

# TRANSLATION

## Unnecessary Words

### The Zen Dialogues of Bankei Yōtaku

#### PART II

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

30

Whenever Bankei spoke to his assembly, he generally told them this:

—The fundamental reality of all existence is the natural state of suchness, which is plain and distinct without the discriminations of the ego-self. This state of suchness is the spiritual essence of the primary mind, whose knowledge is instantaneous and perfectly clear.

On one of these occasions, a monk said:

—If the primary mind has such an inherent spiritual essence, that clear knowledge shouldn't take even an instant.

—But that's perfectly clear, replied Bankei.

—Why do you say it is clear? asked the monk. I don't understand.

—If you already know that it doesn't even take an instant, and that there is no mental discrimination involved—then what is unclear?

32

A priest asked:

—You always teach people that paradise, hell, the realms of the devas,

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\* This installment completes the translation of Bankei Yōtaku's *Zeigo* 贅語 ("Unnecessary Words"); part one appeared in the previous issue. In this part, several of the entries, those which are concerned not with Bankei himself but with his disciples, have been left untranslated. An account of Bankei's life may be found in my *Unborn, The Life and Teachings of Zen Master Bankei*, North Point Press, San Francisco, 1984.

craving demons, fighting spirits, and the rest, all exist in the mind and are to be found nowhere else. But a sutra spoken by the Buddha states that "there is a realm called Paradise created by Amida Buddha a thousand million Buddha-lands to the West from here."<sup>1</sup> Could he have spoken falsely?

—Who fixed the direction? asked Bankei.

33

A monk asked:

—How does "fundamental purity and clarity suddenly give rise to mountains, rivers, and earth"?<sup>2</sup>

—Whose mountains and rivers? asked Bankei.

The monk could not reply.

34

A monk asked:

—Master, you say that hell exists in our minds and that it is not apart from this very place. But the sutras tell us that Mount Sumeru is situated in a certain location and hell is found tens of thousands of *yojanas* under the earth.<sup>3</sup> Are those statements false?

—A man who committed a crime in the province of Mutsu would be punished in Mutsu, said Bankei.

—Yes, he would, said the monk.

—A person who committed a crime in Satsuma would be punished in Satsuma.<sup>4</sup>

—Yes, said the monk.

—Yet as far as that criminal was concerned, the circumstances would be the same in both places.

Again the monk agreed.

—What is the reason for him to be sitting where he is, awaiting his punishment? asked Bankei.

<sup>1</sup> The *Amida Sutra*, one of the principal scriptures of the Pure Land schools.

<sup>2</sup> A koan based on a passage in the *Shuryōgon-kyō* (Sanskrit, *Shurangama Sutra*). *Blue Cliff Records*, case 35.

<sup>3</sup> An ancient Indian unit of distance; one *yojana* is about 15 kilometers.

<sup>4</sup> Mutsu and Satsuma are the names of former provinces.

—His own wickedness, what else? replied the monk.

—What is the cause of that wickedness? asked Bankei.

—His wicked mind, of course, answered the monk.

—Then how can you say that hell does not originate from the mind? said Bankei.

The monk's head bowed in agreement.

35

At the great retreat of 1690, Zen master Gekkei of the Sōtō sect<sup>5</sup> was among the contingent of visiting priests. They were quartered in the Chikurin-ken,<sup>6</sup> which had been set aside as a guest residence for senior clerics. Gekkei went to the abbot's chambers for an interview with Bankei.

—My eye is just the same as yours, he said.

Bankei blew out a breath.

Gekkei struck him.

—I'll take two or three of those, said Bankei.

—What are you doing talking about two and three? said Gekkei.

—I've reeled you in with one cast of my line and tossed you down inside the Iron Double-Hoop Mountains,<sup>7</sup> Bankei said, laughing aloud.

Gekkei made his bows and returned to the guest quarters. There he confessed to the other Zen masters what had happened to him in Bankei's chambers. As he described to them the methods Bankei had used, they were quaking uncontrollably with fear.

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At the age of thirty,<sup>8</sup> when Bankei returned home from Nagasaki, his name was already widely known throughout the country. A large number of

<sup>5</sup> 月桂. Nothing is known of this priest.

<sup>6</sup> The Chikurin-ken 竹林軒 was a sub-temple of the Ryūmon-ji, Bankei's main temple. For the retreat of 1690, see part one, p. 112, entry 27.

<sup>7</sup> Nitetsuisen (also Nitetchisen 二鐵圍山). The ninth and outermost of the concentric mountain chains that surround the world. According to one account, it consists of two separate, parallel ranges. These ranges enclose a valley of impenetrable darkness inhabited by the "evil demon-ghosts of the black mountains."

<sup>8</sup> Bankei arrived in Nagasaki to have an interview with the Chinese priest Dosha Chōgen (Tao-che Ch'ao-yuan) in 1651 at the age of twenty-nine; he remained there until the following year. See fn. 54.

students came to Hamada to seek his teaching, but although they remained for a week, he continued to refuse their requests for interviews. At length, they had no choice but to leave without seeing him. People attempted to remonstrate with Bankei. They told him that he should receive students and confer his Dharma teaching on them.

—Compassion is a deep personal commitment of mine, he smiled. There is no difficulty in meeting students and teaching them. But it then becomes meaningless discourse. When the time and occasion arrives, they will become Buddhas and Patriarchs merely upon hearing a word or seeing a shadow.

And, in fact, from his middle years onward, he attracted a large following made up of students of every kind. Their enthusiastic devotion to him and their commitment to his teaching remained strong and undiminished throughout the years. Even those who came armed with views and fixed notions of their own, hoping to pit their ability against the master's, would, upon actually encountering him and receiving a word or two of guidance, take it directly and lastingly to heart.

