

Once the old mother, who had stayed in the home village to take care of the household, received an omen in a dream concerning her daughter. Surprised and fearful, she wanted to have a scripture recited for her daughter, but she was too poor to ask a monk to do it. As her mind was never free of worry for her daughter, she finally thought of taking off her robe and washing it to offer it to the monk for his service. Then another omen appeared in a dream. In even greater fear she took off her skirt, cleaned it, and, as she had done before, gave it as an offering to the monk for reciting a scripture.

Meanwhile her daughter was living in the official residence for a provincial magistrate at her husband's post. It happened that her children were playing in the court, while she herself was inside the back quarters. The two children saw seven monks seated on the roof reciting a scripture. They called to their mother, saying, "Mother, seven monks are chanting a scripture on the roof. Hurry! Come and see them!" The chanting sounded like bees humming together. Wondering at this, the mother had scarcely come out of the rear building when its wall collapsed. All of a sudden, the seven monks disappeared. Greatly terrified and marveling at this accident, she thought to herself that heaven and earth had saved her from being crushed. Later, however, she heard from her mother who had sent a messenger to tell her about the evil omens and the subsequent services for the recitation of scriptures. She was so impressed with her mother's report that she professed her faith in the Three Treasures with the greatest awe.

Thus we know that the whole sequence of events was generated by the power of reciting scriptures and the determination of the Three Treasures to protect us.

## 21

### *On the Clay Divine Image Which Showed an Extraordinary Sign by Emanating Light from Its Legs and Incurred an Immediate Reward<sup>1</sup>*

On a hill east of the capital of Nara<sup>2</sup> there was a temple named Konsu 金鷲.<sup>3</sup> In that mountain temple lived a man who was popularly called

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (XVII, 49), *Fusō ryakki* (Shō II, Shōmu), *Genkō shakusho* (XXVIII, Jizōshi), *Hōbutsu-shū* (V), *Kojidan* (III), etc. A famous story on the foundation of the original Tōdai-ji.

2. Present Kasugayama 春日山 area.

3. Or 金鐘寺 which was the old name of Hokke-dō, Tōdai-ji.

Konsu ubasoku<sup>4</sup> because he made his residence there. That temple has since become Tōdai-ji 東大寺.<sup>5</sup>

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, before the establishment of the huge temple,<sup>6</sup> Konsu the Ascetic stayed there and lived a disciplined life. In the temple was enshrined a clay image of Shūkongōjin 執金剛神.<sup>7</sup> The ascetic never ceased to pray day and night, holding a rope tied to the legs of the image.<sup>8</sup>

It happened that light emanated from its legs and reached the imperial palace. In surprise and wonder, the emperor sent a messenger to discover its origin. The imperial messenger<sup>9</sup> traced the light back to the temple, where he found a lay brother prostrating himself before Buddha and confessing his offenses,<sup>10</sup> holding in his hand a rope tied to the legs of the divine image. The messenger went back immediately to report this to the emperor. The emperor sent for the ascetic, and asked, "What have you been praying for?" In reply he said, "I prayed that I might renounce the world and devote myself to the study of Buddhist teachings."<sup>11</sup> Therefore he was ordained<sup>12</sup> by an edict and adopted the name Konsu. The emperor admired his practice and made sufficient offerings to provide the four necessities.<sup>13</sup> People called him Bodhisattva Konsu, praising his discipline.

The image of Shūkongōjin which gave off the light still stands at the north door of Kensaku-dō 羈索堂<sup>14</sup> of Tōdai-ji.

The note says: How good is Konsu the Ascetic! He kindled a fire of faith in spring and made it flare up in the autumn. The light from the legs helped the fire to be recognized, and the emperor reverently revealed the sign of his faith in Buddha.<sup>15</sup> Indeed we learn from this story that no vow is made without obtaining a response.

4. Identified with Rōben 良辨 (689-773), who came from Ōmi province. Tradition says he was caught by an eagle and abandoned in front of Kasuga Shrine in Nara, where Giin 義淵 saved him and taught him the Hossō doctrines. In 733 Emperor Shōmu founded Konshō-ji for him, and after it was expanded into Tōdai-ji, he was in charge of the great temple. He became *sōjō* in 760. See I.9, n. 1, for the story of a child carried away by an eagle.

5. See Chap. I(1)c, for the construction of Tōdai-ji.

6. Its construction started in 747 and was completed in 749. Since the image of Lochana Buddha was dedicated in 752 (see I.Preface, n. 14), that is also taken as the year of the erection of Tōdai-ji.

7. Skt. Vajradhara, the guardian of dharma, originally a Vedic deity that was adopted in the Buddhist tradition; also an incarnation of Kannon.

8. This practice is called 綱引業 *tsunahiki-gyō* which became popular during the Heian period, particularly among those who aspired to rebirth in the pure land.

9. 勅信 *chokushin*.

10. 禮佛海邊 *raibutsu keka*; for *keka*, see Chap. II(1)a.

11. 佛法 *Buppō*.

12. 得度 *tokudo*; see Chap. I(t)d.

13. 四事 *shiji*, a shortened form of 四事供養 *shiji kuyō*, four kinds of offerings; shelter, clothing, food and drink, and flowers and incense.

14. Or 法華堂 Hokke-dō, 三月堂 Sangatsu-dō.

15. Refers to Emperor Shōmu.