

tears

*Opening talk by Zen Master Wu Kwang
at the Buddha's Birthday Ceremony
at Providence Zen Center, April 5, 2003*

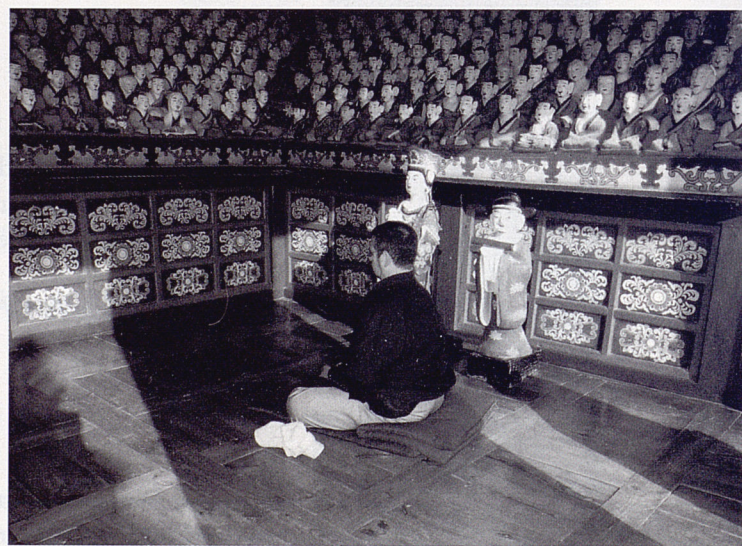
A number of years ago, there was a long-time student in New York who was having some difficulty with practice—a crisis of meaning that many of us go through at different times.

It was about this time of year when the student said to me, “I really don't know if I can listen to the story of Buddha's birth one more time.” [laughter] Actually, every year I really don't know if I can tell the story of Buddha's birth one more time. [laughter] But, embedded in this person's remark—“I don't know if I can listen to the story of Buddha's birth one more time”—is the essence of practice. Because if you truly *don't know*, through and through, then listening is possible, seeing is possible, feeling is possible, connecting is possible, and having engagement with others is possible. And that, in and of itself, is actually giving birth to the Buddha at that moment.

Now, according to the traditional story, the Buddha sprang from his mother's side and walked seven steps in each direction and then issued his first teaching about “what is true self.” However, a number of years ago at a Buddha's Enlightenment day ceremony, Zen Master Seung Sahn offered another story. Standing before the sangha, he said, “Two thousand, five hundred and some-odd years ago, Buddha got enlightenment by seeing a star. But if Buddha were to get enlightenment today, it would not be expressed by looking at the star and saying, ‘Ah, wonderful.’” Then Zen Master Seung Sahn stood silently, letting his face become sadder and sadder, while his finger slowly traced an imaginary tear running down his cheek. “That,” he said quietly, “would be Buddha's enlightenment here and now today.”

But now, we have another *today*. I think that if Buddha's birth were to occur here and now it would not be by springing from the right side of his mother, but maybe by emerging from some of her teardrops. Because it is quite sad that people once again are killing other people in this world. It is quite sad that young men and women are going off to war and really don't know all the essential reasons connected with why they are being sent. And sad because they will probably do serious damage to other people and will have to cope with the psychological repercussions of that for the rest of their lives. It is quite sad that leaders of countries and other world leaders do not know how to talk to and get along with each other. And it is incredibly sad that young children are hearing bombs dropping near them day after day.

I think it is very important that *we* enter into that sadness—and that we let the emergence of that sadness give birth to Buddha's mind of compassion, joined with clear seeing, wisdom and some kind of straightforward action.



Zen Master Wu Kwang at the Whole World is a Single Flower Conference and Tour

