

# TRANSLATION

## The Zen Sermons of Bankei Yōtaku

### PART THREE

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL

*The morning sermon of the 25th day of the eighth month*

25. The reason you have all assembled here like this before dawn in order to listen to my talk is due precisely to the Buddha-mind, the unborn mind. None of you would have had any intention to venture out and come here so early in the morning unless you had thought you would hear something quite extraordinary.

Among those in attendance, those who have reached the age of fifty have not known for their fifty years that they have had a Buddha-mind. Thirty year olds have not known it for thirty years right until today. You've been slumbering the years away. But today, here at this gathering, if you come to understand thoroughly the true nature of the unborn that is inherent in each one of you, then right from today you *are* the Buddha-mind. My speaking to all of you, is only to make you come to understand that you are unborn. When you firmly understand this, from that time on you are the Buddha-mind. For an infinite number of kalpas you have the Buddha-body no different from

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▪ This is the final installment of Bankei's sermons, completing the translation of the *Bankei butchi kōsai zenji bōgo* (The Dharma Sermons of Bankei Butchi Kōsai Zenji): see the *Eastern Buddhist* Vol. VI, 2, p. 132. The first two parts appeared in previous issues.

Śākyamuni himself, never again to fall into the evil ways.<sup>1</sup>

But when you return home after having realized the unborn's true nature that I make known to you at this meeting, if any of you get irritable because of something you see or hear, that little bit of anger makes the unborn mind that only today you were enlightened about change into the way of the Fighting Demons or Hungry Ghosts, compounding the deep wrong you dwelled in prior to hearing about this unborn by hundreds of millions of times. You lose the Buddha-mind and begin to transmigrate. I doubt whether there is a single person among you that would tell me he was averse to becoming a Buddha. That's why I give my teaching to each and every person. Once you are able to understand it, you are from then on the Buddha-mind.

What is more, were I to say you didn't need to become a Buddha and tell you to go to Hell instead, I doubt if a single one of you would be volunteering to make the trip. The proof of this is that you are here at this meeting to listen to my sermon. You got yourselves up from your beds while it was still dark outside and came here. All of you people have come to listen to me, without minding about being packed uncomfortably together like this, because each of you wants to become a Buddha. So inasmuch as you do have such hopes, you should from today be very careful in all matters.

I received this mind and body in order to become a Buddha. That is the reason I was born into this world of men. I wanted to become a Buddha from the time I was a youth, and, through long and continued effort, I came to grasp that I was from the first essentially living in the Buddha-mind. Unless you become a Buddha now [in this life] you fall into the realm of the Hungry Ghosts or Animals. And once you fall into an Animal existence it is doubtful you could ever become a Buddha, even in hundreds of millions of kalpas. As proof of this, if you led a cow or horse in front of me here, I could give it the same teaching I give you, but then would that animal understand it? No, once you become an Animal you cannot understand Buddha or Dharma. It transmigrated and came to this pass to begin with because [in a previous existence] the aspiration to become a Buddha did not appear. Each of you, having heard all about the principle of this, be unborn from today and avoid

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<sup>1</sup> *Evil ways*: Bankei here is referring to the transmigratory realms of the Fighting Demons, Hungry Ghosts, Animals, and Hell.

transmigrating. It all depends on your own mind.

The unborn mind is of course the Buddha-mind. You have come here to this meeting for the express purpose of hearing what I have to say. Yet if a dog barked or if the cry of a street vendor should come from somewhere outside the temple, all of you would hear it, though during my talk you had no intention to do so. That's because of your unborn mind. The unborn mind is like a bright mirror. When anything is placed in front of it, its shape has to be reflected even though the mirror has no intention to reflect it. And when it is taken away the mirror does not reflect it, even though it does not decide to cease reflecting it. This is the vital nature of the unborn. Seeing or hearing something, whatever it might be, after thinking to see or hear it, is not the Buddha-mind. You are able to see and hear things without any previous intent to, because of the virtue of the Buddha-mind inherent in each one of you. And that is none other than the unborn mind. I'm explaining the principle of the unborn to you in this way so you can understand it. If even now you can't grasp it, then you couldn't understand it no matter how many words I spoke. Those of you who understand the truth of the unborn after attending only this one meeting, are Buddhas.

Let me give you an example. You don't know the way from Takamatsu to Marugame,<sup>2</sup> so you ask someone who does. You fix well in your mind all the details of the directions he gives you. If you follow them accurately you reach your destination without difficulty. If today, in the same way, all of you first listen carefully to what I tell you, and then arrive at an understanding of it, you are the Buddha-mind just exactly as you are.

On the other hand, if you don't follow the directions for Marugame even after having heard them, you will wander off to an entirely different place.

So regard what I tell you in these talks as the straight truth and don't be wandering astray and brewing up a lot of useless notions. If you don't become a Buddha now, you will sever your roots to the Buddha-mind for myriad kalpas. You must get a firm grasp of the principle of the unborn and stay free from illusion. Then, from today, men will be male Buddha-minds, and women will be female Buddha-minds. In spite of the fact that women have Buddha-

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<sup>2</sup> *Takamatsu* and *Marugame*: towns on the Inland Sea coast of Shikoku, in present Kagawa prefecture.

minds, it is said that they cannot become Buddhas.<sup>3</sup> This troubles them a great deal. It's ridiculous! There's no distinction between men and women in the unborn. Men are Buddha-bodies. Women are also Buddha-bodies. You have no reason to ever doubt that.

Once the nature of the unborn is fully grasped, there is no difference between a man's unborn and a woman's. All of you are the Buddha-body. If there really were some discrimination against women becoming Buddhas, what would I gain leading this large group of people astray by lying to you about it and telling you that a woman could attain Buddhahood? If women really couldn't become Buddhas and I told you that they could, I'd be the very first one to fall into Hell. Now I undertook religious practice from an early age just because of a desire to become a Buddha. Do you think I want to fall into Hell now for the sin of having lied to you? All the women should listen carefully. From this time on have no doubts about this.

