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# Shunzei's Lotus

*Chronotopic Enfoldment  
in Nijū hapon no uta*

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at Yale University  
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In the punctual centre of all circles white  
Stands truly. The circles nearest to it share

Its color, but less as they recede, impinged  
By difference and then be definition  
As a tone defines itself and separates

And the circles quicken and crystal colors come  
And flare and Bloom with his vast accumulation  
Stands and regards and repeats the primitive lines.

-Wallace Stevens, *from The Packet of Anacharsis*

“The model for the sciences of matter is the ‘origami,’ as the Japanese philosopher might say, or the art of folding paper...”

-Gilles Deleuze, *from The Fold*

*The following discussion of Fujiwara no Shunzei's (1114-1204) Nijū hapon no uta 二十八本の歌, a 28 poem sequence in which each poem is based on a different chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is part of an ongoing larger project that seeks to investigate the development of and relationship between three figures or tropes variously deployed in literature, criticism, and philosophy: folds, portals, and labyrinths. This study will look at a variety of mediums, genres, and contexts, including but not limited to the narratives of Borges, Calvino, Proust, and Buddhist sutra literature, the philosophical writings of Leibnitz, Deleuze, Hume, and Nietzsche, as well as the art of M.C. Escher, and of Japanese origami. Taking Angus Fletcher's work Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare as a precursor for such a study, I also hope to incorporate current models and descriptions of the physical universe found in string theory and M-theory into a consideration of the way in which folds, portals, and labyrinths remain crucial figures by which the mind narrates its engagement with a world both within and around it. Although not articulated in the original talk, I invoke in my discussion of Shunzei here specifically the Deleuzian Fold, which usefully posits an ontic continuity between any two discreet spaces or objects. I also draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, as a way of describing the phenomenological folds or enfoldments that occur in the spaces of these shakkyōka 釈教歌. I have included here as an appendix translations of three Nijū hapon no uta sequences: those of Shunzei, Fujiwara no Kintō (966-1041) and Akazome Emon (956-1041).*

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I'd like to start my talk today at the end of Fujiwara no Shunzei's *Nijū hapon no uta* sequence. The final poem reads:

haruka naru	There is no need
sono akatsuki wa	to wait for that distant dawn,
matazu to mo	far in the future,
sora no keshiki wa	when already we can see
mitsubekarikeri	the look of an empty sky.

The *kotobagaki* for the poem indicates that its topic (*dai* 題) is the following statement from the Lotus. I borrow Hurvitz' translation here:

“He shall straight away ascend to the top of Tusita Heaven, to the place of the Bodhisattva Maitreya.”

The statement comes at the end of a longer, climactic passage in which the Buddha releases a grand finale of praise on the one who would “receive and keep, read and recite, recall, interpret, practice and preach the Lotus Sutra.” This being the culminating poem of the sequence, I cannot help but read it as a kind of statement about what it means to write a Lotus poem, or to write a 28 poem Lotus sequence. “There is no need to wait for that distant dawn.” Why? The Sutra suggests that those who engage the text in these various ways will one day reach heaven, but Shunzei reformulates this idea and seems to be saying that no, salvation is, somehow, possible now. Could it be that Shunzei had misunderstood the import of this final chapter? Or could it be that Shunzei had understood something fundamental about the way the Lotus conceives its own ontology, and about the particular relationship between that ontology and the salvation of any individual who comes to the text, a relationship that is of course mediated and enacted through language. And finally, had Shunzei understood something as well about the relationship between the Lotus and a poem that is based on it?

There are three things I want to do today. First, I’d like to propose a theoretical framework or set of terms that I believe are useful for getting us further into Shunzei’s Lotus poems. Here I hope to show that the relationship between text, poem, and reader can best be described as a kind of presencing through a process of what I call “chronotopic enfoldment,” which I will elaborate on in a moment. Secondly, I want to argue that the Lotus Sutra itself predicts, prescribes, and privileges just such a literary process of chronotopic enfoldment as a program for salvation. Lastly, I want to look at just one of Shunzei’s poems in detail in hopes of showing how this program plays out in a single poem.

What is a chronotope? The literary term “chronotope” was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin based on Einstein’s idea of “space-time.” Simply put, “chronotope” refers to the way in which time (chrono) and space (topos) are structured, always together, in a work of literature. The development of a chronotope can be long and complex or at can be as short as a simple image. As Bakhtin writes, “Those things that are static in space cannot be statically described, but must rather be incorporated into the temporal sequence of represented events and into the story’s own representational field.”<sup>1</sup> As I see it, chronotopes are by no means mutually exclusive. Many can exist in the space of a given work. Here I would like to expand on the Bakhtinian chronotope a bit by positing my own three categories of chronotopes to examine in Shunzei’s Lotus poems.

First, there are *textual* chronotopes, and these belong to the world within the work. They are the chronotopes that keep the story within specific bounds; they are the structures, however complex, that limit how long and how far the narrative goes. They give the story a beginning and an end, and provide the spatial boundaries beyond which the story does not continue. Both the Lotus Sutra and a *waka* are chronotopic in this first sense in that they both contain events that take place in time. On the most basic level, the Lotus is the story of Śākyamuni’s appearance on Numinous Eagle peak, the sermon he gives there, and the events that transpire. Likewise, a given *waka* provides a narrative, though often contained within the moment of the perception of an image along with an accompanying sentiment induced by the image or for which the image functions as an