## 38

Bankei was an easy person for his attendants to serve. When I asked Itsuzan about this,<sup>9</sup> he said:

—One of the ancients has stated that it is easy to serve a superior man but extremely difficult to please him.<sup>10</sup> That is just the way I found it. I served the master for years. I was always by his side. We were like a fish and water, each oblivious of the other's presence. It was never the slightest trouble for me; and yet I never knew him to be pleased with me. He was someone to look up to, to respect. But it was impossible to take liberties and be overly familiar with him.

He also told me:

—The master said that "those who are able to associate closely with a true Buddhist teacher are fortunate. No matter what they say or do, whether they are active or at rest, they are drawn deeper and deeper into the profundity of the master's enlightened mind." When I was a young monk, and hadn't yet penetrated to realization, I was unsure of those

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<sup>9</sup> Itsuzan Sonin, 1655–1718, a longtime attendant of Bankei who became one of his chief teaching heirs. See part one, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> From the Confucian Analects.

words about entering deeper into the master's mind. Much later, I came to know that they were true.

## 39

There was no fixed pattern in the master's everyday life. In the years after his death, Zen master Itsuzan, then staying at the Jizō-ji in Yamashina,<sup>11</sup> was visited by Zen master Kogetsu.<sup>12</sup> Kogetsu asked him repeatedly about Bankei's daily behavior.

—The master's daily life was altogether patternless, said Itsuzan. There was nothing out of the ordinary about him at all—he just remained in a state of *buji*.<sup>13</sup> But when he was responding to various different circumstances as he dealt with students, his limits were truly unfathomable. It has never been seen before, not even among the ancients.

Kogetsu heaved a sigh of admiration.

## 40

In his early thirties Bankei travelled to Kanazawa in the province of Kaga to pay a visit to Zen master Tesshin at the Tentoku-in.<sup>14</sup> He stayed for several days. One night, Tesshin calmly said:

—Do you remember the dialogue we had when we were studying with Dōsha? I'd like to go over that with you again.

—I see that the spiritual tortoise is still sweeping his tail through the mud,<sup>15</sup> said Bankei with a smile.

Tesshin just laughed.

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<sup>11</sup> A temple, located to the east of the city of Kyoto, rebuilt by Bankei and used by him as a personal retreat

<sup>12</sup> Kogetsu Zenzai 古月禪材, 1667–1751, was with Hakuin Ekaku one of the great Zen masters in the generation after Bankei.

<sup>13</sup> The word *buji* 無事, literally, "no matter," has been used with various connotations throughout Zen history. Here, it describes a man of profound spiritual attainment freed from all externalities; being master of all things, nothing "matters," or "happens" to him.

<sup>14</sup> Tesshin Dōin 鐵心道印 (1593–1680), was a well-known Sōtō priest and abbot of the Tentoku-in in the city of Kanazawa; he studied for a time with Dōsha Chōgen in Nagasaki during the same period Bankei was there (1651–52).

<sup>15</sup> The spiritual tortoise uses its tail to wipe away its footprints and conceal the whereabouts of its eggs; yet its tail still leaves traces in the sand: by extension, the phrase indicates a failure to achieve the totally traceless activity that characterizes authentic realization.

A monk named Sokan came for an interview.<sup>16</sup> After several exchanges, Bankei said:

—You're working on something that emerges *after* the appearance of Ion'ō Buddha.<sup>17</sup> What I teach is prior to before and after. You can't raise it into thought at all.

Bankei's student Sotei,<sup>18</sup> hearing this, suddenly shouted out:

—My immense debt to the Buddha-patriarchs has at last been paid!!

—The bystander got the greater part, said Bankei.

(Setsugai Sotei became one of Bankei's leading disciples. He was later awarded the honorary Zenji title Myō'ō.)

—Why does someone who is originally a Buddha suddenly become a sentient being? a priest asked

—It's a mistake on the part of his parents, said Bankei.

The monk couldn't understand.

Another monk, seated nearby, was also puzzled by Bankei's reply. After Bankei's death, he asked Zen master Itsuzan about it.

—It certainly is a marvelous response, said Itsuzan. It contains naturally all three of the essential Zen phrases.<sup>19</sup>

The monk still couldn't understand.

<sup>16</sup> Sokan 祖閑; nothing else is known about this monk.

<sup>17</sup> Ion'ō Buddha 威音王仏. The first of the Buddhas, who appeared infinitely far in the past, before the world emerged from chaos. Here, "after the appearance of Ion'ō" indicates "after the arising of mental discrimination."

<sup>18</sup> Setsugai Sotei 節外祖貞, 1641–1725, was Bankei's successor at the Kōrin-ji in Edo. A quotation from a well-known Zen work of the Sung, *Dale's Letters* (Daie-sho 大慧書) reads: "By realizing the highest, supreme enlightenment, you succeed to the vital wisdom that is the life of the Buddhas, and thereby repay the immense debt that you owe them."

<sup>19</sup> This is probably an allusion to the Three Phrases (sanku 三句) of Ummon Bun'en, 862–949 (Yun-men Wen-yen), formulated by one of his disciples, Tokusan Enmitsu (Te-shan Yuan-mi), to describe Ummon's basic Zen standpoint: (1) it covers all heaven and earth, and embraces all things; (2) it cuts away all passions and illusory thoughts; (3) it accords perfectly with all circumstances and conditions, while maintaining an attitude of total independence and freedom.

## 43

Once Bankei was sitting together with his attendants Sogaku, Shūin, and Sonin.<sup>20</sup>

—Are the fifty-two stages of Bodhisattva practice all clearly distinguished?<sup>21</sup> asked Sonin.

—How could they be otherwise? replied Sogaku.

Shūin said nothing, but nodded his agreement.

They appealed to Bankei.

—People who read sutras get caught in their web, said Bankei.

## 44

Layman Gessō made Bankei a present of a sweet melon.<sup>22</sup>

—This melon is so big that it encompasses heaven and earth, he said. Now where will you set your teeth?