That brings to my mind the time last year when I went to Bizen to give a sermon. A party of four or five people from a place called Niwase in Bitchū came to Bizen to hear me.<sup>4</sup> Among them were one or two women, one of whom sent word to me that she had something to ask me, but that since it would not be proper for a woman to raise questions during the sermon, she would like to put her questions to me in private.

I replied that I would be glad to see her. Sometime later, a group of four or five people came. After we had gotten acquainted with each other, one of them, a woman, said: "I am from a place called Niwase. I am married and lead a very ordinary life. We have no children of our own, but there is a son by my husband's former wife. I raised him and he treats me with the same consideration he would give a real mother. So now that he is grown up, even my lack of children is no inconvenience to me. There is, however, one matter that

<sup>3</sup> There was a tradition, deriving from early Indian Buddhism, that women could not attain Buddhahood. Later, Mahayana Buddhism, which taught that all beings possessed the Buddha-nature and the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, naturally held that women were capable of Buddhahood, though the earlier tradition continued on as well. There seems to be no reference in any orthodox Buddhist teaching to the idea mentioned below of *childless* women being cut off from Buddhahood.

<sup>4</sup> *Bizen* and *Bitchū* were neighboring provinces on the Inland Sea coast of Honshū; included in present Okayama prefecture.

weighs heavily on my heart. I have heard that a childless woman cannot become a Buddha even though she may have a great desire for the Pure Land. According to what I have been told by priests, women are different from men in that they cannot attain Buddhahood. So even though I have received life as a human being, since I happened to be born a woman and am thus cut off from Buddhahood, my getting human form was after all meaningless. I constantly lament that. I have been sick with worry, so much that as you can see I have wasted away to my present state. Oh, I have been wanting so very much to encounter an eminent priest so I could ask him if it really were impossible for a woman to become a Buddha. When I happened to hear that you had come here for some talks, I thought that it would be an excellent opportunity to ask you if it were really true that a childless woman was incapable of attaining Buddhahood."

Then another member of her party spoke, "Just as she told you, ever since she heard that childless women could not attain Buddhahood, it has been plaguing her day and night. She has worried and been ill these past several years. As you can see, she has wasted away to almost nothing. There are many childless women in the world, but surely none is more anxious about her future existence than this one. The grief she feels at being unable to attain Buddhahood has brought her to this sad state."

Today gave me a good chance to tell you this story. Well, I replied by assuring her I had never heard anything about people without children being unable to become Buddhas. The proof they can is that ever since the time of our first Zen patriarch Bodhidharma, right up until me, through all the intervening generations of Zen masters, there has never been a single one with children. I asked if she had ever heard that Bodhidharma had fallen into Hell.

Her answer was, "Even though you had no children, he was the first patriarch and you are all fine priests. You could not fall into Hell. You are all Buddhas."

So I asked her, "As men and women are both equally endowed with the Buddha-mind, even though you are childless, do you think if you desire to be reborn as a Buddha you will not?"

"That is welcome news to me," she replied, "but that teaching about a woman being unable to attain Buddhahood bothers me very much."

"In that case, let me give you some examples of the many women who have

become Buddhas. In the time of Śākyamuni there was an eight year old Naga maiden; in China there was Ling-chao; and in our own country, Taima no Chūjōhime, all of whom were women and all of whom attained Buddhahood.”<sup>5</sup>

This convinced her. “How wonderful,” she said, “that rids me of an anxiety that has been troubling me for a long time.”

She stayed on for a while in Bizen and attended my talks many times. Her appetite immediately began to return and color came back to her face. Her companions all were overjoyed at the amazing improvement in her. Isn't it a remarkable thing that such aspiration awakened in a woman and became the gravest concern in her life?

Moreover, the unborn Buddha-mind isn't lost even by an evil person. When an evil man converts [to the unborn Buddha-mind], he is then the Buddha-mind exactly as he is. Let me show you with an illustration that even evil men have the Buddha-mind.

Two people are walking toward Takamatsu. Though one of them is a good man and the other an evil man, neither of them is conscious of that. As they go along engaged in conversation on a variety of subjects, if something should occur on the way, even though they have no thought to see it, the things they come upon appear equally to the eyes of the good man and the evil man. If a horse or a cow approaches from the opposite direction, both men will step aside to let it pass. They step aside as they encounter it, though they may even be conversing at the time, even though neither of them has made up his mind beforehand to do so. If there is a place they must jump over, they both jump over it. When they come to a stream, they both ford it. You might suspect that the good man would step aside to let the horse or cow pass without prior reflection whereas the evil man would not be able to do

<sup>5</sup> *Naga maiden*: in the Lotus Sutra (*Devadatta*), a highly intelligent eight year old daughter of the Dragon King Sagara is presented as instantaneously becoming a Buddha, after she transforms into a male. *Ling-chao* (Jap. Reishō 靈照): celebrated daughter of Layman P'ang yün (Jap. Hōun 龐蕴; 740-808), the famous Chinese Zen layman of the T'ang period. She appears in a number of the episodes dealing with her father recorded in the Zen histories. *Taima no Chūjōhime*: semi-legendary 8th century daughter of Fujiwara Toyonari; said to have become a nun and devoted her life to the practice of Nembutsu, and, with the aid of Amida Buddha, to have embroidered a picture (known as the Taima mandala) depicting the splendors of the Pure Land.

so as readily without some deliberation, but in fact there isn't the least bit of difference between them in doing this. That shows that even an evil man possesses the unborn Buddha-mind. Each of you here, too, being evil persons basically inclined to various thoughts of regret and desire, to losing your tempers and becoming angry, have been turning your Buddha-minds into the way of the Fighting Demons and Hungry Ghosts, and wandering into transmigratory illusion; still, if today you listen and firmly understand what I tell you, this regretful, desirous mind of yours immediately becomes the Buddha-mind. And never again will you miss out on this Buddha-mind. Be very careful. If you lose out on your Buddha-mind [in this life], you then cannot become a Buddha for hundreds of millions of kalpas. It would thus be best to understand me very very well.

