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Today we are celebrating Buddha's Birthday. Zen Master Seung Sahn says that being born is already a mistake. An eminent Korean teacher, Sosan Taesa, once said, "Before the ancient Buddha was born, one thing was already perfectly clear. Shakyamuni Buddha never understood it, how could he transmit it to Mahakasyapa?" So, today we are celebrating the big mistake Buddha made a long time ago. However, this mistake was necessary to teach sentient beings about their original treasure. His birth was like a finger pointing at the moon. As the story goes, when he came out of his mother's side, he took seven steps in each of the four directions, held one finger up and one down and said, "In the heavens above and the earth below, only I am holy." This "I" is no-I and belongs to every human being; it is our original nature. In fact his whole life was pointing at the inherent clarity and wisdom we all possess.

A famous philosopher once said that life is an incurable disease because it always ends with death. Sometimes when we look at human beings' lives it's difficult to refrain from such conclusions. People constantly follow their desire, anger and ignorance, creating senseless suffering for themselves and the world around them. Buddha said that human beings have no meaning and no direction. Despite the fact that we are endowed with this one pure and clear thing, we are almost completely blind to this truth. So, being born seems to be a sad mistake. But perceiving this does not change anything. We must apply the medicine given to us by the Buddha so that we could transform lack of meaning into great meaning and lack of direction into great direction. We must really attain, "Only I alone am holy," and help this world to awaken to this truth. This is the only medicine for the sickness of life.

Buddha's life was the best example of how to correct the mistake of being born. I thank him for the help he gave our world. But being attached to Buddha can also be a problem. Sometimes we can think with great pride, "I'm Buddhist. I follow the noblest of truths. I'm somebody special." There is a very wise saying: "When I was a Buddhist I had conflict with the whole world. But when I'm the Buddha the whole world is in harmony." That's why Zen Master Un Mun said, commenting on Buddha's birthday, "If I had been there, I would have grabbed a big stick, killed him and fed him to a hungry dog. Then the whole world would be at peace." So, when we really put it all down, we can clearly perceive one pure Buddha-substance, which was apparent in everything even before Buddha was born. I'm grateful to all of you for making this mistake of being born and fixing it by being here and practicing together.

mistake