

The Zen Sermons of Bankei Yōtaku

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

Introduction

THE Zen master Bankei Yōtaku 盤珪永琢 was born in the third month of 1622 at Hamada in Harima province, an area bordering the Inland Sea in what is now Hyōgo prefecture. He died in the same town in 1693 at the Ryūmon-ji, a temple one of his lay followers had built for him. His father, a Confucian physician belonging to the samurai class, died when he was ten, leaving the education of the strong-willed young Bankei to the eldest son.

Bankei's subsequent study of Confucian texts, in particular the *Great Learning*, led him to Buddhism. After initial ventures in the Pure Land and Shingon schools, he turned to Zen. At the age of seventeen he was ordained at the Zuiō-ji temple in Hamada by the priest Umpo Zenjō 雲甫全群. He stayed with Umpo for several years and then began pilgrimage to various Zen masters in different parts, during which he engaged in severe discipline. The story of his religious quest is related in his own words in one of the sermons he delivered in his late years.¹

He is said to have attained final enlightenment and arrived at his realization of the "unborn Buddha-mind" when he was twenty-six. Then another pilgrimage, taking him among other places to the Sōfuku-ji temple in Nagasaki, where he received the seal of approval of the Chinese Zen master Tao-che Ch'ao-yüan 道者超元 (Dōsha Chōgen), recently arrived in Japan from Ming China. But he was not yet satisfied and returned once more to the Kyoto-Osaka area; yet another period of pilgrimage and practice ensued. His master Umpo died in 1653 and was succeeded by his disciple Bokuō Sogo 牧翁祖牛.

¹ See Suzuki Daisetz, *Living by Zen* (Tokyo: 1949), pp. 139-158.

Just before his death he gave these instructions to Bokuō:²

The one person capable of bolstering Zen and raising the Dharma banner in the future is certain to be Bankei. I want you, in my place, to push him out into the world. By no means should he be allowed to hide his talents.

In 1657 Bankei returned to his native place and became Bokuō's successor. From then on right up until his death he was continually teaching, travelling from one temple to another in response to the numerous requests for his sermons. His disciples were many, as are the temples he is credited with building or rebuilding. In 1672 he assumed the post of head-abbot of the great Myōshin-ji temple in Kyoto, then at the height of its prominence. Under his guidance retreats for practice and Zen lectures were held annually at the Ryūmon-ji and various other temples. Some of these gatherings were for his immediate disciples, but many were open to all, and Buddhist priests and laymen of all sects, as well as representatives of other religions, came to hear him in large numbers. Thirteen hundred people are said to have attended the winter retreat at the Ryūmon-ji in 1690; according to a manuscript by one of his followers, "... there were priests from both the Sōtō and Rinzai sects, and followers of the Risshū, Shingon, Tendai, Jōdo, Shin, and Nichiren as well."³ The sermons and impromptu responses Bankei gave to questioners were, on some of these occasions, transcribed by his disciples. They represent the only record we have of his teaching.

He died the third day of the ninth month, 1693. In 1740, forty-seven years later, he received the posthumous title of *Kokusbi* (National Teacher) from the Emperor Sakuramachi. Although his teaching was continued by his disciples, its previous success slackened and was soon overshadowed by the commanding presence of Hakuin, whose teaching was destined to dominate Rinzai Zen up until the present day. Had Hakuin not appeared to rejuvenate and reorder the koan system, Bankei's teaching might perhaps have fared differently. As it was, its greatest influence in later times was probably in the Shingaku ("Mind-Learning") movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

² Fujimoto Tsuchishige, "Bankei," *Kōza Zen*, v. 4 (Tokyo: 1967), pp. 312-315.

³ *Bankei zenji goroku*, ed. Suzuki Daisetz (Tokyo: 1966), p. 32.

At least one famous Shingaku teacher, Tejima Toan 手島唯庵 (1718–1786), is said to have used Bankei's *Sermons* for purposes of education among the common people.⁴

Bankei's sermons ("talks" would perhaps be a better word to describe them) were delivered in engagingly plain, everyday Japanese, the common language of the common man. They are "popular," in the word's best sense, to a degree greater than those of any other Japanese Zen master before or after. No one had taken Zen to the ordinary person in such an informal yet thoroughgoing manner. Zen writings in the colloquial language (*kana bōgo*) had existed since Kamakura times, but it was in the seventeenth century that they really began to enjoy great vogue. This tendency away from Chinese and a playing down of highly specialized Buddhist terminology may be seen as a movement toward a more fully Japanese Zen. Bankei, whose sermons are almost totally free of words not in everyday use, exemplifies this movement more than any other figure.

Reappraisal of Bankei after more than three hundred years of neglect was due almost entirely to Suzuki Daisetz. His studies of Bankei's "Unborn Zen," *Zen sbisō-shi* I (Studies in the History of Zen Thought, 1942) and *Bankei no fushō zen* (Bankei's Unborn Zen, 1940),⁵ revealed for the first time in concrete terms the true significance of Bankei in the history of Zen thought. The high estimation in which he held Bankei is clearly shown in this quotation from the former work.

Zen entered Japan at the time of the Southern Sung dynasty in China. Dōgen Zen began to be promulgated. This, although said to be the Japanese Sōtō Sect, is in actuality Dōgen's Zen, a Japanese Zen that grew and developed around Dōgen's work, the *Shōbōgenzō*. What is called the Rinzai Sect transmitted the system of Southern Sung Chinese Zen, and did not beyond that develop any individual or characteristic Zen thought of its own worthy of mention. Coming to the middle Tokugawa period, we see in the *Kanna Zen* of Hakuin

⁴ Furuta Shōkin, "Fushō zen" (included as an appendix to *Bankei zenji garaku*, op. cit.), p. 291.