I'm going to retire now. You should be getting back too.

*The sermon of the 26th day of the eighth month*

26. All of you have shown admirable resolve in coming here like this so early in the morning in the hope of becoming Buddhas. If you fail to become a Buddha now, you cannot become one for thousands and thousands of kalpas. You have been born into the human world in order to become Buddhas. If you fail this time and fall into Hell, you will transmigrate and be destined to suffer a punishment of endless torment. So reach a firm and resolute understanding. There are some perversely inclined people who say that you are told you go to Hell or Paradise after you die simply in order to intimidate you. These mindless individuals don't have even the slightest notion of the real Buddha Way. Now were someone to come along whose teaching was actually comparable to Śākyamuni's, and he denied the existence of Hell and Paradise, we just might attach some weight to it. But for those whose only skill is in their tongues to say such things is a great mistake. To begin with, Śākyamuni possessed the six supernatural powers.<sup>6</sup> He could see Hell and

<sup>6</sup> The text is literally: "Śākyamuni's six sense organs (*rakkon* 六根; vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the faculty of the intellect) possess the six supernatural powers (*roku jinzū* 六神通)." These are six supernatural faculties a Buddha possesses, giving him extraordinary powers of eye, ear, body, mind, etc., incomprehensible to unenlightened beings. Among other things, he is said to be able to see everything from the highest heaven to the lowest hells.

Paradise distinctly without even moving from his seat. He preached the Buddha Dharma widely and his preaching is transmitted even today in various sutras. For some ignorant fellow who hasn't the slightest idea about the Buddha Dharma to slander it, is like a summer insect that is born and dies in the same season thinking the world is always a hot place. Unless you set your resolve on the Buddha Way, study it, and fully realize it, you're like that summer insect that doesn't know anything of the winter.

Śākyamuni is a Buddha whose name will be heralded through future generations. Would he have preached that Hell and Paradise existed if they actually did not? What would he have gained from it? If some wrong-minded person happens to take it into his head to believe on his own that Hell or Paradise doesn't exist, that's his business. But it is the height of human arrogance and bigotry to teach others such groundless nonsense. There's no way to justify it. It's the distorted act of malign, self-intoxicated men.

[You often see that when there is someone who has a certain art or skill of surpassing excellence which everyone praises, arrogant and self-centered men will try to deny this art, saying that while it may be skillful, the man himself has such and such a fault. How to describe such arrogant malignity!]<sup>7</sup> These same fellows, when someone they themselves are partial to has some trifling skill unknown to others, will invariably take it upon themselves to praise him to the skies, and hold him up as a genius rarely seen in the world. There are a lot of such people around. Theirs is a grave error. When praising someone you should praise him so as to give him delight, and when you hear about someone's happiness you should be happy just as if something pleasant had happened to you. *That* is man's way in the world; it may also be called the nature of the unborn.

To see and hear things arrogantly with a bias to yourself is to turn your inherent Buddha-mind into a Hell. And, of course, you shouldn't ever doubt the Buddha Way. Such doubts will forfeit your future existence, deprive you of the Buddha-mind, and turn you into an evil person. Then you will live self-centeredly, until, finally, your crimes are discovered, you are arrested, bound all up, and then hung up in crucifixion, or your head displayed on a

<sup>7</sup> The passage in brackets is not found in the *Bankei zenji goroku*, Iwanami bunko ed. (p. 71); supplied from the *Bankei zenji bōgo shū* (Shunjūsha, Tokyo, 1971), p. 69.



pike before the prison gates. That would be unfilial.

How deplorable to end up turning this Buddha-mind your mother gave you when you were born into the way of Fighting Demons. No parent wants his child to grow up to be evil. Unless you make an earnest effort to set yourself on the right path, you cannot speak of filial piety. Everyone, set your resolve from today, for there's nothing so welcome as a parent's love. They took you who knew neither east nor west and brought you up until you could reason for yourself. You, who were ignorant of Buddha and Buddha Dharma as well, now have come to hear about that wonderful teaching. You have learned about the unborn Buddha-mind. All this is due solely to the great love of your parents. So honor them. That is filial piety. When you are in accord with the way of filial piety, that is the Buddha-mind. When we say that this is the mind of filiality and this the Buddha mind, these aren't two minds, or three minds. All virtues are but one single mind. Divorce yourself from self-interest that gets you angry and makes you regret this and covet that. Don't deal harshly even with your own servants. Treat them with compassion. Even though you pay them a wage it is wrong to strike them or say outrageous things to them. Even with servants, you should not make a point of regarding them as total strangers unrelated to you. How often your children have disobeyed you right before your eyes! When a disobedient child belongs to someone else, it will irritate you no end. But you will endure it when it's your own, because you think of it as "my child." No matter how outrageously you reprimand your own offspring, he probably will not resent it too deeply because you are his parent. But with a servant, who is unrelated to you, the resentment will be of a different dimension.

Until now, you have become cross and scolded people and gotten all upset because you didn't understand this essential truth. You were deeply mistaken. Now that you have learned the truth of the Buddha-mind you shouldn't impair it any longer. And please, though I tell you this, don't think your servants put me up to it! There will always be people who approach things without adequate consideration.<sup>8</sup>

In their honesty and sincerity, women are different from men. They perhaps have less intelligence than men. But when you teach a woman that she will

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<sup>8</sup> The significance of this remark is unclear.

fall into Hell if she commits evil acts, she is convinced beyond doubt of it; and when you teach a woman that she will become a Buddha by doing good, she firmly resolves to become a Buddha. Therefore, women become especially deep believers. If, having listened to my teaching of the unborn, they give rise to faith, women of sincere and honest mind will have a better chance of becoming a Buddha than intellectually clever men! Right now you should vow that, come what may, you will become a Buddha.

