

*On Being Repaid Good and Evil for Copying the
Hoke-kyō and for Exploiting Others with Heavy Scales¹*

Osada no toneri Ebisu 他田舍人蝦夷² was a man of the village of Atome, Chisagata district, Shinano province 信濃國小縣郡跡目里.³ He was very rich, and would lend money and rice. He copied the *Hoke-kyō* twice, and each time he held a ceremony to recite it. After further thought, he was not satisfied with this; he reverently copied it once again, but did not hold another ceremony.

At the end of the fourth month in the summer of the tenth year of the ox, the fourth year of the Hōki era,⁴ Ebisu died suddenly. His family conferred and said, "Since his birth was in the year of fire,⁵ we won't cremate him." Instead they consecrated the ground on which to build a tomb, while providing temporary burial.⁶

Seven days had passed after his death when he was restored to life and related a story as follows: "There were four messengers who accompanied and guided me. At first we crossed in a field and then came to a steep hill. When we had climbed the slope, I saw a tall zelkova tree. Standing there and looking over the path ahead, I saw many men sweeping the road with brooms and heard them saying, 'We are sweeping and purifying the road along which a man who copied the *Hoke-kyō* will pass.' When I reached them, they stood by and bowed to me. In front of me there was a deep river about a hundred and twenty yards wide. There was a bridge over the river. Many men were repairing it, saying, 'We are repairing the bridge which a man who copied the *Hoke-kyō* will cross.' When I reached them, they stood by and bowed to me.

"Having crossed the bridge to the other side, I saw a golden palace, in which a king was seated. Near the bridge, the road was three-

forked.⁷ The first way was wide and flat; the second was somewhat overgrown with grass; the third was obstructed by thick bushes. The messengers forced me to take the third one, and one of them entered the palace, saying, 'We have brought him.' The king saw me, and said, 'This is the man who copied the *Hoke-kyō*.' Pointing to the second way, he said to the messengers, 'Take him that way.'

"The four men accompanied me to a hot iron pillar, which they made me hold while they pushed a scorching iron net against my back. After three nights, they made me hold a copper pillar, pushing a scorching copper net against my back. After three days, the objects were still as hot as burning charcoal. Though the iron and copper were hot, they were not unbearable, merely uncomfortable. Though they were heavy, they were not unbearable, but certainly not light. Led by my past evil deeds, I was attracted to them, only wanting to hold them and bear the burden.

"When six days had passed, I left the place. Three monks asked me, 'Do you know why you suffered?' I replied, 'No, I don't.' Then they asked me, 'What good did you perform?' I said, 'I made three copies of the *Hoke-kyō*, one of which has not yet been dedicated.' They took out three tablets, two made of gold, one of iron.⁸ Then they took out two scales; one weighed on the heavy side by one quart of rice,⁹ the other on the light side by one quart. Then they said to me, 'Checking our tablets, we have learned that you made three copies of the *Hoke-kyō*. Though you copied a Mahayana scripture, you committed a grave sin. You were summoned here because you used the lighter-weight scale for lending rice,¹⁰ but the heavier-weight scale for collecting debts. Now, go home immediately.'

"On my way back, I saw many men sweeping the road with brooms and repairing the bridge as before and heard them saying, 'The man who copied the *Hoke-kyō* will return from the palace of King Yama.' When I had crossed the bridge, I realized that I had been restored to life."

After that he paid homage to the copied scripture, and recited it with greater faith in the service. Indeed, we learn that doing good brings luck and doing evil brings disaster. The effects of good and evil never disappear, and the repayment of these two takes place at the same time. One should only practice good and never do evil.

1. Karmic retribution of good and evil is exemplified in one person who visited the land of the dead. Similar to II.5, 16; III.23, 37.

2. The family name Osada is found in Suruga, Shinano, etc. Toneri is used like a *kabane*, and Ebisu is the first name, probably originating from a common noun for people in the eastern part of Japan.

3. Present Chisagata-gun, Nagano-ken 長野縣小縣郡.

4. 733, in the reign of Emperor Kōnin.

5. 丙 *hinoe*; the third of the Ten Stems, which is associated with fire, one of the Five Elements. See Chap. II(3)a, n. 119.

6. 糞 *mogari*.

7. 衢 *chimata*; for the symbolism of the three paths, see Chap. II(1)c, n. 57. Since Kyōkai never uses *sanzu* 三塗(途), it seems that the term and idea were not familiar to Kyōkai.

8. Merits were recorded on the tablets. Cf. III.22, n. 10; III.38, n. 34.

9. About a quart of rice is obtained from a sheaf of rice stalks.

10. 出舉 *suiko*; see I.23, n. 9.