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982. 250

objective correlative. Yet the events within *waka* take place at a particular time and proceed within time's continuum. *Shakkyōka* based on the Lotus Sutra share its textual chronotopes. A given poem can be spoken by characters reimagined from within the textual world of the Lotus, and thus contain one textual chronotope. Or they may be spoken by a believer reflecting back on a world that that believer takes to be historically contiguous (in so far he or she believes the events of the sutra *did* happen) with his or her own, and thus contain two textual chronotopes: that of the sutra and that of the speaker of the poem.<sup>2</sup>

The next category I would like to posit is that of *metatextual* chronotopes (*meta* in the sense of “beyond” or “across”) that mark the work off *as a work* from other works. These chronotopes are the characteristics of a given text—its language, its idiom, its tropes, its material bases—that differentiate it spatially and temporally from other works, from other genres, and even from other mediums, and that locate the work within a particular historical moment or tradition. In this respect, *shakkyōka* are partially defined as such by *metatextual* chronotopes characteristic of *waka*. This is to say that Lotus *shakkyōka* call attention to themselves as *waka* by employing the same form and rhetorical devices, strategies, and gestures found in other *waka*, and thus distinguish themselves as works from the other work on which they are based.<sup>3</sup> Though these chronotopes operate in the world within the *shakkyōka*, and may function as textual chronotopes that shape that world, they are metatextual in function in that they also reach outside the poem in order to place boundaries on it. This is the self-referential aspect of the metatextual chronotope, its identification of the *waka* as such vis-à-vis other works, such as the Lotus Sutra. We might think of these chronotopes as indicators of a *waka* tradition, or those qualities of a *waka* that define the tradition, within the tempora and spatial trajectory of which the *waka* is located.

Finally there is what I would call the chronotope of *the reader*. Here it is useful to draw from the scholarship of Peter Shillingsburg on the several categories by which we might talk about a text's ontology:

A piece of literature that might be expressed in any number of forms (in folio or quarto, on vellum or paper, in various editions, etc.) but that is not reducible to any single one of those expressions should be termed the “work.” Distinct apprehensions of the work that are expressed in words and punctuation form the “linguistic text.” This linguistic text, in turn, may be housed in any number of material forms or physical “containers.” The

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<sup>2</sup> Himeno Kimi discusses at longer length the modulation of viewpoints in *nijū happei no uta*: 姫野希美, 「藤原俊成の法華經廿八品の詠法をめぐって」 国文学研究 104: 30-42. 1991

<sup>3</sup> Edward Kamens has made these observations and argued along similar lines in Kamens, Edward. *The Buddhist Poetry of the Great Kamo Priestess: Daisaiin Senshi and Hosshin wakashū*. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies Monographs 5, 1990, as well as in “Dragon-Girl, Maidenflower, Buddha: The Transformation of a *Waka* Topos, ‘The Five Obstructions.’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53:2 1993, 389-442. My contribution to this discussion is to point out that these characteristics of *waka* have both a temporal and spatial dynamic inherent in them—that they are chronotopic.

combination of linguistic text and physical container forms the “material text.”<sup>4</sup>

In so far as we can say a literary work or text “exists,” independent of (and yet interdependent with) the material base that provides the medium for its expression, it does so as something actualized first by an author’s creation of it and second through the reader’s encounter with it (through whatever material text is at hand). We might say that the Lotus Sutra, for instance, exists not only as the formal qualities of the language and idiom in which it was written (the linguistic text) and the material base in or on which it is encountered (the material text), but also as a work shaped by the reader, who himself or herself occupies a particular place and time. Works have paratexts, for instance, because readers are fundamentally chronotopic as well. This is to say that the way in which a reader engages a text will be determined by the chronotope(s) that govern his or her own circumstances at the moment of reading.

We can think of each of these three levels of chronotopes as enfolded by the other two, or as the fold itself that brings the other two together in the space of the poem. The poet’s engagement with the Lotus in the act of reading it and writing about it is the medium in which (or the force by which) the world within the Lotus is rendered and combined with those qualities of *waka* that distinguish *shakkyōka* as a *waka*. In other words, it is the poet’s engagement with the text that folds the world of the Lotus and the realm of *waka* together. The textual world within the Lotus, however, is the narrative material that provides the occasion for the poet to enter into the realm of *waka* through using its rhetorical devices, strategies, and gestures to express that material. It folds the poet and the *waka* tradition together in the act of rendering it forth as a *waka*. And finally, the *waka* tradition is the semantic sphere in which the poet engages the world within the Lotus. It folds the poet and that world together, making them present to each other. Thus these chronotopic levels, the textual chronotopes of the world within the Lotus, the metatextual chronotopes of the *waka* tradition, and the chronotope of the reader (or poet as reader and writer), each fold one onto the other.

Now, I want to switch gears here for a moment to talk about the Lotus Sutra itself, and the relationship between language, salvation, and ontology that is presented in this text. As we saw from the passage on which Shunzei bases the final poem of his sequence, the Lotus, (like most Mahāyāna Sutras but perhaps particularly so), is obsessed with its own survival, urging us to propagate the text in almost every way possible. This kind of rhetoric of anxiety may be explained by the fact that early Mahāyāna was what Gregory Schopen has called “a cult of the book,” in which the site of textual engagement with sutras replaced the construction of and organization of meetings around sacred stupas.<sup>5</sup> Survival of the book, then, meant survival of the Mahāyāna. In any case, the rhetoric has implications that extend beyond a consideration of the historical circumstances that perhaps gave rise to it. One result of the sutra’s anxiety over its own survivability, for instance, is that it always makes salvation contingent on acts of textual engagement and

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<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Eubanks, Charlotte. *Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture and Medieval Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. 36

<sup>5</sup> see Schopen, Gregory. “The Phrase *sa prthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet* in the Vajracchedika: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna.” *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna in Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005.

reproduction. In other words, salvation in the Lotus almost always entails an act of language, whether that act be receiving (in written form), keeping (in memory), reading, reciting, copying, or interpreting the sutra. One must save the text in order to be saved by the text, and this soteriological exchange happens through language.