You all think: Bankei's always telling us that we must be on guard to control our emotions. Don't lose your temper! Don't feel joyful! But, if he himself was doing just what he tells us to do, and someone addressed him as "That fool," he probably wouldn't be able to stand for it. I can understand your reasoning. However, someone who calls another a fool when he is not, is himself is a fool. You should pity him and leave him alone.

And yet a samurai would not take that kind of talk from anyone. I'll give an illustration. There are many people who own expensive pieces of pottery, Korean teabowls for example, and flower vases. They wrap them up in layers of the softest cloth. That's highly commendable. The attitude of a samurai is like that. He always places his sense of duty above all else. If even a single word spoken runs counter to this, he calls it to account without an instant's hesitation. That is the way of the samurai.

Once a word of challenge has passed between two samurai there can be no question of their letting it drop, so they always take care beforehand to keep this uncompromising side of their mind under wraps in order to keep its rough edges from brushing against others. Once a challenge has been spoken the matter cannot rest until one of them has fallen. It would be well for you to understand this thoroughly.

There is a type of killing in which a samurai spearheading an attack rushes in front of his lord and cuts down an adversary. But since that is a duty that is expected of a samurai, we don't speak of such people as being murderers. On the other hand, if they kill someone acting on their own, that is murder. In that case their Buddha-mind is turned into the way of the Fighting Demons.

I have another temple in Edo.<sup>9</sup> It's located in Azabu on the outskirts of

<sup>9</sup> The Kōrin-ji 光林寺.

the city. There used to be a man there who had worked at the temple for a long time. As he possessed some religious hopes of his own he was constantly observing the daily lives of the monks, with the result that a genuine religious aspiration developed in him naturally. Well, one evening some of my colleagues sent him out on an errand. It took him to the outer fringes of the city where no houses were to be seen and where from time to time samurai appeared to test their swords on passers-by.<sup>10</sup> They told him that since it was getting dark they would be worried about him going all alone. But he said not to worry, he would be right back, and set out. On his way back in the growing darkness, a samurai with a mind to test his sword stepped out at his usual haunt and brushed past him.

“You brushed your sleeve against me on purpose,” said the samurai, drawing his sword.

“My sleeve didn’t touch you,” said the messenger, and then, unaccountably, he bowed before the samurai three times.

“Strange fellow. I’ll let you go. You can pass on,” said the samurai, and the messenger thus escaped unharmed.

A tradesman saw all this take place. He had escaped into a nearby teahouse and had witnessed the events from a place of hiding. As he was saying to himself, “He’s going to strike him now. He’ll carve him up now,” he realized that the messenger had come up and was now standing in front of him.

“You certainly got out of that by the skin of your teeth!” he said. When asked what he was thinking of when he made the three bows, the messenger answered that all the people where he worked bowed three times.

“My mind was completely empty. I just thought, if you’re going to strike me with that sword, then do it. I made those bows unconsciously. He told me I was a strange fellow and said he would let me go on my way. Then he allowed me to go past.”

The messenger safely returned to the temple. He had escaped from a very dangerous situation. I told him that I thought this was because he possessed an especially strong faith. Thus he was able to reach the heart of even such

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<sup>10</sup> In the Tokugawa period samurai sometimes tested their swords by cutting down passers-by on remote byways.

a lawless samurai. There is nothing more trustworthy than the Buddha Dharma.

I run across various things in my travels in different places. I have a temple in Ōzu in Iyo province.<sup>11</sup> I spend some time there almost every year. The structure there is a large one, not like this, and when I'm there great crowds of people come. There is even a building especially for women. Four people, two men and two women, see that things go smoothly with the seating of the audience and make sure everyone listens to my talk as they should. Everyone from the countryside two or three *ri* around Ōzu comes.

One time, there was a young woman from Ōzu who was married to a man from a place about two *ri* outside of that city. His mother was living with them. The woman gave birth to a child, but the couple got along badly. They were constantly bickering. Then they had a great quarrel. The wife turned the child over to her husband and made up her mind to leave him and return home to her parents. As she was leaving, her husband took up the small infant and threatened to throw him into the river unless she stayed. "I gave him to you. I don't care what you do to him now," she retorted. "You go," her husband replied, "but you can't take any clothing or anything else with you." Her parting remark was, "After I leave this house, I couldn't care less about such things," and she departed for her parents' house in Ōzu.

At that very time a large number of people had set out on their way to the temple to listen to one of my talks. The woman saw them, and, instead of going home to her parents, joined up with them and came to my temple. She listened carefully to the talk I gave that day, and when it was over she fell in with the procession of people making their way home. On the road she met one of her parents' neighbors. He asked her what she was doing in Ōzu, and she told him, "I had a quarrel with my husband this morning [and I left the house]. I had come all this way when I saw these men and women on their way to hear a priest give a sermon. I felt it would be a good chance for me to go and listen too. Instead of going straight to my parents' house I went to the temple with them. The sermon today had to do with me in particular.

<sup>11</sup> *Bankei zenji goroku* text has Ōtsu 大津, which is a mistake for Ōzu (Ōsu 大洲), an ancient castle town in Iyo province on the island of Shikoku where Bankei had an important temple, the Nyohōji 如法寺.

I feel very ashamed of myself. My leaving my husband's house today was the result entirely of my own meanness. He didn't want me to go. He and my mother-in-law both tried to talk me out of it. But I was in a great temper over some trivial thing. I made them both very angry with me. But thanks to today's sermon, I now realize fully how wrong I've been. I won't go to my parents. I'll go straight back to my husband, confess my faults, and ask him and my mother-in-law for their forgiveness. And I must tell them about the wonderful sermon I heard and urge them on to Buddhahood. Unless I do that, my own learning of it will be meaningless."

