

Dōgen, Hakuin, Bankei

Three Types of Thought in Japanese Zen

Part II

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WHEN we isolate two objects of a comparison as absolutes abstracted from their contexts, we do not see things in a true light. Whoever or whatever it may be has emerged from within a certain historical milieu, and this also ought to be taken into our comparative considerations. We should not limit ourselves merely to general historical circumstances; in the case of a person, for example, we should consider the many areas he as an individual lived in actual contact with. When we come to compare the Zen of Dōgen and Bankei, therefore, instead of treating their teachings as isolated entities, we find an even deeper interest is obtained by examining the paths the two men travelled prior to the time they began to expound their own Zen teachings. I think that while a straight comparison of *shikan taza* ("just sitting") and the Unborn also deserves separate study of its own, we should beyond that look into the circumstances which led Dōgen to become the exponent of *shikan taza*, and those which brought Bankei to advocate his Unborn Zen. In that way, the truths embodied in each of their Zen teachings should come to be demonstrated, *taza* and the Unborn each on their own terms. I think then we will be able to appreciate the place each holds and the meaning each possesses with regard to Zen as a whole.

Let us first take a look at the process by which Dōgen was led to declare that "negotiating the Way in *zazen*" (*zazen-bendō*), that is, just sitting, is the sole way of Zen practice, and at how Bankei was brought to proclaim that in

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all the many generations of enlightened Zen patriarchs, there was until him no one who had "given real proof of the Unborn."

As for the teaching Dōgen received from his master Ju-ching (Nyojō) during his two-year stay in China at the T'ien-t'ung monastery, it may be summed up in words he reiterates again and again in his writings: "Cross-legged sitting is the Dharma of old buddhas. Commitment to Zen (*sanzen*) is body and mind dropping off. Offering incense, making bows, nembutsu, penances and reading sutras are unneeded. It is only attained in just sitting." His practice under Ju-ching was pursued in accordance with this teaching.

Ju-ching told him that he should bring his mind into his left hand when he did zazen. This is a zazen technique based on the same psychological principles as the Contemplation on the Letter A and the Moon Contemplation found in the Shingon sect. In the Shingon practices, however, one places the object of meditation at some distance from oneself; in the meditation taught by Ju-ching, it is not apart from one's body. From the sources now available to us it is unclear just how, according to that technique, Dōgen was supposed to conceive the mind as it rested on the palm of the hand. Was it as some sort of crystalline sphere? Or was it just as something present there? We have no way of determining this for certain. But we may nonetheless assume that the meditation was a question of concentrating the mind on the palm of the hand.

After practicing this method of meditation for a period of time, Dōgen went and reported to Ju-ching: "I did as you taught me and both my hands disappeared. There is no place to put my mind." Ju-ching replied with the following advice: "In that case, from now on make your mind fill your entire body. Fill it so there isn't a single empty place anywhere."

"To fill the body with the mind"—how does one go about doing that? Here there can be no question of the mind as a crystalline sphere. Neither may we imagine it as having a vaporous or liquid quality. Hakuin describes in his late work *Tasenkanna* a method of meditation he learned from Hakuyū, a hermit he found living in the mountains northeast of Kyoto, in which one is to imagine a lump of butter on his head slowly melting down to cover his whole body.¹ With Dōgen, though, what was the real essence of what he called

¹ There is an English translation of *Tasenkanna* ("A Chat on a Boat in the Evening") by R.D.M. Shaw, in *The Embossed Tea Kettle*, Allen & Unwin 1963, pp. 25-48.

“mind”? All we can say is, whatever it was, by virtue of the sort of practice described above he was one day able to go to Ju-ching with the information that, “As a result of making my mind spread throughout my body as you directed me to, my body and mind have completely dropped away. It’s like the sun spreading its light throughout the great sky, its round shape unseen.” When he heard this, Ju-ching confirmed Dōgen’s attainment: “You have gained today true emancipation, and have entered into great samadhi. Keep and preserve this truth. Do not lose it.”

In a work entitled *Nihon tōjō rensō roku* (“Records of the Succession of the Lamp in the Japanese Sōtō School”)² we are given a slightly different version:

One night, when Ju-ching was going around the zazen hall, he saw a monk in zazen dropping off to sleep. He rebuked him: “Commitment to Zen calls for the falling off of body and mind. What good will it do you, just sleeping like that!” Dōgen who was sitting nearby and heard this, suddenly became one with Enlightenment.

At daybreak he went to the abbot’s quarters and offered incense. Ju-ching said, “Well, what about it?” Dōgen said, “Body and mind dropping off.” Ju-ching said, “Body and mind dropping off, dropping off body and mind.” Dōgen said, “This is merely a temporary bypath I’ve entered, master. Do not give me your seal of approval without due cause.” Ju-ching said, “I do not approve you without due cause.” Dōgen said, “What do you indicate by your not giving approval without due cause?” Ju-ching said, “Dropping off body and mind.”

