

The Zen Sermons of Bankei Yōtaku

PART TWO

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

19. Bankei spoke to an assembly of people:

When you were born, all of you received a Buddha-mind from your parents. You received nothing else. It is beyond any doubt that this Buddha-mind is unborn and possessed of illuminating wisdom. All things are resolved in the unborn.

While you are facing me listening to me speak like this, if a crow cawed or a sparrow chirped or some other such sound occurred somewhere behind you, you would know perfectly well it was a crow or a sparrow even without giving a thought to listening to it, because you were listening by means of the unborn. This is the proof that everything is perfectly well managed in the unborn. And this is how in the unborn things all fall into harmony. That they do is the unborn's proof. A person who firmly realizes in himself that this Buddha-mind is beyond all question unborn and possessed of illuminating wisdom, and just lives in the unborn Buddha-mind as it is, is from that day and forevermore a living Tathagata. He will from that time on dwell in the Buddha-mind. The sect to which I belong is for this reason sometimes called the Buddha-mind Sect.

* The first part of this translation appeared in the *Eastern Buddhist* VI, 2, Oct. 1973. I have followed the text edited by Suzuki Daisetz in the Iwanami bunko series, *Bankei zenji goroku* (Tokyo, 1941), which is based on the printed edition of 1758; with reference also to the new edition edited by Fujimoto Tsuchishige, *Bankei zenji hōgo shū* (Shunjūsha, Tokyo, 1971), which is based on a manuscript copy that contains some significant variation from the Suzuki text.

As you are facing this way listening to me, if a sparrow chirped somewhere behind you, you would not mistake it for a crow. You would not mistake the sound of a bell for that of a drum. Neither would you hear a man's voice and take it for a woman's nor take an adult's voice for that of a child. You hear and clearly recognize various sounds without a single mistake. That is possible by virtue of the working of illuminative wisdom. This is the proof that illuminative wisdom inheres in the unborn Buddha-mind.

Anyone who said he heard these sounds because he made up his mind to hear them would be a liar. All of you are facing this way listening to hear me speak, wondering "what will Bankei say?" You are concentrating on listening, and thus none of you has any intention to hear the sound of a crow or sparrow or other noise behind you. The reason you hear things unerringly and clearly make out various sounds as they occur without forethought, is because you are listening in accordance with the unborn Buddha-mind.

There is not a single person here who has ever heard any sound because he decided beforehand he would hear it if it occurred. That means that you hear things by means of the unborn Buddha-mind. If any of you firmly realize, beyond the slightest doubt, that the Buddha-mind is unborn and illuminating, and live in the Buddha-mind, you are from then on a living Buddha forever.

"Buddha," too, is a name that arises after the fact. That means a man of the unborn is one who dwells at the source of all the Buddhas. The unborn is the source of all things, the origin of all things. As there is no origin of things apart from the unborn, to be in accordance with the unborn means to be dwelling at the original source of all Buddhas.

Since if you live in the unborn, "non-extinction" or "undying" is then superfluous, I speak of the "unborn" and not of the "undying." There can be no extinction for what was not born, so if it is unborn, it is obviously undying. There is no need to say it.¹ The words "unborn, undying" can be found in the Buddhist sutras and in the recorded sayings of the Zen masters, but there has never yet been any "proof" or "confirmation" of the unborn. So people just learn the words "unborn, undying," without ever having any knowledge of the unborn that you confirm in yourself.

¹ Usually in Buddhism, the expression *unborn* 不生 is used as an abbreviation for *unborn, undying*.

It is now forty years ago, when I was twenty-six, that I first realized that all things were perfectly well managed in the unborn. I am the first person to teach, *by using the proof of the unborn*, that unborn, illuminating wisdom is definitely the Buddha-mind. None of the monks here can claim to have heard of any other person before me who has taught this. I am the first to speak about this proof.

When you dwell in the unborn you dwell at the source of all things. The unborn Buddha-mind is what the Buddhas of the past attained in realization. Today as well, even though we are in the latter day, if even one person lives in accordance with the unborn, the right Dharma is manifested. Everyone, is that not so?²

(The teaching of the true unborn Dharma that Bankei always gave to people was just like the foregoing passage. If you do not thoroughly take in this passage and be attentive to the following instructions, you cannot arrive at full understanding.)³

20. Bankei said: A priest once told me: "Day after day, you do nothing but repeat the same teaching. You ought to give your listeners a change of pace and make their minds more receptive by interjecting some stories and anecdotes of the Zen masters of the past."