⁵ Both works are included in the first volume of Suzuki's *Complete Works*.

a new development in the methods or techniques of Zen practice, and, in a certain sense, a systematization of Zen thought. But, slightly before Hakuin's time was Bankei, whose "Unborn Zen" advocated a new and original thought for the first time since Bodhidharma. "Unborn Zen" is truly one of the most novel manifestations in the history of Zen thought. Indeed, Bankei must be said to be one of the very greatest masters Japan has ever produced.⁶

This is the first part of a translation of the *Bankei butchi kōsai zenji bōgo* (The Dharma Sermons of Bankei Butchi Kōsai Zenji),⁷ which is, with one exception,⁸ the only collection of his sermons to have been published until the twentieth century. It consists of a more or less direct transcription of Bankei's talks and replies to questions on two occasions in the year 1690: at the winter retreat at the Ryūmon-ji and at a series of meetings over a period of days at the Hōtsū-ji in Marugame, Sanuki province (present Kagawa prefecture).

I have used the text edited by Suzuki Daisetz in the *Bankei zenji goroku*, Iwanami bunko series (Tokyo: 1966). My numbering of the sermons follows this edition. The selections included in the *Zenke goroku shū* (Nihon shisō series, v. 10, 1969), edited by Koga Hidehiko and Yanagida Seizan, have also been helpful. Fujimoto Tsuchishige's article on Bankei in the *Kōza Zen* series has provided much of the biographical material in the introduction. For the translation itself, Suzuki Daisetz's books and articles on Bankei have of course been invaluable.

⁶ *Zen shisō shi kenkyū* 1 (Complete Works, vol. 1), p. 7.

⁷ 盤桂佛智弘濟禪師法語: Also known as the *Bankei butchi kōsai zenji gojimonbo* (告示聞書).

⁸ *Sōgen kokusai gammoku*, ed. Mori Daikyō (included in vol. 1 of *Zenrin sōsho* series), Tokyo, 1897. Printed from an unpublished manuscript in Mori's collection.

The Zen Sermons of Bankei Yōtaku

(text)

1. A monk addressed Bankei: I was born with a short temper which is always flaring up. My Buddhist teacher has done his best to help me, but without success. I realize myself it is not good, and I try to correct it, but it is something I was born with so I have not been successful. What should I do to rid myself of this temper? With your teaching I hope this time to cure myself. If I do, when I go back to my native place I can stand before my master again, and it will prove a lifelong credit to me, besides. So please, give me your teaching.

Bankei said: You have a very interesting inheritance. Is this short temper here now? If so, bring it out right this instant. I will cure it for you.¹

The monk said: I don't have a temper now. It appears suddenly when something irritates me.

Bankei said: Then you weren't born with it. You precipitate it yourself on account of some chance cause. Such causes may arise, but still, where could the temper come from if you did not generate it? You allow your temper to rise because you are partial to yourself and contend with others to establish your own ideas over theirs, and then you say that it is something you were born with. You show great lack of filial piety, indeed, in laying the blame on your parents.

At birth, each person receives a Buddha-mind from his parents.² He is born with not a single other thing. Yet his illusions he produces by himself through his own onesidedness. Is it not foolish to regard them as inherent? If he did not make them himself, wherever could they come from? It is the same with all his illusions. Unless he deludes himself, no delusions will appear.

¹ A well-known exchange, very similar to this one, between Hui-k'ō (Eka, 487-593) and Bodhidharma, is found in *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* (*Keitoku dentō roku*); also translated in R.H. Blyth, *Mumonkan* (Tokyo: 1966), pp. 266-72.

² *Buddha-mind* (*bussbin* 佛心); a synonym for the Buddha-nature.

People are mistaken on this point, and they create in themselves through their own selfishness and deepseated habits that which is not inborn, at the same time thinking that it is inborn. Because of this they cannot help but be in delusion with regard to all things. Do they treasure their illusions so much, they would rather live by them than by their one Buddha-mind? Were they to know the one Buddha-mind's great value [they would realize that] Buddhas are those who could not be deluded even if they wanted to be; that enlightenment consists in being free of illusion; and that there is no other way to become a Buddha.

Come close, listen to what I say to you, and grasp it well. Your temper appears when someone does something you think is contrary to you. When things do not go according to your expectations you are anxious to advance your own way of thinking—you oppose the other person and kindle your temper all by yourself. You are a most unfilial son to complain of being vexed by an inherently short temper and then to unreasonably accuse your parents of having presented it to you, which they did not. Were it really inborn it would be present now; it is not present because it is not inborn. Your short temper is something you call on yourself from time to time when the organs of your six senses are stimulated by external conditions and you struggle to oppose them, wanting to affirm your own way because it is dear to you. If you were not partial to yourself and did not contend against things or give rise to opinions, then where could the temper come from? It could not appear. Our illusions are self-created. They derive from our attachment to self. This applies universally to all illusions, which arise without exception because of our fondness for our self. When there is no such fondness, illusions do not appear.

Listen carefully. Your parents gave you a Buddha-mind when you were born, nothing else. From the time you were a tiny child you have watched and listened to people in their fits of ill temper and you have learned from them and imitated them, until irascibility has become a part of your own disposition too. Now, from time to time you arouse your temper. But to think it is something you were born with is foolish. If now you realize your past folly and henceforth do not allow your temper to arise, then you will have no temper to cure. A more direct way than trying to correct it would be not to produce it in the first place. To try to correct it after it has appeared involves a great

deal of effort, and [in the end] will prove futile. There is no need to rid yourself of it if it is not produced to begin with, so bear this deeply in mind.

