

Ordinary people

As mentioned earlier, when Baso told his teacher that he sat in zazen because he wanted to become a buddha, his teacher immediately picked up a tile and began to polish it. “How can your polishing make that tile a mirror?” asked Baso. “How can your zazen make you a buddha?” asked his teacher. In this dialogue, the tile stands for an ordinary person, while the mirror stands for a buddha. But if you believe a buddha is like a mirror, then you must always clean this mirror, because dust is falling on it constantly. In other words, you are judging a buddha to be an ordinary person, but even though you make every possible effort to become a buddha, you cannot do it—because an ordinary person is an ordinary person, and a buddha is a buddha. The essential quality of existence is completely beyond judgment and evaluation. No matter how long we try to become something else, it is impossible. We can’t do it. But just what is an ordinary person? Emptiness. And so, in Reality, we can actually be free from the identity “ordinary person.” But we always handle “ordinary person” as though it were an object. We control and manipulate it as an object. In fact, we handle everything in this way—even spiritual things—and it all thus becomes the conceptual world of things and ideas. The true nature of an ordinary person is completely beyond material or spiritual forms and explanations. All concepts must drop off if we would truly see the ordinary person. It is necessary that we see the ordinary person not as an ordinary person. We must ennoble, enhance, or raise each person and all things in the material world to their highest spiritual capacity. We don’t understand how sublime the ordinary person is. But eventually the ordinary person can become free from “ordinary person,” because the true nature of the ordinary person is emptiness. It cannot be pinned down.