

Then the patient talked, being possessed by a spirit, saying, "I am Nagate. I had the banners of Hokke-ji 法花寺<sup>5</sup> taken down and later was responsible for the pagodas of Saidai-ji 西大寺<sup>6</sup> having four corners instead of eight and five stories instead of seven. Because of this sin, I was summoned to the Office of King Yama, who made me hold a pillar of fire and drove bent nails into my hands, interrogating and beating me. Then the palace filled with smoke. When the king asked, 'What smoke is this?' there was a reply, 'This is the smoke of the incense from the hand of the monk who has been attending Ieyori, Nagate's son, suffering from disease.' Thereupon, the king released me and sent me back to the world. My body, however, has perished, and I have nothing to live in, and must float about in the air." All at once, the patient, who had not been eating, asked for food and recovered from his disease, leaving his sickbed.

Speaking of the banners of the temple, they are good causes for being born as a Buddhist universal king 轉輪王.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, a pagoda is a treasury to store the Buddha's remains in the past, present and future. Accordingly, this man committed sins by taking down the banners of the temple and lowering the proposed height of the pagoda. How could we not be in awe? This is a recent instance of immediate repayment.<sup>8</sup>

## 37

### *On Receiving a Penalty for Doing Evil because of Ignorance of the Law of Karmic Causation<sup>1</sup>*

Saheki no sukune Itachi 佐伯宿禰伊太知<sup>2</sup> of the Junior Fourth Rank,

5. Located at present Hokkeji-chō, Nara-shi 奈良市法華寺町. Founded by Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 in 741 as the headquarter of all provincial nunneries.

6. Located at present Saidaiji-chō, Nara-shi 奈良市西大寺町 and founded by Empress Shōtoku in 765. There were two five-storied pagodas at Saidai-ji.

7. See Chap. II(2)a, n. 79. Banners were symbols of royalty in India and later were used as symbols of the Buddhist dharma.

8. As shown (n. 1, above), this story differs greatly from the court history in its assessment of Nagate. In the court history he is a loyal and wise minister, but in the *Nihon ryōiki* he is a destroyer of the Three Treasures and hence made to suffer in hell. This story is intended to show that even a man of great influence and high status is not free from karmic retribution.

1. Similar to III.35 as to the motif of suffering in hell reported by a visitor to hell; similar to III.36 as to the hero politically lauded but religiously criticized.

2. Or 伊多智, 伊達, who won crucial wars against Nakamaro in 764 and was promoted to the Junior Sixth Rank (*Shoku Nihongi*, XXVI, Tenpyō jingo 1:1:7), and Junior Fourth Rank, Upper Grade (*ibid.*, XXXI, Hōki 2:3:1) in 771.

Upper Grade, lived in the reign of the emperors who resided at Nara Palace.<sup>3</sup>

Once a man from the capital went to Chikuzen 筑前<sup>4</sup> and died of a sudden illness, arriving at the palace of King Yama. Though he did not see anybody, he heard the voice of a man who was being beaten echoing through the earth. At every lash of the whip, he cried, "What pain! What pain!"

The king asked his clerks,<sup>5</sup> saying, "When he was in the world, what good did he do?" The clerks answered, "He made one copy of the *Hoke-kyō*." Then the king said, "Atone for his sins by balancing them against the scrolls of the scripture."<sup>6</sup> When they matched the scrolls with his sins, the scrolls were outnumbered without any comparison. Then they matched the 69,384 characters of the scripture<sup>7</sup> with his sins, but still the latter outnumbered the former, and he could not be saved. Thereupon, the king clapped his hands in surprise, saying "Although I have seen many people who committed sins and suffered, I have never seen a man who committed so many sins."

The man from the capital secretly asked a person beside him, "Who is the man being beaten?" The answer was, "This is Saheki no sukune Itachi." When he returned from the Land of the Dead<sup>8</sup> unexpectedly and was restored to life, he remembered the name very well and sent a report on the Land of the Dead to the local government.<sup>9</sup> The government, however, did not believe it. Therefore, he took an opportunity to go up to the capital by boat and gave a report on how Lord Itachi had labored and suffered in the palace of King Yama. At this news, his family was deeply troubled, saying, "From his death to seven times the seventh day<sup>10</sup> we practiced good and applied the merits to his benevolent spirit. How can we think of him suffering severely, having fallen in an evil state?" Then they made another copy of the *Hoke-kyō*, revered and dedicated it in order to save his spirit from suffering. This is also an extraordinary event.

3. He must have lived in the reigns of Emperor Shōmu, Empress Kōken (Shōtoku), and Emperor Kōnin.

4. Present Fukuoka-ken 福岡縣, the northern part of Tsukushi.

5. 諸史 *shoshi*, clerks in charge of records.

6. The *Hoke-kyō* consists of either seven or eight scrolls or volumes.

7. See III.35, n. 17.

8. See Chap. II(1)b.

9. Dazaifu; see III.35, n. 8.

10. The forty-ninth day, the end of the funeral rites.