

Hojyoki

Translated by **Yoshifumi KOHRO**

The flow of the river never ceases, and the water is ever changing. Bubbles floating on the quiet surface take shape and disappear all the time and never remain the same. People and dwellings in this world are just like this.

Dwellings of people of any kind, noble or humble, crammed together as if they were competing with each other in the magnificent capital, seem to be unchanged for centuries, but asked if this is true, there are few which remain as they were in the old days. Some dwellings are newly built this year after last year's fire, and others are small houses which used to be larger ones. This is true of people living in them. There are few out of twenty or thirty whom I saw in the old days even in the same populous place. Indeed, the way people die in the morning and are born in the evening is just like bubbles floating on the river surface.

I do not know where mortal beings come and go, nor do I know for whom we worry about and with what we please our eyes while living in temporary dwellings. The way dwellers and dwellings are competing for transience is the same as that of the morning glory and its dew. The flower may remain after the dew has dropped. It may remain, but it withers in the morning sunshine. Dew may remain, but it never fails to disappear by evening.

Having lived more than forty years since I began to know the world, I have seen incredible events occur time and time again.

I guess it was on the twenty eighth day of the fourth month¹ of the third year of

Angen.² It was a noisy evening with a strong wind blowing. Around eight o'clock,³ a fire broke out from the southeast of the capital and spread to the northeast. It finally spread to Suzaku Gate, the Great Hall of State, the School of Government Officials, and the Office of Citizens, until at last all were burnt to ashes in one night.

They say that the origin of the fire was a temporary dwelling around Higuchi-Tominokoji⁴ where dancers were staying. While blown by the whirling wind, jumping here and there, it was broadened to the shape of a fan. The distant houses were choked by smoke, and in the areas close to the blaze, flame was blown intensely onto the earth. With ashes blown into the sky, the flame severed by the wind jumped over one or two blocks⁵ at a time as if flying, being reflected in the light of the fire of all crimson. I wonder if men in the fire had their senses. Some people fell down, suffocated by the smoke, and others fainted in the fire and were killed instantly. Yet others just managed to get away from the fire with only their lives but they were unable to rescue their properties. Thus, their treasures were completely burnt to ashes. Nobody knows how much was lost. Sixteen houses of court nobles were burnt at that time. Not to mention, it is impossible to know how many other houses were burnt. They say that roughly one third of the capital was burnt. Tens⁶ of men and women were killed, and innumerable domestic animals, such as cows and horses, were killed as well.

What humans do is all meaningless, but the most meaningless is to spend one's treasure on building a house in such a dangerous capital and to worry about it.

Then, around the fourth month of the fourth year of Jisho,⁷ a great whirlwind arose

¹ In the Japanese ancient lunar calendar.

² 1127 A.D.

³ Originally, the time of the Dog.

⁴ The intersection of Higuchi Street and Tominokoji Street.

⁵ Another interpretation is a unit of length used at that time, around 200 meters. Asami (2012), p.33.

⁶ As Asami (2012, p.34) notes, the figures can be interpreted as 'hundreds' or 'thousands' as in other sources. However, the present translator takes the original one.

⁷ 1180 A.D.

around Nakanomikado - Kyogoku⁸ and blew up as far as near Rokujo.

While it blew intensely over three or four blocks, no house, which looked as if shrinking in the area, whether large or small, was left undamaged. Some houses were flattened on the spot, and others were left with only beams and poles. Gates were blown over four or five blocks⁹ away and neighboring houses became one as their fences were blown away. Needless to say, all property inside the houses was blown up into the sky, and cypress bark and shingles were just like winter leaves being scattered in the wind. Since the wind blew up the dust as if it were smoke, I could not see anything. Nor could I hear people speak because of the awful rolls of thunder. I wondered if even the wind blowing in hell could be as terrible as this. In addition to the damage to houses, there were a great number of people who got injured and maimed while repairing damaged houses. This whirlwind moved to the south-southwest¹⁰ and many people lamented. I wondered, "A whirlwind often arises, but how can this kind of thing happen? This is not a mere disaster. It may be a portent from the Divinity or something."