Let's look at the whole passage that culminates in the phrase on which Shunzei bases his final Lotus poem:

O Universally Worthy! If there is anyone who can receive and keep, read and recite, recall properly, cultivate and practice, and copy this *Scripture of the Dharma*, be it known that that person has seen Śākyamunibuddha, that he might have heard this scriptural canon from the Buddha's mouth... Be it known that that person has had his head stroked by Śākyamunibuddha. Be it known that that person has been covered by Śākyamunibuddha's cloak... He shall attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi... If anyone in the latter age accepts and keeps, reads and recites this scriptural canon, that person shall never again want for clothing, bedding, food and drink, or for the things that support his life. His wishes shall not be in vain. He shall also in the present age gain his happy recompense.<sup>6</sup>

What I find particularly interesting here is the Buddha's emphasis on his *presence* at the moment a reader engages the text. Anyone who would keep, read and recite, recall properly, or copy the text has, in doing so, "seen Śākyamunibuddha" and "heard this scriptural canon from the Buddha's mouth." In fact, Śākyamuni goes on to say, he is present to such a palpable degree that "that person has had his head stroked by Śākyamunibuddha" and "has been covered by Śākyamunibuddha's cloak."

Compare this passage with another in the chapter "The Lifespan of the Thus Come One," in which Śākyamuni explains that his final passing into Nirvana is only an illusion, a form of expedient means or *hōben* 方便.

For the beings' sake,  
And as an expedient device, I make a show of nirvana;  
Yet in fact I do not pass into extinction,  
But ever dwell here and preach dharma.  
I, ever dwelling here,  
By the power of my supernatural penetrations,  
Cause the topsy-turvy living beings,  
Though they are near, not to see.<sup>7</sup>

What is significant for our purposes is Śākyamuni's use of the word "here" 此, where he states that he is "ever-dwelling." One way to read this "here" is in the light of the final passage of the sutra. That is, Śākyamuni is referring to more than just the textual chronotope of this particular event on Numinous Eagle Peak: the "here" where the

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<sup>6</sup> translation from Hurvitz, Leon. *The Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma: The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 308-309

<sup>7</sup> Hurvitz. *The Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma: The Lotus Sutra*. 223



Buddha ever dwells is the very here and now of the moment the reader engages the text. We might say that Śākyamuni has folded his own chronotope onto that of the reader's (as every reader, or copier, keeper and interpreter of the text is situated in his or her own time and space). Out of this enfoldment a new type of chronotope emerges: the chronotope of *presence*. In these passages Śākyamuni seems (almost eerily) aware that his true lifespan depends on the cult of the book—on the ones who open the text and pass it on.

Just what this text *is*, however, is something that the sutra wants to interrogate. The Lotus destabilizes its own ontology by frequently referring to itself. So, the Lotus Sutra exists in (at least) three different forms: there is the sermon the Buddha first heard long ago; there is the sermon which the Buddha is now preaching to his assembly on Numinous Eagle Peak; and finally there is the Lotus Sutra that the reader encounters, consisting of Śākyamuni's sermon as well as the events that transpire as he gives it. The Lotus Sutra seems to be continually translating itself outward from a (perhaps inaccessible) center and into other forms. There is something like a centrifugal trajectory of the text implied within the sutra. It seems to predict its own movement outward and away from its own previous self. The keeping, reading and reciting, and interpreting that Śākyamuni advocates are linguistic acts meant to preserve the text, but we can see in the way that the sutra understands and presents its own ontology that this process of preservation can also entail transformation.

Such transformation resonates with the Lotus Sutra's central theme of *hōben* or expedient means. It is important to note here that the primary form of *hōben* in the Lotus is parable. Whether the burning house, the phantom city, the prodigal son or the jewel hidden in the sleeve, the truth of the Dharma is re-presented or, we might say, *translated* into language that is most suitable for its intended audience. *Hōben* thus always implies transformation: from emptiness to form, from timeless to provisional, from truth to anecdote. That parable is the privileged method by which this is accomplished in the text suggests that the Lotus inherently permits and even encourages its creative appropriation into other forms. To say otherwise would be to violate a central message of the text: that the teaching must be adopted, reimagined, re-presented, or even recreated according to the dispositions of its audiences. Viewed in light of the sutra's own attitude regarding the soteriological role of language in its ontology, what it means to receive and keep, read and recite, recall properly, cultivate and practice, copy and interpret, all seems to expand. Perhaps it is the potential for creativity suggested by the Lotus' program for salvation that Shunzei picks up on, and which becomes an integral theme in his own Lotus sequence.

Let's turn our attention to Shunzei's poem on Chapter 16, "The Life Span of the Thus Come One," taking as its *dai* 題 the very passage we saw earlier in which the Buddha explains his passing into Nirvana is a form of *hōben*.

karisome ni	That pillar of smoke
yoha no kemuri to	rises far off into the night sky
noborishi ya	only provisionally...
washi no takane ni	for the white cloud it becomes
kaeru shirakumo	will again return to Eagle Peak.

As we saw, in the Sutra's narrative the Buddha claims that he is eternally present ("ever-dwelling") on Numinous Eagle Peak, and that the body that expires is not the real body.

