

Gratitude Attracts Luck: The Scroll of Fortune

Who is the luckier man: He who rides in a fine palanquin, or he who carries the rider?" All across the grassy grounds of Soganji Temple, the faces of eager listeners shone in the afternoon sun, and they answered readily as if in a single voice. "He who rides!"

At this the distinguished merchant Manzo smiled knowingly. He was a little man with a long mustache, the ends of which dangled well below his chin. He presided upon the speaking stump, having been invited by Sir Hideyoshi to address the pupils of the temple school.

"Many years ago when I rode such a fine palanquin," Manzo began, "I thought as you do. I believed luck belonged to he who is served. But after luxury had coddled my mind and softened my hands, I learned a greater truth: Good luck arises from serving others."

The humid summer air had thickened with the rising of the afternoon sun. Manzo waved a fan in one hand, and the ends of his thin mustache swayed like the fronds of a willow. On the fan's gold-speckled

paper his listeners could see an exquisitely wrought Chinese maxim, inscribed with the red seal of the calligrapher.

“Sir Manzo,” said a thin charcoal maker who had risen near the back, his weathered face stained by the black lines of his trade, “this morning we learned to attract luck by developing our talent and accepting opportunity. Now you say it is as servants that we will become lucky. Won’t you reveal your meaning?”

“Indeed I will,” replied Manzo. “Listen closely today, and my story will illustrate an ancient principle whose mysterious power no human mind can fully fathom. Yet its truth is as constant and unchanging as the sun.”

The assembly rustled with anticipation as the venerable merchant settled back onto the stump to begin his tale.

“As a boy I always wore the finest garments, ate the finest foods, and took my leisure at the finest entertainments. Everything I wanted came to me without a minute of effort on my part. My father was a peasant, but in the chaotic aftermath of the Onin War he became a merchant and adopted the surname Kato. In his success he grew to be widely respected, treated much like a nobleman. As do many parents who come late to distinction, Father wished to spare his son the bitter hardships of his own youth. So I grew up as spoiled as a prince—a beloved only child who never

longed for anything. But in truth I was deprived of something precious: the lessons of struggle, which reveal a man to himself.

“One day I was passing with my father’s procession through Okazaki in Mikawa Province. I rode in a palanquin, customary for a pampered fifteen-year-old whose silken sandals rarely touched rough earth.

“As we crossed a bridge in the early hours, our procession halted and a commotion awoke me. I peeped through the curtain. Our attendants had surrounded a young lad who lay sleeping in the road.

“One attendant roused the boy with a vicious kick. ‘Out of the way, you rude fellow! Can’t you see Master Kato is coming through?’

“Rubbing sleep from his eyes, the boy stood. His face was fierce and defiant. ‘Your master may ride in comfort while I lie in the dirt, but that doesn’t give him, you, or anybody the right to treat me this way!’

“‘Beggar! How dare you speak thus!’ Steel glinted in the morning light as the attendant drew his blade.

“‘Danjiro! Put that sword away.’ Father’s voice boomed across the bridge. He strode forth from behind my palanquin. ‘What’s going on here?’

“The angry attendant bowed. ‘This vagrant was blocking the road, Master Kato.’

“Bristling, the urchin boldly addressed the circle of grown men surrounding him. ‘You all show your ignorance by concluding that I’m a beggar because I lie here.

This bridge is not meant for you alone. It's intended for the community, so all who pass along should be careful to act politely to fellow travelers. To deal with someone lying in the road by kicking and calling him a beggar is dishonorable behavior, I must say.

"But," the boy continued with a sly smile, "if you take me for a beggar, then make good on your judgment by giving me some food."

"Watch your tongue!" blustered Danjiro, purple with rage.

"Now, now," said my father, stepping closer for a look at this brazen boy. "The lad's words make sense." He knelt down and gazed into the young man's hungry eyes. "I know how it feels to scrape the bottom of your rice chest." Removing a string of copper coins from his purse, Father placed it into the boy's hands. "Run along and buy yourself a square meal."