—I'll give you the seeds back, Bankei replied.

Gessō roared with laughter.

## 45

Bankei was visited at the Kōrin-ji in Edo by Priest Seizan Eryō from Sendai and Zen master Daidō from Mino province. They remained for several days of interviews and dialogues, until, finally, all their questions were exhausted. Later, they were visiting Zen master Rokuon of the Tōzen-ji in Edo.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Daikei Kakkō, d. 1719; Reigen Shūin, 1653–1718; Itsuzan Sonin. See part one, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> The traditional division of Buddhist practice into stages, beginning with the unenlightened state and ending with Buddhahood.

<sup>22</sup> Layman Gessō (月窓居士 “Layman of the Moon Window”), Katō Yasuoki, Lord of Dewa, was one of Bankei's most devoted followers. He was the master of Ōzu castle in Iyo province (on the island of Shikoku), where he built a large temple, the Nyohō-ji, for Bankei. There is an allusion here to a famous dialogue between Layman Hō (P'ang; 740–808) and the priest Daibai (Ta-mei; 752–839). Layman Hō visited Daibai and asked him “whether the fruit was ripe” (the name Daibai literally means “Great Plum”). “It's ripe,” he answered. “Where will you set your teeth?” “I'll bite it into a hundred pieces,” replied the Layman. “Give me back the seeds,” said Daibai.

<sup>23</sup> The Kōrin-ji 光林寺 was one of Bankei's main temples. Seizan Eryō 西山慧亮, n.d., of the Zuigan-ji near Sendai; Daidō 大道 may perhaps refer to Daidō Koen 大圓

—I hear that you two have been to see Bankei. Is that true? Rokuon asked them.

—It is, they replied.

—What on earth made you do that? he asked.

—Because of the Matter of fundamental importance, said Eryō.

—He doesn't know the first thing about the fundamental Matter, declared Rokuon, who went on to deliver a withering denunciation of Bankei.

—You don't think we went there without good reason, do you? said Eryō.

—It doesn't matter, said Rokuon, raising his voice. What that fellow teaches is still utter nonsense!

—Then I have some questions for you, said Eryō. Do you think you can answer them?

—Go right ahead, said Rokuon. Let's hear them.

Eryō proceeded to examine Rokuon on several points, but when he heard Rokuon's responses, he said:

—Can't you do any better? That's not what I want to know.

—What were Bankei's responses like, then? replied Rokuon.

—We asked him over two dozen questions, said Eryō. His replies were perfectly free and spontaneous—they came like responses from a struck bell. Master Bankei transcends the present age. He is a great Zen teacher—like the men who lived prior to the Fifth Patriarch.<sup>24</sup>

—I have been ignorant of Bankei too long, said Rokuon with surprise. He thereupon sent two of his disciples, Sobai and Senri, to visit Bankei.<sup>25</sup> They had a thoroughgoing interview with the master, and returned deeply convinced of the truth of Eryō's assessment.

## 46

Bankei's disciple Soen was by nature extremely steady and reliable.<sup>26</sup> His everyday conduct was faultless. On the Dharma battlefield he was a

古彌, d. 1723, of the Kokoku-ji in the city of Gifu. Rokuon Kan'yo 鹿苑開善, d. 1700, of the Tōzen-ji in Edo, served also as head abbot of the Myōshin-ji in Kyoto.

<sup>24</sup> The fifth Chinese Zen patriarch Hung-jen 弘仁 (Gunin), 601–674.

<sup>25</sup> Nan'ei Sobai 南榮祖梅, d. 1744, succeeded Rokuon at the Tōzen-ji; later served as head abbot of the Myōshin-ji. Nothing is known about Senri 千里.

<sup>26</sup> Yūhō Soen 融峯祖円.



stalwart and eager campaigner. But Bankei found it necessary to caution him frequently for being too free in offering his opinions. His outspokenness was conspicuous particularly at times when the Dharma was being discussed. As this tendency remained unchanged despite repeated scoldings, Bankei ordered him to leave the training hall. After many pleadings and professions of repentance, Soen was at length allowed to rejoin the brotherhood. But the old habits soon reasserted themselves and Bankei banished him again. This was repeated several times. At the time, people could not understand the reason for the measures that Bankei took, but I think he did it because of his deep compassion for Soen; he was trying to show him the correct deportment for a disciple in pursuing the Buddha Way.

Soen fell seriously ill during the great Ryūmon-ji retreat of 1690. He was close to death when Bankei went to visit him in the Enjudō (the hall for sick monks). Sitting by his pillow, Bankei said:

—Soen, every day that one lives is to be lived for the sake of others.

Soen nodded in agreement. Soon afterward he died. No one could fathom the true significance of Bankei's words of consolation.

## 47

In his early thirties, Bankei was staying at the Sanyū-ji, a temple located in Okayama, Bitchū province.<sup>27</sup> The daimyo, Lord Ikeda, was a zealous champion of the teachings of Wang Yang-ming.<sup>28</sup> His infatuation with the Neo-Confucian philosopher finally led him to order the expulsion of Buddhist priests from the province and the destruction of their temples. The priests who remained behind to train their monks would confront the bands of samurai who came to evict them with wild outbursts of Zen rhetoric and drive them away.

A group of these Neo-Confucian samurai came to the Sanyū-ji to interrogate Bankei.

—You Zen people create these refuges like this for yourselves, one of them said. Then you ensconce yourselves in them and turn your backs on the world. When you fail to succeed with reason and run out of words,

<sup>27</sup> The temple of Bankei's brother disciple Bokuō Sogyō.

<sup>28</sup> Ikeda Mitsumasa, 1609–1683, ardently championed the anti-Buddhist teachings of the Japanese Neo-Confucianist Kumazawa Banzan, but it does not appear that he actually embarked on a wholesale destruction of Buddhist temples.

you hit people with your staffs and shout at them. These temples have become breeding grounds a race of stubborn, parasitical frauds.

