for a woman not to have her period. If such women become wealthy and still fail to plant good karmic roots—if they want more than what they already have, or want to wear more robes than they're already wearing—then when they die, they'll be like leaves blown from a tree. If you have wealth like that, your first thoughts should be for the next life, and you should plant good roots. People with children are likely to receive some benefit in the world to come, although it depends of course on the children. And even so, there aren't many children who pray enough to get their parents out of hell."

Nitta saw a demon hacking off a man's arms and legs with an adze. "That man cut down trees and grasses for no reason at all, and he let them wither and die. He'll be tortured to no end."

Saying that he would show him the realm of hungry ghosts, the Bodhisattva led Nitta further on. The sinners there had bellies as vast as oceans, necks as thin as threads, and heads as large as Mount Sumeru.⁵⁰ There was food before them, but when they tried to eat it, it burst into flames. Unable to consume a single thing, they were tormented by hunger, day and night. "These people were wealthy in their former lives, but they didn't share their riches with others, or even allow themselves to eat. They reveled in their coins and grain, forcing themselves all the while to endure hunger and cold. People like them will fall into the realm of hungry ghosts, where they'll suffer without cease for five hundred thousand kalpas.

"Nitta, tell everyone back in the human world: whether you're rich or poor, you'll find wealth if you clean your rooms, maintain your clothes, prepare proper

48. The 1607 and 1627 *Fuji* texts explain that the woman would ignore visitors by hiding her head in her kettle, which is why she is punished in the way that she is.

49. According to the Keiō and 1607 *Fuji* texts, the woman was having nails pounded into her forehead. The 1607 and 1627 *Fuji* texts explain that her punishment was for the sin of envying the length of other women's hair.

50. This and the following two sentences are translated from the Keiō *Fuji* manuscript, which in this part is more complete than the 1603 *Fuji* text.

food, feed others and also feed yourself. The world is no more than what we see in a dream. If you failed to plant good roots in the past and resent rich people in the present, you'll fall into the realm of hungry ghosts."⁵¹

There was a hungry ghost who was giving birth to children, then ripping them apart and eating them. "This is the punishment for people who feed themselves by selling adolescent children, and for people who abandon their babies. They'll suffer like this continuously for three million kalpas. No matter how much trouble children are, it's forbidden to sell or abandon them."

Nitta saw a demon stuffing a sinner's mouth with rice. Blood gushed from the sinner's maw, and he was unable to eat.⁵² "Now this person, he hated giving things to others. People like him will all fall into the realm of hungry ghosts for a very long time."

Nitta and the Bodhisattva came to a crossroads where they saw a man with Jizō and Taishaku. "That's the Hirata Priest, otherwise known as Myōshinbō, from the Hirata district of Mikawa province. He and his wife didn't have any children in the human realm, so they decided to renounce the world and pray for their lives to come. They took holy orders, and now they're on their way to the Pure Land of Nine Grades. The buddhas of the three ages have all gathered there to build them a golden hall."⁵³

Examining the animal realm, Nitta saw all the birds of the sky and beasts of the earth spliced together in disturbing combinations. "This is what happens to children who are overly attached to their parents, and to people who are overly attached to their stepmothers or stepchildren. They all fall into the animal realm."

Nitta looked into the *ashura* realm. He saw tremendous flames rising up into the air, and warriors armed with bows and blades engaged in ceaseless fighting. "People who die in battle fall into the *ashura* realm, where they suffer for two thousand three hundred years."

After showing him the Six Realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, *ashura*, humans, and heaven, the Bodhisattva took Nitta under his arm and led him to Enma's court. There was a golden palace hall there where the Ten Kings dwelled. Birth companion deities had recorded the deeds of the righteous in tablets of gold, and those of the wicked in tablets of iron. There were demons shouting, "Look here, sinner! I'll show you all the crimes you committed since you were seven!" They were forcing sinners to gaze upon the iron tablets. When the sinners protested that they were not guilty of so many crimes, the demons declared,

51. The Keiō *Fuji* text alternately explains: "People who were born poor because they failed to plant good roots in their previous lives, who envy the rich because they themselves do not succeed, and who long to possess everything they see—they are the hungry ghosts of this present [human] world."

52. According to the 1607 *Fuji* text, the demon was also sewing the sinner's mouth shut with iron thread, pounding nails into his cheeks, and piercing his throat with needles.

53. The three ages are the past, the present, and the future.

“Then we’ll weigh you on the karma scale!” and they did just that. For sinners who continued to protest, the demons offered to show them the Jōhari Mirror, which reveals all of a person’s crimes and transgressions from the age of seven. Before the mirror, the sinners were unable to argue any further. Falling to the ground, they pressed their faces to the earth and cried, “Save me, Buddha, please!”