"I'll never forget the glowing pride on that boy's face as my palanquin passed and our eyes briefly met. Those eyes of his seemed to say, 'Watch, my fine palanquin-boy. People often exchange places; the high become low, the poor, rich. Someday you may find yourself tying my sandals!'"

"Spoiled as I was, I could only envy the youth's independent spirit, his resilience in the face of struggle—not to mention his great pluck in standing up to an entire entourage of privileged men! For years the scene lingered in my mind, and today you may see

for yourselves to what heights that boy rose. For he is here among us, grown to illustrious manhood—and it's high time I tied his sandals!”

So saying, Manzo bent to the leather straps at Hideyoshi's feet.

Gasps echoed through the crowd. Could it be? Hideyoshi a beggar!

“Yes, friends,” cried Manzo. “The boy on that bridge decades ago was none other than our esteemed Master Hideyoshi.” With a wink he added, “That monkey face is emblazoned in my memory.”

The tiny samurai was beaming with amusement. He waved his finger in mock scolding. “Manzo, today many a man could lose his head for comparing me to an ape. Fortunately, you're not among them.”

Whereupon the two old friends embraced before the astonished listeners, who clamored with delight at their professors' antics.

Turning to the pupils, Hideyoshi raised his arms, palms upward as if drawing upon a higher power. “I stand before you as a man who once begged,” he thundered, “and a man who is better for it. Listen well to Manzo's tale if you would learn the first secret of fortune and fulfillment: *Gratitude Attracts Luck*.”

Quiet descended and Manzo began to speak again in a sure, clear voice.

“Soon after that encounter at Okazaki my fortunes changed. My mother died. Father and I were grief

stricken. But a year later Father married a widow with one son. She was a crafty woman of hard and selfish spirit—and a stunning beauty. By her charms she had wrung great sums of money out of more than a few rich men. Now she manipulated Father's affections in his state of enduring grief. From the start, stepmother hated me deeply and began plotting to position her own son as my father's successor.


“Father and stepmother had been married barely a year when Father's heart stopped beating during his sleep one summer night. Suddenly I was bereft of that gentle man who had shown me nothing but love my entire life. How blessed I had been while he lived, how assured of every earthly comfort. And now I was left alone with my stepmother and her mean-spirited son.

“The heartless woman no longer disguised her intentions to control my family's fortune. There was much discord between me and the schemer, and finally, on my seventeenth birthday, she told me that if I agreed to leave and never return she would see that I carried a load of golden *ryo* with me at my going, enough to live in luxury for a lifetime.

“Still heartbroken by Father's death, and too weak to resist this wretched temptation, I accepted the money.

“As I left the only home I'd ever known, I carried amongst my things a certain object my father had given me long before. When I was barely old enough to read, he had pressed an ancient yellowed scroll into

my hands. He'd cherished this heirloom since his own youth, in the days when he first rose from a peasant birth to distinction as a merchant. The scroll bore, in bold and jagged calligraphy, the words of an ancient Chinese proverb:

*When you drink from a stream,
remember the spring* 

“This scroll is priceless,’ Father told me, ‘but only to the man who truly grasps its message. The greater your understanding, the greater its value. Keep the scroll always, for he who holds to its wisdom becomes pure of heart, a willing servant, and the richest of men.’

“I read the words of the scroll that day, but they made little sense to my young mind. *When you drink from a stream, remember the spring.* What could such a saying possibly mean? And how would it make me a rich man, as Father promised? Anyway, I was already more wealthy than every other boy I knew. I put the scroll away and forgot it entirely, until the day I accepted stepmother’s bribe and gathered my things, the scroll among them. Its ancient message was mysterious as ever. Nevertheless, I carried the heirloom with me as I set out upon the road.

“At first it hardly appeared to matter that I had surrendered my rightful place as Father’s successor, for life seemed only to improve. Indeed, I congratulated myself for accepting my stepmother’s offer. I

purchased an opulent estate in Omi Province. My days were awash with an embarrassment of riches. In all my years of privilege I'd never enjoyed luxury so great, for now no one looked over my shoulder. All decisions were mine. Yet in such freedom lay the seeds of my own humiliation.

