



# BIRTH

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When Buddha was born, he sprang out of his mother's hip, walked seven steps, said, "Heaven above, earth below, only I am holy."

*[hits]*

When you and I were born, we sprung from our mother's uterus, dropped into the doctor's arms, and screamed, "WAAAAAAAAAH!"

*[hits]*

Are Buddha and you the same or different?

KATZ!

The Buddha is wearing gold; Kwan Um Zen students wear grey.

Happy Buddha's Birthday, everyone.

I'd like to take a look at the story of the Buddha from an unusual angle. The Buddha was born a prince in a kingdom in India. His father, the king, decided that, to make him a really great king, he would have to pretend that there was no suffering, old age, sickness, or death in the realm. The amount of deception and lying that had to be maintained to shelter the Buddha from all of this must have been incredible.

The Buddha couldn't know that people got hurt. He couldn't know that people didn't have enough to eat. He couldn't know that they succumbed to illness. What happened, then, when the Buddha played with his friends on an

elephant and one of them fell off and got hurt? How did they hide that from him? How did they conceal the fact that his grandparents died? How did they hide the fact that his elderly uncles and aunts got sick and died?

In short, the Buddha spent the first twenty-odd years of his life in total ignorance. And this total ignorance was supposed to make him a great king. How does ignorance make someone a great king? Really, the whole idea that deception and falsehood would make a great king seems quite absurd.

As the story of the Buddha unfolds, we learn that one day he noticed somebody suffering. He noticed sickness. He noticed old age and he saw a corpse. With that his whole world exploded. Everything that he had believed about life was wrong. All of the things he was taught, all of his ideas, everything, was wrong. It was all made up—a man-made illusion. It's no wonder that when he finally attained his true self, the Buddha decided that his path would be based on truth, because he had been lied to his whole life.

If you think about it, our own stories are no different than the Buddha's. We also grow up being lied to—however well-intentioned the lies are. We are also brought into this world in a very narrow corner of the universe. Each of us has our own different situation that we're born into. But when we're born, our parents, relatives and teachers begin a subtle process of deceiving us, telling us half-truths

# HOLIDAY

*Happy Buddha's*

and lies, for the purpose of making us what they call “good citizens.”

When young, how many of us had a relative die and our parents didn't tell us? One summer my grandmother died while my brother and I were in summer camp. My parents called and told me to come home to the funeral, but told me not to tell my younger brother where I was going because they were afraid it would hurt him too much.

We go to school and the socialization process starts to make us into “good citizens.” So sometimes a very subtle, and at other times, a very unsubtle process happens. We're molded, pushed to become a certain way. Often, we willingly buy into this process. We desperately want to be accepted. We want friends, we want love, we want so many things so badly that we're willing to sacrifice our own perceptions in order to win love and approval. We begin to realize that when we act in certain ways we elicit a smile from someone who is important to us. We conclude: “Oh, I'll do that again. This is great. I do this, and I get a hug. I do that and I'm liked. I do this and I'm accepted.” We really are very smart. We look around, see what works for us, what we think works for us. So, just like the Buddha, we grow up in an environment where we're lied to and told half-truths. We really don't know anything.

How did the Buddha react when he discovered that his life had been a sham, a charade? He said, “Holy shit! I gotta

get out of here! This is crazy!” So he left. He left his wife, he left his child, he left the opportunity to be a king and all the wealth you could imagine, in order to find his true self.

But Buddha isn't the only one who has that kind of experience. All of us sitting here have had similar experiences. For me, I was fifteen and in my sophomore year in a high school English class. I had a young teacher at the time who must have been twenty-two or twenty-three years old. She decided we would study poetry by bringing in lyrics from rock 'n roll songs. This was 1968. She believed we could learn poetry this way. It was a great idea.

I was a bit conservative at the time, and I liked Simon and Garfunkel, so I brought in one of their songs. I presented it in class and we talked about it and everything went well. Somebody else brought in the song, “Hey Jude” by the Beatles. We read the song and the teacher said, “OK, great. What's it about?” I liked to talk in class so I raised my hand and I said, “It's about love, it's about a person wanting somebody, and that kind of thing.” In the back of the room was a guy with long, red hair who raised his hand and said, “Nunh hunh. It's not about that.” He said, “It's about shooting heroin.” He went through the whole song, line-by-line, and showed how it was all about shooting heroin in your arm.