The Ten Kings would ask, “Did you have a child in the human world?” Those who answered yes would be taken from the demons and set to the side; those who answered no would be dropped right down into the Hell of No Respite.⁵⁴ “Listen, Nitta,” the Bodhisattva said. “Read *dharani* and the sutras, recite the nenbutsu with unwavering concentration, and avoid hating or envying others without good cause. And always show compassion. The Ten Kings revere those who do.”⁵⁵

Nitta saw some sinners being mashed up in an iron mortar. He also saw the Ten Kings rising from their seats to pay homage to a nenbutsu practitioner and send him on to the Pure Land. There were also demons using iron bows to shoot a priest full of arrows, one after another, with a cruelty that was difficult to watch. “That man pretended to know a sutra that he didn’t. Priests like him who eat offerings, accept alms, and allow themselves to be honored will be made to suffer in this way.”

The Bodhisattva addressed himself to the people at large: “Listen, sinners. If no one in the human world prays for you on any of the seventh, fourteenth, thirty-fifth, forty-ninth, or hundredth days after you die...”⁵⁶

“We’ll drop you into the Hell of No Respite!” the demons shouted.

Hearing these words, the Ten Kings wept and spoke: “See here, demons, at least wait until the third year!”

“If no one prays for them by then, we’ll take them and dump them into hell!”

“Then wait until the seventh year,” the Ten Kings said. “And if they don’t receive prayers by then, then wait until the thirteenth year.” The Kings agreed that if by that time the sinners had still not received any prayers, they would release them to the demons, who, sad to say, would drop them into the Hell of No Respite. Turning back to the Ten Kings, the sinners cried, “Oh, Ten Kings, please save us!”

The Bodhisattva spoke: “Well, Nitta, that’s pretty much the gist of hell. Shall I

54. The 1627 *Fuji* text explains that because sinners with children might receive prayers from the human world, the Ten Kings delay their judgment until such prayers have (or have not) been received.

55. The Bodhisattva’s advice here is interpolated from the 1607 *Fuji* text. In the 1603 text, the Bodhisattva simply advises Nitta to always show compassion. *Dharani* are magical Buddhist incantations, and the nenbutsu is the ritual invocation of Amida Buddha’s name.

56. Due to an apparent textual corruption, the Bodhisattva’s sentence is left unfinished. In the other early *Fuji* texts, the Bodhisattva makes no such statement.

show you some of the better places now?” The Bodhisattva led Nitta to the west. They came to a place where there were four bridges. “Those are for buddhas, bodhisattvas, and venerable people to cross over into the Pure Land of Nine Grades.”⁵⁷

Radiating a brilliant light, Amida Buddha was awesome to behold. Around the lake, the wonderful cries of ducks, geese, and male and female mandarin ducks rose up from among the waves.⁵⁸ Golden flags fluttered in the merciful breeze, and twenty-five bodhisattvas played music and danced for joy. Flowers rained from the sky, beyond the heart to fathom or words to explain. Nitta wished to stay, but the Bodhisattva said that he would show him where the buddhas and bodhisattvas dwelled, and he led him on and made him pray.

They visited the abodes of Jizō, Ryūju, Kannon, Seishi, and all the buddhas of the three ages. Among them were places where the inhabitants engaged in seated meditation, places where they meditated on the *Lotus Sutra*, places occupied by esoteric practitioners, and places inclined toward righteousness. There were also places where ignorant people, beset with desire, had nails pounded into their six sensory organs.

In one place, Nitta saw a woman screaming as she was being eaten by a venomous snake. The Bodhisattva explained: “This woman failed to give up her attachments to men. She’ll suffer constantly like this for fifteen thousand years.” Nitta also saw a woman who had flushed with anger when her husband sought to plant good karmic roots. “This life is all that’s important,” she had thought to herself. “Who cares about the next? My husband and his damned ‘good roots.’ He should be worrying about my clothes!” The woman was impaled upon the point of a sword. Her punishment would last for fifty million kalpas.

The Bodhisattva spoke: “Husbands and wives should always encourage each other to plant good roots. The present life is just a dream within a dream. Still, some people think that they’ll live for a thousand or ten thousand years, and in their wickedness, they want more than what they already have, and wish to wear more than what they’re already wearing. They should simply accept the world as it is.