If you grasp this securely and apply it to the matter of your temper, you will find that you cannot be deluded by any other thing as well. Then you will dwell constantly in the unborn Buddha-mind,³ and for you there will be nothing else. Live and work this very day by the unborn Buddha-mind and all things will be found in harmony. It is for this reason my sect is called the Buddha-mind sect,⁴ and for the same reason, you are a living Buddha today. Is not this the priceless thing that is “directly pointed at”?⁵

Trust yourself to me. Do as I tell you. If you begin by accustoming yourself for thirty days to dwelling in the unborn, from then on, naturally, without any trouble, even if you grow tired of it, you cannot avoid living in accordance with the unborn. You will by then have become a splendid dweller in the unborn. And because the Buddha-mind is unborn, you will be constantly functioning in accordance with your Buddha-mind. That means you are a living Buddha that very day!

I want all of you to listen my words as if you were today reborn and renewed. If your minds hold any preconceptions, they will not admit what others have to say. So if you listen now as if you were born anew, you will hear my words as if for the very first time, and as you will thus be without preconceptions, you will take and understand fully each word as I speak it. With that, the Dharma will be fully achieved.

2. A laywoman from Izumo⁶ who had been listening to Bankei's teaching, asked: According to what you have said, all we have to do is simply dwell effortlessly in the Buddha-mind. But isn't that a bit too frivolous?

³ *Unborn Buddha-mind* (*fusō no bussbin* 不生の佛心) is a key phrase Bankei uses again and again throughout his talks. See footnote 9.

⁴ Another name for the Zen sect.

⁵ Allusion to the Zen saying, *Kyōge betsu den, furyū monji, jikishi nimbun, kenshō jōbutsu* (a special transmission outside the scriptures, not based on words or letters, [in which] man sees into his [true] nature and attains Buddhahood [by] directly pointing to his own [Buddha-]mind).

⁶ Part of present Shimane prefecture.

Bankei said: To live according to the Buddha-mind is frivolous? You regard the Buddha-mind as inconsequential, and you become angry and turn the Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon, vent your selfishness and change it into a Hungry Ghost, give rise to folly and make it into an Animal.⁷ You turn the Buddha-mind that is in you into all sorts of different things—that is what is frivolous, not what I teach. There could be no teaching less frivolous, none with more gravity than that which advocates living in accordance with the Buddha-mind.

Therefore do as I say and live by the Buddha-mind. My teaching to live in the Buddha-mind may perhaps seem frivolous, yet it is a matter of gravest consequence. It is because of its very weight that people find it unattainable. Can this be frivolous? On the other hand, living by the Buddha-mind might seem very difficult. But if you listen to my teaching carefully, deeply understand it, establish yourself in it unwaveringly and live in the Buddha-mind, then without any effort, easily, simply, you are today a living Buddha. Is this not true?

After hearing me speak, you said that dwelling effortlessly in the Buddha-mind was easy. But it is not easy, and that is why you transform the Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon, Hungry Ghost, or Animal. Since by becoming angry over even unavailing things you are creating a Fighting Demon, you will of course fall into the realm of the Fighting Demons when you die. Again, when because of your onesidedness you devote yourself to turning the Buddha-mind into greed, you are without even knowing it, within your own lifetime, carefully laying the foundation for your rebirth into the realm of Hungry Ghosts, because egoism is the root cause of the Hungry Ghost existence.

⁷ Fighting Demon (*Aibura* 阿修羅), Hungry Ghost (*Gaki* 餓鬼), and Animal (*Chikusō* 畜生), together with Hell-dweller (*Jigoku* 地獄), constitute the Four Evil Ways of the transmigratory cycle, those in which sentient beings are reincarnated as a result of their wrong or sinful actions (karma). These four are included in the various classifications that have been formulated by Buddhists to describe all the realms of existence. The realm of the Fighting Demon is characterized by constant strife; that of the Hungry Ghosts by perpetual and unappeasable hunger; that of the Animals (including birds, beasts, fish, insects, etc.) by ignorance and the continual devouring of one another. The harrowings of the Buddhist hells are many and varied.

You thus need have no doubt about it, you will surely go to the realm of the Hungry Ghosts when you die. Or, perhaps your thoughts and speculations will lead you into worrying yourself perpetually over one fruitless concern after another, without being able to achieve any resolution. In that case, you are transforming the Buddha-mind into ignorance. And since ignorance is the cause of man's being reborn in the Animal existence, it is evident even now while you are alive that when you die you will enter that existence.

It is pitiful to see people who are unable to realize this dedicating themselves during their lives to deliberately creating the cause of their rebirth in the Three Evil Existences.⁸

When you do not transform the Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon, or Hungry Ghost, or Animal, you then cannot help but dwell naturally in the Buddha-mind. Let us go and attain to it completely!

The laywoman from Izumo said: Of course, you are right. There is nothing I can say. Thank you very much.

3. Bankei said: The Buddha-mind is invariably unborn and possessed of illuminative wisdom.⁹ It is the unborn Buddha-mind, and when it is realized all things are in perfect harmony. That is why I tell everyone to go in accordance with the unborn. When you do you are the same as all the Buddhas. Is that not something to treasure? When you understand the Buddha-mind's

⁸ The above-mentioned Fighting Demon, Hungry Ghost, and Animal existences. Buddhists usually include Hell instead of Fighting Demon in this classification.