—When Confucianists fail to get their way with reason and run out of words, what do they do? asked Bankei.

The samurai hesitated, not knowing what to say.

Bankei hit him with his staff.—Ah! he remarked admiringly. A truly life-giving staff!

Bankei's response came like the spark from a struck flint. It left the samurai gasping for breath.

## 48

As a young monk, Bankei travelled to the Daian-ji in the province of Echizen to visit Zen master Daigu.<sup>29</sup>

—Welcome Jari! Daigu said with a smile. I hear that your attainment is ripe.

During Bankei's stay, which lasted for several days, he was treated with great hospitality. A monk who was staying at the Daian-ji at the time, asked Daigu:

—Where do we return when our physical body disperses?

—How do I know? replied Daigu with a sigh.

Afterwards he asked Bankei the same question.

—Daigu's answer cannot be betrayed, Bankei replied.

## 49

On his way back to Nagasaki in his thirty-third year, Bankei stopped off for a few days at the Tafuku-ji in Bungo province<sup>30</sup> to visit Zen master Kengan. The two men took the opportunity to talk over old times. Kengan had a layman with him who had been coming to him day and night for several days seeking help in understanding the koan about "the sameness of sleeping and waking."<sup>31</sup> But as he was still no closer to grasping it, Kengan deferred the matter to Bankei. Bankei called out

<sup>29</sup> Daigu Sōchiku 大愚宗策, 1584–1669, of the Daian-ji 大安寺; later head abbot of the Myōshin-ji. One of the most highly regarded Rinzai teachers of the seventeenth century. *Jari* is a respectful form sometimes used when addressing a priest.

<sup>30</sup> Bankei revisited Dōsha Chōgen in Nagasaki in 1655. Kengan Zen'etsu 賢巖禪悦, 1623–1701, of the Tafuku-ji 多福寺. Bungo is in present Ōita prefecture (Kyushu).

<sup>31</sup> The koan *gomi kōichi* 磨寐恒一, as given in the *Kattō shū*, no. 34, reads: "In the *Shuryōgon Sutra*, it says: 'Whether waking or sleeping, it is always the same.'"

to the layman and asked him to come forward. When he responded, Bankei said:

—Is that sameness? Or is it difference?

The layman pressed his head to the ground in a deep bow, utterly convinced by the words Bankei had spoken to him.

—How swiftly he responds to the occasion, sighed Kengan in admiration.

## 50

Nanryō, a senior priest of the Sōtō sect, was visiting the Gyokuryū-ji in Mino province.<sup>32</sup> Addressing himself to Bankei, he pointed to the teaching seat with his fan.

—How will you walk past that? he said.

—What place is it? Bankei replied.

—Unborn, undying, said Nanryō.

—You mistake those noble words, said Bankei.

—Travelling all over the country, at your age, said the old priest in a loud voice. Why must you go on confusing and deceiving lay men and women!

—When you view things with an eye that is confused, Bankei replied, they will naturally appear confused to you.

The priest withdrew, but presently he reappeared and went and prostrated himself gratefully before Bankei. He was now a firm believer in his teaching.

## 51

In his middle thirties, Bankei was giving a night talk to several of the monks in the Chikurin-ken.<sup>33</sup> During a pause in the talk, amidst a perfect stillness, a boar's tusk that was lying on top of the table suddenly started hopping up and down and emitting sounds. Bankei roared with laughter. The monks marvelled at the strangeness of it.

## 52

In his late thirties, Bankei was residing at the Kaian-ji, a temple in his

<sup>32</sup> Nanryō 南龍; nothing is known of him. For the Gyokuryū-ji, see part one, p. 106, fn. 28.

<sup>33</sup> See fn. 6.

native village of Hamada.<sup>34</sup> A messenger arrived from Lord Katō, the daimyo of Iyo province. Bankei ordered his attendant Sokyō to peel off a sheet of paper from a spot on the wall where he had previously had him paste it.<sup>35</sup> Underneath was found the following inscription: *On such and such a day, in such and such a month, a messenger will arrive from Lord Katō.* Bankei had foreseen that the man would come, and had known the date of his arrival down to the exact day. People were amazed. But it was not an isolated incident in Bankei's life; in his younger days, strange and unusual feats were common. Later, however, he ceased to display such powers, fearing that they might be the cause of strange rumours that would be harmful to his students. From then on there was nothing out of the ordinary about his behavior. His life to all appearances was normal in every way.

## 53

In his early thirties, Bankei used to practice at a hermitage in the mountains of Hitachi.<sup>36</sup> During one of his visits there, he said to a monk who was staying with him:

—It's unusually cold this winter. Old Umpo is advanced in years.<sup>37</sup> I'm concerned about his health. Besides that, last night in Osaka, the wife of my student Enni passed away.<sup>38</sup> I received their kindness and charity for many years. I want to go and offer my condolences.

—I came here to share this hut and practice with you because I perceived that you were a man of the Way, the monk replied reproachfully, his face coloring. Osaka is many days distant from here. You couldn't know that someone died there yesterday. Why do you try to pull such shameless tricks, you lying bonze!

<sup>34</sup> The Kaian-ji was a temple in Aboshi where Bankei lived for a time prior to the building of the Ryūmon-ji. For Lord Katō, see fn. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Tairyō Sokyō 大梁祖教, 1638–1688, became Bankei's chief disciple and successor at the Ryūmon-ji, but died before Bankei. His untimely death was a great disappointment for Bankei. He is reported to have said: "I have lost both my arms."

<sup>36</sup> Later the Gyokuryū-ji. See part one, p. 106, fn. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Bankei's teacher Umpo Zenjō 雲甫全祥, 1571–1653; founder of the Zuiō-ji 隨興寺 in Akō, near the city of Himeji. This incident probably occurred in Bankei's thirty-third year.