Dull-witted as I am, if this were something that I felt would be of benefit to people, I think if I had a mind to I could probably remember one or two anecdotes. But to teach people such things would be like feeding them poison. I could never do that.

I never cite the words of the Buddhas and Patriarchs when I teach. I need only to comment directly on people themselves. That is enough, so I don't

² Reference here is to the Buddhist teaching of the three Dharma periods that were supposed to follow upon the Buddha's death: the period of the *right Dharma*, when the Buddhist teaching, practice, and enlightenment still exist; the *semblance or imitative Dharma*, when teaching and practice alone remain; and the *latter or final Dharma*, when only the teaching remains. In Japan, "latter-day" teachings began to appear at the end of the Heian period, when, according to one theory, the age of the semblance Dharma ended and the latter-day began. The teachings of the Pure Land sects, especially, center around the theme of the "latter-day" Dharma.

³ This paragraph is an insertion by one of Bankei's disciples.

have to quote them. I don't say anything about either the "Buddha Dharma" or the "Zen Dharma." I have no need to. I make do with commenting directly on you and your concerns here and now. And since that clears everything up, I have no reason to preach the "Buddha Dharma" or "Zen Dharma."

In spite of the fact that you all came into this world with an unborn Buddha-mind and with nothing else, you are partial to yourselves, so you want to make things move in your own way. You lose your temper and become contentious. Then you think: "I have not lost my temper. What that fellow says is so unreasonable that he has *made me* lose it." And so you fix anxiously on his words and inadvertently transform your vitally important Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon. You keep on worrying yourself over this unimportant matter. It keeps churning over and over in your mind. You may even get your way in the end, but in that case you fail in your ignorance to realize that your concern over this matter was in fact meaningless. Ignorance is the cause of the Animal existence, so you change your vitally important Buddha-mind—which you are still totally ignorant of—into an Animal of the first rank.

Though all of you are intelligent people, because you are ignorant of the unborn Buddha-mind you transform it into a Hungry Ghost, Fighting Demon, or an Animal, into all manner of various things, and you become a Hungry Ghost, Fighting Demon, or Animal. Once you become an Animal, then you take no notice of the truth even though you hear it. Or, granting that you do take notice of it, since you did not retain it even when you were a man, now that you have become an Animal you no longer have the intelligence to retain it. You pass from one Hell to the next, change one Animal existence for another, or spend many lives as a Hungry Ghost, going through lives and existences one after another, leaving one darkness only to enter the next, transmigrating endlessly and suffering untold torment for a myriad kalpas and a thousand lives, during which you have no opportunity to rid yourself of the evil karma you have produced.

It is indeed a grave matter when by some chance anyone happens to lose his human form. All you need to do is to understand very, very well that you must not transform the Buddha-mind into other things.

Now not a single one of you in attendance here is an unenlightened man. You are all people of the unborn Buddha-mind. If any of you think you are unenlightened, I would like you to step forward and tell me: What is an unen-

lightened man? There are in fact no unenlightened people here.

[But] when you get up to leave, you might bump into someone in front of you as you cross over the threshold; someone behind you might knock you down; when you go home, you might see or hear something that displeases you. You immediately begin to fret over it. The blood rushes to your head, and because of your onesidedness you go astray in illusion, inadvertently changing your Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon. Until you transform it, you dwell in the unborn Buddha-mind as it is, and are not unenlightened. The moment you do transform it into something else, at that very instant you suddenly become an unenlightened man. All illusions are like this. You set to worrying over something, favoring yourself, and you change your Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon, falling into illusion of your own making.

So whatever anyone else may do, whatever happens, leave things as they are. Don't worry yourself over them. Don't take your own side. Just dwell in your Buddha-mind as it is, and do not change it into other things. If you do that, illusion can never occur. You will pass the day constantly in the unborn Buddha-mind. Then, that very day, are you not a living Buddha? Yes, you are a firmly established living Buddha. And that is a matter of inestimable worth.

21. Bankei spoke again: All I do at these meetings is repeat the same thing over and over. Yet those who have heard me before will not be hindered by that. They will become more convinced of what I tell them just because of the number of times they hear it. Every day people come here who have not heard me before. Many today will hear me for the very first time. I am obliged for their sakes to explain things once again right from the start. If I didn't, they wouldn't be able to achieve full realization. It would be detrimental to those who earnestly come to listen.

