

Buddha's Birthday 2002

Zen Master Wu Bong

Excerpted from *Zen Life, Moment Life* by Zen Master Wu Bong (ISBN 978-3-937983-34-9). Copyright © 2012 European Kwan Um School of Zen. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission of Johannes Herrmann Verlag. For information on ordering this book, see page 17.



This is mistake day, so my talk points the same way.

Buddha was born and the gods enjoy: Big mistake.

Six years under the Bodhi Tree, then enlightenment:
Another big mistake.

Your life, my life: Also a mistake.

Today it's Buddha's birthday celebration: Mistake
celebrating mistake.

Then how will you make your life correct?

In one gulp swallow all oceans and rivers.

Then someone hungry, give them food; someone
thirsty, give them drink.

Very simple.

The tradition says that when Buddha was born, in heaven they had a big celebration because all the devas, all the gods, they could see that it was somebody great because a great light shone from the Buddha's birthplace into heaven. So they were very happy. They already understood that Buddha is born, future Buddha is born. But as several people pointed out, if you are born, already a mistake, so the same thing is true for Buddha. He was a human being, not a god in heaven, so as a human being, already a mistake.

You are all familiar with Buddha's story, sitting under the Bodhi Tree, getting enlightenment. Somebody once asked a great master about Buddha's enlightenment, and this master said: "Golden sand in the eye." Zen students want enlightenment, but the problem is that as soon as you want something, this something is binding; it becomes your prison. Whether this prison is golden and beautiful, or bad and terrible, still prison is prison. So, if you are attached to something, want something, then already you don't get freedom.

In our life it's that way. We start, we begin our life with a mistake, then the continuation of our life is this moment, just now. In this moment we are also making a mistake, because we are celebrating a mistake. That's why it's a mistake celebrating a mistake. So everybody has a challenge: How do we make our life correct? How do we use this mistake and make our life worthwhile? I already said, if you are attached to something then you can't get freedom.

Then what is freedom? In one gulp swallow all oceans and rivers. That's absolute freedom. That means you can be anything, but if you are attached to this freedom, then this freedom itself becomes your prison. That's also a mistake, so the final step is most important—this final sentence of the speech: Then, somebody is hungry, everybody understands what to do. Somebody is thirsty, also everybody understands what to do. So only one thing remains to do: *do it*.

Thank you everybody for coming here. It's wonderful to see people from many countries, many places, and I'm sure if Buddha was with us, Buddha would be very pleased.◆

[5