Then around the sixth month¹¹ of the fourth year of Jisho,¹² the capital was transferred suddenly, which really was an unexpected happening. According to what I have heard about the origin of the capital, it has been over four hundred years since this city was ordained as the capital in the time of Emperor Saga. It is quite reasonable for people to have felt uneasy and been worried about this, because the capital should not be transferred without any special reason. However, it was no use complaining, and from the Emperor to the ministers and court nobles on down, they all moved. How could an office-holder remain in the old capital? Those who are eager for higher court ranks and depend on the benefit from their lords try to move earlier even by one day, but those

⁸ The intersection of the two streets.

⁹ See note 4 above.

¹⁰ Originally, the direction of the Sheep

¹¹ See note 1 above.

¹² 1180 A.D.

who missed the opportunities and were neglected and left behind without any hope remain there anxiously. Dwellings, which looked as if they were competing with each other, are falling into ruin day by day. Houses are broken into pieces and floated on the Yodo river,¹³ and the land is turned into a field before our eyes.

People's minds have changed, and they think much of only horses and saddles. No one needs oxen or carts. They ask for fiefs in the southwest, and they do not like manors in the northeast.¹⁴

At that time, I happened to have a chance to go to the new capital in Tsunokuni.¹⁵ I saw the circumstances of the place, but the land was not large enough to partition. The north part skirts the mountain high, and the south is bordered low and close by the sea. The sound of waves is always clamorous, and the sea wind is especially strong. Because the palace was in the mountains, it looks all the more elegant with a somewhat different appearance, even making me wonder if the Palace of Bare Trees¹⁶ was like this. I wonder where houses, which were broken into pieces every day and floated down crowding the river, would be rebuilt. There is still much vacant land, but not many houses are being built.

The old capital had become dilapidated, but the new capital has not been completed. Every single person feels as if they were floating in a cloud. The natives lost their land and worry about it. People moving in recently complain of troubles in building houses. Looking around the streets, people who should be riding a carriage ride horses, and those who should be in formal clothes for court nobles and aristocrats wear clothes for warriors. Customs in the capital have changed instantly, and they are not different from those of country warriors.

¹³ To be used for reconstruction in the new capital.

¹⁴ The areas in the southwest were under the control of the Tairas, and the Minamoto family was becoming dominant in the northeast. Asai (2012), p.46.

¹⁵ The location of the new capital was Fukuhara, in present Hyogo Prefecture. Tsunokuni involved parts of present Osaka and Hyogo.

¹⁶ The austere palace built with bare trees in Asakura, Fukuoka, by the Emperor Saimei.

As I had heard that these were the portent of an upheaval, which turned out to be obvious, the world has become restless and people are not calm as the days passed. People's anxiety about an upheaval was not in vain until the last day, and in the winter of the same year, the Emperor returned to this old capital. However, what has become of the houses which had been broken into pieces and carried on the river? Not all have been rebuilt as they had been.

I heard wise emperors in old times reigned over people with mercy. That is, even when they roofed their palaces, they used untrimmed thatch. They exempted poor people from even a limited tribute when they saw scanty smoke from the cook-houses of the poor. This is because they tried to be merciful to the people and save society. The present state should be clear when compared to old times.

Then, I think it was in the Wayo era,¹⁷ but I am not sure since it was so long ago. The world was starving and in an unbelievably terrible condition for two years. Evil things such as drought in spring and summer, followed by typhoons and floods in the fall, succeeded, and no grain ripened. Indeed, there was planting in summer, but there was neither joy for reaping in the fall nor for storing in winter.

For this reason, some people in provinces left their land and went across the borders, and others lived in the mountains, forgetting their houses. Many kinds of prayers were begun and some extraordinary rituals were conducted, but they had no effect at all. The capital has traditionally depended on the countryside as its source for everything, but how could we pretend to be calm when no goods were brought in at all? Being unable to endure, people try to dispose of their treasure as if they were throwing it away, but there is no one who spares them another look. If, by chance, there is someone who would trade, they make little of gold, making much of millet. Many beggars are along the streets and their cries of distress and sadness fill our ears.

The last year barely passed in this way. While hoping that we could recover in the

¹⁷ 1181 to 1182 A.D.

coming year, matters were made worse by an outbreak of plague, and there was no sign of recovery. Since people are starving, the way their conditions worsened day by day could be compared to fish dying in scarce water. At last, even people dressed in decent clothes, with woven hats and leg covers, begged from door to door for their lives. No sooner did one see these miserable creatures walking along than they had fallen prostrate to the ground. Countless people died of hunger outside the walls or along the streets. Because no one knew how to dispose of the corpses, the world was full of a horrible stench and there were countless dreadful sights of decomposition. Needless to say, there is not even a path in the riverbed on which horses or carts can pass.