⁹ Bankei sometimes uses the word *unborn* alone as a noun, sometimes as a descriptive word (*the unborn Buddha-mind*); frequently the combination is, as it is here, the *Buddha-mind is unborn and possessed of illuminative wisdom* (*bussbin wa fusbō nisbite reimei narumono . . .*). In Buddhism in general *unborn* is contrasted to *birth-and-death*, the continuous process of generation-extinction to which man is bound because of his illusions (Bankei would say, because he strays from the unborn Buddha-mind). In this sense the unborn may be said to be synonymous with Nirvana, and to be untouched by the vicissitudes of birth-and-death. The word *reimei* 慧明 (translated here as *illuminative wisdom* and *non-discriminating wisdom* according to context) is descriptive of the working or activity (用) of the unborn Buddha-mind, which is sometimes likened to a bright mirror that reflects all things exactly as they are in their suchness. See Suzuki, *Zen shisō-shi no kenkyū* I (vol. I of Complete Works), pp. 21-30.

great value, then you cannot fall into illusion even if you want to. When you are in secure grasp of it, right then you find yourself in the unborn. So I don't have to refer to it as the "undying" or "never perishing," for what is not born cannot very well perish, can it?

4. A monk came to Bankei and said: You always teach us to live by the unborn, but that would seem to mean to live in unremitting idleness.

Bankei said: To live at all times by the unborn Buddha-mind is to dwell in idleness? You people, unable to live constantly by the unborn Buddha-mind, always occupied in other quarters, doing this, busy with that, spending your time transforming the unborn Buddha-mind into something else—that is idleness.

The monk made no reply.

Bankei then told him: Live by the unborn, for it is far from idleness.

5. A monk asked Bankei: Your teaching would seem to be telling us to remain insensible to things.

Bankei said: While you are sitting there innocently listening to me, if someone came up behind you and stuck you in the back with a gimlet, would you feel pain, or not? You would feel pain, wouldn't you?

I would, replied the monk.

Bankei said: Then you are not insensible. If you were insensible you would not feel it. But you are not insensible, and so you can feel it. In view of this, then, can you say you have ever been insensible? No, you have never been insensible. Therefore, have confidence in me, and live by the unborn Buddha-mind.

6. A monk said to Bankei: Much of the time I tend to be absent from the Buddha-mind. As I am unable to account for it myself, I would like to have your guidance so I might remedy it.

Bankei said: The unborn Buddha-mind all people have received from their parents at birth is possessed of illuminative wisdom, and no one is ever away from it. Your case is no different, although you say you are away from it much of the time. A person who says he is away from it is not away from it. You are unable to know the Buddha-mind, and thus you do not live by the Buddha-

mind as it is. You transform it into this or change it into that, with the result that no matter what you listen to you do not really hear it. What you are doing is making the Buddha-mind into other things, but you are not absent from it. Would someone who is absent from it be inquiring about whether he is or not? If you were in fact absent from it you would also be unaware of being absent from it. You would hardly be asking questions about it. Even when someone falls asleep, he will wake up if someone else comes and awakens him; it is because he is not away from the Buddha-mind. When could you be away from it?

It is just the same right here, now. You have never been away from the Buddha-mind in the past and you will not be away from it in the future. None of the people here now has ever been away from it. By the same token, none of you is an unenlightened man. You are a group of people who have received the Buddha-mind from your parents at birth. Even after you leave here, be toward all things just as you are right now while you are listening to my teaching. Then you will be people living by the unborn Buddha-mind. In spite of this, people enter into illusion, the defilements of their egoism giving rise to a mind that is onesided and striving only for its private interests. Retreat from the Buddha-mind and immediately you are an unenlightened man.

Originally, there is not a single unenlightened man. For example, although two men walk together along the same road, one steals things and the other does not. While the one who steals things is just as much a human being as the other, he is branded with another, special name, that of *thief*, which he carries about with him. As for the one who doesn't steal, no one calls him a thief, and he doesn't go around with that other name. In just this same way, the thief is an unenlightened man, a deluded human being. By contrast, the one who doesn't steal lives in the Buddha-mind and does not stray from it. He is not deluded. He is a man of the unborn.

No parent whoever he may be has ever imparted thievery to his child at birth. The fact is that from the time he was a small child the thief was unknowingly instilled with a tendency to wrong-doing. He stole what belonged to others, and as he gradually attained to adulthood his selfishness emerged. He learned to steal with great skill and was unable to keep from stealing. If he did not steal to begin with there would be no need for him to stop, yet without making the slightest mention of his own failing, he says his desire to

steal others' property is something he cannot stop because he is a born thief. Well, that is absurd. The proof that parents do not bear children as thieves is that there are no inherent thieves. Isn't it just that they follow the example provided by others' bad habits and steal things by themselves because of their own greed? Is it proper to say this is inborn in them?

Or perhaps they may say they are unable to live without stealing because of the depth of their [bad] karma. They are silent about the fact that their egoism has ingrained a pernicious habit in them over a long period of years, and they rationalize it by attributing it to karma. Is that not absurd? It is not that they steal *because* of their previous karma; their stealing itself is the karma. Even supposing it were caused by their karma, even supposing it were inborn, inasmuch as it is possible for them to cease stealing by realizing their past misdeeds, it is not true they cannot stop. If they do not steal to begin with there is no need for them to stop.

For example, even a man who was until just yesterday a great scoundrel, the object of everyone's contemptuous pointing and whispering, if from today on he recognizes his past misdeeds and lives in accordance with the Buddha-mind, from this day forward he is a living Buddha.

