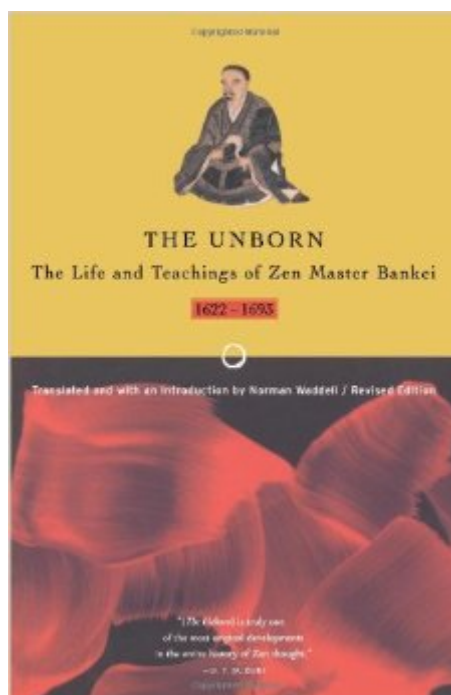


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Unborn: The Life And Teachings Of Zen Master Bankei, 1622-1693



Synopsis

In 1633, at age eleven, Bankei Yotaku was banished from his family's home because of his consuming engagement with the Confucian texts that all schoolboys were required to copy and recite. Using a hut in the nearby hills, he wrote the word Shugyo-an, or "practice hermitage," on a plank of wood, propped it up beside the entrance, and settled down to devote himself to his own clarification of "bright virtue." He finally turned to Zen and, after fourteen years of incredible hardship, achieved a decisive enlightenment, whereupon the Rinzaï priest traveled unceasingly to the temples and monasteries of Japan, sharing what he'd learned. "What I teach in these talks of mine is the Unborn Buddha-mind of illuminative wisdom, nothing else. Everyone is endowed with this Buddha-mind, only they don't know it." Casting aside the traditional aristocratic style of his contemporaries, he offered his teachings in the common language of the people. His style recalls the genius and simplicity of the great Chinese Zen masters of the T'ang dynasty. This revised and expanded edition contains many talks and dialogues not included in the original 1984 volume.

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Customer Reviews

A great gem of a book for any seeker. Master Bankei's teachings revolved around the principal that we are all a part of the Unborn-here and now and that once we abide in that no other knowledge or practice is really necessary. His teachings mainly point this out from many angles based on peoples questions and issues at the time. After many years of his own struggle as a seeker he came to the realization that since everything arises from the Unborn we are all Buddhas once we really abide in

the Unborn, which is possible NOW without any other knowledge. He felt that seekers distanced themselves from this very direct teaching by doing too many things like working on koans or spending a lot of time reading religious Buddhist texts, all the while missing the Unborn Buddha Mind right now that is always present. It seems hard to believe but Master Bankei very profoundly and intelligently makes a great case for this teaching in this wonderful book. I strongly recommend it. It is along the lines of the teachings of Papaji, Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj and more recently Eckhart Tolle (The Power of Now & Stillness Speaks).

I had the good fortune to attend a number of Alan Watts' live talks in the Monterey-Big Sur area during the sixties. Some 35 years later his body of work continues to stimulate my growth and understanding. While Watts never proclaimed any one person as his teacher or guru, the 17th century Zen master Bankei (1622-1693) appears to have been a major influence. As early as 1950 Watts specifically identifies Bankei as a resource in an article he wrote for the journal of the Buddhist Lodge in England. He quotes Bankei even more profusely in his 1957 opus The Way of Zen. Finally, in his autobiography In My Own Way, published a year before his death in 1973, Watts reveals having spent many hours studying Bankei and elevates him to a representative of "Zen at its best." He said that he referred people to Bankei's observations whenever they accused him of misinterpreting Zen. I am delighted to find that the teachings of this Zen iconoclast par excellence are available once again in the revised edition of The Unborn: The Life and Teachings of Zen Master Bankei, translated by Norman Waddell. Highly recommended with one caveat: if your feet are firmly planted in orthodoxy, anticipate the appearance of major cracks in your foundation. A retrofit will not necessarily be an option.

Bankei's Zen shines through this translation. He has no time for the past, and therefore becomes contemporary. His message is clear - You are already the Unborn, Original Mind. The important thing is letting go; being totally natural and spontaneous in all you do. The self centered bad habits which we acquire as we grow up are not innate, are not of the Unborn, however. We leave the self illuminating unborn Buddha Mind and become particular identities, and then search for our original state, using this bundle of learned tendencies. His sense of freedom and colloquial expression in dealing with ultimate problems make this collection refreshing and direct, leaving us thankfully free of any belief systems or adopted religiousness, while at the same time expressing the deepest truth. A big thank you to North Point Press for re editing and re printing this fine book. Also recommended: The Zen Teaching of Huang Po - Tr. John Blofeld Mud and Water - Bassui - Tr. Arthur Braverman

Bankei's zen goes beyond all doctrinal concepts and hits the heart of the matter. His own efforts, described in the early parts of the book are truly spectacular, but, as he says, we are lucky because we do not have to go through the pain and torture that he went through. Bankei speaks to all seekers, devotees and students of religion today, as he did in his day-telling us that we do not need to seek it, it is already our nature-The Unborn. This book should not be out of print-North Point wake up!

I own many books on Buddhism, and while they have all been very helpful, as someone prone to extreme intellectual gymnastics and severe existential doubt I can get lost in the rich yet sometimes densely written works of many teachers, the lengthy descriptions of the suffering that practitioners often confront and the varied practices one applies. This approach can sometimes cause me to lose sight of the awakened state, the entire point of the path. I must make clear that this book is not an instructional manual - there are many books far better for that purpose. Rather, I turn to the words of Bankei contained within as a reminder of the tremendous freedom and bliss of enlightenment, or as Bankei calls it, the Unborn Buddha Mind. "All things are perfectly resolved in the Unborn", Bankei famously realized upon his initial awakening. Some may find his repeated descriptions of The Unborn redundant or unnecessary, but I find the repetition instills a sense of faith that such a level of being is indeed possible, and not just for a select few. Bankei again and again reminds us that we already are what we seek. "There are no unenlightened people here", he says in one of this series of recorded talks, and we would all do well to remember that.

This is a well-written short biography of Bankei with the bulk of the book being a great selection of his sermons and lectures, as well as poetry and sayings. There are only two English texts of Bankei, and both are worth owning.

Once you have read several pieces of literature penned by different Zen masters, the realization begins to form that each one of us, too, has our own perspective of how we understand our view of the world; and then the next realization forms itself in our mind.

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