That is why I say the same thing over and over, day in and day out. Those who come here regularly listen again and again and that way become surer of my teaching. And, the newcomers who show up every day at the present series of meetings would not be at ease unless I began my talk from the beginning. So each time I start from the basic fundamentals, speaking carefully and deliberately so that everyone feels at ease. Isn't that so?

Bankei spoke again: Attending this meeting are old and young, men and women, the high and the low, priests and laymen—four classes of followers. In all, the priests, the newcomers as well as those who have attended before, are the most numerous group. They have arrived from all directions.

If any of you think you have become enlightened, no matter who you are, come forward and say so. Let me give you confirmation of it.

I was twenty-six when it suddenly occurred to me that all things were perfectly complete in the unborn, and since then I have wanted to tell people about it. I have gone all over, yet from the time of that realization I have found no one anywhere who was a match for me. When I attained my realization there was no wise teacher around. At least I did not have occasion to encounter him. There was thus no one who could give me definite confirmation. I had a very difficult time of it. It is because I now remember the difficulty I experienced that I am prepared, in spite of my sickly condition, to give confirmation to anyone who gains understanding. I have a great desire to come here every day and meet with you all. I will not spare my own well-being. So if anyone thinks he has attained realization, he should come before me and say so. I'll confirm it for him.

When I was thirty years old, my teacher⁴ told me that there was a Chinese priest named Dōsha Zenji who had come over from China and was now in Nagasaki⁵ that he thought it would be good for me to go and meet. As I was making ready to begin my trip, he said: "Although you have gotten by until this time with wearing a layman's kimono,⁶ now you are going to have an interview with a Chinese priest. You can no longer very well get along with

⁴ The text does not give the name of this teacher, but it is probably Umpo Zenjō 雲巖全祥 (1568–1653), the head-priest of the Zuiō-ji in Akō who ordained Bankei and gave him continued guidance during his long years of practice.

⁵ Dōsha's full title is given here: Nan'in-zan Dōsha Chōgen Zenji 南院山道者超元禪師 Chin. Nan-in shan Tao-che Ch'ao-yüan Ch'an-shih. He came to Japan in 1650 or 51 and became head of the Sōfuku-ji in Nagasaki. With the arrival a few years later of Ingen (Chin. Yin-yüan 隱元, establisher of Ōbaku Zen in Japan) and a large contingent of Chinese priests, opportunities for other foreign priests were greatly reduced. Dōsha's position grew gradually more untenable, until, in 1658, despite efforts by Bankei to help him, he was forced to return to China.

⁶ *jirroku* 十襖—a jacket-like garment worn over the kimono. During the Tokugawa period it was normally used by people such as scholars, physicians, and artists.

that. This will be for the Dharma, too, so put on a real priest's robe and go to Nagasaki for your meeting with Dōsha."

So for the first time I wore the robes of a priest, and met with Dōsha Zenji. Right off, I told him how I had come to my understanding [of the unborn]. At our very first meeting he said: "This fellow has gone beyond birth-and-death." At that time, Dōsha was the only master who could have given me confirmation of my understanding in such short order. Now, as I reflect back with some deliberation, I can see that even Dōsha was not fully satisfactory. If he were only alive now, I could make him into a fine teacher. Unfortunately, he died too soon. It is regrettable.

22. Speaking again, Bankei said:

All of you here are extremely fortunate. It was different when I was a young man. In those days, there was no wise teacher to be found. Or if there was, I did not have occasion to meet up with him, for being rather headstrong, I devoted myself from an early age to exceptionally difficult training. I experienced suffering others could not imagine, and expended a great deal of useless effort. The experience of that needless ordeal is deeply engrained in me. It is something I can never forget.

That is why I come here like this day after day, urging you to profit from my own painful performance. I want you to be able to attain the Dharma while you are seated comfortably and easily on the *tatami* mats, without undue or unnecessary exertion. You should consider yourselves very fortunate. Nowhere else will you find a teaching like this.

I was a foolish and headstrong young fellow. And sure enough, if I tell you about my experiences, some young men will take it into their heads that they cannot achieve the Dharma unless they exert themselves as I did. And that would be my fault. Yet even so, I still want to tell you about them.

I want the young people to listen very very carefully. You can attain the Dharma without the arduous struggle I put myself through. Now, bearing that in mind, listen to what I say.

