

A Commentary on the  
*Jūgyūzu* 十牛圖  
The Ten Oxherding Pictures<sup>\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup>Talks translated by Priscilla Daichi Storandt. Oxherding text translations by Victor Sogen Hori. A shorter version of this text can be found at the [One Drop Zendo website](#).

## Introduction

For the week we are here together, I would like to talk about the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*. This text, which dates from the twelfth century, is one of the oldest documents of Zen history. The *Blue Cliff Record*, another of the most famous, historically recorded Zen texts, was written by Engo Kokugon in the years of his lifetime, from 1063 to 1135. His brother disciple, Daizui Genjo, had a disciple named Kakuan Shion. Kakuan Shion wrote the text for the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, and then Kakuan Shion's grandson disciple, Gion, added the pictures. Compared to the *Blue Cliff Record*, this was a very accessible text. The pictures could be seen, and the short pieces of poetry could be heard and remembered. Because of this, Kakuan's work was able to reach many, many people.

This is the story of the taming of an ox, of how a wild ox is caught and tamed. The catching and taming of the wild ox are likened to a person's process in practice. Why an ox? Why is the story that of the taming of an ox? In India, oxen were considered very

precious and were carefully taken care of. Because India was a Hindu country, cows were considered messengers of God, and everywhere oxen and cows walked freely, mingling with humans as equals. So to raise an ox meant to work on your divine self.

In the Buddhist sutras there is also a teaching about how we have to grab the ox's snout and not let him rough up the neighbor's garden—in that way to always keep a firm grip on the nose of this ox. In India, an ox, as the representative of an ideal, was used as a metaphor for training. But in China the idea and the thing were not seen as separate. Rather, in China, an ox represented the mind itself directly—not an idea about the mind, but the mind as it is. For us today, oxen are animals, they are wild. But in wildness there is also a quality that is beyond dualism.

Master Nansen gave us another example. Master Nansen went out one day, and when he returned his disciple had prepared a bath for him. Seeing this, Master Nansen said to his disciple, "When the bath is ready, please put the ox in the bath." The monk was a very considerate and attentive monk. When the

bath was ready, he went to Master Nansen and said, “Master cow, your bath is ready. You are welcome to enter it now.” Master Nansen, wanting to test this monk’s mind, said, “Oh, that’s very good. But did you bring the rope to take the cow into the bath? How will you take the cow into the bath if you haven’t got a rope?” The monk had gone far enough in his functioning to be able to call the roshi a cow, but he had not gone quite far enough to be able to see how he was going to get that cow into the bath.

The monk was silent. Another disciple of Nansen’s, Joshu, had just returned. Nansen had no gaps in his practice with his students. He tested Joshu immediately by telling him how this monk had said he was going to take the cow into the bath, but when asked where the rope was to take him to the bath, the monk had become silent. So Nansen asked Joshu what he would have said. At this Joshu immediately took hold of his master’s nose and pulled him into the bath, saying, “Come on, come on, let’s go to the bath.” Holding on to his master’s nose, Joshu pulled him all the way into the bath. Master Nansen cried,

“You don’t have to be so rough about it!” while enjoying his disciple’s answer very much.

For Master Nansen, the ox is the person and the person is the ox. They are not separate existences. The person becomes the ox, becomes the moon, becomes the flower, in every situation radiating brightly, without any disconnection between things, without any dualism.

There is another story from Master Isan Reiyu. Isan Reiyu told his students that one hundred years after his death he would be reborn as an ox. And on the left side of this ox would appear the words “Isan Reiyu”. He asked his students, “Will you call this animal an ox, or will you call it Isan Reiyu? If you call it an ox, then you are just calling me an ox. But if you call it Isan Reiyu, then you are calling this animal me. Which way will you say it?”

Here is another way of looking at this question. We have a name, and we are alive right here. Some think that we die and then disappear forever. Some think that we die and something remains. Each person has an individual way of seeing this question. But

in Buddhism there is no such thing as a concern about being born and dying, about beginning and ending. It is not looked at in this way. This is a mental, dualistic way of looking at it, with a before and an after of death and a before and an after of birth. In Buddhism, right here, right now, everything is eternally alive. We are all beings. There is no sense of anything being separated; there is no dualism.

We are here on this planet, six billion of us. Of course, we cannot look at how we can possibly do something to save each and every one of those six billion people. If we think we have to do something for all of them, that is impossible. In Zen, it is looked at in a different way. If we raise not one thought of a small self, that resolves it right there, and resolves it for everyone. We do not do it as a saving of another person; rather, we are manifested as becoming completely that bird's call or that sun's shining or that moon's light. We become true awareness and fresh aliveness.

We are all this huge space, this huge universe—not just this small planet of Earth but all the galaxies.

All six billion of us are manifesting as these. When the small self-conscious awareness comes forth, then we become divided into six billion separate beings. When we let go of that, when are free from that, we all return to the true root, the source from which everything comes forth. We are able to be born as all things. We return to all things. The true source of all beings is here. From here Buddhism is born.

What is beyond and prior to all of our delusions? What is beyond and prior to good or bad or what is profitable? These all come forth from the same deep source. If our mind is realized to be rooted in this great source, then we have no need for a text like *Ten Oxherding Pictures*. We do not have to stay attached to the delusions and the thoughts that all arise from this source. But while we are all endowed with the source and the possibility of its realization, we forget. As Ikkyu has said, the further we go from our infancy, the more deeply our ego takes over. How can we be returned to our mind's true source? It cannot be done so suddenly. It has taken so much time and so much conditioning for our minds to become filled with so

much clutter, and it will take time as well for them to become clear again. That is why we need a text like this, which divides the process of going through practice into ten simple steps.

Humans live with many delusions, and this aspect of their lives is expressed in terms of the six realms: the realms of hell, of hungry ghosts, of animals, of *ashuras*, of humans, and of heavenly beings. These realms are not something we will experience after death; they are what we are experiencing right now. The first of these, that realm of hell, is to not believe in anything—this hell can be to live under the same roof as someone and not be able to believe in them, or trust them at all. This is truly hell. That realm of the hungry ghosts is to be wanting more and more and more, no matter how much you already have; no matter how much you already have right in your own hand, you still want even more, endlessly. Then there is the world of the *ashura*, the angry god, which you experience when you become irritated and upset, always furious about something and not quite sure why you are so furious. The world of animals is to feel



shame and embarrassment about what you have done. The world of humans is to be able to be sorry, to be able to review our behavior and repent and look at ourselves and improve. The world of heavenly beings is the world where we are able to enjoy our hobbies, or music, spending time pleasantly. But if we have not yet realized our true source, even if we are in the realm of the heavenly beings, enjoying ourselves and feeling that everything is blissful, we will continually return to the realm of the hungry ghosts or the human realm or the hell realm, without rest, without pause.

We of the human realm can review our behavior. We can want to change it. Only humans can do this. For this reason the human realm is the highest in quality of all the six realms. One might look at the realm of the heavenly beings and think that it seems superior, but heavenly beings are so absorbed in their own pleasure that they forget others. When we become absorbed in our pleasure, we forget all of society. Only taking care of our own small self-centered happiness and self-satisfaction, we turn our

backs on society. In this way, the heavenly realm is not of the highest quality. This realization that there is a possibility of reviewing our own behavior, and the knowledge that there is a path to be walked, is what is represented by the first of these ten pictures.

This is also called the awakening of deep faith, or the awakening of the Bodhisattva nature: when we realize that life is not only about our own personal, individual selves but instead about what we can do for all of society. To reduce our own small self-centered self and let go of that ego—this is what we can do for all of society. To lessen our own personal heaviness is the way to liberate all beings. To look to society and offer everything we are to society: that is the point. So why do we do zazen? Why do we do practice? To liberate society is our primary goal, but first we have a challenge to work on within. Until we have clarified our own mind, letting go of our heaviness and ego attachments, our offering to society will only cause more problems. We have to work on the interior clarification, in the same way that the axle has to be straight in order for the wheel to turn smoothly.

## I. Searching for the Ox

**Preface:** Until now, the ox has never gone astray. Why then does he need to search for it? Because he turned away from himself, he became estranged from it; then, lost in the dust, at last he let it astray; he's lost as soon as the path divides. Winning and losing consume him like flames, right and wrong rise round him like blades.

**Verse:** Beating about the endless wild grass, he seeks and searches, the rivers broaden, the mountains stretch on, and the trails go ever deeper. His strength exhausted and his spirit wearied, no place allows him refuge. He listens—there's just the evening's shrilling of cicadas in the trees.

**Waka:** Sought ox in the mountains—missed it. Only a cicada's empty shrilling.

The preface of the first of the Ten Oxherding Pictures begins: “Until now, the ox has never gone

astray. Why then does he need to search for it?” Why have we come here? Why have we gathered here to do zazen together? We are all looking for this deep mind. We are seeking. We are digging and searching. But is there even one of us who has ever lost it, or strayed in any way? Everyone has so many thoughts, so much confusion, and so many concerns. But from where have these come? And how are they different from this original essence?

Think of all the spaceships that have been sent into the universe recently. More than one thousand people from the time of the first flight have traveled into space. But do these flights make the universe any smaller? Do the thoughts that we each have make our Original Mind any smaller? We perceive our thoughts and mistakenly look at them as the source. But those thoughts are not our True Source. The universe includes all of the planets and all of the galaxies, but has the including of those ever made the universe any smaller?

“Until now the ox has never gone astray. Why then does he need to search for it?” It seems that

the more we seek, the farther away it goes. And, if it has already been here, why do we need to search for it at all? “Because he turned away from himself, he became estranged from it; then, lost in the dust, at last he let it astray.” As soon as we think about doing something to clarify our mind, more thoughts and heaviness come. “Because he turned away from himself, he became estranged from it; then, lost in the dust, at last he let it astray.”

In the Bible it says, “Unless you become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.” Those of a pure mind will see God. Yet we divide this mind, this clear mind, this pure mind, into that mind which is emotional, that mind which is dualistic, that mind which is intellectual. We feel strange and uncomfortable and decide to go to a psychiatrist, to see a professional—as if this unfathomable mind could be analyzed in that way. Or we feel physically uncomfortable, and we go to our health club and work out, expecting to be able to resolve our problems in this way. And the doctors who so often divide body

and mind into two separate compartments make this problem even more complex.

A brand-new baby is completely empty-minded. As it's said, unless you become like children you cannot enter Heaven. But the clear mind exists even prior to the baby's heredity. It's said that at the age of sixteen months a child understands "one." At the age of thirty-two months a child understands "two." When a child understands two, then the ego comes forth. The world where there is only an understanding of the one could be said to be the world of God, where God reigns equally over everyone both good and bad. But prior to that knowledge of one, we still have that mind of zero. This is what has to be realized directly. When we give a baby a toy, it's fine with that one toy, until the next toy comes, and then it becomes absorbed completely in that next toy. But the Original Mind is not that mind of one but what exists prior to that, what exists prior even to people or to planets; it is that world of zero.

We live and see everything around us from this world of two. But our eyes' true source—that world

of one—is prior to this world of two. And that which uses the world of one is even prior to that. When we see dualistically we are insecure and unbalanced. The hills of home recede farther and farther away. “He’s lost as soon as the path divides.”