"Because I'd never possessed so much money at once, I'd learned nothing of restraint. I squandered my gold on one trifle after another. Soon I was spending beyond my means. I employed too many servants and concubines, ate and drank to excess, caroused until all hours and slept half the daylight away.

"My story is no different than those of many other spoiled sons. A bounty is poorly guarded by one who lacks gratitude. You'll not be surprised to hear that the day quickly came when I found my coffers exhausted. Having believed wealth my unending due, I awoke from a stupor of luxury to find my fortune reduced to a heap of unpayable debts. I was soon selling off my belongings in a frantic effort to settle accounts. It was not enough. I was compelled to surrender my estate, and at length I found myself destitute.

"From the ruins I had made of my many blessings, I staggered out into the dusty streets. Before long, I came to know hunger for the first time in my life. And now I understood that I would perish if I did not find employment. But few were as unskilled as I.

"From village to village I roamed in desperation,

knocking on doors and pleading with one man after another, ‘Teach me a skill and I will work faithfully!’ I was turned down again and again. With no other choice, I soon began to lie, claiming myself a carpenter, a field hand, whatever it took to get a bit of work, only to bungle every job and be cast out by my justly angered employers.

“My sole worldly possession during this miserable time was Father’s old scroll, which I had taken pains to keep while settling my debts. I could not bear to part with it, for it was all that remained of Father and the life he’d given me. Everywhere I went I carried the scroll wrapped in a mean oilcloth.

“One wretched rainy night, while shivering upon the dank dirt where I had made my bed beneath a bridge, I took out the scroll and read its words again by the dim moonlight:

*When you drink from a stream,
remember the spring*

“This message, which had never made sense to me, now stirred bitterness in my heart. Of what stream do I drink? I said to myself. None! My wellspring is dry. I choke in the mud of poverty! I was in such a shameful state that I muttered a curse upon my late father for bequeathing me this paper inscribed with its useless riddle. I determined then that I would sell the scroll. Perhaps it would fetch a little something.

“The next morning I stood before an antiques dealer in Sakai. As the man pored over the scroll’s striking calligraphy, I noticed a quiet amazement in his eyes. He then looked me up and down in my ragged clothes, and I caught a quick change of expression as he tried to appear nonchalant. ‘I’ll give you three *ryo*,’ he said with feigned indifference.

“Understanding the scroll’s worth somewhat better now, I took it to a dealer in Osaka. In this second man’s face I beheld a similar flicker of greed as he examined the scroll. But this man offered me even less than the first. When I told him I could get more from the other shop, he thought I was bluffing. Shrugging, he said, ‘Sell it to me and eat well tonight, or stay hungry. It’s up to you.’

“As I left the shop, the man called after me with new eagerness, doubling his offer. This I refused, only to hear him triple his sum. I kept walking. The man hurried to his doorway and called out a figure five times his original price. But now it was clear to me that the value of the scroll far exceeded anything I would be offered in my beggarly state. The scroll was indeed more precious than I could have known. And recalling how I had cursed my father’s memory the night before, I suffered pangs of remorse. I uttered a prayer of gratitude to Father’s wise and generous spirit.

“But to what wretchedness had I sunken since his death? First taking my stepmother’s sordid bribe

with no regard for the honor of Father's household, then squandering everything, and now ignoring the grave counsel Father had given me so early in life and seeking to sell the very object he'd said I should never trade. Still, the scroll seemed my last hope.

"I sat down beside the road and unrolled the ancient *washi* paper once more. I studied the calligrapher's lively strokes, as dramatic as forks of lightning. Presently I heard a voice above me.

"There's an object worth caring for!"

"Looking up, I saw the shape of a man, silhouetted against the blinding light of the sun. I could not see his face at first, but the fine robes and sandals he wore seemed familiar, and the thought briefly seized me that he was my father come back from the afterlife.