<sup>38</sup> Layman Enni (Enni Koji 圓爾居士; d. 1664).

—In that case, said Bankei, come along with me. Then there can't be any doubts about it.

So the two men set out together. When they arrived in Osaka, the monk said:

—If it isn't true, I'm going to rip those priest's robes right off your back.

—Go ahead, said Bankei.

Upon arriving at the house, Bankei sent word that he had come. Enni, overjoyed, hastened to the entrance to greet him.

—I had been hoping for several days that you would come, he said. My wife passed away and tomorrow is the ceremony in observance of the seventh day.<sup>39</sup> Your presence here is an answer to my prayers.

Bankei glanced at his travelling companion. All trace of his former contempt and scorn had vanished.

—I promise to follow you for the rest of my life, he declared humbly.

Bankei then resumed his journey, but he arrived at the Zuiō-ji to find that Umpo had passed away the night before. When the funeral was over, he completed his mourning at the foot of Umpo's reliquary tower.

54

Bankei spoke from the teaching seat at the Gyokuryū-ji to encourage the assembly:

—This is an excellent opportunity for each of you to encounter the true Dharma and obtain the guidance of a genuine teacher. How fortunate you are. But you must be diligent and not allow this chance to pass you by. Once you fall among the feathered, hairy, and horned tribes, you cannot expect to escape. . . .

Shun, a priest from Suruga,<sup>40</sup> spoke up:

—Master, you said that once we fall from our present form into the animal realm we have no hope of ever leaving that state. Is that right?

—Indeed it is, said Bankei.

Bankei resumed his talk. Shun stopped him again and asked the same question.

—What I said is true, Bankei replied.

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<sup>39</sup> According to Japanese Buddhist custom, services are held for the deceased seven days following the death.

<sup>40</sup> Shun 尊.

Shun interrupted three more times. Finally, Bankei said:

—I cannot understand why you persist in repeating that same question. I told you that you can have no hope of leaving the animal realm once you have fallen into it. Why can't you understand that?

He then resumed his talk again, but Shun soon stopped him yet again:

—What about the story of Hyakujō's Fox?<sup>41</sup>

—Forget about Hayakujō's fox, said Bankei raising his voice. Right this minute, you've become a fox yourself!

Bowing his head meekly, Shun withdrew with tears in his eyes.

55

Thirteen hundred people gathered for the ninety-day retreat held at the Ryūmon-ji in 1690. Bankei took the teaching seat and delivered sermons three or four times each month. Four or five thousand people, from each of the four classes in the Buddhist community—men and women, both lay and cleric—came and listened intently to his teaching. Their hearts were filled with respect and admiration for him. Following one of the sermons, a monk came forward and said:

—In my practice I chant the Dharani of Radiant Light.<sup>42</sup> I chant it continuously day and night, until my body begins to emit a golden radiance. . . .

—That 'golden radiance' of yours is the flames your evil passions produce as they consume you, said Bankei reprovably.

The priest sheepishly withdrew.

People in the audience looked at one another.

—That priest was experiencing a demonic fantasy, they said. It's a good thing for him that he encountered the master's skillful means.

*(This is clarified in the Maka Hannya Haramitta Sutra [Chapter on Evil Things], Shuryōgon Sutra,<sup>43</sup> and other scriptures. They describe two kinds of demonic fantasy (makyō), inner and outer. The delusion from which this*

<sup>41</sup> Hyakujō's Fox, the second koan in the *Mumonkan* (Wu-men kuan) collection. When a monk was asked by his master if an enlightened man was subject to cause and effect, he answered that he was not, and as a result he was reborn as a fox for five hundred lives. He appeared among the assembly of the Zen master Hyakujō and was delivered from this retribution by hearing Hyakujō's teaching.

<sup>42</sup> The full title of this dharani is: 不空罽索毘盧遮那佛大灌頂光明真言經: Taisho 19:606.

<sup>43</sup> The *Maha Prajna-Paramita Sutra* and *Shurangama Sutra*.

*priest suffered belonged to the former type. A single word from a true teacher delivered him immediately from that illusory state. We must deeply venerate a teacher of such virtue.*

## 56

During the winter retreat of 1684 at the Kōrin-ji in Edo, Bankei's disciple Sonin<sup>44</sup> was in the Monks' Hall reciting the *Diamond Sutra* at the afternoon sutra-chanting. When he came to the place that says, "There is nothing, not even the smallest dharma, to obtain—that is called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment,"<sup>45</sup> he suddenly had an enlightenment experience. Without knowing what he was doing, he cast aside his sutra book and proceeded to the abbot's chambers. As he attempted to express his realization to Bankei, he was trembling so badly he was unable to utter the words.

—I can see with my own eyes, said Bankei. I don't have to rely on what you tell me.

Sonin made three bows and retired.

A few days later, Sonin was in attendance on Bankei. They began talking.

—You have always taught me that illusion and enlightenment do not exist, said Sonin. But viewing matters from where I stand today, I believe that even the great Zen masters of the past must have reached a time when they penetrated to enlightenment.

—What this old priest tells you, said Bankei, expresses the Matter just as it is in itself, without defiling it by smearing it with mud. There is a time and place when each person comes to grasp it. That is the way it has always been, throughout the past and present. . . .

## 57

A samurai came to the Kōrin-ji for an interview. Raising up the fan in his hand, he said:

—This thing comes from the world of being. It is called a fan. Originally, it is nothing. Would you know what it was at the instant that it descended suddenly from heaven?

<sup>44</sup> Itsuzan Sonin, fn. 9; Kōrin-ji, fn. 23.

<sup>45</sup> This passage occurs near the end of the sutra.

—Yes, said Bankei.

—What kind of knowing is that? he said.

—Knowing its unknowableness, said Bankei.

—But the great sages have said that not knowing the unknown is true knowing, said the samurai, sucking in his breath.

