

THE MIRACLE AT TSUBOSAKA TEMPLE

The House of Sawaichi's house and on the mountain at Tsubosaka Temple

Whether dreams be a veil of tears, or this veil of tears a dream
Living in the village of dreams, one must steal oneself to that world.
Along the Yamato Road, which divides good from evil
"In Tosamachi, an isolated locality
near the temple of Tsubosaka"
Lives a blind man called Sawaichi, from birth an honest man,
Playing the koto and shamisen
He scrapes a living,
more slender even than the strings of his instruments.
His wife Osato is in good health,
"A constant aid to her husband,
she takes in piecework and washing,"
The slap of clothes against the starching board,
The only sound to disturb their quiet life.
'Even the birdcalls and the ringing of the bells sink into my ears,
The more I remember, the faster fall my tears,
"Faster than the flow of
Imose River..."
"Oh, you took the shamisen out today. you must be in good spirits."
"Is that you, Osato? Do I look like I'm in good spirits?"
"Well, I'm not.
I'm so depressed.
I tell you, I feel so bad that I've even thought about dying."
"Osato, there's something
I need to ask you."
Come over here.
"I've been meaning to ask you
for some time"
But the days and months have flown by so quickly
"And already three years have
passed since we were wed."
"We were promised to each other
since childhood,"

And we know the depths of each other's heart.
So tell me why you had to hide it from me, why couldn't you tell me?
His words are vague.
Osato is puzzled, unable to understand what he means.
"Sawaichi, whatever are you talking about?
"For these three years as
your wife, I swear,"
I have not hidden even the tiniest dewdrop from you.
If there's something you're unhappy about, just come out and tell me.
That's how husband and wife should be."
"If that's the way you want it."
"Whatever it is, spit it out."
"Osato, hear me out.
For these three years since we wed,
Every morning you have left your bed before four o'clock.
I know that I am blind, and my face is covered in smallpox scars.
It's only natural that you should not care for me,
But if you have found another man, please, you must tell me.
If I only knew the truth I would not be angry.
Our relationship is more like that of brother and sister.
People often tell me that you are a beautiful woman,
So I am resigned, and I will not be jealous. Just tell me the truth.
He speaks proudly, choking back the tears from his sightless eyes,
But within his heart he feels desolate.
Osato is shocked and she clings to him.
"How heartless you are, Sawaichi!
No matter how poor we are, do you really think...
I'm the kind of woman who could abandon you for another man?
I won't hear of it!
When my parents died my uncle took me in,
And I was raised together with you, less cousins than sister and brother.
Fate has been unkind to you, scarred by pockmarks and blind,
But while we may live in poverty, you are still my husband.
I will stay by your side come fire or flood, through this life and the next.
These are not mere words - in order that your eyes might be healed,
I slip quietly from my bed when I hear the four o'clock bell

"And climb alone to the Kannon Hall
at Tsubosaka Temple."
For three years I have climbed the mountain path to the temple.
But Kannon sheds no mercy on my pitiful prayers,
And I wonder what past sin must be the cause.
I have come to hate her.
And now you, not knowing my devotion,
accuse me of having another man.
Your words have angered me.
The tear stained words of Sawaichi's dutiful wife ring with sincerity.
Sawaichi's voice is choked with tears,
"Whatever did I do to deserve you, Osato?
So great is your faith in the Buddha,
You believe that he can make flowers blossom on even a withered tree.
Well then, let these unseeing eyes be a withered tree,
And how I wish flowers would bloom there.
But my sin is deep, so if not in this life, then at least in the next.
Wife, come, lead me by the hand.
Overjoyed, she rushes to leave.
Leaning on his cane,
Sawaichi's hopes as shallow as Osato's vows are deep,
As they head for the holy temple at Tsubosaka.

Legend tells of the Kannon of Tsubosaka temple,
How in the reign of the 50th emperor, when Kanmu made Nara his capital,
"He developed a serious affliction
of the eyes. The abbot of Tsubosaka, "
Doki Shonin, recited prayers for 107 days,
And lo, the emperor's eyes were healed.
Now Tsubosaka is the sixth station on the Saikoku pilgrimage route,
Known far and wide as a most auspicious and holy place.
"A pilgrims' song comes drifting
up the mountain slope,"
As Sawaichi and Osato finally draw close to the holy temple.
"Sawaichi, this is it, we've arrived at the Kannon hall."
"So this is it. What a blessing. Let me pray. Namu Amida Butsu."

"Let's spend the whole night chanting our devotions to Kannon."

The voices of husband and wife ring out as they chant with utmost piety.

"The Kannon of Tsubosaka who raises the mountains and
fills the seas.

The sands of the garden become the Pure Land.

"Osato, I never thought I could, but I followed your word and come here,
But there's no sign of my sight being restored yet."

"Oh, you! Talking like that again.

Instead of wasting time, let's keep chanting.

She encourages him.

"How right you are.

"I will stay here to fast
for three days,"

"So you go on home and get on
with your work."

These three days will decide whether my eyes will heal."

"That's the spirit! I'll go home and finish my chores. I'll be back soon.

But Sawaichi, remember that the path to the temple is treacherous,
And to the right of the path is a precipice of unfathomable depth.
Stay here and don't go wandering off."

"Why would I go anywhere?

For three days I'll be wrestling with Kannon. Though she laughs,
his wife leaves her heart behind, and off she rushes,

Unaware this parting brief as the span of morning dew will be their last.

Sawaichi is left alone. Unable to control his gloom he lies down to cry.