Despite the discrepancies between this and the version I related above, what is certain is that Dōgen experienced the state of “body and mind dropping off” (*shinjin datsuraku*). If we grant that his efforts to make his mind pervade his whole body was the method which induced this experience, an interesting notion then suggests itself. In contrast to the meditative practices of the Shingon sect which are objective and realistic, the one performed by

² 日本洞上禪燈錄. 12 fasc. A standard work of the Japanese Sōtō school, giving the lives of over 700 Sōtō priests beginning with Dōgen.

Dōgen is subjective and psychological. Although we do not know how Dōgen or Ju-ching actually conceived the mind in trying to make it permeate the body, it seems obvious they were regarding mind and body as two things. The result achieved through this meditation was the forgetting of body and mind, though perhaps to say "falling off" is preferable to "forgetting," inasmuch as forgetting implies something of a psychological nature, something conscious. Falling off suggests that something which has been covering over or attached to, or binding and burdening one externally as in a state of discrimination, now drops or falls away. In Dōgen's own recording of the event, he tells us that this falling off was complete and thorough-going. Yet we see no appearance of anything positive or affirmative. "Body and mind dropping off, dropping off body and mind" represents negation. He makes no mention of anything emerging beyond this negation. We may compare his utterance with the declaration of the T'ang Zen master Yang-shan, to the effect that "skin and flesh fall completely away, there is nothing but the one reality," where the "one reality" becomes manifest. In Dōgen's utterance, something is lacking. There is no way that "just sitting," if it ends in the experience of mind and body dropping off, can avoid being mere "Silent Illumination," taking that designation in a pejorative sense. Why is it he did not direct his effort affirmatively toward the "one reality"? Was it perhaps that the realization of this reality, which emerges spontaneously when one experiences psychologically liberation from the fetters of the dualistic consciousness of body and mind, was in his case rendered relatively weak by the intensity with which that liberation was experienced? A dualistic view of body and mind is fundamentally a production of the discriminating intellect. As long as one is unable to free himself from this intellect, he is destined to be trapped within such as dualistic consciousness, with freedom altogether beyond his grasp. Zen practice culminates in one direction in the liberation from this consciousness, or in what is the same thing, the experience of "body and mind falling off," and that is no doubt why Dōgen's writings repeat over and over that "commitment to Zen is body and mind falling off—just sitting." Judged from the standpoint of what Zen calls the Great Function and Great Activity (*daiiki, daiyū*), however, there is in this the unavoidable feeling of some lack. Nonetheless, it must be said that Dōgen was faithful to the tradition of his master Ju-ching.

We are, Bankei says, the Unborn Buddha-mind just in the state in which we are born, living the kind of life described in Zen as "a single iron rod stretching straight out for ten thousand leagues," untrammelled by such things as "body and mind" or "birth and death." The mewling cry of the newborn babe fresh from its mother's womb is in fact a lion roar like that of the Buddha at his birth: "Heaven above, earth below, I alone am the honored one." Here there is no duality whatsoever. No discrimination is employed. We are then in a manifestation of body and mind dropping off. Although this of its nature does not lend itself to modern psychological analysis or objective observation, it is nevertheless something which we experience in our normal daily life. But as we grow older, what Bankei calls "self-partiality" gradually begins to emerge. We lose our way and employ our minds in "irrelevant tasks," becoming ever more deeply set in our growingly wayward habits. In the everyday world, this coming of age is sometimes referred to as "attaining the age of discretion." But this "discretion," or "discrimination," is a nasty customer. When it comes to full fruit in a self-centered thirsting for possession that holds sway over the whole surface of our consciousness, our way of life no longer possesses the basic and intrinsic nature that was ours when we first appeared in the world. The duplexity of body and mind is a presence which shadows us wherever we are. From it too emerges "birth and death." At all events, we must once experience and realize in ourselves "body and mind falling off, falling off body and mind." Dōgen's teaching of "just sitting" is, in that sense, one of great significance. But if the so-called discrimination of non-discrimination does not issue forth from this, then, to put it in Bankei's words, "the wonderful, enlightened activity of Unborn illuminating wisdom cannot come into play." Dōgen, however, was not always "just sitting." *Sbōbōgenzō* and his other works consist to a large extent of his commentaries on a great variety of koan old and new. And he does not confine himself to comments on koan but goes on and even establishes a unique philosophy. Those who came after him either saw only this "just sitting" aspect at the expense of his philosophy and the difficult complexities of his koan interpretations, or else they saw only the latter, forgetting his insistence on sitting. Or again, ignoring neither of these, they attached little importance to the rigor of the life he led or to his scrupulous concern for the cultivation of his disciples. None of these aspects may be overlooked if we wish to see the real

Dōgen. Here, however, for the sake of comparing him with Bankei and his Unborn Zen, I am confining myself to examining the meaning zazen has in his teaching, and the source from which this meaning derives.