In other words, Śākyamuni proposes a dichotomy between his real self and his provisional self. Though the two exist for the mean time, one eventually will disappear. In Shunzei's poem something quite different happens. There is only one Buddha. He transforms (twice) and only then returns. Shunzei's ingenuity lies in how he works *waka* tropes, that of *kemuri* and *shirakumo*, into a passage about the Buddha's extinction. Here the Buddha literally undergoes a transformation into two classic *waka* tropes. In Shunzei's view, the Buddha does not simply "ever-dwell" just beyond our view. Rather, he changes form and comes back. In the poem his being present on Numinous Eagle Peak is contingent on transformation—that is, a kind of translation of the self from something old into something new, from past forms into new forms. I read this poem as Shunzei's way of articulating the relationship between the original sutra text and a *nijū hapon no uta* sequence, a relationship characterized by a transformation that results in what I have come to think of as the Lotus Sutra 2.0.

Chronotopic enfoldment is the process by which these acts of transformation and translation take place. The lifespans of both the Buddha and of the textual world in which he appears are renewed each time they are folded into the *waka* tradition, undergoing metempsychosis into new forms. Yet the *waka* tradition provides the medium in which both Śākyamuni and Shunzei encounter or "presence" each other. This process is what I believe Bakhtin is getting at when he suggests that we "speak of a special *creative* chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work."<sup>8</sup> Shunzei's engagement with the Lotus takes place as just such a creative act of poetic composition, an act of translating prescribed by the sutra as efficacious of and even necessary for salvation. So, returning here at the end to where we began, it is fitting that Shunzei would end his sequence thus:

haruka naru	There is no need
sono akatsuki wa	to wait for that distant dawn,
matazu to mo	far in the future,
sora no keshiki wa	when already we can see
mitsubekarikeri	the look of an empty sky.

There is no need to seek salvation elsewhere. For Shunzei, it lies in the moment we engage the text. Having finished his sequence Shunzei understood, both for himself and for others, the creative power of reading and writing, of *hōben*, and of a lotus in which he might enfold himself and be made present in its world.

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<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination*. 254

## 1. Preface<sup>9</sup>

仏度諸眾生, 其數無有量

*“The Buddha saves living beings,  
whose number shall have no reckoning” (20)*

watasubeki  
kazu shi kagiranu  
hashibashira  
ika ni tatekeru  
chikai naruran

How could it be  
that He made that promise,  
raising it on pillars  
and ushering numberless beings  
all the way to the other side?

Shunzei

\* \* \*

inishie no  
tae naru nori o  
tokikereba  
ima no hikari mo  
saga to koso mire

Since in the past  
he expounded on the Law,  
so rare and subtle,  
I stare upon this shining light  
as a sign of good things to come.

Akazome Emon

kusagusa ni  
chirikau hana wa  
inishie no  
kaze ni makasete  
huru ni zo arikeru

The blossoms scatter  
here and there in all directions  
and entrust themselves  
to that wind of long ago,  
blowing where it takes them.

Kintō

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<sup>9</sup> Transliterations of all Shunzei's poems are made from the original Japanese as found in 川村晃生. 「長秋詠藻」. 『和歌文学大系』東京：月治書院、1998. Translations of the passages on which Shunzei's poems are based (indicated in the *kotobagaki* or headnotes to each of his poems) are taken from Hurvitz's volume, with the page number indicated in parentheses. Transliterations from Akazome Emon's are from the original Japanese in 関根慶子. 「赤染衛門集全訳」. 『私家集全訳叢書』東京：風間書房、1986. Kintō's are from the original Japanese in 伊井春樹. 「公任集全訳」. 『私家集全訳叢書』東京：風間書房、1993

## 2. Expedient Means

深著於五欲，如犛牛愛尾

*“Profoundly attached to the five desires,  
Like a long-tailed ox chasing its own tail...”* (40)

takasago no  
onoe no sakura  
mishi koto mo  
omoeba kanashi  
iro ni medekeri

To witness the colors  
at Takasago’s Ox Tail Peak  
blooming on the trees...  
How regrettable a thing it is  
that I should be so bewitched.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

tokiokade  
irinamashikaba  
futatsu naku  
mitsu naki nori o  
tare hiromemashi

If he were to enter  
his final state of perfect rest  
without explaining  
this Dharma neither two nor three,  
then who would spread the One Law?

Akazome Emon

hitokoto ni  
yorite zo yoyo ni  
idekereba  
futatsu mo mitsu mo  
naki na narikeru

It is with the One  
that from within this very world  
I will escape it.  
For those other vehicles  
are to me but empty words.

Kintō

### 3. Parable

其中眾生，悉是吾子

*“The living beings within them,  
Are all my children.” (67)*

minashi ko to  
nani omoekemu  
yo no naka ni  
kakaruru minori no  
arikeru mono o

How could I have felt  
that I was an abandoned child  
when still in the world  
there remains ever present  
a wondrous law like this one?

Shunzei

\* \* \*

moyuru hi no  
ie o idete zo  
satorinuru  
mitsu no kuruma  
hitotsu nari keru

As the house burned  
I finally made my escape,  
and in that moment  
saw that the three carts outside  
were actually only the One.

Akazome Emon

kadode ni wa  
mitsu no kuruma to  
kikishikado  
hate wa omohi no  
hoka ni zo arikeru

Though I had heard  
three splendid carts awaited me  
outside of the gates,  
I stepped from the flames of passion  
and found something beyond my mind.

Kintō

4. Belief and Understanding

無上宝聚，不求自得

*“And a cluster of unexcelled gems,  
unsought by us, has come into our possession of its own accord.” (83)*

mayohikeru  
kokoro mo haruru  
tsukikage ni  
motomenu tama ya  
sode ni utsurishi

The light of the moon  
that fills with a lambent glow  
my unsettled heart  
shimmers on the unsought jewel  
that found its way onto my sleeve.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

oya to dani  
shirade madou ga  
kanashisa ni  
kono takara o mo  
yuzuritsuru kana

Having lost his way,  
not even knowing his father,  
sad indeed is the son  
who one day will inherit  
all of his family's treasures.

