

The Ten Oxherding Pictures

Yamada Mumon

"A bird flying in the sky leaves no footprints in its wake. To leave no traces behind – that is the Buddha dharma. The Buddha dharma that is not the Buddha dharma, that is what is called the Buddha dharma. In the Buddha dharma there are no rules like "You must believe in this" or "You have to worship this kind of Buddha," or "This is how you must behave." All that is required is to understand your own original heart and mind. That is the Buddha dharma. "

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PICTURE ONE
Searching for the Ox



第一 尋牛

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PREFACE:

Till now, the ox has never been lost. Why then do you need to search for it? Turning away from your own awakening, you became estranged from it; then enclosed by dust, in the end you lost it. The hills of home recede farther and farther away; you're lost as soon as the paths divide. Winning and losing consume you like flames. Right and wrong rise round you like blades.

VERSE:

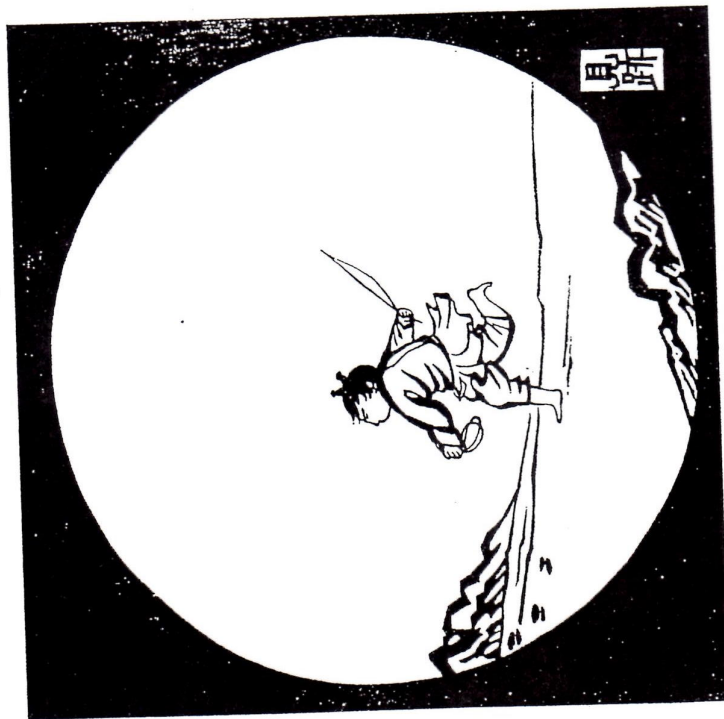
Beating about the endless wildgrass, you seek and search,
 The rivers broaden, the mountains stretch on and the trails go
 ever deeper.
 Your strength exhausted and spirit wearied, no place allows
 you refuge.
 The only sound—evening cicadas shrill in the maples.

WAKA:

Searching
 The deep hills,
 No sight of the ox.
 Just the empty
 Shrilling of the cicadas.

PICTURE TWO

Seeing the Traces



第二 見跡

PREFACE:

With the aid of the sutras, you gain understanding; through study of the teachings, you find traces. You see clearly the many vessels are all one metal, and the ten thousand things are all yourself. But if you do not distinguish correct from incorrect, how will you recognize true from false? Since you have yet to pass through that gate, only tentatively have you seen the traces.