By observing how Bankei's Unborn Zen came into being we can learn the aspects in which it differs from Dōgen's view of zazen, and at the same time ascertain the proper angle from which to attempt a comparative assessment of the two. Bankei's point of departure is altogether different from Dōgen's. This is not solely to be blamed on the different ages in which the two men lived. The courses along which their religious practice progressed may be said to have had altogether opposite bearings as well. Dōgen was guided step by step in his practice by an experienced master. But in Bankei's case there was no one who might in a real sense of the word be called his master. As a youth Dōgen is said to have been visited by doubts as to the necessity, in light of the Buddhist teaching that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature intrinsically, for men to engage in practice and attain realization. Bankei's entrance into religious life occurred within a Confucian context. While reading the *Great Learning*, one of the basic texts of Confucianism, the twelve-year old boy came upon the sentence, "To clarify bright virtue is the way of man." He was curious to know what this bright virtue (*meitoku*, 明德) could actually be. Confucianism does not teach explicitly that bright virtue is intrinsic in everyone. It just says that clarifying it is the proper path for man. In Buddhism, one of the fundamental tenets is that not only man but all beings are originally endowed with a Buddha-nature. Naturally, Bankei was not without some notion of the Buddhist teaching at this time, but the first step toward his study of Zen was prompted by his uncertainty over the meaning of the Confucian bright virtue. Being unable to understand it, he turned to Zen for an answer. Yet he could for all his searching find no Zen teacher able to help him or to give him the kind of guidance he needed. Perhaps, if he had had a master such as Ju-ching, he too might have come to experience "body and mind dropping off," and arrived thereby at an understanding of bright virtue. Since he did not have such an opportunity, he had no choice but to work through to a resolution on his own.

The power of his will was remarkable. Evidence of this is found even in some of the episodes from his early childhood which are included in his biographical

records.³ So it was with an extraordinary tenacity of purpose that he threw himself into the struggle to find a way to dissolve his doubt. Some idea of his incredible perseverance in the face of the intense mental and physical suffering he went through during this period is gained from the reminiscences he frequently includes in the sermons and talks of his later life.⁴ By any standards, his prosecution of this struggle was extraordinary. It may be regarded as having been instrumental in his forging out his Unborn Zen. Had he not undergone the difficult ordeal he did he might well have wound up in the traditional role of most ordinary Zen teachers, giving *teisbō* (Zen lectures) on koan and Zen writings, perhaps emphasizing sitting too.

But as it was, he did not want others to have to repeat his trying experience, and from the compassionate desire to enable them somehow to attain what he had without the accompanying suffering, he brought forth his teaching of the Unborn. From the bottom of his heart he poured out his truth for the sake of younger men, to make them realize that in the Unborn was found something they could grasp without such great difficulty.

All of you here are highly fortunate. I wasn't so lucky. When I was a young man there wasn't any wise teacher to be found. Or at least if there was I didn't have the luck to meet up with him. Being rather foolish, I suffered through tribulations unknown to others and

³ Several of these are found in a work entitled *Shōgen kokushi issuji jō*, 正眼國師逸事狀 ("Anecdotes of Shōgen Kokushi"). One story relates how Bankei left school and returned home early to avoid attending the calligraphy class which he disliked. His elder brother, who was the head of the family, remonstrated with him repeatedly to no avail. To get home Bankei had to cross a river, so his brother instructed the ferryman not to take Bankei across if he should return early. But when Bankei was refused, he simply said, "The ground must continue under the water," strode right into the water and struggled his way along until he emerged, out of breath, at the opposite bank.

Then he decided to commit suicide to avoid further conflict with his brother. He swallowed a mouthful of poisonous spiders and shut himself up in a small Buddhist shrine waiting for death. When after a while he realized he was not going to die, he returned home. *Bankei Zenji Goroku*, ed. Suzuki Daisetz (first edition 1941, Iwanami bunko), pp. 245-6. See also *Living by Zen* (Sanseidō, 1949), pp. 136-7.

⁴ In particular see "The Zen Sermons of Bankei Yōtaku," Part II, *Eastern Buddhist* VII, 2, pp. 130-3.

expended a great deal of futile effort. The experience of that engrained itself deeply in me. I can never forget that bitter lesson.

That's why I come here like this day after day, urging you to profit from my own painful performance. I want you to be able to attain the Dharma while you're seated comfortably on the *tatami* mats, without putting forth any needless effort. You should consider yourselves very fortunate. Where else can you find something like this?

I was a foolish young fellow. I want to tell you about how I wasted all that effort, but I'm afraid some of the young men among you will get it into their heads that they won't be able to achieve the Dharma unless they struggle as I did, and will start to do that. And that will be my fault. I really do wish to tell you about this, but if I do I want the young people to please listen very very carefully. You can attain the Dharma without the profitless struggle I put myself through. Keeping that in mind, then, listen to what I say. . . .