My father was a masterless samurai (*rōnin*) originally from Shikoku. He was a Confucian. He took up residence here [in Harima], and here is where I was born. I was still quite young when he died, and was raised by my mother. She told me that I was a very unruly youngster and that I used to lead all the

neighborhood children in doing mischief. She said that from the age of two or three I showed an aversion to death, so when I cried they would get me to stop by pretending they were dead or by talking about death. This also was used to put an end to my mischief.

Then, when I came of age, this being an area where Confucian learning enjoyed a great vogue at the time, I was sent to a Confucian teacher. Mother had me read the *Great Learning* by rote. When I came to the place in that work where it says that the way of great learning lies in clarifying Bright Virtue, I was stumped by the meaning of this "Bright Virtue."⁷ It puzzled me, and my doubts about it remained with me for a long while. I asked some Confucian scholars what it meant, what it was like, but none of them could give an answer. One of them told me that such knotty problems were well understood by Zen priests, and suggested I should visit one of them. He said that he and his fellow Confucians devoted their time to explaining the literal meaning of the Confucian writings, but that the essential meaning of "Bright Virtue" was something they had no real knowledge of.

Still burdened with my problem, I decided to follow his advice. In those days, though, there was no Zen temple in the area, so I was unable to put my questions to a Zen priest.

I then made up my mind that come what may I was going to clear up the matter of this Bright Virtue, and inform my now elderly mother about it too, before she departed this life.

I floundered about this way and that, hoping to throw some light on Bright Virtue. I journeyed all over to attend sermons and talks. If I heard of a sermon being held I would immediately run off to listen. When I returned home, I would tell my mother all about it. In spite of this, Bright Virtue still remained beyond my grasp.

Determined now more than ever, I succeeded in finding a Zen priest. He told me that if I wanted to understand Bright Virtue I should do zazen. Without further ado, I began zazen practice. I went into the mountains, where I sat without taking any food for as long as seven days at a stretch. Drawing up my garments, I sat directly on the sharp surface of the rocks. Once seated, heedless of the risk to my health, I did not stop until I toppled over, unable to

⁷ The *Great Learning*—*Ta brüch* 大學, one of the "Four Books" of Confucianism. This particular passage occurs at the very beginning: 大學之道在明明德。

sit up any longer under my own power. And since I could hardly expect anyone to bring food to me there, many times no nourishment would pass my lips for days on end.

After that, I returned home. I fashioned a small hut and cloistered myself in it. I would do the Nembutsu and enter a Nembutsu samadhi for long periods without sleeping. I tried everything I could think of, but was in the end no closer to understanding Bright Virtue than before.

But as I was too unmindful of my physical condition and pressed myself cruelly, the skin of my buttocks became broken, causing me exquisite pain when I sat. Still, in those days I had an excellent constitution. I didn't have to spend even a single day lying down or resting. Because of the pain from my lacerated buttocks, I would place layers of paper over the seat and sit on them, changing them frequently. Unless I did this there would be considerable bleeding from the torn skin, which, together with the pain, would have made sitting almost impossible. At times, I put down some cotton wadding and sat upon that.

Despite these difficulties, not once did I lie down, day or night. Later, these long years of physical strain suddenly materialized into serious illness. Bright Virtue was not clarified, in spite of all the prolonged labor I had given to wrestling with it.

My illness steadily worsened. I grew weaker and weaker. Thereafter, whenever I spat, gouts of bloody sputum as big as thumbheads appeared. One time, I spat against a wall and the globules struck and slid to the ground in bright red beads.

Everyone told me that I must recuperate my health at the hut, and a person was provided to nurse and look after me. But the illness proceeded to an acute point. For a whole week I couldn't swallow anything except some thin rice broth. I became resigned to the fact that I was going to die. I viewed it as something inevitable and felt no particularly great regret. I was only sorry to have to die without realizing the meaning of Bright Virtue, which I had been so deeply concerned with for so long.

Suddenly, just at that time, I realized what until now I had been unable to understand: that all things were taken care of in the unborn, and that all my efforts had been exerted for nothing. I finally saw the error of the path I had been following.

Then, overjoyed as I felt the first signs of improvement in my condition, my appetite returned. I summoned the nurse and told him to prepare some rice gruel. I was now able to eat. Even though he seemed to think this a strange request coming from someone until now at death's door, he was highly pleased too. He hurriedly started to prepare the food. In trying to feed me as quickly as possible, he gave me the gruel before the rice had been thoroughly cooked. But I didn't even notice it and wolfed down two or three bowls of it without any adverse effect. From that point on my condition steadily improved, and here I am, today, still living on.