Since lowly people and woodcutters were exhausted, and thus, even firewood became scarce, those who had no one to turn to broke up their own houses and sold the pieces in the market. They say what one person could carry was not enough to live on for a single day. Unforgivably enough, some pieces of wood with traces of lacquer or gold leaf could be seen among the firewood. Tracing back their sources, I found that those who had no other recourse had broken into old temples, stolen the statues, robbed the hall of prayer of their furnishing, and smashed them into pieces. Born into such an evil world, I could not help seeing these miserable doings.

There were also quite pitiful scenes. Among those who had beloved wives or husbands, it was the ones with the deeper affection who died earlier. This is because they gave their scarce food, if any, to the beloved ones before they took for themselves, feeling pitiful for their partners. For that reason, without exception, it is parents who died earlier than their children. It even happened that an infant continued to lie sucking at its mother's breast, unaware that she was already dead.

The priest Ryugyo Hoin of the Ninnaji Temple, lamenting these innumerable deaths, wrote the letter 'A'¹⁸ on the forehead of every corpse he saw, so that they could

¹⁸ The first letter in Sanskrit which is believed to signify the essence of the universe; everything is void, and neither arises nor ceases.

have a bond with Buddha. Someone tried to count the number of the dead in the fourth and fifth months,¹⁹ but the number of corpses lying along the streets in the capital, that is, from Ichijyo to the south, Kujiyo to the north, Kyogoku to the west, and Suzaku to the east, amounted to over 42,300. Needless to say, many died before and after that, and there would be no limit if Kawara, Shirakawa, Nishinokyo and other places on the outskirts were included. Not to mention, the situations of the seven provinces.

I have heard that, in the time of the Emperor Sutokuin, around the Chosho era,²⁰ there was a similar case, but I know nothing of the conditions then. What I saw with my own eyes, however, was extraordinary indeed.

And then, I think it was probably about the same time. There was an extremely strong earthquake. The way everything quaked was totally different from the usual ones. Mountains collapsed, filling in the rivers, and tidal waves rose up and flooded the land. Water came out of the cracks in the ground, and huge rocks were broken and rolled into the valleys. Boats sailing along the shore were tossed about by the waves, and horses walking along the road staggered, having lost their footing. Not one of the temples, shrines and pagodas was left undamaged anywhere in the suburbs of the capital. Some broke up, and others collapsed. Dust and ashes were blown about, soaring upward like rising smoke. The rumble of shaking land and the noise from collapsing houses were just like thunder. One who stayed in the house was to be crashed instantly, and another, who ran outside, saw the earth crack and split before him. Having no wings, no one could fly away. A dragon could have ridden on the clouds. I did realize that, of all fearful things, the earthquake was the most terrifying.

Such violent quakes stopped after a while, but the aftershocks did not stop for a fairly long time. Every day we had twenty or thirty tremors of a strength that would suffice to frighten people. After ten or twenty days, the intervals gradually became

¹⁹ The second year of Wayo.

²⁰ 1132 to 1135 AD.

longer; four or five times a day, two or three times a day, every other day, then once in two or three days. These aftershocks probably continued for about three months.

Among the four elements of the universe, water, fire, and wind commonly bring about disasters, but the earth does not usually cause extraordinary events. Formerly, as I heard it was in the Saiko period, there was a great earthquake which brought about dreadful things, such as causing the head of the Great Buddha in the Todaiji Temple to fall off. But, they say that does not compare to this earthquake. For a while, people talked about tiresomeness of the world, and the darkness and evil seemed to have gone out of their thoughts. However, no one even mentioned the disastrous earthquake after months and years had passed.

Generally, this world is hard to live in, and the way we and our dwellings are transient and fragile is like something mentioned above. Needless to say, it is impossible to count sufferings, depending on our physical location and social standing.

Those who are of low status but live close to a man of power can never express their joy without reserve even if they are happy in their mind. Neither can they cry out when they are in deep sorrow. The way they feel uneasy in anything and fearful in doing any single action is just like that of sparrows coming too near to a hawk's nest.