This being said, Bankei goes on at great length about the futile effort he expended in his youth. But the fact of the matter is that without this "useless effort" the discernment and character which were eventually his could not have come into existence. There is no reason to imagine that he himself was unaware of this. What is at work here, I think, is the Buddhist psychological principle of vicarious suffering.

In any case, hardship aside, with Bankei's Unborn Zen it is enough if one just comes in touch with its vital central point. Because Bankei was there actually in grasp of that point, he was, as he often declared, always ready to confirm whether others were or not. The Unborn is originally something each person receives from his mother at birth, so there is no question here of any abstract, *ex nibilo* impossibility. It was his mind of great compassion (*karuna*) instilling him with the desire to make this fact known to his fellow men that kept Bankei constantly occupied for over half a century travelling and spreading his teaching. He is never high-flown like Dōgen. He spent his life in contact with the ordinary common people, explaining to them that there is nothing at all difficult about Unborn Zen. Moreover, when judged from the standpoint of the authentic Dharma itself, there is something about

this which does indeed make us conscious of Bankei's personal hardships as "vain effort." He touches on this in the following passage from his sermons.

Imagine a group of travellers climbing through a stretch of high mountains devoid of water. They get thirsty, so one of them goes into a distant valley below in search of water. He does this with considerable difficulty. When he finally finds some and returns and gives his companions a drink, don't all those who drink without having exerted themselves quench their thirst just the same as the one who did? There isn't any way to quench the thirst of a person who is suspicious and doesn't drink the water.

Because I didn't meet a clear-eyed teacher I mistakenly undertook great austerities. My ultimately discovering my own mind-Buddha and making all of you know about your inborn mind-Buddha, is just like those people drinking water and quenching their thirst without going anywhere. For each of you to be able like this to use the Buddha-mind inherent in your own self just as it is and achieve a mind of blissful tranquillity without resorting to any illusory austerities—isn't that a Dharma teaching of inestimable worth!

From such a perspective it can be said that for all the formidable self-abandon with which he negotiated them, the extreme hardships Bankei incurred in his young manhood were not absolutely indispensable for his realization of the Unborn. His teaching was not always centered popularly in the Unborn, however. He was not urging people only to follow the Way of Easy Practice. Apparently, he took two different teaching postures, one when he was dealing with the common people and laymen in general, the other with the monks immediately under him. With his personal disciples, he showed not the slightest quarter, demanding without compromise the full opening of their Dharma eye. The reason for this is not hard to understand. Those who leave home to enter the priesthood are destined to become the great teachers of all beings in the world. They must command the respect of their fellows in the Dharma. This is a responsibility a half-baked priest would be unable to shoulder. Bankei set for himself an extremely high standard. His life throughout was the embodiment of ultimate truthfulness. That explains why he urged on his disciples. "I'm now teaching you about how you can

achieve your goal right while you're seated there without any expenditure of effort," he told them, "but you aren't capable of really trusting in it. Your commitment to the Dharma isn't thorough enough."

After he had broken through his Great Doubt, Bankei was possessed by the strong desire to find some means by which he could communicate the understanding he had thus gained. To convey this to others unimpaired, and to do it so that people would come to be convinced of its truth, called for a more than common amount of deliberation.

Personal experience can come to have universal application and function in society only through the agency of thought. Whenever it stops in personal experience alone, it comes to resemble Sakyamuni in his initial inclination tempting him to enter Nirvana immediately after he attained his Enlightenment. "Somehow," said Bankei, "I wanted to be able to reach to the capabilities of ordinary people with a few words, and that is how it came to me to teach you like this using the word 'Unborn.'" It took him long years of reflection and deliberation spent in isolated hermitages in various parts of the country to finally arrive at this teaching. In China, priests sometimes engage in this type of solitary practice even today. It might be that had Bankei been in the hands of a real teacher from the outset he would never have thought of evolving an original teaching of his own. But this is also what makes him different in kind from other Zen masters, those of his age and those who have appeared after him as well, and the reason it was Unborn Zen in particular that he enunciated.

I believe the difference between Unborn Zen and "*taza*" Zen is accounted for in large measure by the contrasting ways in which the two men started out on their course of Zen practice. Bankei, however, has an originality which sets him apart from Dogen and Hakuin alike. This is something which is linked to the teaching method he adopted once he had decided to take up the banner of the Unborn for his lifelong missionary activity. He did not use or rely on Buddhist sutras or Zen writings; he rejected the use of Chinese, the language used traditionally in Japanese Zen. That was a basic inclination of his teaching activity that developed early during the beginning years of his practice and also on through the time of entrance into his Enlightenment. It may be said to have its origins in the influences of the historical period in which he lived. More precisely, it was his intent to go against the prevailing

current of his time. It would also appear that much is attributable to the character of the practice he subjected himself to. He says:

I never quote the words of the Buddhas or Patriarchs when I teach. I need only to examine directly the personal affairs of people themselves. That's enough, so I don't have to quote others. I don't say anything about either the "Buddha Dharma" or the "Zen Dharma." I have no need to. Inasmuch as my examining directly you and your concerns here and now takes care of everything perfectly well and clears everything up for you, I don't have to bother preaching the "Buddha Dharma" and "Zen Dharma."