“Winning and losing consume him like flames, right and wrong rise around him like blades.” As soon as one thought comes forth, we are in a world of dark ignorance and dualism. We have one wispy thought, and then another associates with that, and another with that, and another with that. A couple start life together with very little material support. Working hard together, they gather the basics for a kitchen, a home, a livelihood. They have a child; they build their life as a family. But eventually, as things start working out, as their life becomes more comfortable, where they had been united in their difficulty and in making strong efforts together, now they become divided, with each of them wanting his or her own rights. Their child grows up, and they all want their own rights and their own material possessions.

In China it’s said that you cannot possibly divide a

peach into exactly equal pieces. If you divide a peach into four pieces, even if they are all of exactly the same size and weight, they will still be unequal, because the flavor in each part of the peach will be different. Some part will be more delicious than the others. They will not ultimately be equal, even if they are equal by weight. In this way, the idea of equality is unresolvable. That is the greatest problem on this earth today. Everyone wants an equality of quality as well as an equality of size. But if we give someone else the larger piece, then that person is happy, and we are especially happy at someone else's happiness. This is the equality of satisfaction. Within this we can catch a glimpse of something important. We can see the dualism from a larger place beyond win and lose, beyond right and wrong. Beyond dualism there is an equality of true human quality. This true quality is the source of actual equality. If we can embrace that, if we can see that equality clearly, then all humans can respect and love each other deeply.

That mind of pure equality is called Buddha. We who are so full of dualism cannot see it, but if we can



get a glimpse beyond time and location, in this way we also have a sudden glimpse of this clear mind that we all have from the origin. While having this dualistic mind we realize that we have also, right now, a living mind, prior to that dualism. We must decide to realize that, or else we and all of the world will always be stuck in dualism. This is Finding the Tracks, the second of the Ten Oxherding Pictures.

There is also a verse that goes with Searching for the Ox; its first line is, “Beating about the endless wildgrass, he seeks and searches.” We have given rise to this Bodhisattva vow. But the more we sit, the more thoughts we seem to have. And where is that Original Mind we were going to look for and realize, anyway? Is this mind we are sitting here with, so full of delusions and thoughts, anything that another could ever prostrate to? There is no cow of enlightenment there, not even a trace of a footstep. Maybe we had better go home quickly and accept that we are meant to live in a world full of desires. That’s probably better for us anyway. Thinking about it in that way, we turn away.

“The rivers broaden, the mountains stretch on, and the trails go ever deeper.” We sit. We want to do this, we think about doing that, we plan for doing something else. Our legs hurt, our backs hurt; we get angry at all of those thoughts, we get angry because our legs hurt, we get angry because our backs hurt. The harder we work, the worse it gets. And then there’s the Roshi sitting up there talking about something so splendid, which makes no sense. It’s as if we are trying to scratch an itch on our foot from the outside of our shoe. What is the good of any of this?

“His strength exhausted and his spirit wearied, no place allows him refuge.” It has just started, and already I don’t like being here. I think I’m not meant for this place; it doesn’t suit me. I think I’d better leave. I’ve left so much work undone, and I really should be getting to it. Maybe I didn’t do the right thing by coming here, and I should just leave right now. “He listens—there’s just the evening shrilling of cicadas in the trees.” My life is so busy, why did I leave it to come here? I can’t figure out any of this.

I may as well go home. We all think this. Everyone has thought this. But do not give up when you have finally been able to get started, when you have finally been able to get to the starting line. All of those here who look as if they have been doing this for so long had this exact same state of mind at the beginning. Those people who have now been doing this for three or five years all went through the same phase of wanting to leave. And somehow they kept going. After all, we have all paid already and freed up this week of time for the doing of this. So we might as well stay. But for everyone at the beginning it was a process of deciding to stay, deciding to go, deciding to stay, deciding to go, and then finally staying.

Everyone has this identical experience. No one is a superman about this. Everyone has confused thoughts, everyone has pain, and everyone wants to leave at the beginning. But, when something is finally actually experienced and felt directly, even though we are not sure what that is, we know it was right to keep going. To keep going even a little bit at a time is what has to be done. This cannot be resolved

all at once. But once you have started, just keep that effort going.

## II. Finding the Tracks

**Preface:** With the aid of the sutras, he gains understanding; through the study of the teaching, he finds the traces. The many vessels are clearly all of one gold; and he himself is the embodiment of the ten thousand things. But unable to recognize correct from incorrect, how is he to distinguish true from false? Since he has yet to pass through the gate, only tentatively has he seen the traces.

**Verse:** By the water and under the trees, there are tracks thick and fast. In the sweet grasses thick with growth, did he see it or not? But even in the depths of the deepest mountains, how could it hide from others its snout turned up at the sky?

**Waka:** Deep in the mountains, his efforts bear fruit. Tracks! How grateful to see a sign.

Today we have the second of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, Finding the Tracks. Yesterday we had Searching for the Ox, looking for the traces, seeking the path, and the essence of that state of mind. Today we have the second, Finding the Tracks. After seeking and seeking, something that finally looks something like a track is found. As in the picture here, the traces can be seen. It's written in the preface, "With the aid of the sutras, he gains understanding; through study of the teaching, he finds the traces." This essence cannot yet be affirmed from one's own experience, but from reading and from listening to others it seems this must be it. This is what I was looking for.

People always want to read as many books as possible and find out things, even if only second-hand, by listening to and reading the words of others. But if you are going to learn about Buddhism through books, it's best to read original texts. For Bodhid-

harma, it was a sutra called the *Ryogon Sutra*. For the Fifth and Sixth Patriarchs, it was the *Diamond Sutra*. For Rinzai, it was the *Flower Garland Sutra*. And for Hakuin, it was in the *Lotus Sutra* that he found the true substance of Buddhism. The more layers of interpretation we have to go through, the further and further away we are from the deepest meaning. We have to be able to find these traces to find the source, but we have to be clear about what the best traces are.

For our whole life, we think of this physical body as what we are, as our self, and we think that others are exterior to what we are. That which is inside this bag of skin is what we are, is how we think it is, and anything that is outside this bag of skin is something separate. But that is a mistaken way of looking at it. If we think of how many things we depend on just to stay alive, we can see how different the reality is. “The many vessels are clearly all of one gold; and he himself is the embodiment of the ten thousand things.” We cannot live alone and independently, but if we are not careful, we often make the mistake of

believing that we can. If you close off your nose and mouth, you can see this easily. We need oxygen to stay alive. We must have water to live. Without it, we would die after one week. If we go without food for too long, we can die. The life energy of animals and plants is always supporting us. There is no way we can live disconnected from all other beings.

Scientists tell us that 350 million years ago, in that one moment when life came forth, every single person was born, because from that one spark, that one instant, all of our ancestors have lived in sequence, down to our grandparents, and then to us: we all came forth from one moment. Without that, without that continuation of life energy that has come down through today, we would not be alive here. Our life energy is not a separate thing. A baby is born, and perhaps it has a certain purity and clarity at that time, but it's influenced from then on by its parents, its teachers, its family, and the society in which it lives. This conditioning—all the ways of looking at the world that are taught by everyone the child comes

in contact with—becomes a child's base for perceiving this world.

In all these ways, one single existence is an impossibility. There has to be a connection. And to discover that connection we need to realize and directly encounter our Clear Mind, that which unifies all beings. It's said that we exist as the world, and the world exists as us. Or that all of the ten thousand things come forth from me and I become all of those ten thousand things. Everything consists of atoms, and according to the ways in which these atoms gather and separate, according to karmic conditions, we have causes that become effects, which then become further causes. In this, the essence of all of us can be seen. The sixty billion cells of each person's human body separate into the functions of skin cells and brain cells and lymph system cells, eye cells and ear cells, but all of these originally came forth from one single cell, and that one single cell came forth from one single original atom. When we see this we can see clearly that among human beings there is no differentiation.



“But unable to recognize correct from incorrect, how is he to distinguish true from false? Since he has yet to pass through the gate, only tentatively has he seen the traces.” But even if we know in our heads how it works, that does not satisfy us or our true craving to understand from experience. We have seen traces, but do not yet know the real thing. We have not yet sat until we can pierce through and the bottom falls out and we shine radiantly. We have to keep going, even though we do not yet know what exactly it is that we have to do. We know we have to sit, but we have not yet done the sitting. We know where the traces are, but we have not yet grasped the actual animal.

“Since he has yet to pass through the gate, only tentatively has he seen the traces.” When you have only taken a bite, but not yet actually chewed it, there is no way to keep the essence going in daily life. We sort of know what it is when we are on the cushion, but when we stand up from the cushion it dissipates in every direction and we don’t know how to keep it going.

A verse is then given: “By the water and under the trees, there are tracks thick and fast. In the sweet grasses thick with growth, did he see it or not?” There are tracks. Where the grass has been trampled we can see them. We can see them in the green willow leaves, which look like Kanzeon Bodhisattva, and hear them in the wind passing through the green pines. This is not a metaphor; rather, as we listen openly, the sound made by the pines is a sermon of the Buddha. “In the sweet grasses thick with growth, did he see it or not?” A swift bird taking off unseen from the grasses is a teaching as well, and all of these teachings are in harmony at the same time. A white bird taking flight, the lively manifestation of life energy, in harmony, is the truth being spoken in every moment. In every single sense we can feel and experience this truth.

The *Heart Sutra* says, “All dharmas are marked with emptiness, they are without birth or death, are not tainted nor pure, do not increase nor decrease... no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no

touch, no object of mind, no world of eyes, through to no world of mind consciousness.” If we look at this quietly, we see that if we forget these senses as we use them, forgetting our eyes, forgetting our ears, forgetting our nose, our tongue, our body, our mind, as we perceive things, those things themselves—the eyes, the ears, the body—disappear. Our mind does not decrease or increase, it is not stained or pure, it reflects things exactly as they come to us. We see a fire, but our mind does not burn. The mind, just as it is, is that clarity of the true nature.

As Rinzai has said, the true Dharma has no fixed form, and yet it extends throughout the ten directions. Science gives us laws that say one plus one is two, or two plus two is four. Science tells us that these are rules, facts, fixed phenomenon. They are not something that only people of a certain religion can understand, that only Christians can understand and Buddhists cannot, that only Muslims can understand and Hindus cannot. All beings can understand. Seeing the sun, we become the sun. Seeing a bird, we become the bird. Everything is embraced, every

single bit of it. The whole universe is the ox of our own clear mind.

The Buddha when he was awakened at the sight of the morning star said, “How wondrous, how wondrous, all beings are endowed with this very same clear mind to which I have just been awakened. Everything is shining.” Because his mind became zero at this time and free of any traces of anything at all, he could become the river, the mountain, the flowers—he could become all things. And this wondrous wisdom to which he was awakened, which all beings are endowed with, does not come to us from practice. We are all already within this wisdom. But because we hold on to an idea of who we are, what our status is, what our position is, we are always a small self that gets stuck. But that small self is not the true ox. It is only a small-self idea of what an ox might be like.

“But even in the depths of the deepest mountains, how could it hide from others its snout turned up at the sky?” Yet no matter how much we explain it, we have found the traces after all. Whether we are sleep-

ing, walking, sitting, we have to keep that essence going, without a trace of our small self, without a gap from morning until evening. Doing this we experience a place where, while we still perceive a small self there, we also sense the presence of some other huge, great, enormous energy.

### III. Seeing the Ox

**Preface:** Through sounds he makes an entry and comes to know their source. But it's no different for each and every one of the six senses. In their every function, it is plainly present, like salt in water, or glue in paint. Raise your eyebrows—it is nothing other than yourself.

**Verse:** On the tree branch a nightingale sings, warm sun, soft wind, green willows on the bank. Now nowhere for it to hide, its majestic horns no artist could draw.