After hearing all this the neighbor said, "You've quarrelled with your husband. Now that you've come this far I won't have you talking about returning home right away. You can't go home all by yourself. Now that you're here, go on to your parents' house. Then when you go back to your husband I'll go along with you and help you patch things up."

"No, there's no need to patch things up," she said. "Whatever happens, I was at fault. I'll try to get them back into good humor and when I'm in their good graces again, then I'll tell them about the wonderful teaching I heard today, because of course it's for them too, not for me alone. That will make it have real meaning."

The people who had been walking along close by the two heard this exchange. They were all amazed. "What an admirable woman. Only today she heard the priest's teaching, and already she's realized her mistake and is repentant. How extraordinary to see it in a woman!" they marvelled. They scolded the neighbor for being unreasonable. "What are you doing trying to stop her when she says she wants to go home alone? Who do you think you are, telling her you'll patch things up! You live here in Ōzu so you must have heard of this priest's teaching many times before. How could you make such a mistake." They told the wife, "Your intention is something to be admired. Now hurry and go on home." She thanked them and went on her way.

That same day I was asked to someone's house in Ōzu. A good many of his friends were also in attendance. They all told me this story, adding that my sermon had worked to extraordinary effect. Later I heard what had happened when the woman returned home. On arrival she told her husband and mother-in-law, "You didn't even tell me to leave. It was my own stubborn rashness that set me against you and made me decide to leave and go

to my parents. Yet my leaving proved to be the opportunity which brought me into contact with Buddha.

“I met some people on their way to hear a priest give a sermon. I joined them and we went to a temple to hear him. Everything he said applied directly to me and my condition. There wasn't a single word out of place. It brought home to me clearly how bad my character was. So instead of going to my parents after I left the temple, I came right back here to you. It's all because of my base mind that I caused the two of you such distress. Do whatever you want with me. I've said what I had to. However harsh my lot becomes I won't feel the least resentment.”

When they heard this, the husband and mother-in-law were glad to have her back. They said, “You lost your temper over a small, unimportant matter, but now you have come back. There's nothing more to say about it.”

So things worked out even better than before. She became an obedient wife to her husband, respectful to her mother-in-law, and diligent in her kitchen work. On occasion she told them about the wonderful teaching she had heard, and finally she was able to persuade them to come hear me too. During my stay in that area the three of them frequently attended the talks.

Isn't it wonderful how those with ties to the Buddha, even ignorant people without any learning at all, by just hearing my talk even one time can become free of all contentiousness or anger.

I wanted each of you to hear this story, for I thought it might bring you close to Buddha too. Today's talk was long and has probably wearied you all. Let's stop here.

*The sermon of the 1st day of the ninth month*

27. You have all come here before daylight to this gathering in order to hear my instruction, in spite of these cramped quarters. I find this indeed a welcome thing. Each person arose before dawn to be present here because he had an idea that he wanted to become a Buddha, and the reason for that is, that the mind imparted to each of you at birth is by its nature intelligent. That is to say, it is because of the power of the Buddha-mind you have all been endowed with. And yet nowadays, people deprive themselves of the Buddha-mind because they have been badly brought up and wrongly taught in their passage through life.

## THE ZEN SERMONS OF BANKEI YŌTAKU

When your mother gives birth to you, she provides you with a Buddha-mind. There is proof of this: at the age your infant mind can't even tell good from bad, at a time you can't understand anything however beneficial it might be, if you're taught to say the word "Buddha," you place your hands together in supplication, and if you're given a rosary you take it in your hands in a reverent attitude. This is excellent evidence of the Buddha-mind. Considering this, won't you agree that Buddha is endowed with virtues of every kind? Unless you become a Buddha you will be unable to reach Buddhahood even with the passage of countless kalpas. And if you become an Animal, then no matter how wonderful a teaching is preached, there's no way for you to comprehend it. Your chances of attaining the goal of Buddhahood are extinguished. Even the very desire to attain it can no longer be yours.

You've heard me now speak to you about these things. From this day on live in accordance with the unborn and don't allow yourself the least partiality to yourself.

You don't like to be outdone by others at anything. But despite all your prideful intentions to prevail, you sometimes get the worst of things. When people treat you badly, it is because you are prideful. They act nastily toward you because you have something nasty about you. Look carefully into your own self. You will find that there is not a single bad person in the human world. When anger arises in your mind you change a marvelous wisdom into the way of Hungry Ghosts or Fighting Demons. Both anger and happiness arise from the existence in you of self-partiality. You thus lose out on the Buddha-mind's marvelous wisdom and transmigrate in illusion. If there is no self-centeredness, your mind becomes the mind of the unborn. So you see, you should all firmly realize the truth of this. If you do come to understand it, then even without performing any religious disciplines, without even observing any of the Buddhist precepts, from this day on you are the Buddha-mind.

In fact, there are some aspects of the duty of the samurai which make it easier to perform than the duty of a priest. Those who enter the priesthood begin the pursuit of learning from an early age. They travel from western lands to eastern, from northern regions to southern, running all over. Even though they may have some destination in mind, they never go there with any assurance of what they will find when they arrive. Since they don't pack pro-

visions of food or carry any money on their pilgrimages, they are destined for poverty and privation. If someone gives them shelter when they're on the road, they welcome it with gratitude as the Buddha's grace. When there's no shelter to be found they lie down in the fields and in the mountains. When they run out of things to eat, they take their bowl and beg for food. Often, when there are no alms given, they go with an empty stomach. They carry on their practice for the most part in a state of hunger. If by chance someone provides a decent place for them to stay, they are joyful with a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness for this expression of the Buddha's favor.