One of his disciples adds:

The master was always critical of the many evil customs which were prevalent among teachers and students in the Zen temples of his day. Because of this, his own dealings with students were for the most part direct and to the point. He did not allow indiscriminate use of the staff or katz, diversions in literature, deliberations using words and phrases, or unnecessary displays of one's own insight. He himself never brought up words and phrases from sutras or Zen texts. If anyone would come to him for teaching, he just talked to him intimately using the common language of every day, without regard to whether he was possessed of special intelligence or not.

When Zen was first being introduced into Japan there was little the Japanese could do but follow the Zen and other Buddhist writings in the Chinese language. Even in Dōgen's writings in Japanese such as *Sbōbōgenzō*, which were composed during this same period, stiff Chinese phrases and quotations in Chinese, many of considerable length, are interspersed freely throughout the Japanese text. The situation was much like that in modern day Japan, where scholars introduce Western words into their speech and writings and create new words translated from European sources which no one can understand unless he knows the original words. It was in the former case and is also in the latter something unavoidable. New thought was entering Japan from

foreign lands and there was often no way for it to be expressed fully using the given resources of the language. When it is developed from within that already present, and produced by the Japanese mind, the thought may be expressed somehow with the existing language. But confronted with thought intruding in in a discontinuous, piecemeal manner, the available language cannot answer the need. Thus the reliance of priests of the earlier period of Japanese Zen on Chinese language literature—sutras, Zen records, and the like—must be regarded as a choiceless necessity. We should remember also that someone like Dōgen was part of an intellectual vanguard, and that those who were the recipients of his teaching would also have belonged in such a classification. It was quite natural therefore that the medium used for thought communication should have been Chinese. Even Pure Land teachers like his contemporaries Hōnen and Shinran, who are regarded as exponents of the so-called Way of Easy Practice which aims at making Buddhism easily understandable to all people, when they came to write down their own thought, did so in Chinese, though they may have used Japanese in their letters and occasional writings.

Bankei, though he lived in an entirely different world from the Kamakura period of Dōgen, is on this question of language a “nationalist.” Some four hundred years had passed since Dōgen’s time and it might well be imagined that Zen thought had in the meantime become fully Japanese, with all its exotic tinges removed. But that, in fact, was not the case. Only fifty years after Bankei’s death in 1693, transcripts of his talks and sermons and other related writings, all in Japanese, were taken by his disciples and translated into Chinese. A kind of superstition regarding the Chinese language seems to have still persisted among the Japanese educated classes. But Bankei himself was remarkably thoroughgoing in his adoption of Japanese.

One day, Bankei said, “When I was a young man I also tried practicing question-answer type deliberations with other monks. I worked hard at it. In spite of that, I think it’s best for Japanese to use the language they use everyday when they inquire about the Way. That is most suited to them. Japanese aren’t very good at Chinese. When questions and answers are carried on in Chinese they can’t express themselves fully just as they’d like. There’s nothing at all they can’t ask if they use the same language they use in daily life. So

instead of straining around trying to ask things in Chinese, it would be better for them to ask them freely in a familiar language they use comfortably, without any special struggle. Now, if it were a case where we couldn't achieve the Way unless we used Chinese, I would of course tell you to go ahead and use it. But the fact is that we can ask about the Way and achieve it with ordinary Japanese without any trouble at all. In view of that, it's wrong for us to ask questions in a language that we have difficulty using.

I want all of you to keep this in mind, and whatever you want to ask about, I don't care what it is, feel no hesitation. Ask it just the way you want to in your own words, and clear it up. Since you can work things out this way, what could be more valuable than the Japanese language you use every day?

