

You Are Buddha

by Norm Randolph

Throughout his teaching career, Katagiri Roshi taught, “You are Buddha; all beings are Buddha.”

At first no one understood, but eventually, a few people did. At his last Dharma talk, before he died of cancer, he was very weak and had to be helped to sit down on his cushion. But when he spoke, he gave a very powerful lecture. He knew it was his last talk, so he gave it everything he had. And in this talk, he very strongly emphasized, “You are Buddha.”

The great Zen master, Suzuki Roshi, who founded the San Francisco Zen Center, also pointed this out. He would say to his students, “When I look at you, I see you all as perfect Buddhas.” However, he would go on to say, “I see you all as perfect Buddhas until you open your mouths to say something.”

He saw very clearly that our True Nature was the Buddha Nature. Yet, it was also clear to him that we were ignorant of our True Nature.

Buddha is the Reality of Awakeness, which is the True Self, the True Life, the True Nature of each being. It is the subjectless, objectless Awakeness which is being directly experienced by all beings now.

The historical Buddha, who lived in India approximately 2,500 years ago, was a person who profoundly realized the Reality of Awakeness. He clearly saw that this Reality was his True Self. He realized that the seemingly separate individual that he seemed to be was an empty, illusory manifestation of the True Self or Buddha. He realized this was true for all the seemingly separate beings and phenomena in the universe.

The Reality of Awakeness or Buddha is the boundless, all-inclusive Reality of here and now. Different terms are used to point to this Reality—Totality, Wholeness, the Universe, Dharma, Truth, Thusness, the True Self,

Supreme Enlightenment, the One Buddha Mind, and other terms as well.

This Reality of Awakeness is sometimes described as being wondrous and inconceivable. It is described in this way because it cannot be objectified or conceptually grasped. No matter how much we speak about it or write about it, it cannot be pinned down or objectified, or explained or packaged into a conceptual description. Nevertheless, it is clear and obvious; it is being directly experienced now, and everything is a manifestation of it. It cannot be hidden. Dharma teaching is pointing to this Reality of Awakeness, which cannot be explained or objectified and yet, which cannot be hidden.

This Reality of Awakeness or Buddha, which is clear and obvious, is usually ignored or overlooked. It is ignored by getting caught up in the belief in separation of self and other and the belief in a dualistically structured Reality. Reality is ignored when we are caught up in these beliefs and respond and act based on these beliefs. We are profoundly taken in by these beliefs in many ways. We have many beliefs or assumptions about ourselves, others, and the nature of Reality, and we live our lives based on these beliefs. This is the ignorance by which our Buddhahood is ignored.

We don't try to get rid of beliefs. We don't try to get rid of the ignoring or ignorance. We don't try to get rid of the emotional responses, desires, and patterns of behavior based on this ignorance. Instead, we are just aware of them. Eventually these can be seen as empty, illusory manifestations of the True Self or Buddha—then they cease to be problems. Then they can be seen as helpful pointers—showing us how we are interpreting Reality, how we are responding to it, how we are getting stuck, and how we can be released. In this practice of Awakeness the ways in which the True Self is ignored can eventually be seen through, and they drop away by themselves.

Suzuki Roshi used to say, “Since you are Buddha, you must be Buddha. That is our practice.” In a lecture he gave at the monastery at Tassajara in July 1968 he said, “When it is hot you should be hot Buddha. When it is cold you should be cold Buddha.”

He went on to say that each individual, each thing, each event, each situation, each experience is Buddha. Each thought, each feeling, each emotion, each desire, each perception, each state of consciousness is Buddha. When you realize that you are Buddha and understand everything as an unfolding of the Truth, then whatever you experience is the actual teaching of Buddha, and whatever you do is the actual practice of Buddha.

Usually people practice for a long time believing that it is a separate ego self who is carrying out this practice. With continued practice, with help from a teacher, this belief can eventually be seen through.

People usually begin practice with the belief that after a long time, they will eventually attain Enlightenment. But Supreme Enlightenment or Buddha is being directly experienced now. It is not a matter of practicing for a long time and eventually attaining Enlightenment.

Most people starting out in this practice believe that practice is a means to attain Enlightenment. They believe practice and Enlightenment have a dualistic, before-and-after, means-and-end relationship. But, with continued practice, this belief can eventually be seen through. It becomes clear that Enlightenment, Buddha, or Truth is what we are and that practice and Enlightenment are one.

Some questions might arise, such as, “Who practices?” “Who eventually sees?” “What is eventually seen?” and “How long is *eventually*?”

These are interesting questions, but don’t try to figure out or conceptually grasp particular

answers. Whatever concepts or beliefs we have about Reality are just limited views. It is by holding to these beliefs and limited views about Reality that the actual Reality—Buddha—is overlooked.

So, just live a life of wide open Awakeness and curiosity as if we are discovering who we are and what our experience is for the first time. Just be Awake to directly-experienced Reality now. Just be Awake to directly-experienced Reality now without being taken in by beliefs and limited views. If we believe there is a separate self who practices and “eventually” sees and there is a separate reality that is “eventually” seen, then the directly-experienced True Self or Buddha is being ignored.

The True Self manifests itself in such a way as to bring about the appearance of separation of self and others and the appearance of duration in time and extension in space. There seem to be separate beings, times, places, and events to which names, labels, personal pronouns, and conceptual categories can be applied. In accordance with how things appear to be and in accordance with conventional speech, we use names, labels, personal pronouns, and conceptual categories. We need to function and communicate in the conventional, seemingly dualistic world where there seems to be separation of self and others, without being taken in by the belief that there actually is this separation. Then we can be truly helpful to ourselves and all the seemingly separate beings that we meet.

In this practice of Awakeness it can eventually be seen that all beings are mutually assisting each other. These are not separate beings. If they actually were separate beings, this life of mutual assistance would not be possible. When this is clearly seen, a life of compassion, joy, and fearlessness opens up to us, and we can live as the great Buddhas that we are.