23. I was able to fulfill my vow, after all, and was also able to bring my mother to an understanding of the unborn.

From that time up until the present day, I have encountered no one anywhere who could disprove my teaching. When I was travelling around from place to place struggling with my problem, if only I had encountered someone who really understood things with whom I could have spoken, I would have not had to exert all that useless effort. But there was no such person, and I engaged in prolonged and laborious austerities, subjecting my body to hardships so cruel that I still suffer from the effects even now. That is the reason I am unable to come here and meet with you as much as I would like.

Well, then, after I realized that all things were well managed in the unborn, I wanted to talk to someone about it. As I was contemplating who I should go to, my master told me of a priest named Gudō in Mino province.⁸ He said that Gudō was an excellent teacher and suggested I go and talk with him, since he would be able to give me verification [of my understanding of the unborn]. Following this advice, I went to Mino, but at that time Gudō was away in Edo, so I was unable to meet and talk with him. Still, I thought that having already come this far, rather than return with nothing whatever to show for my trip, I would visit some other priests in the area.

[I gained an audience with one of them.] When I told him that I was a Zen

⁸ Gudō Tōshoku 愚堂東庵 (1577–1661). One of the most highly regarded Zen masters of the time. The *Angō ryakki* 行業略記, a record of Bankei's religious career compiled by his disciple Itsuzan 逸山, calls Gudō "the foremost master in the land." *Bankei zenji goroku*, p. 226.

monk from Banshū province⁹ and that I had come in order to receive his instruction, he proceeded to give me a short talk. After he had finished, I said: "I realize I am speaking out of turn, but I would like to say something. I know it usually isn't done these days. Please, forgive my lack of decorum."

"I am deeply grateful for all the teaching I have received from Buddhist teachers. It is not at all that I don't agree with what they say. Only, somehow or other, the feeling I get is one of scratching at an itchy foot without taking off my shoe. They don't get directly to the itch. Their teaching does not strike home to my inmost being."

As he was a priest, my words did not disconcert him in the least. He answered: "Yes, of course. Just as you say. We merely teach others in the same manner we have been taught ourselves, following the teachings of the patriarchs which are found written in the sutras and the Zen sayings. It is shameful. It is not teaching based on enlightenment. Since we are not really enlightened, you are fully justified in saying that our teaching does not strike home to you, that it is like scratching an itch through a shoe. You recognized me easily for what I am. You are no ordinary man."

Under these circumstances it was of course not possible for me to get verification from him. I returned home and shut myself up in a retreat. As I was engaged in contemplating the ways of my contemporaries and thinking over the means of bringing others to enlightenment, I heard that a Zen master named Dōsha had come over from China and was now in Nagasaki. At my master [Umppo's] bidding, I went to see him. From Dōsha I finally received confirmation that I was beyond birth-and-death.

At this time, men able to give certain verification [of enlightenment] were very rare, and I had quite a hard time of it. That is the reason I appear here every day to meet with all of you. That way, if anyone gains enlightenment I am here ready to give him verification of it. In that respect, you are all very fortunate. If any of you gain enlightenment, you will not be lacking for a witness to attest to it. So if someone believes that he has reached understanding, he should come forth and say so. Otherwise, listen carefully to what I tell you, and establish yourselves [in the unborn].

Your parents endowed each of you with a Buddha-mind when you were

⁹ Harima province, part of present-day Hyōgo prefecture.

born. This Buddha-mind is unborn and is invariably possessed of illuminating wisdom. Since it was never born, there is no need to say that it is "never-perishing." That's why I don't speak of "never-perishing." The Buddha-mind is that which is unborn, and all things are taken care of in this unborn Buddha-mind. "Buddhas" of the past, present, and future, and "Patriarchs" of successive generations, received those names *after they appeared in the world*, and they are thus two or three removes from the place of the *unborn* and of altogether minor significance. To dwell in the unborn is to dwell at the very source of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. No one can know the dwelling place of the man who is firm in the conviction that each person's Buddha-mind is unborn. It is not even known to Buddhas or Patriarchs. Even they cannot perceive it.

[But] once you are firmly established in it, simply and without even any arduous expenditure of effort, while sitting on the *tatami* mats, you are a living Tathagata.