The distinguishing feature of Bankei's pedagogy is his utter rejection of anything apart from himself in any way—spatially or temporally—and his endeavor to “clear things up for people” through comments and criticisms directed to the person right before him at a given time. Here we see the reason for his refusal to place any reliance on sutras or words from the Zen records, and for his rejection of Chinese. Zen has no part whatsoever in talking about what is past, or with abstract, conceptual comments on things removed from oneself. Since the matter of “you yourself today” is in fact Unborn Zen itself, and since we always say we are cold when it is cold and hot when it is hot and our everyday language serves perfectly well for this, Unborn Zen has really no need for a voluminous ninety-five fascicle *Sbōbōgenzō*. Neither does it need the hundreds of old koan and cases of the ancients that Dōgen deals with at great length in that work. Basically, what sets Zen apart from the other schools of Buddhism is its lack of interest in theory and its stress upon the importance of personal experience. To tell the truth, that is how all religions ought to be, and it cannot be said that this emphasis is found only in Zen. That is why in religious literature it is customary for the writer to give elucidations of his belief using the vocabulary and language in common use among the people who make up his audience. The Zen records of China are permeated throughout with the colloquial language of the age which produced them. It can hardly be otherwise. Zen is something a person

experiences with the utmost concreteness, and the medium he uses to give expression to it must also be the one which is closest and most personal to him.

I said above that Bankei went against the current of his age, but that is not quite true. It would be more accurate to say he transcended such things. He tried to communicate the substance of his own experiential understanding to others directly as it really was, with the most immediate sense of personal intimacy. This indeed is where Unborn Zen differs from Dōgen Zen (which makes zazen paramount) and from Hakuin's koan Zen.

It is time to say a few words about Hakuin and his *Kanna* ("seeing into the koan") Zen. First, let us note the manner of his entrance into Enlightenment. It is different from that of either Dōgen or Bankei, and in this difference we can discern the special character of his Zen.

Bankei from the beginning of his practice seems to have had no dealings with koan. While he apparently had contact with Zen priests (he was initiated by a Rinzai priest named Umpo from his native Ako), there is nothing in his biographical or other records to suggest he was ever given koan to work on. We do not know what teaching methods Umpo used with his disciples. All we know from Bankei's own accounts is that he embarked on a rigorous life of religious practice because he couldn't understand bright virtue. In the *Angōkyōki*, a compilation of sayings and episodes from Bankei's life by his disciple Sandō Chijō,⁵ we are told that it was Umpo who gave him confirmation in his Enlightenment. But elsewhere, Bankei clearly stresses the importance of his meeting with the Zen master Tao-chē (Japanese, Dōsha), a Chinese priest who had come to Japan and was currently residing in Nagasaki. In later life, though, Bankei could not even endorse Tao-chē as his teacher.⁶ It seems likely that at no time in his career did Bankei have any active involvement with koan practice. He regarded the method in koan

⁵ 行業曲記. One of several compilations consisting of fragments of dialogues and biographical episodes from Bankei's life that were made by his disciples. The exchange between Bankei and Umpo in question is found in *Bankei Zenji Goroku*, pp. 207-9.

⁶ Cf. "Bankei's Zen Sermons," Part II, p. 130. "At that time, Dōsha was the only master who could have given me confirmation of my understanding in such short order. Now, as I reflect with some deliberation I can see that even Dōsha was not fully satisfactory. If he were only alive now, I could make him into a fine teacher. Unfortunately, he died too soon. It is regrettable."

practice of raising a doubt as an artificial, unspontaneous maneuver pressed upon the practitioner from outside. Therefore, when the time came to deal with students as a teacher himself, he cut down everything that rose to the encounter with the single, self-fashioned blade of his Unborn Zen.

Hakuin was involved with koan from the start of his practice. He wrestled with Jōshū's "Mu" koan. He also had his share of religious anguish, but he seems not to have had, as Bankei did, something that might be called a philosophical Great Doubt. Probably the reason for Bankei's natural opposition to the artificiality of koan Zen is located here. However that may be, Hakuin's writings tell how he finally resolved to concentrate once and for all on a course of assiduous Zen practice through reading a passage in the *Zenkan-sakushin*,⁷ and the occasion of his breakthrough into Enlightenment occurred as he was working on the "Mu" koan, so there was an inevitability surrounding the fact that his subsequent course was oriented toward *Kanna* Zen. Afterwards, when Shōjū Rōjin (1642–1712) prodded him on by badgering him with the koan "Nansen's Passing," it undoubtedly served to strengthen this disposition to koan practice even further.⁸

The custom today in Rinzai Zen—actually Hakuin Zen—which divides training into certain stages, with each stage allotted its own particular koan, is not the total creation of Hakuin alone, but was brought to its present form over a period of many years by his followers.

How did Dōgen go about the actual forging of the monks under him? We

⁷ Chin., *Ch'an-kuan t'ê-chin*, 禪關策進. A collection of anecdotes of the ancient Chinese masters and short passages from a variety of Buddhist writings, compiled by the Ming Zen master Yun-ch'i Chu-hung 雲棲株宏 (Unsei Shukō). According to the biography of Hakuin by his disciple Tōrei, Hakuin, at a time of uncertainty in his religious life, was visiting a temple where the priest was airing his library of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist texts. He closed his eyes and picked a book at random from among them. His hand chanced to fall on the *Zenkan-sakushin* and he opened it to the story of how the Chinese Zen priest Tz'u-ming (Jimin) had kept himself awake during long periods of zazen by sticking himself in the thigh with a gimlet. This is said to have instilled Hakuin with the resolve to continue his own practice in Zen until he too had attained Enlightenment.