"My darling wife, I have known
such happiness."

More than just nursing me these years, you have not resented the poverty,
Nor once did your love grow weary.

You have cared for me faithfully and lovingly, in spite of my blindness.

And I have repaid your kindness with suspicion. Forgive me, please.

Having now parted, I wonder if we shall meet again in the next world?

I am a truly pitiful excuse for a man.

He throws himself on the ground, lamenting his failures.

At last, he raises his head.

"Ah, what point is there in crying?

For three years my wife faithfully devoted herself to prayer,
All to no avail. What merit is there in my continuing to live?
As it is said, if parting should lead to prosperity, then let us part.

"My death will repay
my debt to you."

"You must live on and find
a better husband than me."

As you left you let slip there is a deep valley to the right of the path.
Let that be my final resting place.

Dying in such a holy place, surely I will be saved in the next life.

Luckily night has fallen. While there's no one around, I'll do it.

He stands and gathers his wits, steps just four or five to climb,

"The bell tolls the lateness of
the hour."

"Night draws on, I must hurry."

Leaning on his cane he feels his way, until finally scaling some rocks,

He hears the thunderous noise of the river far below in the valley

"Its sound a welcoming call
from the Buddha"

He thrusts his cane into the ground,

"And with a final prayer,

Namu Amida Butsu,"

He plunges to his tragic death.

Unaware of what has just happened, his wife hurries back, breathless,

In her haste on the familiar mountain path she slips and nearly falls,

But finally she reaches the top of the slope.

"I don't see him anywhere. Sawaichi! Sawaichi!"

"As she searches, there is no reply,
no sign of human life,"

"She rushes here and there,
calling her husband's name."

Sawaichi! Sawaichi!"

But then, in the moonlight trickling through the trees,
she sees something,

"She draws close and recognizes
his familiar cane."

She lets out a cry, and gazing into the valley below
By the light of the moon, she makes out her husband's body.
Whatever am I do?

She writhes, as though mad with grief,
"She wants to fly down to him
but has no wings"

She weeps and wails, but it is hopeless,
"There is none to reply to her
save the echo."

Ah, you can't hear me. After all the hardships I suffered these years,
"All the pain I bore unbegrudgingly.
With all my heart I prayed to Kannon,"
"That she might show you compassion
and heal your eyes."

I have never ceased praying, and now this is how you repay me?
Leaving me all alone. Whatever shall I do now? What shall I do?
Come to think of it, the song you sang today worried me.
Now I can see that even then you intended to take your life.
I had no idea.

If I had, I would never have dragged you here.
Forgive me. Forgive me!
"Can there be anyone more
pitiful than I?"

Separated for eternity from my husband to whom
I was wed for two lifetimes,
"Ah, the misery of being
a weak human."

Is this grief a punishment for a sin I committed in a previous life?
From the blind darkness of this world, he has set out for death's darkness
"Who will take his hand to guide him
in the next world?"

As she pleads and begs, her sorrowful tears swell Tsubosaka river far below.
At last she lifts her tearful face,
"Ah, have no regrets.

Shed no more tears."
"Have faith that everything
was decided in a past life,"
And join your husband in death.
In his haste he forgot his cane, to return it to him I abandon this world,
"Buddha, please guide me to him!
Namu Amida Butsu."
Chanting a prayer, she flings herself into the gorge,
"How tragic this wife,
chaste even unto death."
The time is early February,
Just before dawn, a beam of light shines forth from between the clouds
And accompanied by a swell of exquisite, celestial music
Kannon herself appears in
the form of a gracious woman of great beauty.
In a delicate voice, she speaks,
"Hear me, Sawaichi.
You became blind because of sins in a previous life.
Today your lives have drawn to an end,
but because of your wife's chastity,
And the merit of her daily prayers, I will extend your lives.
From henceforth, be of strong faith, go on the 33-site pilgrimage,
And give thanks for the compassion of the Buddha.
Osato! Sawaichi! Hear me.
Calling in a divine voice, the goddess slowly fades away leaving not a trace,
As the bells of morning ring out from all four directions.
Dawn breaks in the sky, and in the gloom of the valley,
"Two forms slowly arise, knowing not
if they are dreaming."
It's you, Sawaichi! It's really you. And your eyes are open!
They are. I can see. I can see!
"This is all due to Kannon.
Goddess, my thanks."
And you? Who are you?
What are you talking about? I'm your wife.
You? My wife? I'm very pleased to finally set eyes on you.

How happy I am!

This is indeed a miracle. I remember falling into the valley and dying.

But in the darkness, Kannon suddenly appeared and explained everything.

Yes, and I followed in your footsteps and fell into the valley.

But I don't have a single injury, and on top of that your eyes are healed.

Surely this must be a dream.

It must have been Kannon who called me, and brought me back to life.

I am so grateful.

Come, we must go to the temple to give our thanks.

Praying for the first time in the light of dawn, I feel reborn.

Such is the divine favour of Kannon, giving sight to the blind,

"These pearls of thanks,

Like the rebirth of the New Year"

That this husband and wife should be saved, a wondrous thing indeed!

Today is a happy day, as he sets aside

his cane to pray in the first light, Giving thanks to gods and buddhas.

It is Kannon who has opened his eyes to the myriad beauties of the world,

It is the weight of Kannon's vow that raises mountains and fills the seas,

And transforms the sands in the garden at Tsubosaka

to become the Pure Land.

"This revelation is the Blessed Dharma."