The poor living next door to the rich go in and out of their own houses flattering, ashamed of their own poor appearances. When they see the envious looks of their wives, children and servants, or when they hear the rich make light of them, their minds become uneasy every time and never settled.

Those who live in a crowded place cannot escape disaster when there is a fire nearby. Those who live in a remote place have to take the trouble of coming and going and are in constant fear of thieves. Also, men of power are greedy, and people who have no one to depend on are made light of. The wealthy must worry about their properties, and the poor feel bitter about their miserable state. If we depend on someone, we are controlled by that person. If we care for people, we are subject to our affections for

them. If we follow the world, we suffer. If not, we are like the crazy. Where should we live and what should we do so that we can take a rest even for a while and obtain a moment's peace of mind?

I inherited a house from my parental grandmother and lived there for a long time. Later, I lost my ties with my relatives and fell on hard times. I had many attachments to the house, but in the end, I could not maintain it. At the age of over thirty, I built a house of my own.

If compared to the previous house, it is one tenth in size. I built a small shelter only for living, but I could not set up a proper house. I barely put up a wall, but I could not afford to build a gate. In a shed made of bamboo pillars, I parked my carriage. The house was not always safe every time it snowed or the wind blew hard. Since the site was close to the river, there was danger of flood and robbery.

I spent over thirty years enduring the harsh world and worrying about its difficulties. During the time, I naturally came to realize that my fortune was not a blessed one with each failure. Then, in my fiftieth spring, I became a priest and renounced the world. Because I had had neither a wife nor children, I had no dependents to worry about. What on earth could I cling to when I had neither a court rank nor a salary?

Then I spent five more years living to no purpose in the clod of Mt. Ohara.

I built another dwelling like disappearing dew on a leaf when I turned sixty and did not have many years to live. This is just like a traveler building a hut for a night or an old silkworm spinning a cocoon. This hermitage is less than one hundredth in size of the place where I spent my middle years. While saying this and that, I get older and older, and my dwelling becomes smaller and smaller.

My hermitage is quite unlike normal houses. It is only within two mats in size and less than seven feet in height. I built it without owing the site because I did not give any consideration about it. I laid the foundation, thatched a temporary roof, and assembled the wood joints with hinges. This is because I can easily move it somewhere in case I

come to dislike it. How much trouble would I have in rebuilding it? All I have to do is to pay for carrying my belongings in two carriages.

Now, after coming to this hideaway in the depths of Mt. Hino, I installed a shed of over three feet on the east side of my hut and made it a place for burning brushwood. On the south I laid a bamboo duckboard, and to the west of it, I fixed a shelf for the holy water. In the north corner, which was separated by a sliding door, I placed a picture of Amitabha Bodhisattva, hung an image of Fugen Bodhisattva, and set a copy of the Lotus Sutra before them. I laid ears of overgrown brackens in the east corner of the room, making it as my bed. On the southwest, I arranged suspended shelves and put three black leather baskets on them, in which I kept copies of poetry, music, and *Ojyoyoshu*.²¹ I set my koto and lute beside them.

Such is my hermitage. Speaking of its surroundings, there is a water pipe to the south. I built up rocks to pool the water. Since the woods are close, there is no trouble collecting brushwood. The place around here is called Toyama. The paths are densely covered with spindle vines. Trees have grown thick over the valley, but nothing obstructs the view to the west, which could make it possible for me to meditate the Pure Land in the West.

In the spring, I see waves of wisteria. They grow beautifully to the west as if they were a purple cloud. In the summer, I hear cuckoos cooing. Each time one sings, I ask him to guide me across the mountain of parting. In the fall, the cry of the cicada fills my ears, and it sounds as if they feel sorry for the transient world. In the winter, I admire the snow. The way it accumulates and disappears could be compared to our sins.

When I am reluctant to chant the name of Amitabha and I cannot concentrate on reading sutras, I freely rest and neglect them. There is no one to prevent me and no one before whom I would feel ashamed in doing so. I am not especially intent on training of keeping silent, but I can avoid the sins of speech since I live alone. I am not necessarily

²¹ Written by Gen'shin, this contributed to the spread of Pure Land teachings.

trying to keep the commandments, but how could I break them when there is no inducement to do so?