**Waka:** In the spring sun in the green willow strands, see its timeless form.

Finally, we have been able to see the ox. We have been looking for this ox. We have begun some training, full of explanations and ideas about how to do it. Finally, we encounter the traces, and following them we now see the ox. In this picture, however, it's still only the rear end of the ox that has been seen. "Through sounds he makes an entry and comes to know their source."

There is a story from China. The Sixth Patriarch's disciple was Nangaku Ejo, whose disciple was Baso Doitsu, and his disciple was Hyakujo Ekai. It was Hyakujo Ekai who gave us all of the rules that we use today in our training. Without the rules he gave us, our practice would be chaotic and disorganized. In his elderly years, Hyakujo Ekai had a disciple named Kyogen Chikan. Kyogen was one of those disciples who could hear one and understand ten. Among the one thousand monks who were training with this teacher, Kyogen was one of the sharpest. When Hyak-

ujo Ekai died, Kyogen Chikan went to train with Hyakujo's senior disciple, his brother disciple, Isan Reiyu. Because Isan Reiyu and Kyogen Chikan had been monks together under the same teacher, they knew each other very well. Isan Reiyu said to Kyogen, "You are an excellent monk, but I do not want to hear your intellectualizations and your explanations. Before your mother and father were even born, what was it you knew? Say one word of this. If you cannot tell me this, then you should not be here."

Kyogen tried everything he knew, but he was using not his own words but rather the thoughts and repeated ideas of others. Again and again, Isan Reiyu told him not to bring anything that was not his own. Two years went by, three years went by, more years passed. But Kyogen's essence still did not manifest. Finally, he went to Isan and said, "I have nothing more to say. Won't you please tell me the answer to this"? The teacher replied, "I could tell you, but that would be only my words, not your words. You have to know this from within yourself, not by hearing it from somebody else."

Kyogen was desperate. He had been called the best student of his first teacher, and now he was found out to have no capability whatsoever. He decided he could never go into society like this but would spend the rest of his life cleaning a teacher's grave. He found the grave of one of the disciples of the Sixth Patriarch, Nanyo Echu Kokushi, who had even become the emperor's teacher. He spent two, three, four, five, six years cleaning this grave. Every single day he cleaned and did zazen, and always in his mind he was turning over this question and searching for that one word from before his parents were born. What could that be? He gave up on all thinking, all desires, all attachments, and just cleaned all day from morning until night. How clear and pure and quiet his mind must have become.

One day he was cleaning as usual, gathering leaves and various bits of debris that he had swept up and throwing them away out the back gate. This was his daily ritual. But this day, as he threw the leaves a stone that was mixed in with them hit a bamboo; at the sound of the bamboo being hit by the stone, he



became that sound, and it was extending throughout the universe. He had not heard this from someone else. He was in deep great wonder and astonishment. He knew the answer to the question he had been working on, in this moment, in his purified mind. He jumped up in astonishment. He had met the ox directly. Beyond any ideas or dualistic experiences—philosophers call this the pure experience—he knew it from himself completely.

He heard this sound from a place beyond preconceived notions and experiences, from an unborn, fresh place. We are always so caught up in our past experiences that we are unable to experience this great wonder, this fresh-born amazement. Because we are trapped by our hard, fixed ideas, we sit to let go of them. This is why we have to sit—to let go of all of those preconceived notions, all of that clutter, everything that prevents us from being open to this wonder.

The energy that is fixed and hardened is suffocated and without freshness—to be in that state of mind in which everything is new and alive is what

enlightenment or *satori* is. Every day is fresh, every day is new. For Kyogen it came through his ears, but it does not have to come through a particular sense. The Buddha saw the morning star. Here the ox is seen. Reiyun Shigon saw the peach blossom blooming. Badabara Bodhisattva felt the bathwater on his skin, the warm bathwater, and was enlightened in the bath. We can always see, hear, smell, taste, and feel, so why do we not know this wonder? It's because we have become anaesthetized by preconceived notions and fixed ideas.

Rinzai said that in this five-foot lump of red flesh there is a True Person of No Rank who is always coming and going in and out of the orifices. If you have not seen this True Person yet, see it now. Within this physical body that bleeds when it's cut, that True Person of No Rank encounters the eyes and becomes seeing; it encounters the ears and becomes hearing; through the hands, it becomes making something; through the feet, it becomes carrying our body. That True Person of No Rank, without any smell or shadow of a small self: if you have not realized that

True Person, that true life energy, do it now. We all have the exact same eyes and ears and body and awareness. If you do not become fixed and hardened on some idea of a small self, you can always know this place which is fresh and new.

“But it is no different for each and every one of the six senses.” Buddha Nature is the name that is given, but our true nature is not something that is made up or held on to in our heads. It’s not just a name. It’s alive; it’s present; it’s real. As Bodhidharma said in his rules for doing zazen, you need to let go of all connections to the external world and let go of all concerns within and, not holding on to anything in your head, sit with your entire body. Zen is not something we have to be able to hold on to some idea about. It’s not about holding on to an idea of thinking nothing at all either, or an idea of not being moved around by anything—if we approach it in that way we are still beginners. It’s not to sit as if paralyzed either. Rather, as it’s said in the phrase in the *Diamond Sutra* that the Sixth Patriarch heard and was awakened by, “residing in no place, the awakened

mind arises.” Zen is not to think that we should not see, hear, or speak, but while seeing, hearing, and speaking to let everything go after we have perceived it. If we become caught by and attached to anything, our mind stops. Rather than thinking and becoming caught by various thoughts, we can be always new, always fresh. We must know this beyond any preconceived notion or idea or past experience; we must know only that flow of life energy.

In Buddhism the truth is always being likened to a mirror, which reflects everything but is not influenced by anything it is reflecting. It can also be likened to a canvas with a painting on it, or a chalkboard with writing on it, or a movie screen with a film being shown on it. People look at a painting, but they do not look at the canvas. They look at what is written on the chalkboard, but they do not look at the chalkboard. They see what is happening on a movie screen, but they do not look at the screen on which the movie is being shown. Our senses are the same. Our ears encounter a sound, and at that moment we are able to hear. The same is true of tasting a flavor.

We encounter a food, and from that comes forth tasting. Zen is not about searching for a world of nothing at all. That will get us nowhere. That will not be of any use. Nor will being attached to everything that we encounter. “In their every function, it is plainly present, like salt in water, or glue in paint. Raise your eyebrows—it is nothing other than yourself.”

It is foolish to look at a canvas and its picture as two separate things, as it is foolish to look at a chalkboard and what is written on it as two separate things, or a movie screen and what is showing on it as two separate things. They are not separate. As we sit here, if we look for our selves somewhere separated, how foolish that would be. We must dive into that which does the zazen, that which works, that which hears, that which sees, or we are foggy and hazy, and that is not it either. From the tops of our heads to the bottoms of our feet, we must become clear and transparent and taut, or our zazen is being done without meaning. We must let go of all preconceived notions and with that clarified mind see the stars and the green of the trees. If our mind is fuzzy and lax, we



immediately he heard the bird say, “So you’re going to try to catch me now.” The woodcutter saw the bird sitting on a branch in front of him and thought he might be able to put out his hand and catch it, but just as he began to reach for it, the bird flew to a higher branch. When he climbed the tree to reach the branch where the bird was, the bird flew to the next tree. When he ran down and climbed up that tree, the bird flew to the next tree. In this way, the bird kept the woodcutter chasing after him, teasing him the whole time. Finally, the woodcutter gave up and said, “This is a useless chase.” And he went back to cutting trees.

As soon as he did this, the bird said to him, “Now you’re going to ignore me, huh?” And he did indeed ignore the bird and just kept on cutting wood. And who knows why, but for some reason the woodcutter’s hatchet suddenly flew out of his hand and knocked the bird right into his hand. This bird is the bird of enlightenment. In Japanese, the word for bird is *tori* and the word for enlightenment is *satori*,

so the bird in this story is the *tori* of *satori*, the bird of enlightenment.

“Now nowhere for it to hide, its majestic horns no artist could draw.” People of the past also always said that you can draw a picture of a peach but you cannot taste the flavor of a peach from looking at its picture. When people hear a story about someone else’s experience, they then try to imitate how it was done. They lie down in a certain way, or they do something in a certain way to imitate another person’s realization. But those imitations can never be the real thing.

What has to be done is to let go of yourself completely. You must separate from that idea of a small self completely, or you will never be able to know the ox and see it for yourself. Here we have just barely had a glimpse of this ox. We have not really seen the whole thing yet. We have not made it our own yet. So while we may have a sense of what it’s like, we cannot use it yet; we cannot put it to use. We do not know this ox freely.

Take these words and do not just listen to them superficially but use them; do your practice with that



mind of clarity until it becomes transparent from all parts of you. Take this essence and make it into a oneness in everything you are doing, whether you are sitting or standing or working; whatever you are doing, bring it into oneness, keep it all as one, without separation. Do that and keep that going all the time. Do not become caught on your own ideas of what you have understood up until now. If you still carry those around with you, you are a slave of your past experience. Buddhism is the life energy of this very moment, this immediate moment, separated from all the past moments. We must be in this immediate moment right now so that we do not waste this precious opportunity of doing sesshin here together.

#### iv. Catching the Ox

**Preface:** At last today you finally meet up with the ox so long hidden in the wilderness. But the world around is so distracting, it is hard to keep up with the ox. It will not give up its longing for the sweet grass.

It is just as willful as before and just as wild natured. He who would truly tame it must lay on the whip.

**Verse:** He expends all strength to take the ox. But willful and strong, it won't soon be broken. As soon as he gains the high ground, it vanishes once more deep into the mist.

**Waka:** Thinking "At last, my mind—the ox. Don't let go." Just this is the real fetter.

Seeking the ox, we leave home, depending on words and explanations; finally we see the ox, or something like an ox. But we cannot yet use it freely. We know it, but we cannot use it in our everyday life as we want to. We cannot yet give function to its essence.

Yet there is no special thing such as an ox that we actually attain. We have never been separated from our Original Nature. It has only been covered over by conditioning and habits. We intend to have understood; yet, in our daily life, it does not work that

well. We hesitate. Our experience cannot yet come to life.

We have worked for years and realized something like an ox, but as we go on our thoughts spread and a murky state of mind is present. We return to the beginning again. People have many varieties and depths of experience, deep and shallow, but they must make the effort to keep deepening them and to continue. We have to realize the place where we stand without even knowing that we are standing, walk without even knowing that we are walking, becoming as clear and as sharp as a crystal. This is not just about learning some koan answers and making a good breath. This is that place where no dualism is even possible, where we have let go of any sense of our bodies, any sense of our location, and become a complete fool—until we get caught once again on an idea of having understood something.

In the olden days people would say that in the world of the path, if we notice a confusion, as soon as we notice it, it's resolved. But in the world of emotions and habits, it's not so easy to cut through all of

our conditioning. We are convinced that the way we are seeing something is right, and we become immovable in that conviction. A long-term commitment and a firm determination are needed before we can let go of these misperceived convictions. We have to practice in such a way that we can see our misperceptions and let go of all those things we are carrying around in such a big, burdensome way.