That guy totally blew my mind. I realized that the world wasn't necessarily the way I thought it was. All of the beliefs

and ideas and everything else that I had were just a creation. They weren't really true. So great doubt appeared for me like it did for the Buddha.

In our Zen tradition, we have the story of Dok Sahn, who was a sutra master in northern China. He had heard about the Zen practitioners in southern China who sat all day long facing the wall and did nothing. He said, "This is crazy! They're not studying sutras. How do they expect to get enlightenment?" Dok Sahn was so sure of himself that he knew he had to personally go and teach these monks the true way. Apparently, he was a very famous sutra master and had some standing in the Buddhist community.

He walks hundreds of miles to go teach these crazy Zen monks a lesson. As he approaches the first monastery, Dok Sahn stops at a tea house and encounters the woman who runs it. She sees him carrying a bundle of books and says, "Oh, what's in that bundle?" The sutra master replies, "That's the Diamond Sutra. I am a great Diamond Sutra master. I am going to teach these monks a lesson. They'll learn the Diamond Sutra, then they'll understand the true way."

So the tea house woman says, "That's very interesting. But I have a question for you. If you can answer this question, you can have your lunch for free. If you can't answer, you have no lunch." Dok Sahn was very prideful so he responded: "I can answer any question about the Diamond Sutra. I know it all." "I already understand," the sutra master boasts. "OK, you ask me. No problem."

The tea house woman says, "In the Diamond Sutra it says, 'Past mind can't get enlightenment, present mind can't get enlightenment, future mind can't get enlightenment.' With what kind of mind will you eat your lunch?" The sutra master was stumped.

Dok Sahn couldn't answer at all. Suddenly, this great question appeared: "What is this? I don't understand everything." Just like the Buddha, who realized that his whole life had been a lie. Just like me sitting in that classroom, realizing I didn't know what was going on.

Reaching this point is very important in our practice. Because it's at such a moment we truly understand don't know mind. We truly realize great doubt. What is this? If we're really honest, and truly practice, we are able to hold great doubt. We don't hold it like an idea, but as a direction in our life. "I don't understand. What is this?" Not knowing is the heart of our kong-an practice. "What is this?" Who is

it that thinks they know everything? We're all crazy. Why? Because we hold so tightly onto our opinions, our ideas, our feelings, our desires, our anger, trying to hang onto a little bit of security in this very insecure world.

With his great question, the Buddha went off and pursued every spiritual practice that was around at the time. All of them had one major problem: They all believed something. As his practice deepened, he realized that all belief systems were limited. "That's not the way," he decided. "If you believe anything, already you have lost the way."

Eventually, the Buddha just sat down. He sat down for six years. Breathing in, breathing out. What am I? One morning he saw the morning star [*claps*] and realized great enlightenment. What did he see? What do you see in front of you right now? Is that great enlightenment?

The Buddha taught us that everything is already enlightened. Everything is already complete just as it is now. So, like him, we have to use this great question and deep practice of breathing in and breathing out to let go of our ideas, our opinions, our situation—everything.

Breathing in and breathing out. Only let go. Then when everything disappears, the truth is right in front of us. We already have it. It's already all around us. Why make something more? That's the truth of our way. So, any idea, any belief, any understanding, throw it away, open your eyes, and perceive.

Then we say, helping all beings is possible. If you cling to your idea or your belief, helping all beings is not possible. It's tainted by a fixed idea. So, in Zen we say, throw away all ideas, perceive this situation as it is and correct action becomes possible. The correct way is very clear. But, if we cling to something, we lose it.

I'd like to end with a poem written by a very great Zen Master. It's a poem that I use to begin a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. The poem, called "Original Face," is by Zen Master Seung Sahn:

Your true self is always shining and free.  
Human beings make something,  
and enter the ocean of suffering.  
Only without thinking can you return to your true self.  
The mountain is always blue.  
White clouds coming and going.

Thank you very much.