Akazome Emon

sasuraeshi  
mukashi wa oya to  
shirazariki  
ie o makasuru  
kefu no ureshisa

In that distant past  
I knew not my father's pain,  
having wandered far.  
Oh, such happiness today  
when he entrusted me his house!

Kintō

## 5. Medicinal Herbs

無有彼此，愛憎之心

*“...since I have neither ‘that’ nor ‘this,’  
Nor any thought of love or hatred.” (99)*

harusame wa  
kono mo kano mo no  
kusa mo ki mo  
wakazu midori ni  
somuru narikeri

The spring rains fall  
here and there and everywhere  
on grass and tree alike,  
and while making no distinctions  
dyes them all a verdant green.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

nori no ame wa  
kusaki mo wakade  
sosogedomo  
onogajishi koso  
ukemasarikere

The rain of the Law  
pours down from the heavens  
equally on all,  
but the trees and grasses alike  
receive it each in their own ways.

Akazome Emon

hitotsu ame ni  
uruu kusaki wa  
kotonaredo  
tsui ni wa moto ni  
kaerazameya

The trees and grasses,  
moistened in a single rain,  
are each different,  
yet will they not all end up  
returning to a common source?

Kintō

6. Bestowal of Prophecy

於未來世、咸得成佛

*“...in ages to come  
They shall all be able to achieve buddhahood.”* (119)

ikabakari  
ureshikariken  
sarade dani  
komu yo no koto wa  
shiramahoshiki o

One indeed wonders  
how happy they must have been:  
had they not heard it  
they would have wanted to know  
their fate within the world to come.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

tsugitsugi no  
hotoke ni ōku  
tsukaete zo  
hachisu o hiraku  
mi to wa narubeki

In making offerings  
to the myriad Buddhas  
of the distant past  
you will in your final body  
open up the lotus flower.

Akazome Emon

aratamete  
fukaki kokoro o  
satorinuru  
shirushi o kefu wa  
uru ni zo arikeru

In dispelling wrong views  
I have achieved the deep mind  
of enlightenment.  
For today I bear the marks  
of the Ones who have arrived.

Kintō



## 7. Parable of the Conjured City

以大慈悲力，度苦惱眾生

*“By the might of your great good will and compassion  
Saving the woe-beset, agonized living beings!” (126)*

yo no naka no  
kurushiki michi wa  
awarebi no  
chikara kuruma no  
hakobu nari keru

On the loathsome road  
winding through this world,  
it is His compassion  
that becomes a steady vehicle  
to carry us all on our way.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

koshiraete  
kari no yadori ni  
yasumezu wa  
saki no michi ni ya  
nao madowamashi

Had you not consoled us,  
and had we not stopped to rest  
at this temporary lodge,  
would we not have lost our way  
on the long road before us?

Akazome Emon

inishie no  
chigiri mo kai ya  
nakaramashi  
yasumete michi ni  
susumezariseba

I would not have kept  
that promise I made long ago  
to reach my goal  
had I not rested by the road  
and continued on my way.

Kintō

8. Receipt of Prophecy by Five Hundred Disciples

世尊於長夜，常愍見教化

*“For the World-Honored One throughout the long night of time,  
Ever in his pity teaching and converting...”* (153)

nagaki yo ni  
nao satenomi ya  
sugusamashi  
aware to mitsutsu  
oshiezariseba

Could we have made it  
through the long and difficult night  
by any other means?  
Had He not taught us the way,  
regarding us with compassion...?

Shunzei

\* \* \*

koromo naru  
tama to mo kakete  
shirazariki  
yume samete koso  
ureshikarikere

I did not know  
that a rare and precious gem  
lay hidden in my robes...  
Only when I woke from my dream  
did I joyously find it therein.

Akazome Emon

kite fushite  
toko ehi nareba  
koromode ni  
kakaruta tama to mo  
samete koso mire

Drunkard as I was,  
passed out fully on the ground,  
I awoke to find  
that a rare and precious jewel  
had been sewn into my sleeve.

Kintō

## 9. Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts

壽命無有量，以愍眾生故

*“His life span shall have no measure,  
Since he shall have pity on the multitude of living beings.”* (155)

kagiri naki  
inochi ni naru mo  
nabete yo no  
mono no aware o  
shireba narikeri

That His very life  
is beyond the limits of time  
comes from the fact  
that He knows the suffering  
of all who live in this world.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

morotomo ni  
satori o hiraku  
kore koso wa  
mukashi chigiri shi  
shirushi narikere

I predict you all  
shall open to enlightenment,  
and this very fate  
is proof of the former vow  
that you made so long ago.

Akazome Emon

futa nagara  
miyo no chigiri no  
arikereba  
yuku sue kanete  
yufu ni zo arikeru

On account of the vow  
regarding their future lives,  
though they are two,  
the ends to which they go  
are bound together as one.

Kintō

10. Preachers of the Dharma

漸見濕土泥，決定知近水

*“At length he sees moist earth and mud,  
Thus knowing of certainty that water is near.”* (165)

musashino no  
horikane no i mo  
aru mono o  
ureshiku mizu no  
chikazukinikeri

At Musashino  
the well of Horikane  
is difficult to dig,  
but what a joy it is to know  
that fresh water lies so close.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

sumigataki  
kokoro shi muro ni  
tomaraneba  
nori toku koto zo  
murera narubeki

Should the worried heart  
not settle down and abide  
in this honored room,  
then one's preaching of the Law  
will be an unlikely thing indeed.