In Okayama there is a college of Notre Dame. Watanabe Katsuko is the head of this school; she is also excellent at zazen. Her father was a politician, a congressman, when the emperor was still in power. Then, a group of young military rebels staged a coup d'état against the emperor for being so indulgent, and they killed the government members. In front of her eyes, she saw her father fall, shot with twenty or thirty bullets. What a painful and awful thing for a daughter to witness! After much struggle and pain and remembering, she began a life as a nun and, full of repentance, worked to forgive those who had shot her father in front of her eyes. When she reached the age of fifty, and all of the assassins from that time had

been for many years imprisoned, the families of those assassins gathered to make an offering in the memory of those who had been shot. All of the living descendants of those who had been shot were invited. Even though she was a Christian, she decided to go to this Buddhist offering ceremony, thinking that by now she had let go of all of her anger and hate. While she was there, one of the family members of one of the assassins said that the victims had all been shot for the good of the country, that the assassins had been justified in shooting them. Suddenly, she knew she should not have come. She had worked so hard her entire life to be able to forgive, but in her heart there was one place where she had not yet been able to do so. It is this kind of consistent effort and letting go and cutting that has to be done, and it is because it is not done that there are so many problems of this nature in the world today.

“At last today you finally meet up with the ox so long hidden in the wilderness. But the world around is so distracting, it is hard to keep up with the ox.” Even if we know how it should be, we cannot al-

ways function in this state of mind. For a moment, we know clearly we are all equal, companions of the path. But we cannot leave it at that. Hakuin had a teacher whose name was Dokyo Etan. This teacher of his never went into society. Even though Hakuin was famous and did so much great painting and calligraphy and teaching, his teacher, Dokyo Etan, never left his mountain. Yet Dokyo Etan had a profound effect anyway. Some people in his village had been killed by an angry wolf in the area, and everyone was afraid to go outside. Because there were so many wolves in the pack that was heard and known to be living near the village, people were very frightened. They went and told Dokyo Etan, and he said, "Good! This is an excellent chance to challenge my state of mind." At night he sat in the graveyard where the wolves would pass him on their way into town. As it became dusk, the wolves came one by one into the cemetery where he was sitting *zazen*. The first wolf cried and jumped over him and showed his fangs and glaring eyes. Many other wolves surrounded him. But he continued his solid, steady *zazen*; he contin-

ued sitting. The first wolf put its paw on his crossed leg, drooled on him, and licked his face. Then he put another paw on top of his head. But Dokyo Etan did not move. He did not move one bit. The wolves finally left, silently, one by one. The next night as well he sat there in the cemetery, and the wolves came, surrounded him, and then again quietly left. And the third night they didn't come back at all.

This kind of seriousness, this sincerity, has to be present in our true practice. It has to be real like this, or it ends with only discussion of a single moment's brief glimpse. If we understand deeply and truly, then we know what our responsibility is, and we take it.

“It will not give up its longing for the sweet grass. It is just as willful as before and just as wild natured. He who would truly tame it must lay on the whip.” We have nothing to hold on to in our original clear nature, yet we are pulled around by our own points of view and are attached to superficial external appearances. And all of our words are strung to our own small-self personal interests. And what about this world we have tasted once? This glimpse we have

had? It has become just words and explanation. After having lived for so long from a small I point of view, to erase it is not a simple and facile thing to do. It takes everything we are. That practice of continuous clear mind moments, that practice of shikantaza, is not just sitting quietly. Everything we are has to be thrown into letting go of everything we hold on to. It all has to be let go of; every last bit of it has to go.

“He expends all strength to take the ox. But willful and strong, it won’t soon be broken. As soon as he gains the high ground, it vanishes once more deep into the mist.” This poem is about verifying and clarifying the discovery of the ox. For doing this, our dualistic functioning, which has been with us so naturally for so long, has to be thrown away and thrown away completely, or thinking will prevent us from seeing clearly, even if we have had a glimpse. Catching the Ox is not about taking something or realizing something but about letting go of everything. Everything we see and feel, all of it, every bit of it, is the ox, but if we do not let go of our dualism completely, we can never know this.



## v. Taming the Ox

**Preface:** If even the slightest thought arises, then another follows. With awakening, all becomes truth; but if you reside in ignorance, all is unreal. Things arise, not because of the objective world, but only because of the mind. Keep a firm grip on that rope and do not waver.

**Verse:** Let drop neither whip nor line even a moment lest the ox wander back to dust and desire. Tame this bull and it will be pure and gentle. Without fetters or chain, of itself, it will follow.

**Waka:** Days past counting and even the wild ox comes to hand. Becoming the shadow that clings to my body—how gratifying.

Searching for the Ox, Finding the Tracks, and Seeing the Ox—these three together are about the deepening of our samadhi, that practice of zazen in stillness.

We work on our zazen samadhi. We lose track of our bodies and of the zendo and of our thoughts, until we catch the ox, until we suddenly know that mind of no thought remaining. Taming the Ox is the experience of zazen in action, of functioning with that mind of zazen. If we cannot do that, we have no true relationship to society. We have to address the question of how to deal with social problems, how to live our lives with integrity, or there is no meaning to our living in society. In the very midst of that busyness with so many things to do and think about, we maintain our center and concentration. This is called samadhi in action.

Our usual training deepens one step further. Even if we go into society, we are not moved around by what we encounter. If we can function even a little that means we have been allowed to enter the mind of Taming the Ox. But that is only a part of it. We cannot do everything with our own will. We mature until there is no longer any separation at all between things. It is this mind that is often compared to a mirror. Bankei also described it like this. A man comes in

front of the mirror, and a man is reflected; a woman comes in front of the mirror, and a woman is reflected; a child comes, and a child is reflected. When something comes in front of a mirror, it is reflected exactly as it is. Something comes, it is reflected; something leaves, it is gone. From the origin, there is nothing there to begin with; there is nothing to be added on, and nothing to be taken away. When a flower is shown in front of a mirror, the mirror does not become more beautiful; when dog shit is reflected, it does not become dirty. Bankei called this our Unborn Buddha Nature—that mind with no plans, no expectations, no reviewing of behavior. Some ask, How can that be? How can we live without a future plan? But it is only because we know this Clear Mind that we can review our behavior. We all mean to repent and review our past actions, yet while repenting, or thinking that we repent, we repeat the same errors over and over and over again. To know that truly clear mind directly: this is Taming the Ox.

Yet Taming the Ox is not about attaining something, or trying to get something to work. We have

never been missing anything. Nothing has been missing from the origin. We must know that Original Mind, we must touch it directly; if we do not actually know it from our own experience, the true thing of it, then our words will only be empty discussion and empty explanations.

In the great earthquake of Kobe, on the seventeenth day of January, 1995, at 5:46 a.m., six thousand people in one moment died. At dawn in the chill wintertime, before people were even awake, in one brief second that earthquake came. It was so sudden that there was no time to have a dualistic idea about it. It happened to everybody at exactly the same time.

A novelist living in Kobe wrote about this, describing the sensation of being in his bed that morning and feeling as if he was being sucked into the earth. And then he was being swung and tossed and turned around inside a dark black room. In this one second before any dualistic approach to this experience was possible, before even a thought could occur, there was only a huge roaring hum. What was flying around him in the room were not many birds but

his books flying off the shelves. At the same moment, the earth and the walls and the street, everything around him, cracked; the roaring hum was the sound of that cracking. Of course, the fear of the house caving in was huge and immediate. Wanting to escape, he started to leave the house and then remembered his family. Wait, how are they doing? Are they alright? And he called to them.

The victims were all one. They had all fled the destruction that had come in the early morning. They had had no time to prepare. There was no water, no clothing, no food. Those victims gathered in the local schools or in the public halls and waited for help to come. The actual rescue came two days later, with many volunteers arriving on the scene, bringing water and food and blankets. The elderly, the children, and the weak and injured were helped first. Everyone was so grateful. There was no separation between those helping and those being helped. Each injured person felt like oneself—that great round mirror self, moving with that mysterious functioning where there is no separation between the person

who is helping and the person who is being helped. For many people this crisis brought the immediate experience of that state of mind of the huge great mirror and that equal functioning—in one moment becoming the person you are with and moving spontaneously and naturally in accordance with them.

But if one person suddenly becomes upset and angry and starts yelling, then everyone else also becomes insecure. People become clearly what they are, with their individual qualities of character—emotional, sneaky, self-interested, sly, helpful. Those with animal characteristics, or those who will help no matter what comes along: all of those traits become clear. How do we gain the ability to see what is happening with the mysterious eye that recognizes each difference and knows what needs to be done for it?

Those who were doing volunteer work, when they were doing it for just for one day or one week or even one month, could remain centered, but after two months, or three months, the grumbling and the irritation and the expressions of self-concern would begin. This pure wisdom had been given birth to, but

without that practice that leads us to know how to make those mind-moments continually clear, it is a very very difficult thing to keep going. This is Taming the Ox—when we have been able to experience this essence but not have been able to ripen it and keep it going. We have to be able to tame the ox as well as to have that glimpse of it.

“If even the slightest thought arises, then another follows. With awakening, all becomes truth; but if you reside in ignorance, all is unreal.” When our thoughts arise, we cut them. But then even more come forth. We may be fine in a calm time, in an easy situation, but in the midst of a crisis—for example, when there is no place to go to the bathroom, or no way to keep warm during the cold night after the earthquake, or no food to eat, and you are stuck with your thoughts about all the people you know who have died, about the life you led which has so suddenly disappeared—then it becomes extremely difficult to keep that mind of no thoughts clear and in focus.

“With awakening, all becomes truth; but if you

reside in ignorance, all is unreal.” Thinking about things that have happened in the past, and about the bleakness of the future, we look up and realize how many things need to be done, how many people are becoming so upset and irritated and need help, how much can be done for all of them. Before we could not take time from our jobs to do things for others in this way, even if we intended to and wanted to. But now there is so much to be done, there is no time to sit and be concerned with all the difficult things of the past and all the bleakness of the future. With just this one shift, we go from residing in our own dark thinking to being in a place where we can bring brightness to everyone around us.

“Things arise, not because of the objective world, but only because of the mind.” Although the world can be seen in more than one way, there is only one real world. What has to be done is to see that world clearly, not as melancholy and deceitful, but as taut and full. The world can in one moment appear as something that drags us down, and in the next, with a small shift, it can be seen as something clear and



true, a place for us to work in. It's said that the world becomes painful or joyful according to our mind and how we look at things. To encounter the world with no shadow or trace does not mean that we become feelingless people. Rather, it means that we are free from the wandering thoughts that distract us and keep us from being able to function with clarity.

To think that we are doing something good when we work for others is completely upside down. When we are concerned with how well we have done, our efforts will only become a burden for the other person, making them uncomfortable. We have to know this. We have to be able to see when we are doing this. Even if we can for a moment act without that self-conscious awareness of how good we are, to do it continually takes great determination and hard work.

By flowing and moving like water from a high place to a low place, going naturally to where we are needed, without pulling along unnecessary thoughts, we can know this clear mind. Like the mirror that reflects and then lets go of what it has reflected, in each moment, in each place, we reflect only and then

let go, without ever being influenced by what is being reflected. People who encounter even one person like this can be liberated through that encounter—not from this person's functioning, but from his very way of being, from being touched by and knowing this state of mind that is clear, free from any caught places whatsoever.

“Keep a firm grip on that rope and do not waver.” In the world of Taming the Ox, the reins are still pulled hard and firm. Later, when in each moment we can finally live freely and without hesitation, functioning in just the way that is appropriate in each moment, those reins can be loosened. The truth has no form, yet it moves in all ten directions. The true master is free in every situation.