Then the eye with which to see others will open in you, and you will be able to see things from the standpoint of realization. I myself never err in my judgment of people, and for everyone else, the eye of the unborn is just the same. For that reason, the Zen Sect is also known as the Sect of the Clear-Eyed. And because when your attainment is achieved you are dwelling in the unborn Buddha-mind, it is called the Buddha-mind Sect as well. When the eye to see others truly is opened and you see into their very hearts, you may consider that the Dharma is fully realized, for then, at that very place, it is.

Those who are not yet firmly established [in the Buddha-mind] may feel that I am deceiving all of you. They may, for the time being, not believe what I have just told you. But after you leave here, if the day should arrive when you come to realize the matter I have spoken of, then and there, that very day and at that very spot, you will be able to see clearly into the hearts of others. Then you will realize for the first time that I was not deceiving you. You should be diligent now in the interest of that future day. If I am lying and deceiving you, after I die my tongue will be pulled out for the sin of speaking falsehood.¹⁰ Would I be telling you lies, knowing I would have my tongue rooted out for it?

¹⁰ One of the Buddhist precepts is directed against speaking falsehood.

Although the truth of the unborn has long been extinguished in both China and Japan, it has now appeared in the world once again. When you come to the firm conviction that the Buddha-mind is ultimately unborn illuminative wisdom, then it is as if all the people in the world were to get together and say that a crow is a heron, even though you know very well by experience that a crow is by nature black and a heron by nature white; they could not convince you no matter how much they tried.

If only you are convinced beyond doubt in this way that the Buddha-mind is unborn and illuminating wisdom, and that all things are in perfect order in the unborn, then you no longer can be fooled or led astray by others. Such people are said to be of firm and incontrovertible conviction.¹¹ That means they are, today, people of the unborn, living Tathagatas forevermore.

When I was young and first began to declare the unborn Dharma, people did not understand me. They thought I was preaching heresy, or they took me for a Christian. They were afraid of me. Not a person would come near me.¹² But they soon realized their mistake, and came to know quite well that I was teaching them the true Dharma. Now, instead of them staying away as before, I am besieged by too many callers, imploring and pressing me to meet with them. I am not allowed a single day of quiet.

All things have their season. Since I first came to live here over forty years have passed. And because I have been repeating my teaching over and over during that time, many people can be found in these parts who excel the masters of religion.

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The third year of Genroku (1690), at the end of autumn, Bankei Zenji

¹¹ *kesujō sbita bito.*

¹² Suppression of Christianity had been a government policy since the early part of the century. George Sansom, in his *History of Japan, 1615-1867* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 102, cites a contemporary document dated 1658 containing various articles of governmental prohibition, one of which states: "In a rural district not a single Christian priest or brother or other member of a forbidden sect may be allowed entry. Care must be taken to prevent such entry."

crossed [the Inland Sea] to Marugame, Sanshū, and delivered sermons at Yōshō-zan Hōtsu-ji.¹³

The midday sermon—the 23rd day of the eighth month

24. What I teach everyone in my sermons is nothing other than the unborn Buddha-mind of illuminative wisdom. Everyone is endowed with it, only they do not know it. I speak like this in order to make it known to them.

Well, then, what does this mean, to be endowed with a Buddha-mind? Each of you now present decided to come here from his home in the desire to hear what I have to say. Now if a dog barked beyond the temple walls while you were listening to me, you would hear it as a dog's bark. If a crow cawed you would hear it as a crow. You would hear an adult's voice as an adult's and a child's as a child's. When you decided to make your way to this temple from your homes, you did not do so expecting to hear a dog bark, a crow caw, or the voice of a child or an adult, any of which might come from outside the temple during my talk. Yet while you are here you would hear such outside sounds. Your eyes distinguish red from white, and your nose can tell good smells and bad smells. Though you could have had no way of knowing beforehand any of the sights or sounds or smells you might encounter while at this meeting, you are nevertheless able to recognize these unforeseen sights and sounds when you encounter them. This is due to the working of the unborn you are all endowed with.