In the days of my youth there was a rascal called the "Kappa" in this neighborhood, as great a robber as the notorious Kumasaka no Chōhan.¹⁰ He employed himself in separating people from their money through highway robbery. He had a wonderful robber's knack of watching a person approach and being able to gauge just how much money he had with him. It was uncanny. Eventually, he was caught and thrown into Osaka prison, where he remained for a long time. After many long months and years, because he was such a master robber, he was spared from execution to become a spy for the constabulary. Later, he was released from that work too and became a free man at last. Afterwards he turned to the sculpture of Buddhist images, and lived in Osaka as a master of the art. Becoming a Pure Land believer, he passed away in a Nembutsu samadhi.

¹⁰ A *kappa* is a kind of Japanese water imp, extremely elusive, and as difficult to describe as fairies and elves. Kumasaka no Chōhan 熊坂の長範: a famous robber of 12th cent. Japan. He figures in the Yoshitsune stories, and is according to one legend said to have gone to Mt. Kōya intending to steal but instead to have realized his evil ways and become a man of deep faith.

By mending his ways, even such a notorious robber as the Kappa ended life repeating the Nembutsu, desirous of rebirth in the Pure Land. [Therefore,] where is there a man who steals because of the depth of his karma, or because of the blackness of his sin? Robbery is the bad karma. Robbery is the sin. If he didn't steal, neither the karma nor the sin would exist. Whether he steals or not depends on his own mind, not on karma.

What I have just said applies not only to robbery but to all illusions. Man's illusions are all like robbery. Whether you are deluded or not depends on your own mind. A man who is deluded is an unenlightened man; if he is not deluded, he is a Buddha. And there is no particular shortcut apart from this to being a Buddha. Is it not so? Each of you, fix this unshakably in your mind.

7. A man asked Bankei: Everyone says you are able to read other peoples' minds.¹¹ Is that true?

Bankei said: Such strange things are not found in Zen. Even if I did possess such an ability, because the Buddha-mind is unborn, I would not use it. They come to think I can read minds from hearing me comment on the concerns of those [who come to see me]. But I cannot read minds. I am no different from anyone else. Since dwelling in the Buddha-mind is the source of the supernatural powers of all the Buddhas, all things are in order and brought to perfection without recourse to supernatural powers. Without speaking of a myriad other nonessentials, the unborn right Dharma makes do with direct comment on peoples' lives.

8. A man asked: I believe I can say I have practiced a great deal. Yet even when my practice progresses to the point where I think it will not regress, the tendency to regress is stronger, and I slide back. What should I do to avert such backsliding?

Bankei said: Be in the unborn Buddha-mind. If you are, there is no regression nor any need for advancement. If you would dwell in the unborn, the intention to make progress is already a regression from the province of the

¹¹ *Tasbinzū* 他心通. One of the supernatural powers (*jirzū* 神通) usually said to be possessed by those of high spiritual attainment.

unborn. A man of the unborn has nothing to do with advancing or backsliding. He is always beyond both.

9. A monk said to Bankei: I have been working for a long time on "Hyakujō's Fox,"¹² but in spite of all my efforts I am still unable to grasp it. I believe the reason is simply that I cannot achieve singleminded concentration. I would, if possible, like to receive your teaching.

Bankei said: Here I don't employ those expositions on old scrap paper. As you do not yet know [that the important thing] is the unborn Buddha-mind of illuminative wisdom, let me tell you about it. It will clear away all your barriers, so listen very carefully to what I have to say.

Bankei then gave him his usual sermon on the unborn. The monk listened and then gave a deep nod of assent. He is said later to have become very prominent.

10. Another monk, who had been listening to this, asked: If what you say is true, then are all the old koans useless and unnecessary?

Bankei said: When the worthy Zen masters of the past came face to face in their testing encounters, it was for no other need than to give a direct and immediate response to a given question. There is no reason for me to personally say that their responses were necessary or unnecessary ones, helpful or unhelpful ones. It is enough if everyone just lives in accordance with the unborn Buddha-mind. That will settle the matter, so there is no need to go and create any additional labor [for yourself]. That is why I tell you, live in the unborn. The vehemence of your intense striving in these other matters causes you to stray all the more from the unborn. So cease from them, and as it is only in the unborn Buddha-mind of illuminative wisdom that things come to ultimate solution, go and live in the unborn Buddha-mind!

11. One day Bankei addressed an assembly: All illusions without a single exception derive from being partial to oneself. If you simply do not create this

¹² The koan entitled "Hyakujō's Fox" is found in the *Wu-men-kuon* (*Mumonkan*), Case 2. See Blyth, pp. 39-55. Bankei calls all such koan "old tools" (see section 14), "expositions on old scrap paper."

partiality there will be no illusions for you to go astray in. For example, if the men next to you quarrel, you may in theory be able to make judgment and decide which of them is right and which wrong because you are not actually involved yourself. You will not become angry and lose your temper. If, on the other hand, you are personally involved, you will take your own part and struggle with your opponent. And you will transform your Buddha-minds into Fighting Demons as you have at one another.

As the Buddha-mind is possessed of illuminative wisdom, it will mirror all that you have previously experienced. If you give heed to these reflections you are inadvertently lost in illusion. Thought is not something that already exists in the depths of your mind and then rises forth; it occurs when something you see or hear is reflected [to the pure and clear Buddha-mind] through your having seen or heard it previously. Since originally thought has no real substance, if only you give no heed to the reflections, letting thoughts reflect as they do, letting them arise as they do, letting them cease as they do, illusion cannot arise. If only you do not pay attention to them, illusion will not arise. Therefore, no matter how many images are reflected, it is the same as if they were not reflected. Even if a hundred or a thousand thoughts spring up, it is the same as if they hadn't, and since they don't cause you the least amount of trouble, there is no thought to get rid of, no thought to be cut off.