All people of old struggled with this. “Keep a firm grip on that rope and do not waver.” In the calligraphies of Daito we can see his strong and well-worked life and light. And in those of Bankei as well, we can see that he did not budge whatsoever. We have to become this state of mind where no matter what is encountered, we are not moved around by it.

We have gathered so much complex conditioning and knowledge and clutter. To manifest as our true Buddha Nature, we have to continue to clarify and deepen, or our experience is only something that ends in self-satisfaction, without true meaning and essence. But as long as we think we have to push and make great efforts, there is still a small self remaining that is telling us to do that. We must sit until we are beyond thinking in this way, until we naturally enter a deep vessel in a deep way, and a shallow vessel in a shallow way, with no resistance—this is Taming the Ox.

## vi. Riding Home on the Ox

**Preface:** The struggle is over; all concern about winning and losing has ceased. He sings woodsman's village songs and plays children's country tunes. Lying back on top of his ox, he gazes at the sky. Call him back but he will not turn around; try to catch him but he will not be caught.

**Verse:** Astride his ox, leisurely he heads for home.  
Trilling a nomad's flute, he leaves in misted sunset.  
In each beat and verse, his boundless feeling—what  
need for an intimate companion to say even a word?

**Waka:** Roar in the sky of limpid soaring mind;  
white clouds come back on the peaks.

We are more than halfway through the *sesshin* now. Our bodies' physical pain and the many thoughts of our lives away from here have become less important, fading further away. We can see the clear point and focus on it with stronger essence. Now we come to number six, *Riding Home on the Ox*. It's always fun and joyful to travel, but that is because finally we return home, full of memories and good experiences. We return home with a feeling of great relief to be home again. To travel with no home to return to is only to wander endlessly and meaninglessly, with a feeling of great melancholy.

*Riding Home on the Ox* is not as leisurely as traveling perhaps. To be able to return to our home and

family after having worked wholeheartedly all day long brings us a warm and comfortable feeling. To have trained the ox and struggled with it does not bring that same kind of warm and comfortable feeling, but now the ox is facing in the same direction we are, and together we return home, not even needing the reins any longer.

“The struggle is over. All concern about winning or losing has ceased.” But the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* is about the world of the mind, not just about life in society. We must realize that our jobs, our life plans, are transient; no matter how much we love our dear family and our closest beloved, they all will at some time die. We will have to part from them. All of us as well will die. We wonder, what is life about? Where is the truth in all of this? We read books and wonder and go to hear talks. But we cannot resolve this question just by reading and listening. Rather than searching outside ourselves for the answers we then turn inward. We practice the samadhi of susokkan, the samadhi of the koan, from morning until night; we put away all thoughts of exterior things and keep

our focus sharp all the time. And then we see it—a glimpse. In the sutras there is a story about a man named Enyadatta who looked in the mirror one day and could not find his face. He went everywhere exclaiming, “I haven’t got a face! Have you seen where my face is? I can’t find it anywhere! Where could my face have gone?” Finally he was told by someone that his face was right on his head, where it belonged. Raising his hand, he felt his face and realized it had indeed been there all the time. We have never been separated from this ox. We are always at one with it. We are only confused and deluded about an idea of a separation, a sense of a separation. When our mind is settled, we see that we never were deluded, and then we are at one with the whole world in huge expansive abundance; without grievance, without complaint, truly peaceful, we return home.

“The struggle is over. All concern about winning or losing has ceased. He sings woodsman’s village songs and plays children’s country tunes. Lying back on top of his ox, he gazes at the sky. Call him back but he will not turn around; try to catch him but he

will not be caught.” The mind that had been divided is brought into a state of oneness; ideas of good and bad, winning and losing, are no longer necessary, and they no longer obstruct us even if we have them. We can see that, in society, to lose is just a part of doing business. We understand that to be resented is just a part of living. Although we fear failure, we see that in failure there is also a teaching. Although we fear illness, we learn from it as well. Seeing in this way, we know the whole picture, as if we were looking at it from above, seeing all parts of it at once. We don’t need anything so fancy as a name like satori; we just encounter whatever comes along without being moved around by it. It doesn’t matter whether we like people or dislike them, they will all die, and we will part from them. When we see the whole picture, even though we still experience those emotions that have always tossed us around—anger, joy, sadness, irritation—we are no longer moved around by them. We say what has to be said and we do what has to be done. This kind of functioning is manifested naturally.

“He sings woodsman’s village songs and plays children’s country tunes.” It’s about our way of living life, our way of looking at all things. If we are stuck always on an “I” this and an “I” that, putting ourselves in the center and expecting things to be the way we want them to be, we live always in a struggle between how we think things should be and how they are in fact different from that. But then we ask the question: Who gave us this life anyway? Was it God? Was it Buddha? If we look at the six billion people living on the earth today, and at all the people who have lived on the earth since life first came forth, and then we look at ourselves, today, we can see that in this long process of time and history it is just our turn on the stage. In terms of these millions of years of life, what a tiny part we are playing. And when we see things like this, it makes it much more difficult for us to become caught and pulled around by anything, and easier for us to live with a large, expansive sense of how things really are.

There is a story about a woman who married the man she loved and knew that life was good. After



many years, a son was born, and what a joyful family they were. Then they realized that the son had polio; he began to have trouble moving his limbs and eventually was paralyzed. The mother was desperate. She was desolate. She couldn't understand why this had happened to them. They had waited so long for this child to be born. What did God have against them? Why did this have to happen to them? And finally she knocked on the door of religion.

The mother went from one religion to the next. At the first one she was told that, thanks to this child, she had been able to see God's face, and this was a great opportunity for her. She answered, "That may be fine for me, that I get to see God's face because of this child. But what about the child? What about his future?" And she couldn't accept the teaching of this first religion. She went to another religion, and she was told that life is suffering, that life is never complete, and that in this life happiness won't be possible, so let's pray for a better life next time. But she asked, "But what about my child? How will this help him? I may pray for my excellent future life, but my child

won't be helped by this." And she couldn't accept that teaching either and kept questioning, knocking on the door of the next religion. There she was told that she wasn't in good favor with her ancestors. Some great sin had been committed long ago, and now she was paying for it. But again, she couldn't believe that her ancestors would punish her and the poor child in that way, and for what?

Finally, she and her husband went together to learn about yet another religion. As they had tea with the abbot there, he told them, "You have been given that other life by God, by Buddha, to take care of. Take good care of it; it is a precious gift." And she realized, suddenly, that she had been seeing only her own place in the picture. "I have been given a gift. I have to take care of it. I will take care of it." And she went home, clear and ready. As she had more children, she taught them as well to treat their brother as a gift from God. "Now I'm eighty years old, and my son is fifty. He cannot speak clear words but only mumbles sounds. But he works more than anyone in the family. When others who are facing the same

difficult, challenging situation hear about our story, they come to visit. They see my son, and his kind, warm, and loving face, and they are all helped by this, and by hearing our story.” All of this came from this one mother’s great kind quiet mind.

“Lying back on top of his ox, he gazes at the sky.” Hakuin writes in *The Song of Zazen*, “Realizing the form of no-form as form, whether going or returning, we cannot be any place else. Realizing the thought of no-thought as thought, whether singing or dancing, we are the voice of the Dharma.” If we let go of all sense of our small self, it’s as if we are riding on the ox’s back. The scenery comes and goes of itself. The actuality does not change, but we experience it very differently. Although various difficulties and challenges may come to us, our feet are firmly rooted in deep faith, and we face everything without fear or distortion. We are in society, but when we are pushed, we move back; when we are pulled, we move forward. We keep our feet steady on the ground, with no attachment to any concepts such as good or bad or win and lose.

“Call him back but he will not turn around; try to catch him but he will not be caught.” Having come this far we are solidly in the world of truth. No matter how much we are called back to the world of desires, to the world of attachments, to the world of dualism, even if we are called back by gods, or devils, or buddhas, we will never go back. We are in the samadhi of joy in every single moment, in every single thing that we encounter.

Clear days are weather. Rainy days are weather. Cloudy days are weather. Hailing days are weather. As Master Unmon said, every day is a good day. For many years he said to students, “I won’t ask you about the fifteen days before this. I won’t ask you about the fifteen days following after this. But this very day. How about it?” I won’t say anything to all of you here at this sesshin about the past or about the future, but how about right now, this very minute, how about it? In Unmon’s sangha, no one could answer. Finally, when Unmon was eighty, someone came to him and asked him for the answer to this question. Unmon replied, “Every day is a good day.” These

words, which appear so simple, are not so easy. In *Riding Home on the Ox* we see what is involved in being able to arrive at the place that can be easily described as “every day is a good day.” But it’s not so easy to arrive there.

When Unmon was asked about the deepest essence of the state of mind of “every day is a good day,” he answered, “The grandfather dies, the father dies, the son dies.” This seems like a very strange answer at first. But from the point of view of the whole history of life, of being alive, we can see it more clearly. It is in fact good fortune that the son should not die before the father, or the father before the grandfather. That things occur in that natural order of the grandfather dying first, then the father dying, and then the son dying is what is proper. We should be able to say “every day is a good day” not only in easy or comfortable times but even in the most difficult and challenging times. When we know, no matter what comes along, that every day is a good day, that essence will extend throughout the heavens and the earth.

But that essence is our original essence. Here is another story. My teacher would cure people with loquat leaves, which he had learned how to do from the priest of a temple called Konchiin. This priest lived a very honest life, always treating people from morning until night, and then in the evening cleaning his own garden and yard, gathering the leaves and burning them. The neighbors in the village would see the smoke of the burning leaves and know that that day, too, their beloved priest was fine. One day, he was called to court to testify about a young man who often visited the temple to hear his talks. When asked if during those many visits he had seen this young man's mind opened and improved, the priest said no, not at all. Everyone listening was surprised; the priest had been asked to testify in the young man's favor, but he seemed to be doing just the opposite. But the priest continued, "This young man has no need to improve. He's never done anything bad at all to begin with. From the origin his mind was fine. Where was there any need for it to be improved?" Everyone in the court was surprised; they had never heard such

testimony before. And they saw that this young man was being seen in the truest way. This state of mind—the mind that from the origin has had no problem and no obstruction and no delusion—is what is being talked about in Riding Home on the Ox.

## VII. The Ox Forgotten, The Person Remains

**Preface:** The dharma is not dual; the ox just stands for the actuality. Likewise, the snare and the rabbit are different, and fishnet and fish are not the same. So, too, gold separates from dross, and the moon emerges from the clouds, sending out a single shaft of icy light from before the age of Iron.

**Verse:** Aback his ox, he's reached his original abode, Ox now gone, he too is still. Sun risen high, yet still he dreams, old whip and line put away in the woodshed.

**Waka:** Hard to take—people who fret over good and bad, knowing nothing of Naniwa reeds.

Having begun with Searching for the Ox, we might think that we have completed the search when we ride the ox home, when we know our sought-for mind and our original mind to be one, as when man and God become one, the highest point of religion. In kendo, in judo, in flower arranging, in tea ceremony, people observe forms and learn their practice, and then they let go of those forms and become that practice.

From the point of view of society, we need good policies, a strong economy, and good jobs. Riding Home on the Ox, we look at what is best for society, but for a politician to be able to do this always is very difficult. Even when the economy is going well, various techniques and means have to be employed, and insecurity and instability can easily take over. When the politician feels that he has to keep all of the promises he made in order to get elected, he becomes a slave of politics. In fact, it is a truth



in many paths—in judo or kendo or flower arranging or tea ceremony—that when we receive higher and higher licenses or positions or awards for levels of performance attained, we become concerned with maintaining our position. We become caught by a fear of mistakes or a fear of not being able to maintain our status, and we lose ground.