Suppose, for example, that you heard a dog bark. Even if ten million people said that it was a crow, I doubt if they could convince you, for it is highly unlikely they could delude you into believing what they said. That is due to your illuminating, unborn Buddha-mind. It is your unborn Buddha-mind that sees and hears without prior intention to do so. Not giving rise to the intention to see or hear, it is called unborn. Since it is unborn, it is undying, that is, it does not perish; for there is no way for something that is not born to perish. Everyone is endowed like this with the Buddha-mind. Since the Buddha-mind is always unborn—from the world of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas down to this world of men—each one of you must also be endowed with it. It is from your

¹³ The second volume (*kan*) of the sermons begins here. It records talks given on five occasions between Aug. 23 and Sept. 2 1690 (lunar calendar). *Sanshū* (Sanuki) is present-day Kagawa prefecture on the island of Shikoku. To travel there from his temple in Harima Bankei had to cross the Inland Sea.

not knowing you possess it that you are in illusion.

What is this illusion? It comes from being partial to yourself. What do I mean by being partial to yourself? Well, if you heard that your next door neighbor was disparaging you, you would become angry. You would glare at him indignantly, thinking him to be unjust and unreasonable, and take whatever he said in a bad sense. All this because you harbor a partiality for yourself. By becoming angry and losing your temper, aren't you just transforming the Buddha-mind you have into the sinful way of the Fighting Demon existence?

On the other hand, if your neighbor praised you or told something that pleased you, even though the praise was totally unfounded and what pleased you only a wishful thought, wouldn't you immediately be delighted all the same? This pleasure is something that comes from your partiality to yourself.

Look back to the origin of your self. When you came into this world, your parents imparted to you no thoughts of pleasure, evil, or bitterness. They were produced after your birth by your intellect. As I said before, if you think thoughts of hate, your Buddha-mind changes into the path of the Fighting Demons. If you covet what belongs to other people, your inherent Buddha-mind changes into the path of Hungry Ghosts. This is what is called transmigration.

If you people fully realize the meaning of what I say, and do not lose your tempers and become angry, or give rise to covetous or malicious thoughts, or harbor feelings of bitterness or pity—that, in itself, is the unborn Buddha-mind. This is what I tell everyone concerning the matter of having a Buddha-mind.

Why do I do this? Well, from childhood I devoted myself to attaining the Buddha-mind. I went all over in the pursuit of my religious practice. Seeking out good religious teachers, I had personal interviews with them and questioned them about the various doubts and uncertainties that had arisen in me. I did zazen. I went and lived in the mountains. I taxed myself physically and expended a great deal of mental effort. Still, I did not come to understand the matter of the Buddha-mind.

Then, after prolonged effort, it finally came to me, and I arrived at realization. As a result of this, I began to tell others about the truth of the unborn. I don't think there is anyone else who teaches the unborn the way I do.

As I said, I practiced for many long years and came to realize this Buddha-

mind only after great hardship. You, without that term of practice or that physical punishment, can come to understand the Buddha-mind easily right where you sit. That means your link to Buddhahood is stronger than mine was. You are all very fortunate.

I discovered the truth of this Buddha-mind and have preached it all over. Many people have come to understand it. Of course, it is not something I learned from someone else. I discovered it all by myself. And since I did, each time I tell others about it at these meetings, my words come from my own knowledge and understanding. Just telling you about it like this one or two times is probably not enough to make you realize it yourself, so I talk about it over and over. If you have any questions about it you should ask them. Then I can answer them for you.

A certain Confucian scholar in Edo once asked me some questions which I think would be good for you to hear. He said: "I can accept the truth of 'unborn, undying' without any trouble. It is quite reasonable, I think. While the flesh is strong, it is true that the ears hear sounds, the eyes see and recognize things, the nose distinguishes smells, the mouth can perceive the tastes of the five flavors and is able to speak, all without any conscious thought to do so. But once this body dies, then no matter how much it is spoken to, it makes no response; it cannot then tell red from white; it is ignorant of any smells. Then, you can't very well speak of either 'unborn' or 'undying'."

Despite the fact that his idea may sound quite reasonable, it is not. We can use it to make the principle of "unborn, undying" better understood. Since this mortal frame of ours is something that was born of earth, water, fire, and air brought temporarily together,¹⁴ and since it is in the nature of things that what is born cannot avoid perishing, this body too must one day die. Nevertheless, since the [Buddha] mind is unborn, it cannot be burned; nor, of course, does it decompose upon being buried, even while the body itself does become earth or ashes. It is simply that the [unborn Buddha] mind makes the born body its home.¹⁵ And, while it resides there, it is at freedom to hear,

¹⁴ Earth, water, fire and air: according to Buddhists, the Four Great Elements (*sbidai* 四大) of which all matter is constituted.