"A genuine Ikkyu!" said the man. 'I've beheld only one other like it in my lifetime.'

"Now he squatted before me and I saw a smooth brown face of great kindness. The man was not my father, of course, but something in his manner still reminded me of Papa. And his robes were indeed much the same. No doubt he was a man of equal wealth and success. Sensing opportunity, I quickly gathered my thoughts.

"Sir,' I said, 'since you obviously perceive the preciousness of this antique, perhaps you might consider buying it.'

"At this the man gave a gentle, knowing smile.

“Oh, but you should never sell this scroll,’ he said quietly. ‘Its value is beyond reckoning. And not just because the calligrapher, Ikkyu, was a genius and legend among Zen masters—but because this scroll’s value will grow the longer you keep it and better understand its wisdom.’

“My heart leapt upon hearing these words, for I recognized them to be almost exactly what Father had said to me so long ago. I was dumbstruck.

“The man’s clean, manicured hand came forth and touched my arm. ‘If you cannot be convinced to keep the scroll, I know an antiques collector who will pay you well for it. But listen, even better, would you be willing to assist me with a task today?’

“As I had guessed, he was a local merchant. He said he needed an extra hand to help his employees load a huge quantity of goods onto a buyer’s train of carts.

“I’ll gladly pay you, and see that you’re well fed for the day.’

“Hungry as I was, I readily agreed.

“We walked together to his estate. He told me his name was Takeo. When we’d reached his house, Takeo sat me down to a bountiful meal amongst the other employees in his kitchen. Though simple, the food looked ravishing. Overcome with gratitude, I nearly wept as I ate.

“I spent the rest of the afternoon hard at work, my arms loaded with heavy stoneware as I trudged from

the stockroom to the customer's carts—back and forth for hours. But my spirits remained high. With my belly full and the promise of pay ahead, I hardly noticed my aching muscles. In fact, I was so happy I felt I could work for a month without pause.

“At day's end, Takeo drew me aside to give me my earnings. He looked into my eyes.

“You're a hard worker, Manzo!”

“The hardest worker you'll find in Osaka,” I said.

“I like the energy you've shown today.”

“With a smile, he pressed several coins into my outstretched hand. I beheld a golden *ryo* glimmering among the coppers. The sight of it took my breath away. Though few had less knowledge than I of a day's rightful earnings, I knew this was far more than I deserved.

“Offering sincere thanks, I handed back the golden *ryo*, pocketed the coppers, and, at a loss for further words, made a weak gesture of farewell and turned to go. Takeo's generosity moved me profoundly, but the sight of that precious coin had roused a new determination within me: I must learn the true value of work, and stand on my own two feet in the world.

“Before I got far, Takeo called after me.

“You know, Manzo, I've just lost an employee and could use a new worker.”

“I turned. ‘Sir?’

“Tell me,” he placed his hands on his hips and gave

me a testing look, 'what are your skills?'

"I remembered my recent experiences with the employers I'd deceived, and knew I must be honest this time. I told him, 'I fear I have no particular skills, sir, but surely no one's more eager to learn than I.'

"'You're willing to learn, are you?'

"'Indeed I am, sir!'

"The merchant smiled. 'Then don't worry. I'll see that you're well trained.'

"I could hardly believe my luck. After all my troubles, this stranger was offering me respectable employment! Hot tears flooded my eyes.

"'Well?' said Takeo, chuckling. 'Do you wish to be hired?'

"I swallowed a sob and said, 'I wish to prove more faithful than any employee you've ever known!'


"Takeo showed me to a small room and saw that I was given fresh clothing and sandals. He told me to rest for the night and be ready to work again in the morning.

"Before he left me I said to my new employer, 'Forgive me, Master Takeo, but why would you take such pains over a wretch like me? Sure, I can carry stoneware for hours, but why risk employing one who admits to lacking skills?'

"Again the merchant smiled his benevolent smile. 'Let's just say I believe wholeheartedly in the wisdom on that scroll of yours.'