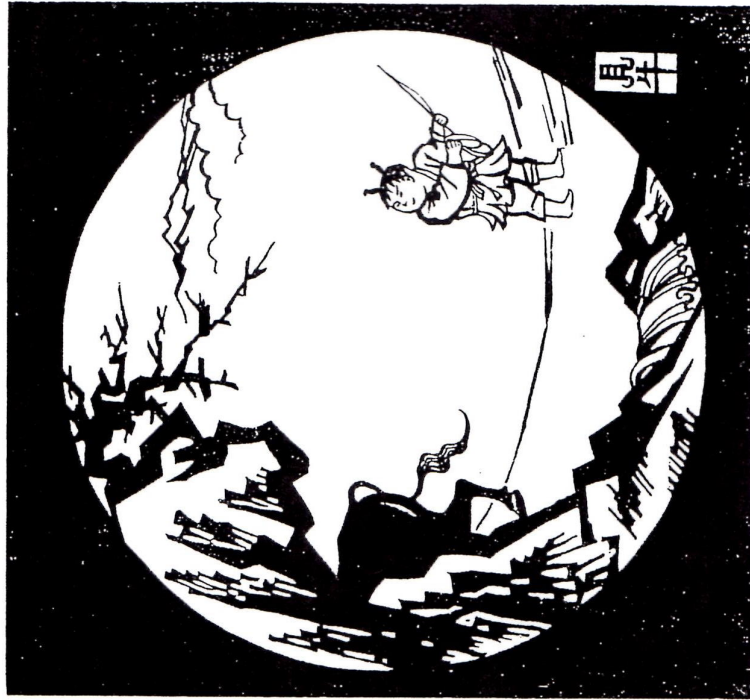
VERSE:

By the water and under the trees, tracks thick and fast.
In the sweet grasses thick with growth, did you see it or did you not?
But even in the depths of the deepest mountains,
How could it hide from others, its snout turned to the sky?

WAKA:

Determination deep
In the mountains
Your efforts bear fruit.
Tracks!
How gratifying to see a sign.

PICTURE THREE
Seeing the Ox



第三 見牛

PREFACE:

Through sound, you gain entry; by sight, you face your source.
The six senses are none different; in each daily deed, plainly
there.

Like salt in water, or glue in paint. Raise your eyebrows—it is
nothing other.

VERSE:

In the trees nightingales sing and sing again,
Sun warms the soft wind, green willows line the bank,
Here, there's nowhere left for it to hide,
Its majestic head and horns no artist could draw.

WAKA:

In spring sun in the green willow strands
See its timeless form.

PICTURE FOUR

Catching the Ox



第四 得牛

PREFACE:

Today you've chanced upon it, so long hidden in the wilds.
But you can't keep up with its high spirit, and it won't give up
its love of sweet grass. Even more willful, as wild as ever, if
you want to tame it, you must lay on the whip.

VERSE:

With your last ounce of strength, you take it,
But stubborn and strong, it won't be broken.
Now it suddenly climbs to high ground,
Then it descends to vanish deep into mist.

WAKA:

Thinking only "Ox! Ox! Don't let go!"
Just this is the real fetter.

PICTURE FIVE
Taming the Ox



第五 牧牛

PREFACE:

Once one little thought arises, another follows. Adhere to awakening and all becomes truth; reside in ignorance and all is unreal. This happens not because of the world, but only because of your mind. Keep a firm grip on that rope and do not waver.

VERSE:

Not for a moment put down whip or rein,
 Lest the ox wander back to dust and desire.
 Pull again and again, till it's tame and gentle,
 Of itself, it will follow without bridle or chain.

WAKA:

Days pass, even the wild ox comes to hand,
 And becomes a shadow to my body,
 How gratifying!

PICTURE SIX

Riding Home on the Ox



第六 騎牛歸家

PREFACE:

Shields and spears are gone; winning and losing are nothing again.

You sing woodsmen's village songs and play children's country tunes.

Stretched out on back of your ox, you gaze at the sky.

We call you but you won't turn around, catch at you but you won't be tied down.

VERSE:

Riding high on your ox, leisurely you head for home.

Trilling on a nomad's flute, you leave in the evening mist.

In each beat and verse, your boundless feeling,

To a close companion, what need to move your lips?

WAKA:

Lowing at mind

limpid and soaring
sky.

White clouds are coming back to the peaks.

PICTURE SEVEN

The Ox Forgotten, the Self Remains



PREFACE:

The Dharmā is not dual, the ox just points to our subject.
As rabbit and snare differ in name, so fish and net are not the same.

