

ZEN NOTES



who later became Buddha's foster mother and later still the mother superior of Buddha's sangha. Mahaprajapati placed the infant Buddha on the ground. Immediately he walked round seven times with his right finger pointed to the sky, his left to the earth, and he said: "Between heaven and earth I am the only one who is honored."

This is the mythologized description of Buddha's birth day. If I render this mythology into theology its meaning will become clear.

Buddha was a child of the Tushita Heaven It means he is the spirit of the universe. Nourished by water he grew in heaven and descended to the earth. Earth means the mind of human-beings, who are earthbound. From pure infinite heaven the spirit of the universe descends into the body, which is earthbound; materially, into the body of a human being.

Conceived by the physical existence of Maya This means "the creator" was incarnated in human shape as Maya, the wife of Suddhodana.

She offered a pure blossom This means "sacred thoughts." Buddha's birthday is always celebrated in the spring, which is decorated with pure holy white blossoms, like snow. The spirit of the universe, then, was incarnated in the phenomenal world in the middle of the spring. By the positive power of the world, as everything blooms and generates, he was born.

He was received by the God Brahma Brahma signifies "knowing power," knowledge; to be aware of existence. This in India is called Brahma-loca, signified by the eye. In Egypt, also, the sign of the eye means knowledge.

And Brahma received the spirit of heaven and gave it to Indra Indra is the god of desire, intention, will power. Not waiting for Nature's force, he strives with his own force to do something without Nature's order.

Maya's sister received the child from Indra and placed it on the ground Placed it on this physical ground. Before that, Indra had placed the child on the hand of the woman, Mahaprajapati. And she placed the child on the ground.

He walked round seven times Seven usually refers to the five outside senses and the two inside, or the seven stages of consciousness.

And he said: "Between heaven and earth I am the only one who is honored." I here is the consciousness which came to earth as the child of heaven, the son of God.

What I have just told is the canonical explanation of the mythologized story.

Every religion has these two steps by which it is transmitted.

First: A mythologized story.

Second: Through the teacher, according to the canon, the story is rendered into a philosophy or theory.

The story of Buddha's birth thus explained is that pure spirit passed through four stages--from fire to water to air to earth; it exists only that every one may worship it. It is never desecrated or involved with earthly desire or mere human thought. It does not lose the power of omnipresence or omnipotence, but exists on earth as in heaven. It passes through the two hands of sense perception and will power, then goes to

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the foster mother. But it is always the empty sky, *Akasa-garbha*, - which is the real mother, who conceives all, immaculately.

Third: Religion is mythological first, then canonical. But Zen adds a third step. For theory must be realized to be complete. One who has the true eye will discover the true meaning of mythology, will grasp the Reality which theory seeks to explain.

From the follower's view, mythology is accepted first, theology second. Reality is grasped last.

From the teacher's side, Reality is first, but cannot be given directly. So mythology and theology are given in order that the children of sentient beings may be led to realization.

When Christmas comes and Western people decorate their houses and streets to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ I recall this old Buddhist legend. With your true eye, you will find the same note in these two stories, Christian and Buddhist, even though the descriptions are different. Seen with the true eye, all religions become clear and plain.

Every year we as Buddhists celebrate the birthday of Christ, the Son of God, interpreting this event in our own way.

One who reveals the perfect consciousness of Dharmakaya, of God, is by Buddhists called a Bodhisattva. From our standpoint, the Christ as a person manifested the perfect consciousness of Dharmakaya in his own body, therefore he is called the Son of God, the Son of Sambhogakaya. Without the Bodhisattva, without Christ, we as human beings are entirely separated from God, but when we encounter this perfect manifestation of consciousness we are at once convinced there is a God. Through the Bodhisattva's manifestation of perfect consciousness embodied in human flesh we can clearly observe the wholeness of Dharma; through Christ we can see God.

We as human beings are possessed of perfect consciousness too but we rarely manifest it as children of God; for though we too have perfect consciousness we are imperfect human beings. From the Buddhist point of view, however, when you see perfect consciousness within yourself, immediately you stand face to face with God; when you find perfect consciousness within yourself, this too is the birthday of Christ. Thus, as through this symbol of the holy birth of complete consciousness the human being may come to awareness of the reality of perfect consciousness, Christmas is one of the great memorial days to Buddhists.

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