“I took this opportunity to confess that the scroll’s message baffled me.

“Takeo responded by gesturing for me to follow him across a courtyard into his living quarters. He brought me into a small room and waved his hand across a shrine lit with candles. On the wall above the shrine hung a scroll exactly like my father’s heirloom. In its stunning calligraphy I read the selfsame words:

*When you drink from a stream,
remember the spring* 

“The brushstrokes seemed to come alive before my eyes, dancing in the candlelight.

“Manzo,’ said Takeo, ‘as a young man I once found myself in straits similar to yours. It was upon my first employer’s wall that this scroll was hung. My master grasped its meaning full well, and his actions bore out his understanding. He took a chance on me, you see. My gratitude to him made me his hardest worker. And before he died, he entrusted me with the scroll. Soon, Manzo, you’ll begin to understand the message of old Master Ikkyu—tomorrow, no doubt. For this reason I knew I couldn’t go wrong in hiring you.’

“Takeo’s words proved prophetic. The following morning I woke before daylight, sought out my fellow employees, and set to work amongst them in a spirit of great joy. My labors were clumsy at first, and some of the workers begrudged me this, but my enthusiasm

did not diminish in the least, for I sensed that I was working for a man of noble spirit from whom I would not fail to learn much. At noontime, pausing from my labors to eat a nourishing meal, I reflected on my great fortune at finding myself employed, sheltered, and generously fed. It suddenly occurred to me that I was indeed, as Takeo had foreseen, coming to understand the truth of the scroll's words. Feelings of gratitude seemed to be making a new man of me, transforming my fate. Surely that's what came to one who 'remembered the spring,' the source of one's blessings!

"Each morning thereafter I rose a bit earlier, becoming a better worker by the day, and within a few months I had earned the distinction of the household's earliest riser. At the end of each day I found it difficult to leave off my tasks, so I began to work regularly until midnight as well. Unlike some of the other servants, I took pride in performing my duties with equal excellence whether under supervision or not.

"One day Takeo summoned me to his quarters. 'Manzo,' he said, 'I'm pleased to see that you always work faithfully, but I'd be more pleased if you would stop your work at an earlier hour and go to bed at the same time as your fellow servants. If you continue to be so much more industrious than they, there will be complaints among them.'

"My good master,' I replied. 'I don't like to disobey you, but in truth I can never get to sleep

before midnight.’

“You’re a rare one, Manzo, and I’m grateful for your zeal! But maybe you could stay in bed, at least, until the other servants get up in the morning.’

“My good master,’ I said again, ‘I’m afraid I’m hopeless. I can’t for the life of me stay in bed past five o’clock in the morning.’

“Now Takeo paced the floor of his quarters, thinking. At length an idea struck him. ‘Manzo, you are your own master while your fellow servants are asleep. We both know that’s the natural law of things. And I truly do not wish you to work for me in those hours. But since you prefer not to rest, you ought to employ that time in making sandals for your own profit. I’ll see that you’re provided with plenty of straw.’

“Master Takeo, you’re very kind, but I’m afraid I can’t work for my own profit employing time that I might use for your benefit.’

“At this Takeo wagged a finger. ‘Ah Manzo, you can’t refuse all my proposals. Please do as I request just this once.’

“Naturally, I could not refuse my master’s kindness, and I consented to use my spare time for my own profit. After that, my early morning and late evening hours were devoted to the task of making *waraji* straw sandals, which Takeo sold to a housewares dealer in Osaka.

“Thus I began to earn a small but regular second income, every bit of which I entrusted to my

master for safekeeping. After a while the people of Izumi Province began asking for 'Manzo sandals' in preference to other types. This naturally pleased the housewares dealer and he pressed me for further supplies. Master Takeo, likewise pleased at the success of his plan, determined to lend out the money I'd entrusted to him, hoping to increase the amount by good interest. He had little difficulty in this endeavor, for people had come to believe that luck attached itself to anything connected with Takeo's sandal-making servant, and were only too glad to be accommodated with loans out of his savings.