12. During retreats, Bankei always had a Vinaya academy set up for priests of the Vinaya (j. Ritsu) Sect¹³ who were among his followers. At the great retreat [of 1690] there were fifty-three priests of that sect in attendance. Two of their number asked Bankei: We believe that if we always observe the two hundred and fifty precepts we will attain Buddhahood. Is that good? Or is it bad?

Bankei said: There is nothing in the least wrong with it. It is a good thing. But it is not the best. I mean it is shameful to clothe yourselves in precepts and say that you are the Vinaya Sect, as if you thought that was superior.

¹³ The Vinaya (Japanese, Risshū 律宗) or Precepts Sect is one of the old pre-Kamakura sects of Japanese Buddhism, brought from China in the Nara period. Its teaching is based on a code of rules (*vinaya*), the observance of which is thought to lead one to enlightenment.

Precepts were originally fashioned for the sake of evil priests. Priests of the true stripe make no attempt to violate the Dharma's conventions, nor do they undertake to uphold precepts. For a man who doesn't drink, there is no need for precepts against drinking. Those who do not steal do not need precepts concerning theft. And to people who do not lie precepts against prevarication are meaningless. You say, however, that you observe the precepts. Yet to violate them or not is actually the concern of evil priests. To say that you are the Vinaya Sect, setting up precepts as in some way superior, is to put yourself forward as evil priests. It is like a good man who acts like or imitates an evil one. Is that not shameful?

Because the unborn is the Buddha-mind, if you live in accordance with the Buddha-mind, then from the first there is no distinction between observing and violating [precepts]. "Observing" and "violating" are designations that arise after the act itself, and from the standpoint of the unborn are second or third principles [not the first principle, which is the unborn], utterly trivial, distinctions after the fact.

The two priests gained a deep understanding of Bankei's teaching, and said: Indeed, you are right. We thank you very much.

13. During a sermon Bankei said: When I was in Marugame in the province of Sanuki,¹⁴ the women who lived in the town below the castle walls came to hear my talks. Once, a certain married lady came, bringing a maid-servant and an elderly attendant along with her. They listened to my talk and then went home. Some time afterward, the lady and the old woman came again. This time the lady said to me: "Before my elderly attendant met you she was always irritable and haughty, her temper would flare at even the slightest pretext.

"It is now quite a while since we listened to your talk, but from that time to the present day she has not once become angry. Not only that, she speaks with nothing but the greatest prudence and reason, and she hasn't the least inane notion in her head. Now I too have been put to shame because of her example. It seems simply that she grasped your teaching thoroughly. This I believe was due to your exceptional influence."

¹⁴ Marugame is a castle town in Sanuki (present Kagawa prefecture on the island of Shikoku) where Bankei had many followers and often went to teach.

Such were her words, and from what I afterwards heard from people, the old attendant never strayed from the Buddha-mind again.

The unborn I preach is the Buddha-mind; the Buddha-mind is the unborn, and is possessed of illuminating wisdom. In the unborn all things are in perfect harmony, and one who executes all things in accordance with the unborn gains the eye to see others [truly], and realizes conclusively that all people are living Buddhas today. That is why such a person, just like the old woman of Sanuki, will never fall back into illusion. Because they realize the great worth of the Buddha-mind, they can never go astray from it again. Because people do not know the Buddha-mind's great worth, they give rise to illusion in all things, even the most trifling, and live as unenlightened beings.

There are in attendance here a lot of women, too. Women are especially prone to losing their tempers even over the most inane things, and turning their unborn Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon, ignorant Animal, or greedy Hungry Ghost, transmigrating in great variety and becoming lost in illusion. So I want you women to listen to me well.

In houses that keep servants there are many servant boys and girls. Among them are sure to be some who are careless with things. Treasured articles and dishes are broken accidentally. Though they are not really worth speaking about, still you scold the offender with a fierce countenance, your blood-pressure soars, your wrath is enflamed. It makes no difference how much the dish or teabowl may have been prized, for it was not broken deliberately. It was an accident, and now there is nothing that can be done about it; still you rashly transform the precious Buddha-mind you received from your parents when you were born into a Fighting Demon, through the defilements deriving from covetousness. You can replace a teacup by buying another. Moreover, tea tastes no different whether you drink it from a [priceless] Korean teabowl or from an Imari teacup;¹⁵ your tea-drinking is not the least inconvenienced. But a temper once roused cannot be restored to its original state.

If you thoroughly understand the single matter of this teabowl, you will know, without being told about each one separately, that it holds true for all things. For with regard to all other things too, if you do not turn your

¹⁵ Here the idea may be not the difference in value, but merely the difference of the two tea bowls.

Buddha-mind into a Fighting Demon by continuously fretting over things, if you do not change it into ignorance, if you do not transform it into a Hungry Ghost through your egoism, that is, of itself, nothing else than living by the unborn Buddha-mind. Once you know the Buddha-mind's great value there is no way you can avoid living by the unborn, even if you don't want to. What I am saying is this: not changing your Buddha-mind into the Three Poisons¹⁶ is a matter of such extreme importance that you must listen to me very closely, and take great care not to transform the Buddha-mind into other things.