Well, after the great hardship and suffering during this period of pilgrimage, they may have the good fortune to have their own hermitage or to be entrusted with a temple. Then they receive the contributions their parishioners provide and are finally in a position of some security. They didn't leave home to become priests just to be able to enjoy such comforts. All that hard and painful practice was undertaken because they hoped above all to awaken themselves in enlightenment and discover the Buddha-mind.

Compared with this, a samurai receives a stipend as a retainer of his lord, and he carries out his duty wearing warm clothing, eating and living his daily life as he pleases. If, as it is to be hoped, he devotes time in his daily life to the matter of his future existence, it isn't difficult for him at all. After all, if he attains the mind of the unborn, that is consistent with his loyalty to his lord. The Buddha-mind will permeate all things. There is no lessening in the performance of his duty to his master, for no matter what duty he may be given to perform he does it in the unborn. And he doesn't find it any trouble at all. Indeed, if he dwells in the unborn he doesn't resort to partiality or self-interest in the performance of his duty. When thus engaged, his mind is right. That cannot help but be a source of great pleasure for all the people he deals with. Any official of the Shogunate who is able in this way to cause the people's happiness will of course be a precious treasure to his lord. The people will sing the praises of such a man. This fidelity to one's lord is due wholly to a mind that has become the vital life of the unborn in constant practice of the Buddha Way. Therefore there is much to be gained by a samurai practicing the Buddha Way. What is more, he performs this practice very easily, more easily than a priest can.

Or take those peddlers who carry their wares on their backs. They shoulder



them and begin their day in the early hours of the morning, travelling through fields and over hills and valleys. Their life is difficult. But set beside the practice of someone disciplining himself to become a priest, the adversity is of an entirely different order. The peddler has a dwelling from which he departs on his daily selling rounds. It's true that he sets out before dawn when the stars are still out, and when evening comes his clothing is moistened with the dew. He has to sell things like this. But when they have all been sold, he can rest his weary body at leisure at an inn, passing the time as he wants to, forgetting his daily routine and enjoying things in keeping with his station in life.

A priest, of course, has no place he can call a home. He sleeps out in the mountains and knows only adversity and suffering and hunger. No one is waiting for him where he goes, so he never has even a moment's real relief from fatigue. As he doesn't possess extra clothing he has no way to protect himself from cold weather. Nothing can even begin to compare with the life of a priest.

Still, he carries on his practice, taxing his body like this, and for one reason: because he desires to discover the bliss of Buddhahood. That's why he undergoes such austerities. When his practice is achieved, he attains to a wonderful wisdom, and his name becomes well known to people.

Let me tell you about the miraculous merit of the Buddha-mind. About thirty years ago there was a fellow, he later became my disciple, that people called Magoemon the Thief, because he used to rake in a good profit by cheating people in his sales to them. Whenever he passed by people would point him out and say, "There goes that thief Magoemon." He had a knack for this kind of profit-making, so he got better and better at it and became a wealthy man. Since at that time he often frequented my temple, I remonstrated with him. "You're impossible, Magoemon," I told him. "People all say you're a thief. And it's you who are greatly at fault. You have no one but yourself to blame that people who come to this temple call you by that bad name."

However, Magoemon replied, "I would no doubt be ashamed if I'd broken into others' homes to steal their property, or if I'd opened a hole in the rear of their storehouse to enter there. But I don't rob people like that. I'm not

the only one who makes a profit through trade." And he remained rather unconcerned about it all.

Then later, I don't know what happened to cause it, but he came to me and begged me to shave his head. "If someone else made that request," I told him, "I might hesitate somewhat before granting it; but from someone like you, with your bad reputation, it must have been spoken with a special resolve." So I proceeded forthwith to turn him into a monk. He became a man of strong faith. This story shows the marvelous power of the Buddha. After he had become a monk not thirty days had passed before people were calling him "Buddha Magoemon." That's the way these things happen, so I want each one of you here to arrive at a firm understanding—there is nothing in the world as blessed as the Buddha-mind.

When any of you decide you want to attain the unborn mind, you have no recourse but to undertake its practice. I'm not telling you to observe any austerities. Since each one is already endowed with the Buddha-mind, it isn't something I can give to you, either. You, if you listen carefully to this talk and attain the Way, right then are the unborn.

If a daimyo comes and invites me to, I'll give this talk anywhere I'm asked to go. Sometimes the talks extend over a period of twenty or thirty days. But wherever it is I've been, later they always tell me that Buddhist followers have increased, and that public morals have improved as well. I find it most rewarding that you in this area too have been coming here before daybreak to these meetings each time they're held to listen to me so eagerly. The day after tomorrow, on the third of the month, I must leave here, so on that day there will be no talk.

*Sermon of the 2nd day of the ninth month*

28. As I've been telling you, each of you is inherently the Buddha-mind, but having through habit and usage grown accustomed to a bad way of life, you have turned this Buddha-mind into a grudging, grasping Hungry Ghost existence. When you know this and fully realize it, you take on the nature of the unborn. However, if upon deciding you want to become the unborn you try to stop yourself from growing angry, and from regretting or desiring things, then your one mind becomes two. It's like chasing after a running man. What happens when you try to stop the flow of your thoughts is that the

thought to stop their arising struggles against the constantly arising thoughts, and so there is no stop. So even though you may grow angry in spite of yourself, or give rise to regrets or desire things, leave such thoughts alone, don't bring them along any farther, don't hold fast to them. Don't be concerned about stopping or not stopping them. If you have nothing to do with them they cannot fail to cease of themselves.