"Ten years passed and I remained happily employed by Takeo. One day the master called me into his study again.

"My dear Manzo,' he said. 'I can hardly believe ten years have gone by since I found you in the street studying that beautiful Ikkyu scroll.'

"Yes, Master Takeo. How fortunate I became that day!'

"Not you alone, Manzo. I've watched you closely over the decade you've spent in my employ. You've never squandered your wages as other servants do; after setting apart a small amount for personal expenses you've committed to my care all that you earned. I would have served poorly as your banker if I hadn't sought some profitable investment for your deposits. All these years I've been lending out your money at a moderate rate,

and it's astonishing to find how much your capital now amounts to. Behold! Your savings, with interest, have reached the sum of one hundred golden *ryo!* Now, what do you propose to do with all this money?'

"I was taken aback at the idea of such wealth. 'My good master,' I said, 'you must be joking!'

"Not at all. One hundred *ryo* it is! Will you continue to lend it out, or would you prefer to dispose of it in some other way? It's for you to decide.'

"One hundred *ryo!*" I gasped. 'Did you really say *one hundred ryo?*'

"One hundred *ryo!*" replied my employer, smiling.

"It's unbelievable!"

"Your own industry is responsible for it,' said Takeo. 'Now tell me your plans for the money.'

"I thought long and hard, and could truly summon no answer. There was nothing I felt I lacked.

"Takeo, with a look of keen approval, came close and gripped my shoulders, staring into my eyes. 'Manzo, you have a pure and grateful heart. Remember when I told you how my first employer entrusted me with the Ikkyu scroll before he died?'

"Of course, Master Takeo.'

"What he also entrusted to me, Manzo, was his business.'

"Sir?'

"The very business about which you've learned so much in your ten years under my employ. And now,

Manzo, as I am getting old and am ready for my rest, and as I have no sons, I wish to bequeath the enterprise to you.'

"To me, sir?"

"Indeed. It's only fitting, you see? For you've learned the truth of the scroll. Your understanding of this truth is born out by your actions every day. Your spirit is one of willing service. Now, in addition to entrusting you the business, I propose that we set you up as one of the branch families in the village. Your hundred *ryo* will easily supply you a house befitting your station. And isn't it time, Manzo, that you took a wife?"

"I felt myself blush hotly at this remark, which caused my master to laugh heartily and slap my shoulder. Takeo's business proposal astonished me. I was by no means eager to accept such a great honor. But it was clearly my employer's heartfelt wish, and I understood that I would be doing a rightful honor to his prior employer as well, so I consented.

"Soon afterward I found a wife. We had three children together. For many years my family has lived happily and our business has thrived in Osaka. Master Takeo, when he passed away some years ago, entrusted his Ikkyu scroll to my keeping. It now hangs with my father's heirloom above my family shrine. I will never part with these scrolls. I've sought to instill their wisdom in my children."

With this, Manzo concluded his account. A rever-

ent silence gripped the many students before him.

From the edge of the assembly, a Portuguese priest called Xavier rose to his feet, resplendent in his dark-brown robe and cape. Suspended from a golden chain at his breast was a cross of polished wood. He spoke in a deep, resonant voice.

“Your tale has moved me, Sir Manzo. Gratitude lies at the heart of all the world’s great spiritual traditions—my own no less than any other. I never considered that gratitude attracts luck, but how could it be otherwise? For indeed, gratitude instills a spirit of sincere and industrious service. It’s been our privilege to hear your story today, Sir Manzo, and to be reminded of one of the world’s great truths.”

At this, Hideyoshi came forward and thanked the mustached merchant, then proposed that the temple school reconvene a fortnight hence. So the afternoon session drew to a close, and the crowd of students dispersed. But upon the sun-dappled grass beneath the trees a small crowd lingered, watching the gentle-spirited Manzo amble away shoulder-to-shoulder with Hideyoshi.

Already the merchant’s teachings rested deep in the hearts of these listeners, and when at last they turned to journey home, each man among them pondered the things that made him grateful.