

REALIZING YOU ARE BUDDHA is a very sobering experience. This wasn't exactly the Buddha you had in mind when you came to practice. You were looking for another Buddha, maybe a sixteen-foot golden body, an exciting, powerful Buddha.

Yet at some point, we come to realize the Buddha body we are seeking is inside, not somewhere else. "Take the backward step and turn your light inward to illuminate yourself," says Dogen in *Beyond Thinking*.

Illuminate the mind that doubts itself, contradicts itself, equivocates—illuminate that mind. Instead of avoiding it or being pushed around by it, illuminate it. Open up into that mind. That is the mind of reality itself, actualizing itself.

Someone asked recently, what is the effect of your sitting practice on your practice of the precepts? I replied that I first took the precepts to be "outside" my own mind, in books or in the teachings of others. After many years of externalizing my expectations, I came to see that for me practice of the precepts begins with acknowledging my ordinary mind,* in its actual

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manifestation. This busy mind, sometimes clear, sometimes conflicted, is the human condition. We live in this mind with everyone, and the strength of practice is that we finally come to realize this. We stop looking outside ourselves. We become quite grounded.

Mazu's realization, often quoted, "this very mind is Buddha," brings forth the mind of humility. When we realize we are Buddha, we find everyone else is too. Generosity and kindness come forth. The person who irritates you—this person is also Buddha, maybe now in his or her "distress" disguise. When we wear our distress disguise, practice offers itself most intimately. Notice how intimate irritation or disgust feels. The part of us that is bothered by "someone else" is actually bothering itself. Being bothered happens within, of its own causes and conditions. It feels intimate because your own insides—your mind, stomach, chest, intestines—are reacting to their own juices, their own stimuli, their own dark and hidden places.

Our Soto tradition is free from methods. We sit in the completeness of our awakened mind. And that completeness takes practice to actualize. Even though we are always inconceivably total, real, perfect, until we actualize this condition, it is not realized. Our practice is to actualize what we really are.