As gold comes forth from dross, so the moon emerges from clouds,

A shaft of its icy light, ancient even in the age of Ion.

VERSE:

Astride your ox, you've reached the hills of home.

With ox put away, you too are at ease.

The sun's risen three poles high, yet still you're dreaming.

Your whip and line hang idle under the thatched eaves.

WAKA:

Hard to take

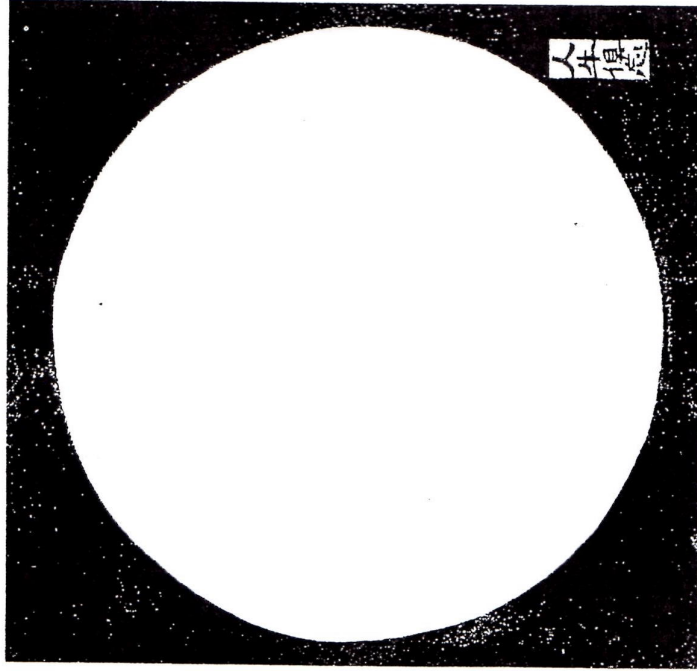
People who fret over good and bad.

Knowing nothing of Naniwa reeds.

第七 忘牛存人

PICTURE EIGHT

Forget Both Self and Ox



第八 人牛俱忘

PREFACE:

Shedding worldly feelings, erasing holy thoughts,
You do not linger where the Buddha is,
You dash right past where the Buddha is not.
Don't cling to duality, or the thousand-eyed one will soon find
you.

If birds were to bring you flowers, what a disgraceful scene.

VERSE:

Whip and line and you and the ox, all gone to emptiness,
Into a blue sky for words too vast.
Can a snowflake survive the fire of a flamepit?
Attain this, truly be one with the masters of the past.

WAKA:

No clouds, or moon, or cassia tree,
Swept clean,
Lost in the sky.

PICTURE NINE

**Return to the Origin,
Back to the Source**



第九 返本還源

PREFACE:

Originally immaculate, without a speck of dust. Watching appearances come and go, you reside in the serenity of non-doing. But this is not the same as illusion, so why cling to it? The rivers are blue, the mountains green. Sit and watch them rise and pass away.

VERSE:

You returned to the origin, went back to the source—such wasted effort.

How much better to just be blind and deaf?

From inside your hut, you don't see outside your hut,
Let the streams just flow on, the flowers just bloom red.

WAKA:

The Dharma way—no traces—on the original mountain,
The pines are green, the flowers glint with dew.

PICTURE TEN

Entering the Marketplace with Extended Hands



第十 入堂垂手

PREFACE:

Alone behind a brushwood door, not even a thousand sages are aware. Hiding your light, you shun the tracks of sages of the past. Dangling your gourd, you come into town; thumping your staff, you return to your hut. Visiting bars and fish stalls, you turn all into buddhas.

VERSE:

With bare chest and feet, you come to the market.
Under dirt and ash, your face breaks into a laugh.
With no display of magic powers,
You make withered trees burst into flower.

WAKA:

Hands extended, feet planted in the sky—
Otokoyama
On a withered branch perches a bird.