On mornings when I feel like comparing my life to the “vanishing white wave,”²² I put myself in the mood of Manshami,²³ while gazing at the boats coming and going at Okanoya. On nights when the wind in the katsura trees makes their leaves rustle, I play the biwa, following Gentotoku,²⁴ and send my heart out to the Yangze River. If this continues to amuse me, I harmonize my “Tune of the Autumn Wind”²⁵ with the sound of the pines and play the melody of “The Flowing Spring”²⁶ to the sound of the water. My technique is poor, but it is not for entertaining people. By playing and chanting alone, I just console myself. That is all.

At the foot of the mountain is another brushwood hut. This is the dwelling of the keeper of the mountain. There, lives a child. He sometimes visits me and we play together. When I have nothing special to do, I take walks with him as my companion. He is ten years old, and I am sixty. Though our ages differ greatly, we share the same amusement. Sometimes we pick cogon grass, get cowberry, collect wild bulbils, or gather wild parsley. Other times, we go to the rice fields at the foot of the mountain, gather fallen rice stalks and make them into little bundles.

When the weather is fine, I climb to the mountain top and look across Kohatayama, Fushimi-no-sato, Toba and Hatsukashi toward the sky of my old home in the distance. Since these scenic places have no owner, nothing disturbs my pleasure in doing so. When it is no trouble to take a long walk and I am in the mood for wandering further, I cross Mt. Sumi, pass Mt. Kasatori along the ridges, and worship at Iwama

²² This is compared to transient waves, about which Manshami wrote in *Shui-shu*. See Asami (2012), p.108.

²³ A well-known poet in the Nara period. See note 22 above.

²⁴ An expert biwa player and poet in the Heian period, who was also Chomei's biwa master. Asami (2012), p.108.

²⁵ A great piece in koto music.

²⁶ A piece in biwa music.

Temple or Ishiyama Temple. Or I make my way through the field of Awazu, mourning Semimaru²⁷ at the place connected with him, then cross the Tanakami river, and visit the grave of Sarumaru-Mouchigimi.²⁸ On the way back, depending on the season, I enjoy the beauty of cherry blossoms or maple leaves, snip bracken or gather berries. I offer some of them to statues of Buddha on the way, and some I bring home for myself.

On a silent night, the moon seen through my window reminds me of the deceased, and the monkey's sad cries make me shed tears. Fireflies in the grass look like the flicker of fishermen's fire-lures around the sand bank of Maki, and the rain at dawn sounds naturally like a storm blowing the leaves on the trees. When I hear the copper pheasant cooing, I wonder if my father or mother has come to see me from the other world. When a mountain deer gets accustomed to my presence nearby, I realize how far I am from the outside world. Also, when I wake up in the middle of the night, I stir up the charcoal embers of the fire for company. Since this is not an formidable mountain, the beautiful mountain scenery of each season never ceases, as I am touched by the song of the owl. Not to mention, for people who meditate deeply and have great knowledge, the pleasures would not be limited to these.

When I started to live here, I thought it would only be for a while, but five years have already passed. The tentative dwelling has gradually become a beloved one, dead leaves have piled up on themselves, and moss has covered the base. According to what I happened to hear of the capital, many men of the loftiest rank died after I came to live in this mountain. Of course, it is impossible to count all of those with no account. No one knows how many houses were burnt in the repeated fires. Only in this temporary hermitage, is it calm and safe. Although it is small, there is a floor for me to sleep on at night and a place to sit in the day time. It is enough for one person to live in. The hermit crab likes a small shell. This is because it knows the size of its body. The osprey flies

²⁷ A sage of poetry in the Heian period.

²⁸ A legendary poet in the early Heian period.

above a wave-beaten shore because it is afraid of human beings. I am like these creatures. Since I know myself and the world, I do not have any desire, and neither do I busy myself. I just hope for calm and take delight in living without anxiety.

As a general rule, people do not build their houses because there are special reasons to do so. Some build for their wives and children, their dependents and retainers, and others for their close friends and companions. Still others build for their lords, masters, and treasures, and even for their animals. I, however, built my hermitage for myself, not for someone else. The reason is that, considering the conditions of this world and my present situation, I have no one to live with, nor servants to depend on. Even if I build a larger home, whom would I house there with me?

