

The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures

Stages in a Spiritual Journey

Paintings by Gyokusei Jikihara, Sensei

Poems by Zen Master Kakuan
(1100-1200 CE)

Adapted by John Daido Looi



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1. SEARCHING FOR THE OX

*Vigorously cutting a path through the brambles,
you search for the ox;
Wide rivers, eternal mountains,
the path seems endless.
With strength depleted,
and mind exhausted, you cannot find it.
There is only the gentle rustle of maple leaves,
and the cicadas' evening song.*



2. FINDING TRACES OF THE OX

Along the river, deep within the forest,
 you find the traces;
 Leaving behind the fragrant grasses,
 you study the subtle signs.
 The tracks, suddenly as clear as the distant sky,
 lead you into the endless mountains.
 There is no place to hide.



3. SEEING THE OX

*The song of the yellow oriole
echoes in the forest.*

*Warm sun, gentle breeze,
willows green along the shore.*

*The ox has no place to turn
in the brambles.*



4. CATCHING THE OX

*Through extraordinary effort
you seize the ox.*

*Still, its will is forceful,
and its body spirited.*

*Sometimes it runs high into the mountains,
other times it disappears into the mist.*



5. TAMING THE OX

*The whip and tether cannot be put aside
or the ox may wander into mud-filled swamps.
When patiently trained to trust, it becomes gentle
and can be unfettered.*

*Then, freely,
it follows your way.*



6. RIDING THE OX HOME

Following the winding road
 you ride the ox home.
 The sound of your rustic flute
 pervades the evening haze.
 Each note, each song: feeling unbounded.
 Beyond lips and mouth.



7. FORGETTING THE OX

*Astride the ox, you reach home.
 Now at rest, the ox is forgotten.
 With the bright sun high in the sky,
 you are in blissful repose.
 Whip and tether are abandoned
 behind the thatched hut.*



8. TRANSCENDING THE OX

*Whip, tether, self, and ox
 all have merged, no traces remain.
 The vast blue sky cannot be reached by thoughts;
 how can a snowflake abide in a raging fire?
 Having reached home,
 you are in accord with the ancient way.*



9. RETURNING TO THE SOURCE

*Having returned to the source,
effort is over.*

*The intimate self sees nothing outside,
hears nothing outside.*

*Still, the endless river flows tranquilly on,
the flowers are red.*



10. ENTERING THE MARKETPLACE

*Entering the marketplace
barefoot and unadorned.*

*Blissfully smiling, though covered with dust
and ragged of clothes.*

*Using no supernatural power,
you bring the withered trees spontaneously into bloom.*