Akazome Emon

nori tokamu  
mimuro mo soto ni  
nakarikeri  
tada kokoro o zo  
sumasuberanaru

There is no other place  
in which one should preach the Law  
than this honored room,  
yet in order to dwell here  
one must purify one's heart.

Kintō

11. Apparition of the Jeweled Stupa

若暫持者，我即觀喜

*“If anyone can hold it for a moment,  
Then I will be delighted.”* (176)

makimaki o  
kazareru himo no  
tamayura mo  
tamoteba hotoke  
yorokobitamau

If someone could hold  
but a moment the jeweled strings  
that adorn these scrolls,  
then that would be an occasion  
for the Buddha himself to rejoice.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

ōzora ni  
takara no tau no  
arawarete  
nori no tame ni zo  
mi o ba wakekeru

In the sky above  
there appeared a great stupa  
of many jewels  
and for the sake of the Law  
He split his body into many.

Akazome Emon

sono kami no  
chikahi taeneba  
ikuyo to mo  
shiranu sugata o  
sora ni miru kana

That ancient promise  
will never be extinguished,  
and so in the sky  
we see now the ageless body  
of one whose years remain unknown.

Kintō

12. Devadatta

採薪及菓蓏，隨時恭敬與

*“Gathering his firewood, his fruits and melons,  
Presenting them to him respectfully at the appropriate times.”* (180)

takigi tori  
mine no konomi o  
motomete zo  
gataki nori wa  
kikihajimekeru

By gathering kindle  
and by collecting wild fruit  
deep in the mountains  
He was able to hear the Law  
so difficult to encounter.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

watatsumi no  
miya o idetaru  
hodo mo naku  
sawari no hoka ni  
narinikeru kana

The moment she left  
the ocean palace's walls  
she quickly reached  
the hallowed place that transcends  
this worldly realm of obstructions.

Akazome Emon

mina hito o  
hotoke no michi ni  
iretsureba  
hotoke no ada mo  
hotoke narikeri

Since the Buddha  
will one day put us all  
on the buddha path:  
Even a buddha's enemy  
will himself a buddha be.

sawari ōmi  
nami o wake koshi  
mi o kaete  
hachisu no ue ni  
iru to koso mire

Her obstructions many,  
she burst forth through the waves  
and changed her body,  
alighting atop a lotus flower.  
This we saw with our own eyes!

Kintō

13. Fortitude

我不愛身命，但惜無上道

*“We do not covet bodily life,  
We do but regret the unexcelled path.”* (190)

kazu naraba  
oshiku ya aramashi  
oshikaranu  
uki mi to kikeba  
ureshikarikeri

If I were among those  
whose lives are worth coveting  
then perhaps I would,  
but I rejoice when I hear this body  
is not something to covet at all.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

mi ni kaete  
nori o oshiman  
tame ni koso  
shinobigataki o  
shinobite mo heme

To hold dear the Law  
we would forsake our lives...  
For this very cause  
we would go on enduring  
that which is hard to endure.

Akazome Emon

samazama ni  
ukiyo no naka o  
shinobitsutsu  
inochi ni kaete  
nori o oshimamu

Long will we endure  
the many kinds of sorrows  
in this fleeting world...  
Still we would forsake our lives  
in order to hold dear the Law.

Kintō

14. Comfortable Conduct

深入禪定，見十方佛

*“Deeply entering into dhyana concentration,  
And seeing buddhas in all ten quarters.” (204)*

shizukanaru  
ihori o shimete  
irinureba  
hitokata naranu  
hikari o zo miru

Setting up my hut  
and then moving into it,  
into that deep quiet,  
there is nowhere before me  
that I do not see His light.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

na o agete  
home mo soshiraji  
nori o tada  
ōku mo tokaji  
sukunaku mo seji

To mention by name  
another’s virtues or faults  
is not to be done.  
For when preaching the Law  
one must preserve equanimity.

Akazome Emon

yo o somuku  
kuse mo kokoro o  
ushinaite  
chikaite sue no  
nori o hiromemu

The spirit of one  
determined to forsake this world—  
that I cast aside,  
and promise to spread the Law  
for all future generations.

Kintō



15. Welling Up Out of the Earth

從地而踊出

“Out of earth and welling up...” (215)

ikemizu no  
soko yori izuru  
hachisuba no  
ikade nigori ni  
shimazu nariken

How is it that  
from the bottom of the lake  
the lotus flower  
rises all the way to the surface  
unhindered and unstained by mud?

Shunzei

\* \* \*

ikade ka wa  
ko yori mo oya no  
wakakaran  
oite wa wakaku  
\*naru ni ya aru ran

How could it be  
that a father is younger  
than his own child?  
Could there really be such a thing  
as growing younger as you age?

Akazome Emon

tarachine no  
oya yori koso wa  
oinikere  
toshi aragai no  
hito mo shitsubeshi

If one were to say  
he was older than his father,  
then it is likely  
that among those who hear him  
everyone will doubt his age.

Kintō

16. The Life Span of the Thus Come One

現有滅不滅

“...I make a show of nirvana,  
Yet in fact I do not pass into extinction...” (223)

karisome ni  
yoha no kemuri to  
nobarishi ya  
washi no takane ni  
kaeru shirakumo

That pillar of smoke  
rises far off into the night sky  
only provisionally...  
for the white cloud it becomes  
will again return to Eagle Peak.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

arinagara  
shinuru keshiki wa  
ko no tame ni  
tomeshi kusuri o  
sukasu narikeri

While yet still alive  
he feigns his own passing,  
and thus for their sake  
persuades his children to drink  
the medicine of salvation.