⁸ Hakuin himself describes these events in several works. For an English translation of the account in the *Orategama*, see *The Zen Master Hakuin*, trans. Philip Yampolsky (Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 117–120.

may be fairly sure that he had them practice his "*taza*" Zen; may we not at the same time, however, suppose that he also made considerable use of koan work, that is, the method of having his disciples introspect the "public cases" from the Zen records? Is not his *Sbōbōgenzō*, a work in which he uses both Japanese and Chinese, something which was written to serve as a kind of touchstone for testing their understanding? There is the fact that for hundreds of years after his death *Sbōbōgenzō* was treated by the authorities in the Sōtō sect as a secret book to be used only in the *sanzen* room. It was inaccessible to the public, of course, but was not easily seen even by ranking Sōtō priests. Study of *Sbōbōgenzō* did not begin until the Tokugawa period, at about the same time that Bankei rose to eminence as a Zen master. I will just make the observation, without going into any further detail, that when it came to the scrutiny of old koan, Dōgen yielded little to the *Kanna* Zen specialists in the Rinzai school. And while granting it was not like the testing koan work which takes place today in the *sanzen* rooms of the Hakuin school, we can believe that even in the centuries after his death Dōgen's followers were not totally negligent in investigating the "*exempla* of the ancients."

Hakuin Zen is a koan Zen through and through. This means it has in it the dangers and the benefits inherent in such an artificial system. Dōgen's *taza* Zen, with no stages, has a want of definiteness with regard to practice; it is from the beginning beyond all grasp. One may in a sense say of koan that they are beyond grasp as well. But when you work on a koan it is right there before you, and all your effort can be concentrated on it. With *taza* Zen, for all its talk of "body and mind dropping off," to know where and how to begin is no easy matter. For its part, koan Zen provides steps for the practitioner, and if he can somehow get a foothold on the first step he is brought along from there without much difficulty. This is clearly a form of artifice. But one cannot deny its convenience. And this is the real reason why masters of the past devised the method of giving koan to their students. It was, as I have been saying, an expression of the deepest compassion—what Zen calls "grandmotherly kindness." But along with that kindness goes an accordingly great danger. The danger lies in the tendency to formalization. It may happen that a petty thief crowing like a cock at dawn will get past the barrier by deceiving the gatekeeper into opening the gates. As a matter of fact, in the koan system such fellows do get past, or we should say rather that they are

passed through. The danger that the goods will be sold cheap is something intrinsic to the system. In any construct devised by man a pattern always evolves. When the pattern becomes fixed, the quick of life cannot move within it. When the realm of true reality which is freed of samsaric suffering is treated in such a way that it comes to resemble the fixed gestures and patterned moves learned in a fencing class, Zen ceases to be Zen. At times patterns work well and are useful. And they do have the virtue of universal currency. But by that alone no living thing is produced. I suppose, though, there are some who even find enjoyment in such a counterfeit, lifeless thing, much as they would divert themselves with games of chess or mahjong.

These days people occupy themselves with the records of the ancients. They deliberate meaninglessly over them. Intent on chasing after others' words, feeding on others' dregs, they cannot break free of others' orbits. They make their livelihood in a dark ghost-haunted cave, gauging and speculating in the region of discriminatory illusion. It is never like that here with me. Here, you must open wide your own eye at once and stand absolutely alone and independent, overspreading all heaven and earth. The few words and sayings left behind by those of the past were uttered in response to particular occasions, according to changing conditions—a way of stopping a child's crying by showing him a fist with nothing in it. How could there be a Dharma to be preached at all in the school of the patriarchs! If you chase after phrases and cling to words, you're no different than a man who loses his sword over the side of a ship and marks the spot on the rail. The sword is already far away.

In Zen it is often said that real *satori* comes only with real practice. When an existential doubt has welled up spontaneously from within and drives one to intense concentration, as it did in Bankei's case, he will as a natural result try to resolve it by any means he can devise. So when this total, all-out quest arrives at its denouement, genuine *satori* should result. On the other hand, left to a framework which depends on the use of koan, what will be created is a doubt which can only be termed artificial and not the kind of demand that rises from deep within. Bankei's criticism is based on his own experience.

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People nowadays say they must have a doubt because those in the past did. So they cultivate one. That's an imitation of a doubt, not a real one. So the day never comes when they arrive at a real Enlightenment.

After all has been said of Hakuin Zen, it must be admitted that here lies its pitfall. Hakuin Zen evolved after Bankei had already left the scene, but even during his lifetime it seems to have been the fashion in Rinzai Zen for priests to make a kind of game of learning koan and imagining this charade, so-called "lip-Zen," was Zen itself. Here are two passages from Bankei's sayings relevant to this.