¹⁵ There is a *waka* with similar wording attributed to Bankei: "As this Mind is unborn and undying, earth, water, fire, and air are its temporary dwelling." *Bankei zenji goroku*, p. 181.

smell, and speak. But since the dwelling place of the [Buddha] mind disappears with the perishing of the body, which is born as a temporary composition of elements, seeing, hearing, and speaking are then no longer possible. As I said, because the body was once created, it has a birth and a death, while the mind, being originally the [Buddha] mind, does not. Don't you find this quite reasonable? It is the same with Śākyamuni's Nirvana (Japanese, *Ne-han*). Its origin (*Ne*) is the unborn. *Han* is the undying [Buddha] mind.¹⁶

What do I tell everyone? I simply inform them of the unbornness of the [Buddha] mind. In any case, the realization of this is vitally important for you.

You lose out on the Buddha-mind from the outset. A thief, for example, begins by pilfering only small objects. He finds it a wonderfully convenient way of acquiring things. He doesn't even need any capital. And so he grows beyond petty theft to become a highly accomplished robber. Finally, it becomes impossible to keep from being detected. He is discovered, arrested, trussed up, and dealt with by the law. When this happens and he is brought out for punishment, he forgets all about his own misdeeds and expresses indignant resentment toward the blameless officers of the law, reproaching them bitterly for being so hard on him. He is, you will agree, greatly mistaken. As you can see, the transforming of his valuable Buddha-mind into the way of Hungry Ghosts or Animals was something that was bred of a truly minor mistake.

I also have a hermitage at Yamashina in Kyoto. When I stay there, I go into Kyoto every day by way of the Awadaguchi. This is the place where criminals are hung up for crucifixion before the prison gates, so from time to time during my frequent passings I have come upon such sights.

In Edo, there was a criminal prosecutor for the Shōgunate named Koide Ōsumi¹⁷ who I was well acquainted with. Whenever I went to see him at his

¹⁶ Bankei seems to be making a pun here using the word *ne* 根 (root, origin) for *ne* 淵 (the first character of the compound *Ne-Han*, which has no independent meaning of its own) to get a meaning ("Its origin is the unborn") pertinent to his previous remarks. Also, since the character *Han* 樂 (the second component of the *Ne-Han* compound) has no independent meaning here either, it does not literally mean "undying [Buddha] mind" as Bankei says. He seems to be attaching this meaning to it simply to round off his "explanation" of *Ne-Han* (Nirvana).

¹⁷ This name is supplied from *Bankei zenji hōgo shū*, p. 53.

residence, criminals of various sorts would be brought before his magistrates for torture. They suffered miserably. When this happened, oblivious to their own guilt, they could often be seen showing deep resentment toward the undeserving officials, as if their suffering were due solely to them. Afterwards, I made my visits to him only on the days of abstinence set aside by the Shōgunate. On such days criminals were not brought forth for punishment. I tell you this as an example of the Buddha-nature I taught you about being transformed into a Hell because of a minor mistake.

I want you to understand very well this matter of realizing the Buddha-mind. Act so as to scrupulously avoid partiality to yourself—partiality is not something you inherited from your mother. Those of you who are in the service of others—both men and women—should devote your whole self to your masters. Your first task is to have not the least partiality for yourself and to devote yourself wholly to your work. This exercise of complete devotion to your master is, in itself, filiality to your parents. The filiality of you as a child toward your parents can be felt by your master, who will then increase in his kindness toward you. When your parents learn of this kindness they cannot help but be overjoyed. In such a case, isn't loyalty to your master filial piety to your parents? And isn't filial piety loyalty? Many have understood this very well, and in that way fixed the truth of the unborn in their minds.

When your mother bore you, your mind harbored not the least partiality for yourself. That was produced as you made your way to adulthood having been improperly brought up. The unborn is what is prior to the production of this partiality. The unborn is the Buddha-mind. If there is any doubt in anyone's mind about this principle, then I want them to ask me about it, whatever it might be. Have no hesitation whatsoever. This is different from inquiring about things of passing importance in your worldly life. It is a question that involves the future existence extending endlessly before you. So if you have any doubts or questions, you should ask them now. Since it is not certain when I will be able to meet with you again, I urge you to take this opportunity to ask me any question you might have. If you can arrive at a full and firm understanding of the unbornness of your [Buddha] mind, it will be to your great benefit.