—Not so, said Bankei, with a shake of the head.

## 58

Bankei addressed the assembly at the Nyohō-ji:<sup>46</sup>

—All of you are blessed with the great karmic fortune of encountering a true teacher, so that you can enter the right Path directly, without wearing out your straw sandals making pilgrimages, without expending your energy following the empty air-flowers of ascetic practice. You are indeed fortunate. Do not let this chance pass idly by.

—I understand what you are telling us, said a monk. But I have a question. To me, it is like a man wanting to leave a city by fording a river. He must walk a distance. He must also make use of a boat in order to cross the water. Unless he performs those actions, there is no way that he can leave the precincts of the city.

—*But here it is—right here*, said Bankei. *There's no getting there or not getting there.* This is what Zen calls the Gate of Sudden Enlightenment. If you hesitate, you lose it. If you walk after it, you draw farther away from it.

## 59

In the fifth year of Genroku (1692), when Bankei was staying at the Gyokuryū-ji in Mino province, he was visited by the Sōtō Zen master Yui'e. Part of the conversation that took place during this interview has been given before.<sup>47</sup> Yui'e also asked Bankei about the Five Ranks of the T'ang master Tōzan Ryōkai:<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Nyohō-ji 如法寺, one of Bankei's three main temples, located in the city of Ōzu (Shikoku).

<sup>47</sup> Yui'e Dōjō 惟惠道定, 1634–1713; studied as a young monk with Ōbaku teachers, including Dōsha and Ingen, before becoming a Sōtō priest. He appeared in part one, p. 106.

<sup>48</sup> The Five Ranks (*Goi* 五位) were formulated by the T'ang monk Tōzan Ryōkai (T'ung-shan Liang-chieh); the Lord and Vassal (*Kunshin* 君臣) is a parallel commentary



—Tōzan's statements about the Five Ranks, Lord and Vassal, and so on, are teaching tools used by the Dharma masters of my school. They frequently use them arbitrarily, bending them to suit their purposes. What is your opinion of that?

—Tōzan was one of the Zen masters of the past who had gained perfect freedom in the exercise of the Dharma, replied Bankei. Those statements were used as he was dealing carefully with his students. They are just dregs—mere leftovers. They are not essential.

—Do you mean that the Five Ranks, the Three Essentials and Three Mysteries, and the rest, are all unnecessary? Just meaningless phrases? said Yui'e.

—Any interpretation that you set up and fix as the truth becomes meaningless phrases, said Bankei. It's not just a matter of parroting the patriarchs' words.

60

In the winter of 1689, members of the priesthood and laity including large numbers of samurai and farmers gathered for the winter practice retreat at the Sanyū-ji in Okayama, Bizen province, to receive Bankei's instruction. Every day the roads leading to the Sanyū-ji were filled with long processions of pilgrims. A priest from a Nichiren temple in the area, who was jealous of Bankei's success, arrived at the meeting with a score of his followers. He was determined to discredit Bankei and disprove his teaching. When Bankei ascended to the teaching seat to give his talk, the Nichiren priest stepped forward.

—Many of the people who have come here may trust in you and believe your teaching, he said. I do not accept it. What do you do then?

—Would you move a little closer? said Bankei.

The priest moved closer.

—Come closer, said Bankei.

The priest moved towards him.

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on the Five Ranks by Tōzan's heir Sōzan Honjaku (Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi). They were used later in China and Japan in both Rinzai and Sōtō sects as aids for koan practice. The Three Essentials (*San'yō* 三要) and Three Mysteries (*Sangen* 三玄) derive from a passage in the Records of Rinzai (*Lin-chi lu*): "Each statement must comprise the three mysteries; each mystery must comprise the three essentials." See *Zen Dust*, Miura and Sasaki, p. 62.

—You see, you aren't going against what I teach at all, said Bankei. The priest withdrew stupidly without saying another word.

## 61

A priest visited Bankei at the Gyokuryū-ji in Mino.

—Zen masters like Daie and Engo used koans to teach their students.<sup>49</sup> Why don't you use them? he asked.

—What did the masters who lived prior to Daie and Engo use? Bankei replied.

The priest could make no response.

Somewhat later, Bankei said:

—Zen teachers confound later generations of students with their endless verbal complications. The harm they do extends to their descendents far in the future. The sad truth of the matter is that for the past three hundred years now both teachers and students have mistaken these verbal complications as something fixed and unchanging and have regarded them as being fundamental to their true self. They're all of them the same. They pass their entire lives deceiving themselves and deceiving others. The teachers in the past who were endowed with the Dharma Eye acted directly, without relying on Zen stories or koans. They made their students achieve the effortless freedom of marvelous activity through brisk and vital means. What do you see today? The men who hold sway as Dharma masters erect their stalls and set up shop in them; then they wield their staffs, or roar out loud khats! or throw Zen words and phrases indiscriminately about. Engaging in these pointless and ineffectual acts, imagining them to be the vital activity of the Zen Way, they stimulate their students to ever wilder and more nonsensical behavior, making them completely irresponsible and intemperate, and pushing them in the end into a bottomless black pit. How deplorable that the Buddha's Dharma has come to this!

## 62

At the Gyokuryū-ji in Mino, a monk asked:

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<sup>49</sup> Engo Kokugon (Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in, 1063–1135) and his heir Daie Sōkō (Ta-hui Tsung-kao, 1089–1163) were two important Rinzai priests of the Sung dynasty; they are regarded as having made the koan system a firmly established part of Rinzai training.

—Tokusan and Rinzai taught students through the discipline of the staff and khat!<sup>50</sup> Why don't you, master?

—The freedom I've gained with this three-inch drum of mine is all I need when I deal with students, said Bankei. No one who sails into my port stays around very long.