A monk said, "Suppose right now the 'Triple Invalid' appeared before you, master, how would you deal with him?" Bankei said. "You seem to think very highly of triple invalids [those who are blind, deaf, and dumb at the same time], the way you scrutinize them, all eager to actually become one. Right at this instant you are not a triple invalid, so instead of trying to be one—which would be very difficult in any case—please, get to the bottom of your own self! That's the first order of business for you who do not have those three incapacities. To go around talking about other things will get you absolutely nowhere. Listen now to what I tell you."

The "Triple Invalid" refers to the 88th case in the *Pi-yen lu* (*Hekiganroku*), "Hsüan-sha's Triple Invalid." Here are Hsüan-sha's (Gensha) words:

All masters speak about their office of ministering for the sake of living beings. How would you deal with a triple invalid if he should appear suddenly before you here? You may hold up a mallet or a hossu, but a man suffering from blindness cannot see you. You may give play to all the verbal resources at your command, but a man suffering from deafness cannot hear you. You may let him tell his understanding, but that is impossible for a man who is mute. How then will you deal with him? If you cannot deal with him, the Buddha Dharma will be pronounced wanting in spiritual efficacy.

This type of thing is of course hypothetical, yet Zen masters of the past devised various means for testing religious seekers. Or we can say that this was their way of guiding them. In any case, all are but "skillful means" growing out of their compassionate concern for their students. Regarding one's real peace of mind, though, it is immaterial whether one understands such koan or not. Regarding one's understanding of the true purport of Zen, too, we can state flatly that this "Triple Invalid" is idle hairsplitting. Since Bankei is thoroughly aware of just where the questioning priest stands spiritually, he says, "The first order of business for you is to get to the bottom of your own self!"—an indeed salutary instruction.

Here now is the second passage.

The main figure of worship at the Ryūmon-ji (Bankei's temple) was an image of Kannon. It was made by Bankei himself. Fully aware of this, while Bankei was giving a talk a monk from Ōshū who was standing insolently against a pillar asked, "Is that figure a new Buddha or an old one?" Bankei said, "What does it look like to you?" "A new Buddha," replied the monk. "If it looks to you like a new Buddha," said Bankei, "then that's that. What is there to ask? Since you don't know yet that the Unborn is the Buddha-mind, you ask useless questions like that thinking it's Zen. Instead of bothering everyone here with such silly questions, sit down and keep your mouth shut, and listen to what I say."

This monk also makes a rather foolish display of himself. It is said that in the Tokugawa period Zen monks would often engage in such mockeries of Zen dialogues the moment they encountered one another on pilgrimage. It seems from this similar diversions were already taking place in Bankei's day. The annoyance he displays may be said to be fully warranted. The koan system clearly has in it abuses beyond the limits of toleration if it can happen that the question whose resolution should be prosecuted as a matter of life and death is merely something directed toward a koan which has been assigned by someone else, instead of something which emerges from within oneself. It is not for this Zen teachers instituted the use of old model cases and koan. They represent the skillful means of Zen masters

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rooted in Great Compassion. They desired thereby to bring a student face to face with the wonder of nondiscriminatory *prajñā* wisdom. In this respect Bankei can be said to have attempted a return to the Zen of the early T'ang dynasty. He himself said, "I preach neither the Buddha Dharma nor the Zen Dharma"—that tells the real truth of the matter.

Zen masters of modern times generally use "old tools" when they deal with pupils, apparently thinking they cannot make the matter clear without them. They do not show it by thrusting it straight forward without using the tools. Those fellows make it so that tools become indispensable and one cannot do without them. They are the blind sons of Zen.

Also, they tell their students that they won't be able to get anywhere unless they raise a "great ball of doubt" and then break through it, and that they need first of all to raise this ball of doubt, setting everything else aside until they do. Instead of teaching them to live by their unborn Buddha-mind, they saddle students who haven't any doubt with one, thereby making them transform their Buddha-mind into a ball of doubt. A terrible mistake.

The real face of Bankei Zen emerges in the words "[they] transform their Buddha-mind into a ball of doubt." This might be thought to imply that Bankei stresses *sono mama* Zen from a position of relativity or duality. But if that were so, he would not speak of the "Unborn." In this feature of Unbornness his unique standpoint appears to us. It also goes to explain what makes Unborn Zen unlike Dōgen's *shikan taza*.

If we wish to understand Bankei's Zen in even greater depth, I think the shortest way will be to investigate on the one hand Zen before and after the appearance of koan Zen, and on the other hand, to inquire into the relation which must exist between Silent Illumination Zen and realization or Enlightenment. There is, in fact, a close mutual relationship between these. If we can get a good grasp of the former, the latter will become understandable, and with that, I personally feel, an overall picture of Zen will be achieved.

(Concluded)

Translated by Norman Waddell