No matter how many different thoughts arise, let them remain right where they are. Don't give them any further attention. Don't give thought even to what you may find delightful. You mustn't make your one mind into two. If your mind is always set like this, it won't think about what is good and what is not good. It won't think it should not think about such things, or that it should cease to think about them, and therefore thoughts of good and bad cannot help but cease naturally. The same is true of displeasure and pleasure, which are both merely bred from your self-centeredness. Such thoughts cannot fail to cease. At all events, always be careful of the unborn mind. That's what's important above all else. If you don't relax your vigilance in this, thoughts of good and bad do not exist, and you will of course then have no thought to cease them either. This is the state of "unborn, undying," is it not? Yes, it is. It is the unborn, undying Buddha-mind.

29. A monk asked Bankei, "You teach people to dwell in the unborn. But I understand that to mean being insensible (*muki*).<sup>12</sup> Is that all right?"

Bankei said, "While you face me like this listening innocently to what I say, if someone should come up behind you and unexpectedly apply a flame to your back, would it feel hot, or not?"

"It would feel hot, of course," replied the monk.

Bankei said, "In that case you aren't insensible at all. How can someone

<sup>12</sup> *Muki* 無記 (Sanskrit, *avyākṛta*) is a technical term in Buddhist philosophy. Used in conjunction with *zenki* ("good") and *akuki* ("bad"), it refers to what is "neutral," "indifferent," neither good nor bad, this nor that. No English word is adequate to express the significance of the term as it is used here. Though inadequate, "insensible" has the virtue of transmitting the basic sense of the original passage. The monk imagines that dwelling in what Bankei calls "the unborn Buddha-mind" would mean living in a state of indeterminate, anesthetic inactivity, cut off from feeling and sensation.

who feels heat be insensible? Since you aren't insensible, you feel heat. As you aren't insensible, you know and can easily tell what is hot from what is cold without consciously deciding to do so beforehand. Could someone be insensible who asks if it is all right for dwelling in the unborn to mean living insensibly? You're fully able to know by yourself about insensibility, because you are not insensible. And if you were insensible, why would you be asking whether it was all right to be insensible? Therefore you are not insensible. So you see, the Buddha-mind is illuminating wisdom—a wondrous thing. It is not insensible. You are mistaken to think it is. How could anything that thinks be insensible? An insensible being wouldn't even be doing any thinking. Where is this insensibility? When have you ever been insensible? Never.”

30. Bankei said: Though I come here like this to meet with you every day and talk to you about various matters, there's nothing special on my part I have in mind in advance. So if there's anything any of you would like to ask me, you should come forward and ask it. Ask me, then I'll say something about it. I myself have nothing in particular to say to you.

31. Bankei said one day:<sup>13</sup> I have read over the Zen records and other writings which have come over recently from China, and I find that men of the unborn have long since disappeared there. In the recent age, even in China, a man of the unborn is not to be seen.

32. On another day, Bankei said: When I was a young man I tried doing koan work with Zen masters, and I worked at it earnestly. But it's better for Japanese to use the common everyday language suited to Japanese when they ask about the Way.<sup>14</sup> Japanese aren't very good at Chinese. They can't express themselves fully just as they would like to when questions and answers are carried on in Chinese. But when they employ their own everyday language, there's nothing at all they can't ask. Instead of straining around trying to ask

<sup>13</sup> Internal evidence suggests that from this point on at least some of the sermons and replies to questions do not belong with the sermons given at Marugame.

<sup>14</sup> Chinese words and phrases were used for questions and answers between Zen master and student during *sanzon*.

questions in Chinese, it would be better for them to ask them freely in a language they use easily, without special effort. Of course, if it were a case where Japanese couldn't achieve the Way unless they used Chinese, I would say use Chinese. But the fact is that Japanese can ask about the Way, and achieve it, in ordinary Japanese without any trouble at all, so for them to ask questions in a language they have difficulty using is not right.

All of you keep this in mind. Whatever you want to ask, feel no hesitation. I don't care what it is, ask it just the way you want to in your own words, and I'll help you clear it up. Since you're able to resolve things this way, can you think of anything that is as valuable to you as your everyday Japanese?

33. Bankei said: I want you to regard the Buddha-mind as being unborn and possessed of illuminating wisdom. Once you have been to a certain place you don't forget it even after years have passed. You remember it readily without constantly trying to keep it in your mind. If someone else goes somewhere you have been, the two of you can talk about that spot even when you're a hundred *ri* distant from it. No matter where you are when you talk about it, your accounts of it will agree.

While you're walking down a road, if you happen to meet a large group of people approaching from the opposite direction, none of you gives a thought to avoiding the other, and yet you don't allow yourselves to run into each other; you aren't pushed down or walked over. You thread your way through them by weaving this way and that way, dodging and passing on, and even though you make no conscious decisions in this, you're able to continue unhampered on your way. The Buddha-mind is in such a manner unborn and possessed of illuminating wisdom; in it, all is managed perfectly well.

And, if by chance the thought to make way for others does arise spontaneously in you prior to your actually stepping aside, that too will be the working of illuminative wisdom. You may step aside to the right side or to the left because in your mind you have decided to step in one of these directions. Nonetheless, the movement of your feet, one step after another, doesn't occur from your thinking of it. So when you walk along naturally you walk by the unborn.

34. Bankei spoke to the assembly on the first day of *Rōbatsu sesshin*:<sup>15</sup> At my temple, our everyday life is always lived in true samadhi. We don't do as they do elsewhere. Elsewhere they tell you, "beginning from today we will commence the practice of zazen," and then everyone starts bustling around making a great fuss.

I once reprimanded a monk who had just struck another monk that had dozed off. "Why hit someone when he's enjoying a pleasant nap?" I said. "Does he become something else when he sleeps?" I don't urge people to sleep here, but once they are asleep it's a great mistake to hit them. Nothing like that is allowed to happen anymore at my temple. We don't go out of our way to recommend that people sleep, yet neither do we hit them or scold them for it when they do. We neither scold them nor praise them for sleeping, and we neither scold them nor praise them for not sleeping. If you stay awake, then you stay awake. If you sleep, you sleep. When you sleep you sleep in the Buddha-mind that you were awake in. When you are awake you are awake in the Buddha-mind you were sleeping in. When you sleep you sleep in the Buddha-mind, and when you are awake you are awake in the Buddha-mind. Then you always dwell in the Buddha-mind and you're never an instant apart.