In *The Ox Forgotten, the Person Remains*, we find a particular quality. Up until now, it has been us and the ox, or the sentient being and Buddha nature, or the phenomenal and the true absolute. In number six, *Riding Home on the Ox*, the ox is no longer separate. We are now riding on it, at one with it, sentient beings embraced in God's arms, the phenomenal and true absolute as one. The essence of becoming one with God—this is the sixth picture. But now we have the seventh.

Now, having gone beyond the small self, we dive into society and see how the experiences we have had, what we have realized, can shine. From this core, our experience embraces all of the six billion people who have been coming forth since the very first life energy

appeared, and we exist with all beings with tautness and responsibility. Yet if there is the slightest speck of any small self left, it won't be like this.

In our true essence, there is not a single speck of clutter. We must realize that, and then let go of any notion of ever having realized it. As it says in the *Heart Sutra*, “no ignorance and also no extinction of it.” In society, we need money to live, but then we become slaves to money. People in politics become slaves to their politics. To follow a path and then become a slave to it is not the point. Our experience has to become that experience of all beings, of all humanity.

“The dharma is not dual; the ox just stands for the actuality.” Why has this ox been used then? When we participate in a sport, we have a goal that we are moving toward in the doing of the sport. People who are confused and deluded often need to give birth to a concept such as God, and because we need compassion and guidance we search hoping to find them. In this same way, the ox, because of the necessity for it, has been given as an expedient means.

In Buddhism this essence is given as “not two.” As I am liberated, all beings are simultaneously liberated. To present this and to describe it, the image of the ox was borrowed and temporarily used. In society, the economy, the political system, and the monetary system are all just borrowed and used to liberate us to this place where we are “not two,” where we are not divided. We must not mistake this. We must not believe that these things themselves are the absolute, but rather use them to realize this place. Otherwise we will all become slaves to these systems.

“Likewise, the snare and the rabbit are different, and fishnet and fish are not the same.” The goal is the rabbit and not the snare. The goal is the fish and not the fishnet. The awakened mind of Buddha is the same as the awakened mind of all beings. We only borrow the ox to be able to see this.

“So, too, gold separates from dross, and the moon emerges from the clouds.” We melt the gold in the furnace to take out the impurities. The same is true with the diamond—once we take away all of its impurities, it does not ever return to its impure state.

Do not think the moon becomes bright because the clouds move away from it. It has always been bright. Our mind does not become bright because the obstructions are gone. It has always been bright and, even with the clouds in front of it, fully revealed, unmoved.

“Sending out a single shaft of icy light from before the age of Iron.” In this universe there is a great huge energy that gives life to all things. No matter what crisis or dilemma we might encounter, it will not last, and we return to this great universal energy. There is a story about a man who entered a near-death state and was taken to King Emma, who is the guardian of the gates of Heaven and Hell. King Emma looked at the man’s face and checked his book, but he couldn’t find the man’s life story written there. So he said, “You still have some lifespan left to you—you can go back.” The man was so joyful; he had thought he was dead, but now he was going to be able to return to a life. But as he turned to go back, he said to himself, “Wait, I’ve come this far, I want to see what it’s really like up here.” So he went back to King Emma and

said, “Do you mind, now that I’m here, could you show me around?” King Emma looked at his face awhile and then said, “Okay.”

When they passed through the gate, he saw many different doors, labeled in many different ways. There was a door that said “Heaven,” a door that said “Hell,” and a door that said “Limbo.” He stopped in front of the door to Hell and said, “This is the one I want to look into. I don’t want to go here, but can I please just peak in?” He had heard a lot about this place called Hell. He knew that inside Hell there were awful red and blue devils and demons and iron bars that would crush your bones. But no matter how terrible you felt, you still couldn’t die; you had to remain alive and suffer more. He expected to see great pools of blood and many terrible things in Hell.

But when he looked into the room, he was astonished. To his surprise, what he saw was a great white world. In the middle of that world was a long table covered with a white tablecloth, and on top of the table was a huge feast. But when he looked more closely, he saw why this truly was Hell. While the

table was groaning with such a great feast, the people were all skinny and starving and very busy fighting. He wondered why they didn't eat the food instead of fighting like that. But then he looked closely, and he saw that all of their left hands were bound to their chairs with a rope, and he understood. Once we have a position, a place to sit in, we do not want to let go of it. We hold on to it tightly. We have our status, and we do not want to relinquish any of it. But why weren't they using their right hands to eat? Then he saw that each person's right hand held a spoon that was so long that when they tried to bring food to their mouths, it would be thrown right over their heads. This was because they were always thinking, "That person is bad and does this thing, and this person is wrong and does that thing." This is what was being represented by these long spoons in their right hands with which they could not feed themselves.

He left that entrance to Hell and pushed open the door into Heaven. Of course, he thought that Heaven would be a place full of Buddhas resting on lotus petals, playing lutes, and having a wonderful

time. But when he opened that door to Heaven he was again completely surprised. He thought he had made a mistake. It was exactly the same. Again he saw a great white world, with a long table covered with a white tablecloth, on which was a groaning board full of food, hot and ready to eat. But these people instead of fighting were sitting there happy and joyful. He looked and he saw that their left hands were indeed also tied to their chairs. So he saw that Buddhas, too, were stuck on positions sometimes. And their right hands also held long spoons. How could this be? Why were they sitting there so harmoniously and so happily? And then he looked closely and saw that with those long spoons they were feeding each other. They were saying, "You have some first." "No, no, you have some first." "Taste this delicious food." "No, no, you taste some first." With the long spoons in their right hands they were all having a wonderful time feeding each other. They knew that these long spoons were even better than regular ones, because you could feed a person far away from you, and with this they were joyful. He saw that the worlds

of Heaven and Hell were exactly the same; the only difference was in the state of mind of those living there. With a slight shift in how this world was used, it could become Heaven or become Hell. With this, he woke up in his bed and realized it had all been a dream.

In this story we can see clearly the essence of the Ox Forgotten, the Person Remains. If we are caught on a small-self view, we think we can live alone and will do that, acting in a fixed way. But we are all a part of this world, and we need to live together harmoniously. We need each other to live. This is our joy of being here. It's the responsibility of people of religion to see with our own eyes that the welfare of all six billion people on this planet is being taken care of.

From within ourselves, from within our deepest, darkest mind, we decide to seek a path. We see a glimpse of the footprint of the ox. We catch sight of the ox. We catch the ox itself but cannot use it freely. We tame it until we no longer become caught on small things and are free, but there is still a self



who has tamed it and whom we feel is free. We become caught on this self still. To let go of that is Forgetting Both Person and Ox. Forgetting Both Person and Ox, we are longer caught on that world of emptiness we have experienced. There is no small self, nothing obstructing us whatsoever. This is the world of returning to the origin. Whether we are insulted or praised, we are not concerned. At any moment, at any place without fear, we accept it all as it is. In Chinese, the word Dharma is written with the characters “water flowing by.” The true Dharma has no fixed shape, yet it extends throughout the ten directions. The birds fly in the sky without a path, and the fish swim through the water without any traces. If we are free from any sense of a small self, everything we see and hear is our pure essence. Like the sun’s light and heat, our true wisdom comes forth. Our loving wisdom becomes sad and suffering when we are with someone who is sad and suffering, joyful when we are with those who are joyful, and naturally comforting when we are with someone who is melancholy. If we are without a small self, we do not try to be

loving; rather, love comes forth of its own. Originally we are all bright, radiant light. This light comes forth as pure love and is always changing and moving appropriately, according to our circumstances—like that pure dew which has no color of its own but becomes a bright red color when it's on a bright red leaf.

### VIII. Forgetting Both Person and Ox

**Preface:** He has shed all worldly feelings and erased all thought of holiness. He does not linger where the Buddha is; he hurries right past where the Buddha is not. As he does not cling to either side, not even the thousand-eyed one can find him. Birds flocking around bearing flowers—that would be a disgraceful scene.

**Verse:** Whip and line, man and ox—all vanished to emptiness. Blue sky utterly vast—no way to say or convey. Into the flames of a fire pit, how can a

snowflake fall? He who attains this is truly one with the Patriarch.

**Waka:** Without clouds, or moon, or cassia— the tree too is gone, the sky above swept so clean.

In order to clarify our mind's essence, we have many religions. Without religion, people's lives just will not work. But there are so many varieties of lives. Children start school with kindergarten and then progress through elementary school and high school before going on to college. Each level of school offers its own type of education; people do not suddenly study at a college level. The same is true of religions. Perhaps the earliest religion was primitive animism's point of view: the rain falling, the volcano erupting, the storms circling the earth, the earthquakes breaking through the earth's crust are all messages telling us something important. Today, the mind's problems, the mind's challenges, are the same: the fear of nature, the doubts within ourselves about our insufficient essence. When nothing seems to go our

way, we realize that we have to trust in something larger than ourselves. We know that no one will live forever. Learning about this could be considered the high school level of religion. There we have the world of an absolute power to be believed in, and we seek for the truth in that absolute. But if we stop there, believing in an exterior absolute, we have not yet touched humans' true essence. If that were all there is, humans would be slaves for their entire lives—slaves of society; slaves of an idea of a God. This is not true awakening, and this is not actual living freedom. The Ox Forgotten, the Person Remains is the shining of the world at oneness. Carrying this physical body which lasts about eighty years, with which we work wholeheartedly in society, we enter the world of the Ox Forgotten, the Person Remains. Yet no matter how saintly we are, we are still living in a world of dualism, with a sense of separation between ourself and all others. The true essence is not realized yet. That dualism has to be thrown away as well, or society cannot be truly liberated. When it is thrown away

completely, we have the world of Forgetting Both Person and Ox.

Because Forgetting Both Person and Ox cannot be explained in words, it is expressed only in this simple circle. It has nothing to do with concepts of enlightened or not enlightened. The ideas that have cluttered our minds—about how to make effort or how much intention to use or how to explain Buddha Nature—have all been thrown away completely, Forgetting Both Person and Ox.

To understand this essence we can use the example of a person who is sick, goes to the hospital, receives medicine and is cured, and then returns home. Lively and healthy, the person returns to work; all the sickness of the body is forgotten. In Forgetting Both Person and Ox there is no sense of being a man or a woman, rich or poor, foolish or a scholar—no such conceptions are pulled along. Only when we reach the place where all concepts of man or woman, good or bad, are completely forgotten can we say it is the place of Forgetting Both Person and Ox. This is the university of religion. But if we do not actually experi-

ence this, it will only be words of explanation and not true freedom. We have to glimpse this true ultimate, keep our sights set on it, and head in this direction, or it's not Forgetting Both Person and Ox.

Here Kakuan has given us this preface: "He has shed all worldly feelings and erased all thought of holiness. He does not linger where the Buddha is; he hurries right past where the Buddha is not. As he does not cling to either side, not even the thousand-eyed one can find him." In this way, in the university of religious practice, the Buddha's awakening offers a firm base. In India, the popular way of looking at things was in terms of the void, or emptiness, like tasting the flavor of the sky without a single cloud—but often this emptiness was looked at only through concepts. These conceptual ideas did not fit with the way the Chinese approached things. They wanted to put their ideas to work in practical and living ways. Thus, they brought forth what was referred to as the path.