Even before that bell you heard ringing just now rang and you heard it, you were quite aware it was a bell. The mind that recognizes the bell even before it rings, is the unborn Buddha-mind. After it rings, you hear it and say it is a "bell." That is a name that results after the ringing. It is inferior by second or third remove.

14. Bankei said: Here, I urge people always to live by the unborn Buddha-mind alone. There are no additional rules. [Nevertheless,] since everyone got together and decided they wanted to do zazen for a period of twelve incense sticks (about six hours)¹⁷ each day, I told them to do as they pleased, and set aside six hours for their zazen. But the unborn Buddha-mind has nothing at all to do with sticks of incense. If you live by the Buddha-mind and do not go astray from it, you need seek no further enlightenment. If you just sit by the Buddha-mind, just live by the Buddha-mind, just sleep by the Buddha-mind, just arise by the Buddha-mind, just dwell by the Buddha-mind, then in all the normal activities of your daily life you are functioning as a living Buddha. There is nothing further.

As zazen is a matter of the Buddha-mind sitting quietly, [when you live in the Buddha-mind] you are always in zazen. Zazen is not limited merely to the period of sitting. Even though you are sitting, you may rise if you have something to do. Thus, I have everyone here do as they wish. A person may do

¹⁶ *Sandoku* 三毒: greed, anger, and foolishness or ignorance. Called poisons because they are the sources of all man's passions and illusions.

¹⁷ Usually, a stick of incense is burned to measure the length of a period of zazen. One stick lasts roughly 30 minutes. See *Zenke goroku sbū*, p. 272.

*kinbin*¹⁸ for one stick of incense. Since he cannot just remain standing, he sits down and does zazen for one stick of incense. It is hardly possible to sleep all the time, so he gets up; as he cannot be speaking constantly, he falls silent and does zazen. We are not bound by any set rules.

Zen masters of today generally use "old tools" when they deal with pupils, apparently thinking they cannot raise the barriers [to enlightenment] without them. They do not teach by thrusting themselves directly forward and confronting their students without their tools. These men who teach with tools and cannot do without them are the blind men of Zen. What is more, they tell their students that there can be no progress in Zen unless they raise a "great ball of doubt,"¹⁹ and then break through this doubt. So, first of all, they have them raise a ball of doubt by any means possible; they do not teach them to live by the unborn Buddha-mind. Those who have no ball of doubt themselves, they saddle with one, causing them to change their Buddha-mind into a ball of doubt. That is a mistake.

15. A monk who had engaged for twenty years in religious practice to the utter exclusion of all else, who had strived and tried various means without coming to realization, chanced to hear of the success of Bankei's teaching activities and came to meet the master. Bankei immediately gave him the true teaching of the unborn. The monk listened and readily grasped it. He said: "Now that I have obtained your matchless teaching, I realize the wrongness of all those I have previously undertaken."

Bankei said: Even your twenty years of exerted practice cannot match the single word "unborn" that I speak today.

The monk said: Indeed, it is as you say. You are right.

¹⁸ *Kinbin* 經行: Walking about. During zazen, to rise and walk about to relieve the legs or help ward off drowsiness.

¹⁹ Ball (or Lump) or Doubt (*gidanubi* 疑團子). "Quite expressive of the actual state of mind in which the koan student finds himself when he has pursued it up to a certain stage . . . a kind of mental blockade . . . [in which] the stream of thought is blocked up . . . does not run on but is frozen and forms a lump." *Living by Zen*, p. 221.

16. During the great [winter] retreat,²⁰ many women came to see Bankei from various areas of the country; from Tamba, Tango, Tajima, Izumo, Mino. They came with an inconsolable grief, having lost either a parent or a child through death. They believed that if they could meet with Bankei he might be able to assuage their grief.

Bankei gave them the following talk:

The sorrow of a parent who loses his child, or of a child whose parent dies, is the same throughout the world. It is a matter involving the depth of the karma binding together the relation of parent and child and making us parents and children. It is in the nature of things for parent or child to grieve when death takes one from the other. Even so, for all such grief and sorrow, the dead do not come back. In their ignorance, people lament continually with all their heart what cannot be undone. Was ever the return of a dead man achieved because of the zeal with which he was lamented? No. Since it is thus altogether impossible for the dead to come back to you, cease your grieving from this time on, without remorse. Take the time you would have spent grieving and do some zazen, read a sutra, or offer some flowers and incense for them. For the child, that would be an act of true filial piety, and for the parent, an act of parental love.

Unaware that it is in fact a hindrance, people ignorantly mourn their parent's pitiful fate, they feel sorry for their children, and they believe this is done for the sake of the deceased. But such lamentation is actually an obstacle to the deceased, so that even though they declare him to be piteous, they have no real pity on him; nor do they truly commiserate with him, even though they say he is worthy of it. To lament your parent or your child is, rather, to hate them. If you hate them, then you should lament them. If you truly pity them, you should not lament them. To lament them because you pity them is wrong. But to spend your days and nights in constant sorrow over what cannot be helped, piling grief on top of grief at the risk of your own life oblivious to what others say to you, pouring forth tears all day and all night to no avail—that is a great error, the peak of folly. And folly being the cause of an Animal existence, it is obvious even without saying it that if you die in such a state,

²⁰ *Great retreat (dai-kessei 大結制)*. An assembly for Buddhist practice and sermons held twice yearly, summer and winter, for about 90 days each. *Zenke goroku sbū*, p. 278.

parent and child will fall together directly into the Animal existence, there to engage in strife with each other.