It's wrong to think that you become something else when you're sleeping. To be the Buddha-mind only during your waking hours and something else when you went to sleep, would not be the true Buddhist Dharma. It would be straying along in continuous transmigratory illusion.

All of you are working hard to become Buddhas. That's why you scold and strike people who sleep. But that isn't right. What each one of you received from your mother when you were born was an unborn Buddha-mind and nothing else. So when instead of trying to become a Buddha you just dwell constantly in your unborn Buddha-mind, you sleep in the Buddha-mind when you sleep and are awake in the Buddha-mind when you are awake, a living Buddha in your everyday life and at no time apart from Buddhahood. Since at all times you are a Buddha, there is no Buddha in addition to this for you to become. So instead of trying to *become* a Buddha, a much easier and shorter way is to *be* a Buddha.

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<sup>15</sup> *Rōbatsu sesshin*: the great winter retreat from the 1st day of December to the morning of the eighth.

35. The main figure of worship at the Ryūmonji was an image of Kannon. It was made by Bankei himself. Aware of this, while Bankei was giving a talk a monk from Ōshū, who was standing against a pillar, asked,<sup>16</sup> “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,” replied Bankei, “then that’s what it is, and that’s that. Why did you ask me? Since you don’t know yet that the unborn is the Buddha-mind, you ask useless questions like that thinking that it’s Zen. Instead of bothering everyone here with such silly questions, sit down and keep your mouth shut, and listen carefully to what I say.”

36. A person from Izumo<sup>17</sup> asked Bankei, “When someone is enlightened like you are, can he see at will the past, present, and future in the palm of his hand?”<sup>18</sup>

Bankei answered, “Is that question something you thought up beforehand, or did it occur to you just now?”

“It didn’t come into my head just now when I asked it. It’s something I thought about before,” he said.

Bankei’s answer was, “In that case, it will be all right to leave that for later. What you must do first of all is to get to the bottom of your own self, right now. Until you do, no matter how much I tell you what the Three Worlds look like you won’t be able to see them, so you could never comprehend them. Once you’ve come to the end of your self, the visible and the invisible both will be known to you as a matter of course. There’s no use in my telling you and no need in your asking me either. You miss the point completely when you ask questions that would best be put off until later about unimportant details, such as can I see the Three Worlds or not, instead of dealing with the matter of your own self right now today. It’s misdirected

<sup>16</sup> Bankei studied sculpture and produced a number of Buddhist images, some of which still exist in the Ryūmonji 龍門寺 (Bankei’s chief temple, located in Hamada, Harima province) and other temples with which he was associated. Fujimoto Tsuchishige, *Bankei kokusbi no kenkyū* (Shunjūsha, Tokyo, 1971), pp. 614–5. Ōshū was a region that includes present-day Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, and Aomori prefectures.

<sup>17</sup> The province of Izumo was located in part of what is now Shimane prefecture.

<sup>18</sup> The *Three Worlds* (三世) of the past, present, and future, instantaneous knowledge of which is said to be one of the attributes of a Buddha.

effort. It's completely irrelevant to you. It's like counting up someone else's money for him. You won't get a penny of it yourself! Therefore, listen to what I tell you. What is important right now is for you to get to the bottom of your self. So listen very carefully to my instructions, and follow them. If you listen to me closely and then become absolutely sure of it yourself, that very instant you're a living Buddha. Then you'll realize how mistaken you've been needlessly carrying around questions such as you asked me, and so you won't be employing your efforts where you shouldn't be. That's why I want you to listen to me."

37. Speaking once again, Bankei said: My religion isn't concerned with "self-power" or with "other-power" either.<sup>19</sup> It is what is beyond self-power and other-power. The proof that it is, is this: while you face me listening to me say this, if somewhere behind you a sparrow chirped or a crow cawed, or a man or woman spoke, or the wind rose up, while you sit there without any mind to listen you would hear and recognize each sound. This happens because it isn't your self that is listening. So it isn't self-power. On the other hand, it wouldn't be any use to you if someone else heard it for you. So it isn't other-power. That's why I say my religion has nothing to do with self-power, that it's beyond self-power and other-power. Isn't that right? When you listen like this by the unborn, you're beyond all [such distinctions]. And all other things besides are managed in just the same way in the unborn.

So all is perfectly well taken care of for any person who lives his life in the unborn, and those of the unborn have no concern with self-power and other-power. They are beyond both.

*These sermons were hidden away in the hermitage of one of Butchi Zenji's<sup>20</sup> Dharma heirs. Having a bit of leisure, I went to this hermitage one rainy*

<sup>19</sup> A reference to the distinction between the teaching of the Pure Land schools, which teach that enlightenment is attained solely through the compassionate power of an "other," Amida Buddha, and other schools, principally Zen, which teach that it is achieved through the self effort of each practitioner.

<sup>20</sup> *Butchi Zenji* 佛智禪師: Bankei.



THE ZEN SERMONS OF BANKEI YŌTAKU

*day, and, after I had given my talk, I had a chance to look over the manuscript. I thought that if blocks were carved and it was printed and made available to people, it could lead young and old, woman and child into contact with the Buddhist Dharma, and could also be an essential pathway by which they could attain the unborn Buddha-mind. I thus begged the priest to allow me just to write down for myself and others these instructions that the Zenji (Bankei) left behind.*

*Gyokuzui Naniwa (Ōsaka)*

*A winter day, the seventh year of Hōreki (1757)*