

The True Buddha

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

A Dharma Speech given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the International Zen Center of New York on Buddha's birthday, May 18, 1975

(Holding up the Zen stick and hitting the table)

An eminent teacher said, "Before Buddha was born and came to the Kapila Empire, he had already saved all people."

(Hitting the table)

When Buddha was born, he took seven steps, looked in the four directions, pointed with one hand to the sky and with the other hand to the ground, and said, "In the sky above and the sky below, only I am holy."

(Hitting the table)

Somebody once mentioned these words of the baby Buddha to Zen Master Un-mun and asked what they meant. Unmun said, "As soon as Buddha said this, I hit him and killed him and fed his body to a hungry dog. The whole world was at peace."

Today we are celebrating Buddha's 2519th birthday. These three sentences are all in praise of the true Buddha. If you discover the true meaning of Buddha's birthday, then you will become the same as Buddha, and you will finish the great work.

We say that Buddha was born. But what is the true Buddha? Is Gautama Shakyamuni, who was born long ago in India, the true Buddha? Is the golden Buddha just behind me on the altar the true Buddha?

The Diamond Sutra says, "All things that appear in this world are transient. If you view all appearances as nonappearance, then you will see the true Buddha."

The historical Buddha, who was born, became enlightened, and died, and the golden statue behind me — is either of them the true Buddha?

The Diamond Sutra says, "All things that exist are like a dream, a phantom, a bubble, a reflection; they are like dew or lightning; thus should you view them."

If you view all things in this way, then you will see the true Buddha. This is the true meaning of our celebration today.

Then what is Buddha? Zen Master Ma-jo once answered, "Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind." Another time he answered, "No mind, no Buddha." When Zen Master Lin-chi was asked what is Buddha, he only shouted, "KATZ!!!" Duk Sahn only hit the person who had asked. Dong Sahn answered, "Three pounds of flax." Kyong Ho said, "Before you came, did you wash your bowl?"

Which of these answers is correct?

The Diamond Sutra says, "If you are attached to color and sound and want to see your true nature, you are on the wrong path."

If you are attached to the words of eminent teachers, then you cannot understand the true Buddha. You must cut off all thinking and return to before thinking. Then your mind will be clear. A clear mind has no hindrance at all. Everything you see, hear, smell, taste, touch — everything just as it is — this is the true Buddha.

So just like this, mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind. Just like this, no Buddha, no mind. Just like this, KATZ!!! Just like this, HIT. Just like this, three pounds of flax. Just like this, did you wash your bowl? All this is the true Buddha.

So just like this, Gautama Shakyamuni, who was born 2519 years ago today, is the true Buddha. Just like this, the golden statue behind me is also the true Buddha.

All things are equal. There is no holy or unholy. But Buddha said, "In the sky above and the sky below, only I am holy." So I will hit Buddha thirty times.

In original nature, there is no name or form, no life or death. But Un-mun said, "As soon as Buddha said this, I hit him and killed him and fed him to a hungry dog." So I will hit Un-mun thirty times. But already there is nothing. Whom can I hit? So I will hit myself thirty times.

Where is the mistake?

KATZ!!!

In front of Buddha, the paper lanterns are shining.

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