Akazome Emon

ideiru to  
hito wa miredomo  
yo to tomo ni  
washi no mine naru  
tsuki wa nodokeshi

Though people watch it  
coming out and then going in,  
throughout the ages  
the moon at Eagle Peak  
has remained ever peaceful.

Kintō

17. Discrimination of Merits

若坐若經行，除睡常攝心

*“And, whether sitting or walking,  
Ridding himself of drowsiness and ever collecting his thoughts...”*

okotarazu  
tsune ni kokoro o  
osametsutsu  
itsuka ukiyo no  
neburisamubeki

By never relenting  
and by collecting myself always  
I will at some time  
awake from the long slumber  
that makes up life in this world.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

hotoke nite  
etaru kōzu o  
kazoete wa  
chiri bakari dani  
shirazu aramashi

When trying to count  
the incalculable kalpas  
of the Buddha's life  
it is impossible to know  
even a fraction of the time.

Akazome Emon

kiku mama ni  
mina hito michi o  
masu kagami  
yuku sue made mo  
terashitsuru kana

As we hear Him speak,  
we desire even more the Way,  
and like a bright mirror  
He illuminates the path ahead  
all the way to its very end.

Kintō

18. The Merits of Appropriate Joy

最後第五十，聞一偈隨喜

*“If the last, the fiftieth [of those told of the Lotus Sutra],  
Hearing a single gatha, rejoices appropriately...” (240)*

tanigawa no  
nakare no sue o  
kumu hito  
kiku wa ikaga wa  
shirushi ariken

It is at the end  
of the river current’s flow  
that he stops to drink  
yet great is the effect on him  
for his having heard it at all.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

yo no naka ni  
miteshi takara o  
en yori wa  
nori o kiku beki  
koto wa masareri

More than gaining  
the many wonderful treasures  
that fill this world  
simply to hear the Dharma  
is a magnificent thing indeed.

Akazome Emon

tsutaetsutsu  
ana tauto to mo  
iu hito no  
sono hitokoto ni  
shikukoto zo naki

When passing on the Law,  
there is no greater thing to hear  
from those who receive it  
than the single, sincere utterance,  
“Oh, how awesome this Dharma!”

Kintō

19. The Merits of the Dharma Preacher

又如淨明鏡，悉見諸色像

*“Also, as in a pure, bright mirror  
One sees all physical images  
The bodhisattva, in his pure body,  
Sees whatever is in the world.”* (252)

nigori naku  
kiyoki kokoro ni  
migakarete  
mi koso masumi no  
kagami narikere

Having been polished  
by a clean and purified heart  
even the body itself  
can become a perfect mirror  
in which all is truly clear.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

tamochigataki  
nori o kakiyomu  
mukui ni wa  
mi zo sumi kiyoki  
kagami narikeri

For my efforts  
reading and writing the Law,  
so hard to retain,  
this sullied body will become  
a mirror wiped completely clean.

Akazome Emon

nori no ame ni  
mi nagara kiyome  
tsukushite wa  
sawari no soto wo  
nanika tadzunemu.

Since the Dharma rain  
will purify you through and through,  
even despite your body,  
why would you seek out a fate  
beyond that of these obstructions?

Kintō

20. The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

而打擲之，避走遠住

“When he spoke these words, *some in the multitude would beat him* with sticks and staves, with tiles and stones. *He would run away and abide at a distance*, yet would proclaim in a loud voice, ‘I dare not hold you all in contempt! You shall become buddhas!’ (258)

sono kami no  
araki tabusa no  
tsue ni koso  
tsui ni kakarite  
michibikarekere

Now then finally  
he leans upon that same cane  
that once long ago  
struck him down in violence  
and leads others on their way.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

miru hito o  
tsune ni karomenu  
kokoro koso  
tsui ni hotoke no  
mi ni wa narinure

The heart of one  
who never took them lightly  
is the very reason  
that all those who were present  
will become buddhas in the end.

Akazome Emon

uchinoru mo  
sate mo tane oshi  
uetsureba  
tsui ni minori no  
munashikaranu o

Just preaching the Law—  
even that alone in and of itself  
is planting a seed,  
so in the end the Dharma  
will not fail in its fruition.

Kintō

## 21. The Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One

於我滅度後、應受持斯經，  
是人於佛道，決定無有疑

*“...After my passage into extinction,  
Should receive and keep this scripture.  
This man, with respect to the Buddha path,  
Shall assuredly have no doubts.” (266)*

kono nori o  
kono koro tamotsu  
kore zo koro  
hotoke no michi ni  
sadametaru hito

This very person  
who receives and retains this Law  
at this very moment  
is the same that was then declared  
would follow on the Buddha's path.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

sora made ni  
itareru shita no  
makoto o ba  
nori o tamotan  
hito zo shiru beki

It is those among us  
who keep and protect the Law  
that know the truth  
spoken by the Buddha's tongue  
as it reaches up into the sky.

Akazome Emon

medzurashiku  
noburu shita nite  
minori o ba  
makoto no naka no  
makoto o zo shiru

It is from his tongue,  
uniquely long and wide,  
that we come to know  
the truth of the great Dharma,  
the innermost truth of all.

Kintō

## 22. Entrustment

今以付囑汝等

*“I entrust it all to you.” (267)*

aware kefu  
minori no sue o  
kiku koto mo  
yuzuri okikeru  
shirushi nari keru

That we hear it today  
in the latter days of the Law  
moves us indeed,  
for it is the positive result  
of his transmitting it forward.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

nagarete mo  
ada ni suna to zo  
kakinazuru  
uru koto kataki  
nori o toketote

Even as the Law flows  
I tell them never to give up,  
gently patting their heads,  
and go on explaining to them  
this thing so difficult to grasp

Akazome Emon

itadaki o  
kaesugaesu zo  
kakinadzuru  
egataki nori no  
ushirometasa ni

Over and over  
He strokes the tops of their heads,  
concerned as He is  
about the great difficulty  
of obtaining this Dharma.