## 63

Katō Yasuoki, Lord of Dewa (also known by his lay Buddhist name Gessō, Layman of the Moon Window),<sup>51</sup> greatly venerated Bankei. He built a temple, the Nyohō-ji, and invited Bankei to be its first head abbot. A Zen practitioner of long years' standing, Lord Katō's daily activity was marked by a total detachment from all things of the world. This extended even to his fief, castle, wife, and children. His entire existence to the marrow of his being was devoted to the cause of others.

Once, when Bankei had shut himself up for a period of practice inside the Ōshi-ken,<sup>52</sup> Layman Gessō came wanting to see him, but Bankei refused to grant him an audience. Gessō just went and sat for a while in the Zen Hall and then returned home. This situation continued for several months until Gessō began to despair of ever seeing the master. He remarked to one of the ranking elder priests:

—I throw myself into the Matter with body and soul—there is nothing else for me. The Dharma accord that exists between me and the master is not in any way inferior to the master-disciple relationships found among the ancients. I don't believe that I have ever done anything to betray his trust. I would be obliged to you and the other priests if you could provide some hint as to the master's thinking.

The old priest, whose name was Sotetsu,<sup>53</sup> said:

—People in the temple don't know exactly what the master is trying to point out to you. I can only give you one word of advice.

—Tell me, said Gessō. Please tell me.

—Well, said Sotetsu, I think it may be that you still have a bit left.

<sup>50</sup> Tokusan Senkan (Te-shan Hsuan-chien) and Rinzai Gigen (Lin-chi I-hsuan). The "three-inch drum" is the tongue.

<sup>51</sup> See fn. 22.

<sup>52</sup> A hall, located in the hills behind the Nyohō-ji, where Bankei trained small numbers of picked disciples.

<sup>53</sup> Jitsudō Sotetsu 實道祖徹, n.d.; nothing else is known of him.

Gessō promptly acknowledged the priest's evaluation of his spiritual progress. Sotetsu reported this to Bankei, who thereupon granted Gessō his long-awaited interview. Gessō could not conceal his great elation.

The benefit Layman Gessō gained at this time was indeed considerable.

## 64

As a young man, Bankei spent the better part of a year studying with Zen master Dōsha Chōgen at the Sōfuku-ji in Nagasaki.<sup>54</sup> Two of his brother monks at that time were Genkō of the Sōtō sect and Egoku of the Ōbaku sect,<sup>55</sup> who also served with him as Dōsha's attendants. When Dōsha presented Bankei with a verse acknowledging his enlightenment,<sup>56</sup> it caused a considerable stir. The lines were soon on everyone's lips. Some years after Dōsha returned to China, when Genkō and Egoku, then Zen masters themselves, were compiling a collection of Dōsha's recorded sayings, Genkō sent a monk to the Kōrin-ji in Edo, where Bankei was then staying, to ask if he would allow the verse to be published among Dōsha's records.

—It's up to you, Bankei said. Use it if you want to.

Later, when Genkō published a work of his own entitled the *Dokuan Dokugo Shū*,<sup>57</sup> he sent a copy of it to Bankei, but Bankei did not even honor the gift with a reply. Some months passed. A messenger came from Genkō to find out the reason for Bankei's silence.

—Tell Genkō, said Bankei, he can consider my not answering him as a blow from my staff.

<sup>54</sup> Dōsha arrived in Nagasaki in 1651. While serving as abbot of the Sōfuku-ji, he taught many monks who went on to distinguish themselves in Japanese Zen. He was forced to return to China six years later. See fn. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Dokuan Genkō 獨庵玄光, 1630–1698; a leading Sōtō scholar-priest of the Tokugawa period. Egoku Dōmyō 惠極道明, d. 1721, later became an important disciple of the Chinese Ōbaku priest Mu-an (Mokuan).

<sup>56</sup> The jade fowl breaks free of its shell;  
A glorious Celestial Phoenix emerges.  
A felicitous event seen by all men and devas—  
Whose Mind-eyes then open of themselves.

<sup>57</sup> *Dokuan Dokugo Shū* 獨庵獨語集 ("Solitary Talks from Solitary Hermitage"). A well-known collection of Buddhist essays first published in 1683. It was one of the few Japanese Zen works widely read in China. Dokuan served at several temples, including the Kyōzan-ji in Kawachi (near Osaka).

Zen master Dokuan Genkō of the Kyōzan-ji was widely known at the time as a Buddhist teacher of exceptional learning. People marvelled at the manner of Bankei's reply.

I think that it is impossible to discern the full intent of the praise or blame spoken by a teacher like Bankei, for within his words is concealed a truly treacherous meaning.

## 65

Taking part in the winter retreat of 1690 at the Ryūmon-ji<sup>58</sup> were thirteen hundred priests, representing all the Buddhist sects. Altogether, there were five or six thousand men and women, from all ranks of society and each of the four classes in the Buddhist community. Bankei ascended to the teaching seat frequently to give his talks. He was completely surrounded by the great multitude of people. Questions flew at him from every direction—like a rain of arrows. He answered them one by one, the words issuing from his mouth like the retort of an echo. After six or seven such sessions, Bankei told the assembly to cease their questions.

—If you throw such a great variety of questions at me, I must give them each a simple answer. When that happens, I'm unable to reach everyone in the audience. I can't benefit you all. So close your mouths and listen to what I have to say. No matter how many doubts and uncertainties you have, they will dissolve of themselves.

With that the questions ceased, and Bankei, speaking with great sincerity and care, proceeded to tell the vast assembly gathered before him about his teaching of the Unborn.

From that time forth, accompanied by one of his attendants, he made the rounds of the training halls each night. Fifteen training halls had been readied within the temple precincts. In one of them, Bankei permitted students to come for night interviews. To encourage them, he said:

—You should come forward and tell me what is bothering you. Whatever it is, do not hesitate to ask me about it. It is extremely difficult for a student to find a true teacher. You could put on a pair of iron sandals right now and make a pilgrimage over the entire country. You could even go on to visit China or India. You could make a thousand pilgrimages in a thousand different lands, but you would never be able to find another

<sup>58</sup> 龍門寺. Bankei's main temple.

person who could give you the teaching I am giving you now. So do not hang back. Take it and put it into practice! . . .