Generally, people choose the rich and the courteous as their friends. They do not necessarily care much for the compassionate or the honest. Hence, it is best to make musical instruments or the beauties of nature one's friends. Those who are in service place more value on a high salary and ample benefits than anything else. They never seek affectionate treatment or a life of peace and quiet. So the best policy is to be one's own servant.

How could I become my own servant? When I have something to do, I do it by myself quickly. This may be bothersome, but it is less of a bother than being attended by others and taking care of them. When I have to walk, I walk by myself. It is tiring but far better than worrying about horses, saddles, oxen and carriages.

Now, I divide my body and use it for two uses. My hands are my servants, my feet are my carriage, and my mind is pleased with them. Since my body knows my mind's sufferings, I give it a rest when it suffers and use it when it is healthy. Indeed, I use it, but not to excess. When I am weary of doing something, I do not disturb my mind because of that. On the contrary, frequent walks and constant work are good for one's health. How could I sit still to no purpose? This is a sin to torment a person. How could I rely on the strength of others?

This is true of food and clothing as well. I wear clothes woven from wisteria fibers and sleep on bedding of hemp; I cover my body with whatever comes to hand. Aster from the field and berries from the mountain are sufficient for keeping me alive. Because I do not keep company with people, I am not ashamed that I am poorly dressed. Since food is meager, I can be satisfied with whatever meal I get.

I am not urging this type of pleasure upon rich people. Simply applying all this to myself alone, I am comparing my previous situation with the present one.

The Three Worlds are nothing else but one mind. If one's mind is not calm, great treasures are worthless and magnificent castles mean nothing. Now, I am attached to my solitary dwelling; my hermitage of one room. I may feel ashamed of my beggarly appearance, when I am in the capital by chance. But after I come back here, I always feel sorry for people who run around in the dusty world. If people doubt what I say, they should look at the fishes and birds. A fish never gets tired of water, and no one except for a fish knows that state of mind. A bird seeks woods, and no one but a bird knows that feeling. The way one feels about a quiet retreat is just the same — nobody appreciates it until he lives in it.

Now, I am gradually approaching my time just as the moon goes down to the edge of a mountain. Soon I will be going into the darkness of the River of Three Crossings. What am I trying to grumble about at this time of my life? The point of the Buddha's teaching is that we must not cling to anything. So, my attachment to the hermitage and my persistence in quiet life should be refrained around here. Why, then, do I waste my precious time in stating these useless delights?

On quiet dawn, after deliberating on this truth, I reflect: The reason why you renounce the world and live in the woods is that you intend to train yourself in spirit and practice as a Buddhist. However, your heart is completely dyed with mud, although your appearance is like that of a saint. Your dwelling takes after Jyomyo-koji's,²⁹ but

²⁹ A Buddha's disciple who also trained in a shabby hut. Asami (2012), P.138.

what you have achieved is no match for the austerity of Shurihandoku.³⁰ I ask myself; is this because of my poverty resulting from my karma or due to my madness deriving from my illusive thought? However, my heart never responds then. Simply, I used my tongue and ended up chanting informally the name of Amitabha a few times.

Around the end of the third month of Kenryaku,³¹ a wandering monk, Ren'in,³² wrote this down at a hermitage in Toyama.

Acknowledgements:

The present translation is a modified version of the original manuscript, which was written in the classical Japanese course, fall 1988, at Indiana University, Bloomington, under the supervision of Professor Emeritus George Elison. The original manuscript was made possible by a great deal of assistance provided by Elizabeth Armstrong, an amazing linguist who had mastered Japanese at the time. I am also very grateful to Nicholas Nemp for his editorial assistance provided for the present version.

References

- Asami, Kazuhiko. (2012) *Hyojyoki*. Kasamashoin.
Ichiko, Teiji. (1989). *Shintei Hojyoki*. Iwanami-bunko.
Miki, Sumito. (1976). *Hojyoki — Hosshinshu. Shincho-Kotenshusei 5*. Shincho-sha.
Satake, Akihiro, & Kubota, Jyun. (1989). *Hojyoki — Tsurezuregusa*. Shin-Nihon-koten-bungaku-taikei. Iwanami-shoten.

³⁰ A Buddha's disciple who was deemed to be foolish but achieved great enlightenment after a long and slow training process. Asami (2012), p.139

³¹ 1212 A.D.

³² Chomei's name as a priest.