Kintō



23. The Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King

即往安樂世界

“...*she shall straightaway go the world sphere Comfortable...*” (275)

tanomu kana  
tsuyu no inochi no  
keyuru toki  
hachisu no ue ni  
utsushiokunari

I can be certain  
that the dew which remains  
as my life expires  
will rest on no other place  
than on top a lotus flower.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

tomoshitsuru  
waga mi hitotsu no  
hikari nite  
amada no kuni o  
terashitsuru kana

With the very light  
shining from his own body  
that he set ablaze  
he illuminated far and wide  
the various lands of the world.

Akazome Emon

akiraka ni  
terasu hodo ni mo  
miyuru kana  
mi o ba oshimade  
nori o omoeba

In a flash of light  
he illuminated the world  
for us all to see  
by not caring for his body  
and thinking only of the Law.

Kintō

24. The Bodhisattva Fine Sound

及眾難處，皆能救濟

“...or indeed in any other troublesome place, he can rescue them all.” (281)

araki umi  
kibishiki yama no  
naka naredo  
taenaru koe wa  
hedatezarikeri

Whether roiling sea  
or harshest mountain depths  
there is no place  
that can be completely removed  
from the sound of his wondrous voice.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

koko ni nomi  
ari to ya wa miru  
izuku ni mo  
taenaru koe ni  
nori o koso toke

Do we see that  
he has made himself present  
before our eyes only?  
When in fact his wondrous voice  
is teaching the Law everywhere...

Akazome Emon

nori no tame  
kinu to miredomo  
mi o wakete  
itaranu kata wa  
araji to zo omou

Though we see him come  
for the sake of the Dharma,  
he splits himself up  
and now it seems there is no place  
that these many forms do not reach.

Kintō

25. The Gateway to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World

弘誓深如海

“*His broad vows as deep as the ocean...*” (291)

chikaikeru  
kokoro no yagate  
umi nareba  
hito o watasu mo  
wazurai mo nashi

Having made the vow  
his heart was like an ocean,  
and because of this  
there was no hardship at all  
taking people to the other side.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

mi o wakete  
amaneku nori o  
toku naka ni  
mada wataserenu  
waga mi kanashi na

He split his body  
to widely preach the Law  
yet here I am  
my same old saddened self  
unable to cross to the other side.

Akazome Emon

yo o sukuu  
uchi ni wa dare ka  
irazaramu  
amaneki kado o  
hito shisasaneba

Who would not enter  
into the Way that saves all  
since there is no one  
who could ever close the doors  
of its wide and universal gate?

Kintō

26. Dharani

乃至夢中，亦復莫惱

“...even in a dream: let none of these harm them!” (297)

utsutsu ni wa  
sara ni mo iwazu  
nuru tama no  
yume no naka ni mo  
hanare ya wa suru

Here in reality  
there is nothing more to say,  
for even in dreams  
jeweled and lacquered with sleep  
such things shall be kept away.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

nori mamoru  
chikai o hukaku  
tatetsureba  
sue no yo made mo  
aseji to zo omou

Since I deeply vowed  
to protect always the person  
who holds dear the Law  
I will never give up the task  
even for generations to come.

Akazome Emon

kagiri naki  
nori no chikara ni  
toki sofuru  
mamori wa itodo  
tanomoshiki kana

Those who will protect  
the ones out there preaching  
using the power  
of this limitless Dharma  
are very trustworthy indeed.

Kintō

27. The Former Affairs of the King Find Adornment

又如一眼之龜，值浮木孔

“A Buddha is as hard to encounter as an udumbara flower, as hard as it would be for a *one-eyed tortoise to encounter a hole in a floating piece of wood.*” (301)

ware ya kore  
ukiki ni aeru  
kame naran  
kō wa huredomo  
nori wa shiranu o

I have to wonder,  
will I also be like the turtle  
who finds the log?  
Kalpas upon kalpas have passed  
though still I know not the Law...

Shunzei

\* \* \*

hotoke ni wa  
au koto kataki  
yue ni tote  
ko o yurushite zo  
oya mo susumeshi

Because of the fact  
that the Buddha himself  
is so hard to meet  
she allowed her children to leave  
and proceeded on the path as well.

Akazome Emon

yami ni nomi  
madoikitsuredo  
chigiriteshi  
tomo zo michibiku  
shirube narikeru

Though I in darkness  
have wandered about through life,  
these two companions  
who made a vow long ago  
are like signs leading the way.

Kintō

28. The Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universally Worthy

即往兜率天上

*“He shall straight away ascend to the top of Tusita Heaven, to the place of the Bodhisattva Maitreya.”* (307)

haruka naru  
sono akatsuki wa  
matazu to mo  
sora no keshiki wa  
mitsubekarikeri

There is no need  
to wait for that distant dawn,  
far in the future,  
when already we can see  
the look of an empty sky.

Shunzei

\* \* \*

yukusue no  
nori o hiromeni  
kitarikeru  
chikai o kiku ga  
aware naru kana

Hearing him declare  
that he will spread this Law  
to the end of time  
I am moved by his words  
and thankful for his vow.

Akazome Emon

tadzunekuru  
chigiri shi areba  
yuku sue mo  
nagarete nori no  
mizu wa taeseji

Since he made a vow  
to come seeking us always,  
even in the future  
the waters of this Dharma  
will flow forth and never end...

Kintō