In India, people thought in terms of an absolute being who could be worshiped. But the Chinese did

not think of it in this way; they could not think of it in this way. They wanted a path that could be lived in a practical way. As the Chinese put it, “The essence of the order of heavens and God, these are our true nature. To live according to them is the true path. Our true Path is that which leaves out not one single person, not one single being, not the animals, the insects, or the elements. That which leaves out no one. What is that path?” This is the question that was asked, and the answer was “The true Path. The true Way.”

In the ninth century, Master Joshu would often quote the words of the Third Patriarch: “The Great Way is not difficult for those who do not pick and choose. When preferences are cast aside, the Way stands clear and undisguised.” Let go of thoughts that put you in the center of things; let go of all ideas of a preference or a small self. If you insert your own small-minded opinions into a situation, they are always your own preferences. No matter how fine one may think one’s own thinking is, continued Joshu to his sangha, to do whatever you want to and say you

have understood is not the point. To not be caught on preferences, to not be caught on being enlightened and free from preferences, to not be caught on either of these, how is it?

Joshu asked this question, and one monk said to him, “You say you are not attached to likes and dislikes, nor are you caught on being free from any attachment. So then what do you hold important?” Joshu answered, “If you put it like that, I don’t know.” The monk then said, “If you don’t even know, how can you ask others this question?” Joshu responded, “Is that the only word you have to say about it? If that’s all there is to it, prostrate and go home.”

In China, the Indian idea of void was expressed as “Mu,” often translated as emptiness. Still, of course, “Mu” is only a word. A monk asked Master Joshu, “Does a dog have Buddha Nature or not?” In fact he was asking, “Does someone with such a desperate mind as mine actually have something as true as Buddha Nature?” To this, Master Joshu answered, “Mu.” Manifesting this essence—not as a concept, but as something for all to experience—was a chal-



lenge for all the monks. To be the blue sky, without a single cloud; whether standing, sitting, walking, or moving, no matter what circumstances are encountered, to always be fresh and new, always freshly born in our state of mind: this is not just an idea of Mu, but the actual taut reality of becoming that essence, unmoved and not tossed around by anything, yet leaving nothing out; meticulous, but not caught.

In the *Heart Sutra* it's written, "No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind." When we forget our eyes completely, we can see the best. When we forget our ears completely, we can hear the best. If we have a physical problem that is affecting our ears, we cannot hear as well when we are worrying about it as when we have forgotten it completely. When we forget ourselves completely in every single thing we do, we operate and function the best. To become whatever it is completely, to forget ourselves in the doing of it completely—this is the Path.

Kakuan puts it this way: "He does not linger where the Buddha is; he hurries right past where the Buddha is not." Nansen Fugan was the teacher of

Joshu. He was the brother disciple of Hyakujo Ekai. Their teacher, Baso, said that Hyakujo was the one to whom Zen had gone, while Nansen was the one who was the most mysterious, the hardest to fathom. Before having finished his practice or having attained deep enlightenment, Joshu asked his master, Nansen, "What is the path?" Nansen answered, "The ordinary mind is the path." When asked this question before, Nansen had replied, "The path? There's the path, right outside the door." And someone said, "No, the bigger road." Nansen responded, "That bigger road is right over there." But when Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the path?" he answered, "The everyday mind is the path." Joshu continued his questioning: "How do you realize it?" And Nansen said, "If you try to realize it, you'll go even further away from it." So then Joshu asked, "What do you do?" His teacher answered, "To not understand is certainly not the point." This is what Kakuan is saying here: "he hurries right past where the Buddha is not." But if you think you do understand, that is not the point either. "He does not linger where the Buddha is; he hurries

right past where the Buddha is not.” To function naturally, without thinking, without doubt—as clear as the blue autumn sky, without any idea of understanding or not understanding—this is the path. Joshu heard this, and he was immediately enlightened.

For attaining that state of mind of holding on to nothing whatsoever, many monks have used Joshu’s koan of Mu—keeping it going while standing, sitting, walking, taking all of those many thoughts, that scattered life, and gathering it all into one and doing that koan of Mu. To do Mu is to burn everything in that furnace of the Mu, no matter whom we meet or what we do or what we encounter, we gather it all together and throw it all into that furnace of Mu. If we are burning completely, nothing we do or see catches us. We have gathered it all into one, seeing with no sense of having seen, eating with no sense of having eaten, and walking with no sense of having walked. We have to pass through this great darkness once, gathering everything into this darkness, compressing everything into it, until there is no place for even a single thought to enter. If we realize this place

we become totally transparent. That which was dark and black becomes pure; it becomes light and clear, like water that was churning with waves becoming still. And then the heavens and earth are like a perfect crystal. But we cannot even be aware of the fact that we have experienced this. That is not yet enlightenment. It has to be ripened, and from that the actual experience has to be born, or it is just conceptualization. If we do not have the experience of the real thing, it is still a concept. In this clear mind there are no thoughts about such things—no more ideas of enlightenment or no enlightenment or having understood or not having understood. Even if the Buddha were to come forth, he could not read this clear state of mind. If you realize this state of mind at this sesshin and then go home, people around you will say, “I can’t understand a thing you’re talking about.” And that’s true, because there are no thoughts to be found there.

“Birds flocking around bearing flowers—that would be a disgraceful scene.” Doshin, the Fourth Patriarch, had a disciple named Hoyu. In the begin-

ning, Hoyu sat all by himself in the mountains, and doing this he attained enlightenment. Perhaps only one person every few hundred years is actually able to do this, to sit all alone and attain enlightenment. The people in the town honored Hoyu. They knew of his goodness, felt that they could see a light shining forth from him, and offered him food. Not only the people in the neighborhood but also the birds and the animals honored him, bringing him food and flowers. When Doshin heard of this monk, he went to see him. Doshin said, "Everyone is bringing you offerings. Is your understanding only that deep? If what you have seen is truth, to show off your depth is not the way it is done. The sun and the flowers do not ask to be appreciated. How much the sun does for people, but how little it asks for any kind of appreciation. This is not the way of truth." Hearing this, the monk understood well. He worked to continue to deepen his understanding. And as he did this, as he continued to train and deepen, he stopped shining. People in the neighborhood stopped bringing him things, and the birds and the animals stopped bring-

ing him flowers and fruit. He could no longer be seen as anything special. If we look as if we are something special and holy, we can easily deceive and use people, making slaves of them. Seductive gurus often do this, making slaves of people who think they are being liberated. It's very rare to be able to meet someone who has clarified that true nature beyond this point; even to be able to know that is the direction in which we must go is very rare.

To train all day and never have a thought of training; to teach all day and never have a thought of teaching. There are six billion people in this world, and one-third of them are physically weak. Ten years from now the earth's population will have increased to ten billion, and in the next ten years it will increase exponentially again. How complex the problems will become. More and more people will be overlooked. We volunteer in society. But if we are still self-consciously aware of going to help someone, conscious of our selves, we cause even more problems than we solve. If, reaching out our hand to someone who is sick in bed, we still feel that we are help-

ing someone, we are a burden to that person. If we act with even the slightest sense that we are doing something good, we are only putting an enormous pressure on the person we are trying to help. Having a vow, we must forget that we are fulfilling it. “When you do some act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing”: this is how it’s put in the Bible. “Without clouds, or moon, or cassia—the tree too is gone, the sky above swept so clean.” This is a very high quality state of mind, and a very important one.

## ix. Return to the Origin

**Preface:** The fundamental is pure and immaculate, without a speck of dust. He sees the things of existence arise and decay though he resides in the serene quiet of doing nothing. But he is not merely conjuring up visions. Why then is there any need to change things? The blue waters, the green mountains—he just sits and watches them rise and pass away.

**Verse:** Return to the origin, back to the source—such wasted effort. What compares with being dumb and blind? From within the hut, one sees not what is in front—the river by nature broad, flowers by nature red.

**Waka:** No traces of the Dharma way, on the original mountain. The pines are green, the flowers glint with dew.

There are many goals for all of us in this lifetime. We want to do something, we want to offer our bodies to work for society. We want to create high-quality works of art, we want to achieve as much as we can in a certain sport. There are many ultimate goals in life. What is important, however, is the basic standard from which each person decides what to do.

To put it in another way, where is a person's source point? In Christianity the source point of the universe is seen to be God, who created everything, all crises and all creatures. In Buddhism it's taught



that we all return to Amida Buddha. In science we learn about atoms that gather or scatter in waves or particles. These are some of the ways of looking at it, but there many others as well. In Zen, it could be said to be Forgetting Both Person and Ox. In that mind, there is no separation between self and others. There is no idea of what we are going to do in a life. This is a very difficult life sense and world sense and mind sense to understand and depend upon. We can't imagine actually living without our sense of our self. We do Mu to know this place, and everyone at least once in their doing of this koan Mu experiences a great huge fear, a great fear of losing that ego.

If we still have an idea about our own position, an idea of who we are, we still have on glasses that prevent us from seeing clearly what others are doing and how things actually are. We want to help others but are limited by our own ideas of how things should be. We can see the vague form of God but will not know the true light of using our own bodies to do God's work, and the huge energy and awareness that come with doing that. We once have to come up against

this and see the true way of relating to the world. This is Return to the Origin. In fact, Forgetting Both Person and Ox and Return to the Origin are the back and front of the same thing. If we experience Forgetting Both Person and Ox, what is then manifested is this Return to the Origin.

Forgetting Both Person and Ox is that place where there is not one speck being given birth to whatsoever; whatever comes to us, we become that completely. In all the boundless realm of space and in the separation between self and others, not a single hair can be inserted. From the limitless past to the immediate present, we have never separated from this very moment. We must become this and know this from our own experience.

We throw ourselves away, throw all of it away, all of our thoughts, all of our shadows, until we do not even know if we are standing or sitting and are no longer pulling along anything whatsoever. Nothing is clinging to us. We are alive only as a wooden statue, in that continuous flow which has been going on for a million years from the past into the

continual future. Only that breath and the flow of the blood continue. From that essence of holding on to nothing whatsoever, with a bird's call, with a bell's ringing, or with the wind's sound, it's as if the Buddha is here and with the very same ear hearing this sparrow chirping, with the very same eye seeing the green of the trees. In all the boundless realm of space and in the separation between self and others, not a single hair can be inserted. From the limitless past to the immediate present, we have never separated from this very moment. Things exactly as they are. Master Tozan was asked, "What is the Buddha?" He answered, "Three pounds of flax." When Joshu was asked what Bodhidharma's intention was in traveling to China, he answered, "The oak tree in the garden." Master Daijo was asked, "What is eternal life?" He answered, "The mountain flowers bloom like a rich brocade; the river's water flows like deep indigo." The world that is born from that world of nothing at all—all things coming forth from that place of "no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind," the great brilliance of all things shin-

ing, coming forth of their own—that is the world of Return to the Origin.

If there is a self that is aware of seeing, hearing, smelling, or tasting, then there are things that can be seen and things that still cannot be seen, things that can be heard and things that still cannot be heard. There are people who cannot see and also those who can see, people who cannot speak and also those who can speak. If we think in terms of these differences in capability, in terms of the differences in people's experiences, we cannot encounter each other equally. But from that mind of zero, what comes forth is zero, with no judgment and no ideas about how things should be. This place—where exactly what is seen is seen, exactly what is heard is heard, with nothing inserted in between—is the place that anyone would experience in exactly the same way. From that place of nothing at all, we all encounter it directly. This is the place of Return to the Origin.