All those present felt an extreme reverence for Bankei. None of them ever forgot the teaching they received from him. How regrettable that no record was made of this meeting and the wonderful golden words uttered by the master as he went from hall to hall responding directly to his students and answering their questions.

## 66

Bankei gave a talk at the Kōrin-ji. A visiting monk, who had come to the temple for an interview, listened intently and then said:

—I agree on the whole with what you say. I don't have any trouble with the idea that Amida exists in our own body, either. But isn't the statement in the scriptures<sup>59</sup> about the Western Paradise being thousands of millions of Buddha-lands distant from here is an expedient teaching?<sup>60</sup>

—No, replied Bankei.

—Then I still don't understand what you mean, he said.

—It's a direct utterance of truth preached for the sake of deluded beings, Bankei replied.

## 67

One day when Bankei was in Edo at the Kōrin-ji, a priest from one of the esoteric Buddhist schools paid him a visit and stayed to listen to one of his talks. As Bankei was explaining to the assembly that anger turned them into fighting spirits and ignorance into animals,<sup>61</sup> and that this was an inescapable truth, the priest spoke up:

—What you have just said is different from the central Buddhist idea of the Dharma-body."

—How is that? said Bankei.

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<sup>59</sup> See entry 32.

<sup>60</sup> Expedient teaching: the various means or devices a teacher uses to lead students toward enlightenment and mature their consciousness for the reception of ultimate truth; the idea generally being that such means are used because the students would be unable to grasp the truth were it preached to them directly.

<sup>61</sup> This is a recurrent theme in Bankei's talks. See *Unborn, The Life and Teachings of Zen Master Bankei*, North Point Press, 1984, pp. 34–90.

—In the 'Abiding Mind' chapter of the *Maha-Vairochana Sutra*,<sup>62</sup> the priest replied, it says that man's lusting, contentious, ignorant nature is itself the Buddha-nature.

—So is that what you are doing now? said Bankei.

The priest was speechless.

## 69

Bankei made several visits to the province of Hizen to teach in the Fumon-ji, the family temple of the ruling Matsuura clan. Lord Matsuura, an assiduous student of Zen, deeply venerated Bankei.<sup>63</sup> On one of Bankei's visits, Lord Matsuura bowed before him and said:

—Master, I wish to repay you for the incomparable gift of your Dharma teaching. All that I have—fief, castle, wife and children—mean nothing compared to the debt that I owe you.

—Well then, said Bankei, will you undertake to uphold the precept against sexual incontinence?

Lord Matsuura's eyes dropped in embarrassment. Hesitating for a moment, he said:

—I will uphold it scrupulously.

## 70

Bankei's disciple Tsūyō was a scrupulous and conscientious man,<sup>64</sup> but his attention was taken up to an excessive degree with trivial tasks around the temple. He would pick up grains of rice from the floor of the grain-pounding room. He would retrieve scraps that had fallen by the well when the vegetables were washed. Bankei admonished him for this, but Tsūyō was still unable to refrain from searching the kitchen floors for odd bits

<sup>62</sup> *Maha-Vairochana Sutra*; one of the principal scriptures of Japanese esoteric Buddhism.

<sup>63</sup> The province of Hizen was located in the northern part of the island of Kyushu. The person involved here is probably not Bankei's disciple Matsuura Shigenobu, 1622–1703, but his son Takashi; the episode dates from Bankei's final years. A note in the *Bankei zenji itsuwa shū*, zoku hen ("A collection of anecdotes concerning Zen master Bankei," book two: Tokyo, Nakayama shobo, 1975), pp. 17–18, by the editor Akao Ryūji, provides the information that the daimyo of the time kept many concubines, and suggests that Bankei was cautioning Lord Matsuura on this point. See part one, fn. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Tsūyō 通要; nothing else is known of him.

of food and patrolling back corridors for particles of refuse. Bankei finally ordered him to leave the assembly. Although Tsūyō pleaded with the senior priest Tairyō to intercede for him, Bankei refused to reverse his decision. Considerable time passed. Tsūyō continued to beg forgiveness. Bankei at last relented and let him rejoin the assembly. When he came forward and made his bows, Bankei said with a smile:

—Well, I haven't seen you for a long time, Tsūyō. I have thought about you. I see that your old back is still bothering you.

Everyone present was deeply moved by the depth of Bankei's love and compassion for his elderly disciple.

I think that the master recognized Tsūyō's small capacity. Out of compassion for him, he stood resolutely by his decision, as a means of guiding him.

## 71

A priest said:

—You teach a great deal about sudden enlightenment, yet you say nothing about the aspect of gradual training. Zen master Daie of the Sung said:<sup>65</sup> *"The ruling principle is sudden enlightenment; but in practice matters are disposed of gradually."*

—Do you think that you can compare someone like Daie with this old priest? said Bankei. *"At one stroke, previous knowledge is all forgotten, No practice is needed for this!"*<sup>66</sup>—Now what about that!! Right at this moment students everywhere in the land are glued fast to words like 'instant enlightenment,' and 'gradual practice.' They bind themselves all up when there's not even any rope, totally restricting their ability to move either backward or forward. Ah, how regrettable that a few phrases uttered from the mouth of a Buddhist teacher can leave later generations of students crying in confusion at the crossroads.

<sup>65</sup> See fn. 49. I have been unable to trace the source of this quotation.

<sup>66</sup> Well-known lines from the enlightenment verse of Kyōgen Chikan 香嚴智閑 (Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien), a ninth-century monk who attained enlightenment upon hearing the sound of a pebble strike a bamboo trunk.