When he is born, everyone receives a Buddha-mind from his parents. He receives nothing else besides it. Now, because of the [karmic relationship of] parent and child, this unborn Buddha-mind is turned into ignorance. Since this transformation means in effect that the [surviving relation] lives the life of a very fine Animal even during his own lifetime, he will fall quickly into an Animal existence when he dies; and there, parent and child will fight among themselves. There is no merit or anything else to that. Isn't it absurd and deplorable beyond words?

Listen to this carefully. It is natural for a parent to love his children, and for children to be filial to their parents is the way of children. Therefore, if the child by dying first thus causes his parents to grieve his passing and fall into the ignorance of an Animal existence, could that be called an act of filial piety? Such a child would represent the ultimate in unfiliality. Do you imagine an unfilial child that died and thus sent his parents into an Animal existence would have a peaceful future existence? No, it would not be peaceful. The outcome can be only one: parent and child will fall together into the evil, lesser existences. On the other hand, if the parent becomes overwhelmed in sorrow over what cannot be otherwise, and loses himself in illusion on account of his child, becoming an Animal himself and sending the child he pities into Hell as well, could that be called parental love? No. It is parental hate. A child who dies and makes his parent an Animal, is greatly unfilial. The parent is led astray by his child, and by turning his Buddha-mind into an Animal, goes to Hell together with him, where they fight each other as deadly foes, and become sinful Hell-dwellers.

Therefore, even if you lose your child or your parent, to persist in constant lamentation will only render them great harm. Knowing that, it should be impossible for you to lament them without remembering that it will thereby prove their ruin. Or could you grieve over them, even then? You will now probably be unable to lament them, so instead of that, read a sutra, do some *zazen*, offer flowers and incense for the sake of their future. It is this that will bespeak your sense of pity and compassion for them. Those people without faith who lose a parent or child, may, if they then give rise to faith and the desire for a [favorable] future existence, be said to have been saved by the

deceased, since they came to faith owing to their bereavement. So if the child dies and thereby brings the parent to faith, his death has a redeeming feature; he performs an act of filial piety greater than any ever performed during his lifetime. Do you think this child, who has performed an act of great filial piety in saving his parent, will have an unfortunate fate in his next existence? Not in the least. Consequently, both parent and child are saved. If the parent awakens to faith because of the child and lives by the unborn Buddha-mind, the child may die, yet the outcome is propitious; the child becomes a "good friend"²¹ to his parent.

It is commendable that you have all come from far-off places in this season of cold weather hoping to meet me and gain peace for your minds. Therefore, if you would make your long journey worthwhile, it would be best for you all to return to your homes. If you have come here with the idea of meeting me and alleviating your sorrow even a little, then take your sorrow, leave it here with me, and go home without it. If you can understand thoroughly what I say, then in view of the fact that your grief only creates enmity, you will probably not permit yourselves any more grief over your losses.

If someone still finds it impossible to stop grieving, then he is changing his Buddha-mind into ignorance; if he is a child, he will fall into Hell for the sin of turning his parent into an unenlightened being; if he is a parent, he will fall to an Animal existence hand in hand with his child, there to fight with him for having been led astray on account of his child and turning the Buddha-mind into ignorance. In this light, even were there someone who told you you should grieve and lament, it is advice you should never follow. Would you lament, even at such a price?

Thereupon, the group of women who had come with sorrow-filled hearts from many different parts of the country to hear Bankei, declared all together: "Indeed, we understand what you have said very well. You have dispelled all the heaviness from our hearts. We thank you very much."

Bankei said: Very well. I want you to remain that way even after you have left the temple and returned to your homes.

²¹ (Zen) *chisbiki* (善)知識; a person who helps another make religious progress.

The women said: Our tears of sorrow fell because of the extremity of the pity and compassion we felt for our loved ones. But we understand what you have taught and are convinced of its truth; to grieve them is to bring harm to them, to hate them. It is not to pity or feel sorry for them but to become their enemy. We will not lament them and create enmity. We did not realize this before. Our notions were foolish. But now, even after we have returned home, our feelings toward our parents will be as they were before their death, and toward our children just as they were prior to their passing. We will never again lament their death, even if someone should encourage us to.

So saying, the group of women went home.

17. A monk asked: When I fall into a deep sleep I sometimes dream. What do you think about dreams? Why do you think we give rise to dreams?

Bankei said: If you are sound asleep you do not have dreams. Dreams do not occur during sound sleep.

The monk was silent.

18. Bankei travelled to Myōhō-zan Shōgen-ji in Mino and paid homage to its founder, Kanzan Kokushi.²² The temple master and the monks all asked him to give a sermon. He said that he felt too much awe there in the training halls of the Kokushi (National Teacher) to give any instruction. But despite his firm refusal, the adamant petition of the temple master caused him [at last to relent and] deliver a sermon. It is said that the temple master brought out a chair and placed it before him, but that he declined to use it, and said that he would speak while sitting on the floor. Those who understand the Buddhist Dharma are filled with awe and respect for it.

²² The text has *Kassan Kokushi*, "the National Teacher and Temple Founder." It refers to Kanzan Egen 菴山楚玄 (1277-1360), founder of the Myōshin-ji in Kyoto and the Myōshin-ji branch of Rinzai Zen to which Bankei belonged. Before going to the Myōshin-ji Kanzan lived in the mountains of Mino, where, three hundred years later, a temple was constructed in his memory; its full name, Myōhō-zan Shōgen-ji 妙法山正眼寺. See Isshū Miura and Ruth Sasaki, *Zen Dust* (Kyoto: 1966), pp. 324-27.