There was a woman named Helen Keller who at a very young age lost the ability both to see and to hear. Although she never regained her sight or her

hearing, she received an education that enabled her to develop the capability of communicating with language. She said that for her the most amazing thing was to discover that all things have names. She had known objects only through touching them. To learn that something could be called a desk, or a wall, or a ceiling, or a cup—that things had names such as this—was truly wonderful. We use words and never know this great wonder. We see objects and we hear sounds, but we are no longer in wonder because we have lost the mind that deeply perceives. To regain this deep perspective, we have to once more become blind, deaf, and mute. Return to that state of mind, or you will never know that wonder. While our bodies may be healthy, our minds are not. As the *Heart Sutra* says, our six senses are from the origin pure. If we do not let go of all of the impurities of thoughts and delusions, ideas of past and future, then we cannot experience the actual essence of each thing: That deep truth. That which pierces through our ears and eyes and awareness and touches the world around us directly, with no separation whatsoever. That world

of no obstruction. If Forgetting Both Person and Ox is an empty circle, then Return to the Origin is the place where everything is reborn from it.

## x. Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands

**Preface:** All alone, the gate shut so tight—not even the thousand sages can comprehend. Hiding his light he strays from the tracks of the sages who have gone before. He comes round to the market with his gourd dangling and returns to his hut clumping along with his staff. He shows up at the drinking places and fish stalls to awaken all to their buddhahood.

**Verse:** With bare chest and unshod feet, he walks into the market, daubed with dirt and smeared with ashes, laughter fills his face. Without using mystic arts or divine powers he makes withered trees at once burst into flower.

**Waka:** Hands extended, feet in the sky—on a dead branch perches a bird.

Finally, the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* reaches its end. This picture is of Priest Hotei, smiling and abundant—his state of mind can be seen in the picture here. Hotei was said to always carry an enormous bag. There was an actual person who was like this, with a big belly and floppy earlobes, maybe not so good-looking, but always smiling; no matter what was said to him, no matter how unkind it might seem, he was not bothered by it. He was often portrayed in pictures and very respected. Especially today people are so worried, so deluded. In Hotei's time, everyone brought him their troubles, and he would put them in his huge bag. In fact, everything he owned was in this bag. He had no house. He was often given presents, and he would give everything he received to the children who were always gathered around him. He is said to have died while doing zazen. And he left behind a poem about Maitreya.

Maitreya was often worshiped in India. When

the Buddha was dying, he said that he had done everything he could to liberate the people of his era. For everyone he had met, he had done what he could, and he had left behind help—in the sutras, for example—to liberate those who would live in years to come. It was said at that time in India that Maitreya was a Bodhisattva who would come 5,670,000 years after the Buddha to save everyone who was not yet liberated. But many said, “We just cannot wait for Maitreya like that.” And they began a Maitreya sect. The poem by Hotei says:

*Maitreya, Maitreya, we are all Maitreya  
ourselves.*

We are all part of that great vow that all shall be liberated. The vow itself is what Maitreya is. But even though that is true, people cannot hear it and know it, even when it's told to them.

For one whole life, priest Hotei lived as an expression of Maitreya.

Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands is about going into society, entering the whirl of



humanity, and offering help with our own hands. But if we do it without a clear center, we will be tossed and turned and stained, because there will still be a small self operating. If there is an essence alive there, we will not be thrown around when we enter society; we will be sturdy and clear. In the first pictures a child is used to represent searching single-mindedly and wholeheartedly, as children do in their play, without concern for gain or loss. Unfortunately, today's children mature too early, and strange, dualistic, unchildlike children are becoming common. Today, that original childlike mind, pure and eager, is not so easily found.

In *Forgetting Both Person and Ox*, the child who has been searching for the light is able to become, melt, and enter into that light in oneness. And then, in *Return to the Origin*, there is only that light. We return from there and we become and reflect all the mountains and the trees and the rivers. This is the world of truth, of paradise, of loveliness, where there is no prejudice and no differentiation among things. Things are exactly as they are. But how does that con-

nect to today's complicated, confused, deluded world? A perfect world was being searched for, but what was found included that confused, deluded world. In *Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands*, from within our own mind we give light to every single thing that we come in contact with, clearing up all delusion, anger, and ignorance.

Master Kakuan writes in the preface, "All alone, the gate shut so tight—not even the thousand sages can comprehend. Hiding his light he strays from the tracks of the sages who have gone before." He has thrown himself away completely. Without doing that, it is difficult to read another's mind. You might think it would be unsettling to meet someone who could know all of your private thoughts, but one who can see a person through and through clearly is in fact warm and comforting, because that person is not caught on anything, or looking for anything.

So many people today feel alone and sad and believe no one understands them. Even though we think we want to be alone, we are so insecure when we are alone that we become very concerned with so-

ciety and with other people's affairs. When we are young we are always involving ourselves with people in society, but as we grow older and become ill, people stop calling on us, and we end up alone and lonely, feeling left out and isolated. Then, how many people tighten into a difficult, complex state of mind. People who used to be surrounded by a warm, happy, and generous family are left alone as they get old and are no longer so useful and necessary. They have so little joy in their lives. Today's society is becoming fuller and fuller of people weakened in this very way. When people become old or alone or sick, they are lonely and miserable. To know how to be truly alone, how to be one with one's solitude in a full way, is what Zen teaches us.

In Christianity it also says, "Enter the room, shut the door, and pray deeply." This deep belief in God, without any dualism whatsoever, this essence, is rarely found today. People know the pain and loneliness of being alone, but they do not know the joy. They do not know the joy of being alive in this world. That baby that gives a great cry when it is born is

expressing the joy of just being alive. It's said that babies cry at birth because they have entered a world that is so full of suffering. In fact, babies are without emotional content; they are giving a great call of life energy. It's said that when a baby is born its mind is free from all staining and coloring; through conditioning and education, it moves further and further away from the purity of that clean mind it was born with. As it grows older, the wonder and aliveness it knew at birth fade further and further away. In fact, in living this very life we are at one with Confucius or Christ or Buddha. There is no difference between any of us. No matter how sick or lonely we become, this mind that is at one with God or with Buddha is with us all the time—with it we awake in the morning, and without any grief or delusion or confusion or misery we spend the day with God and Buddha in their same state of mind. We are with them the entire time, all day long, and with them we rest.

The Japanese novelist Miyazawa Kenji was born more than one hundred years ago. He studied the *Lotus Sutra* exhaustively, not just scholastically but

also through practice. This is how his most famous book begins: “Not to lose to the rain, not to lose to the wind, not to lose to the snow or the summer heat. With a sturdy body, without desires, not angry, always quietly laughing. Four cups of brown rice with miso and some vegetables. Not putting emotional content into anything but seeing well, hearing well, understanding well, and not forgetting.” In this book he is saying: When you see someone sad, go and help them. When you see someone carrying heavy packages, go and help them carry those packages. When you see someone with an injured leg, go and help them along, lending them a shoulder when they need to walk. Always smiling, bring quiet and joy and rest to everyone you encounter. This is the kind of person society needs, today more than ever.

The joy of being alone—not just the joy of being with others but the joy of being truly alone—is not so commonly known. This joy of being alone is to be able to melt into any situation you might enter—to be like water, which fills any container, no matter what shape the container is, rather than

like ice, which can only enter a container of its own shape and otherwise is cumbersome. When we let go of our hard edges and the things we are stuck on, we become like water, able to enter anywhere, and this brings us joy when other people's joy is present. From morning until night we think only of others, of how we can help, how we can bring joy to them, without thinking of ourselves or putting ourselves first. Like a fool, we only smile and bring warmth and joy and comfort to everyone we meet; not offering difficult explanations, we simply meet everyone with this warmth. And if through this meeting another person's vow is brought forth, this is Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands.

The true nature is our Original Nature, which unites all of us, with which we are all endowed. While we all have a name and those names separate us into what we think of as individuals, the Original Nature is the same for all people, unindividuated. It's expressed in the mind of compassion. Compassion is the word we use in English, but in Japanese the word we use has two aspects. One of the aspects is to bring

joy and happiness to all people. The other is to take away the pain of all people, to erase the pain of all people. Both of these elements make up the Japanese word for compassion. Compassion is the natural expression of our Buddha Nature. We all have this; we are all endowed with this True Nature from birth. What is most important is that we bring forth an awareness of this mind of what is called the Bodhisattva nature in order to give compassion to all beings. To bring forth this awareness is the beginning—it is Searching for the Ox. And then we begin to experience this mind and work with it—this is Finding the Tracks.

Dogen described Buddha Nature as “the vow to liberate all others, even before we ourselves are liberated.” All people have varying qualities and habits. Within these differences it’s hard to find that unifying Buddha Nature. We do zazen and let go of all of these differences and realize that essence where there is no subjective and objective and no separation between self and other, where all the ten thousand things are one within ourselves, where the entire

universe is one huge whole, without any secondary or relative ideas of God and person or enlightened or not enlightened—where everything is one within this huge clear mind. When we know directly that there are no barriers or boundaries between self and other, wisdom comes forth, and so does a great love for all beings. Like the light of the sun which pours down on all beings, this huge love is infinite and eternal. Because it is eternal, we humans have not been destroyed. The poet Tagore said we can know that God has not given up on humankind because he still gives us children. Today people are so stuck on gain and loss and material possessions that they are unable to express that great loving mind, which we all originally are. So we do zazen in order to return to that vow of our Buddha Nature. When we can return to that vow, and that natural true mind, all will be resolved.

The *Ten Oxherding Pictures* depicts the various stages of developing this vow and this state of mind, ending with Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands. All the truth of Mahayana Buddhism



is expressed here. First we realize our Bodhisattva nature, our deep vow to liberate all beings. Then, to ripen that and deepen that, we do zazen, and within the doing of that we awake to know clearly this true nature in all beings.

The great historian Arnold Toynbee has said, “To resolve the spiritual starvation in the world it will take a firm religious way.” This religious way is not believing in an exterior absolute power, or some designed idea of a paradise; rather, it’s that vow that says: before I am liberated I vow to liberate all beings; for the best welfare of all beings, I offer my whole life. Where the person who has realized that vow is, wherever someone like that is alive, that place in itself will become paradise. Aside from the great mind of this offering, where is there a god? To make all beings joyful, to bring that joy of being alive to every person you encounter—where is there except for this place, the true mind of all the Buddhas?

Yet even though we say this, even though we vow this, our state of mind is not so easily, so completely, resolved. Our egoistic filter is not so easily let go of.

With *zazen* and *sesshin* we work to let go of it. As many of you have felt, if we vow from our heart to give everything we are to society, to offer our whole life to society, at that time all insecurity disappears, and our direction is very simply decided. To give rise to that deep vow of the Bodhisattva nature to liberate all beings is the source point of enlightenment, and we can know that when we make that vow.

Even though we all may think that we are worthless and unable to do anything, when we can give flower to this great deep vow, it is the blossoming of the true wisdom of all the Buddhas. And offering that wisdom to all beings is the expression of great love and great compassion. These two, the blossoming of wisdom and the offering of this great love, are the two halves of Buddhism that are being taught in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*.

We have now read together these *Ten Oxherding Pictures*. When our vow is deeply realized, we will be able to see that this text, from more than eight hundred years ago, is still shining in its essence within us. Six days are not sufficient for teaching about this

text, and there are many places I have had to abbreviate. But I hope that this teaching has been able to be a great source of energy for everybody's zazen and practice; for that to be possible would be my greatest joy. I thank everyone for listening to these teachings.



One Drop Zendo

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