“The present life lasts a mere fifty or sixty years, but the future is long. Those who don’t know that they should seek to be reborn in the Pure Land and then enjoy themselves there are truly ignorant. It’s extremely important that people tend toward goodness, and that they not obstruct, mislead, or interfere with

57. The Keiō *Fuji* text explains that of the four bridges, the first three were made of gold, silver, and copper, and that they were intended for those who would achieve the upper, middle, and lower ranks of Pure Land rebirth. The fourth bridge, which was made of iron, was for evildoers’ use. According to the 1607 *Fuji* text, the iron bridge leads to the Hell of No Respite on Mount Tateyama 立山 in Etchū province.

58. According to the *Visualization Sutra* (*Kanmuryōjūkyō* 観無量寿経), the ducks, geese, and male and female mandarin ducks in the Pure Land all expound the Dharma. T 12, 343b, lines 7–8; INAGAKI 1995, 331.

others who do so, too. They'll achieve glory in the present life and attain the Pure Land in the next."

After awhile, the Bodhisattva continued: "There were many things that I wanted to show you, so I'll outline them here and then send you home." The Bodhisattva fashioned three golden scrolls. Handing them to Nitta, he said, "Listen. Don't tell anyone about me, or about the hells and paradise you've seen. You should tell the shōgun and others after three years and three months have passed, but not before. Otherwise, I'll take your life and the shōgun's, too. Then you could move to hell—how does that sound? I'll return you to your own world now."⁵⁹

The Bodhisattva led Nitta down a road that ran to the east. "Whatever you do," he warned again, "don't tell anyone about me." Then he disappeared.

Nitta returned on the seventh day after his departure. He appeared before the shōgun and explained his injunction. Yoriie listened, exceptionally pleased. Various provincial lords said that they wished to hear Nitta's tale, and soon they and many others, humble and noble alike, had crowded the shōgun's abode. They filled the upper and lower verandas and the open space outside. The shōgun wore a hunting robe of blackish-green. "Come now, Nitta," he said from his elevated seat, "tell us what mysteries lie within the cave."

Nitta pressed his face to the floor. "I could describe them easily enough," he said, "but to do so would bring you immediate harm. You'd surely lose your life. Your order therefore leaves me at a loss."

"Tell us now," the shōgun insisted, "even if it brings me harm."

Nitta sat up straight and began to speak. He explained in detail about the cave, the Six Realms, the Four Types of Beings,⁶⁰ hell, and the Pure Land Paradise. All those who heard him were spellbound and amazed. His story brought to mind the sermons of Pūrṇa, Shakyamuni's disciple,⁶¹ awakening its listeners from the cycle of birth and death. But before Nitta had finished, in what was then his forty-first year, his life disappeared like the early-morning dew.

A voice called out from above: "You made him speak of me, Yoriie, so there's nothing that can save you now, either. I'm taking Nitta's life." Hearing these words, the provincial lords were frightened beyond compare.⁶²

59. In the 1627 *Fuji* text, the Bodhisattva states that the scrolls contain painted representations of hell and the Pure Land. According to the Keiō, 1607, and 1627 *Fuji* texts, Nitta should use them to preach. In the 1607 *Fuji* text, the Bodhisattva explains that "most people are unimpressed by hell because they can't see it with their own eyes. You should show these scrolls to them."

60. The Four Types of Beings (*shishō* 四生) are designated according to the ways in which they are born, whether from a womb, from an egg, from moisture (insects, for example), or from nothing at all (i.e., those who spontaneously appear in heaven or hell as a result of their karma). NAKAMURA 2001, 2: 665b–c.

61. Pūrṇa (Jp. Furuna 富楼那) was one of Shakyamuni's ten principal disciples. He is renowned for his eloquence.

62. The historical Minamoto no Yoriie was in fact assassinated by Hōjō Tokimasa's agents on the nineteenth day of the seventh month of Genkyū 1 元久元年 (1204). He was twenty-three years old.

Nitta's body was sent to his family in Izu. Matsubō, Okubō, and Nitta's wife and his men took in the sight. "How can this be?" they cried, utterly distraught. They later cremated him, gathered up his ashen bones, and performed memorial services on his behalf. Matsubō and Okubō went on to enjoy the greatest prosperity; their descendents flourish to this very day.

All those who see this scroll should pray to the Great Asama Bodhisattva of Mount Fuji. Those who read it or hear it should devote themselves to the Way, listen closely, recite the *nenbutsu*, pray for the next life, and chant *Namu Fuji Asama Daibosatsu*, "Hail, Great Asama Bodhisattva of Mount Fuji," one hundred times. If they do so, they are unlikely to fall into the three evil realms. This is *The Tale of the Fuji Cave*.

Faithfully copied by Dōkyō on an auspicious day in the fifth month of Keichō 8 (1603).

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