

The Ten Oxherding Pictures

Version III

Oxherding illustrations by Tomikichiro Tokurik

Chögyam Trungpa , Mudra: Early Songs and Poems, Shambhala Publications, 1972, pp 73-93

Oxherding

by Chögyam Trungpa

I have decided to include the ten oxherding pictures, a well-known Zen representation of training of the mind, so basic that it could be considered fundamental to all schools of Buddhism. A deeper way of looking at it is in terms of spiritual development from Shravakayana to Maha Ati. In the Tibetan tradition there is an analogy of elephant herding but it refers largely only to the practice of shamatha. The symbolism does not go beyond the riding of the elephant. In the oxherding pictures the evolutionary process of taming the bull is very close to the Vajrayana view of the transmutation of energy. Particularly returning to the world as the expression of the compassion of the Nirmanakaya shows that the final realization of Zen automatically leads to the wisdom of Maha Ati.



1 - The Search for the Bull

The inspiration for this first step, which is searching for the bull, is feeling that things are not wholesome, something is lacking. That feeling of loss produces pain. You are looking for whatever it is that will make the situation right. You discover that ego's attempt to create an ideal environment is unsatisfactory.



2 - Discovering the Footprints

By understanding the origin you find the possibility of transcending this pain. This is the perception of the Four Noble Truths. You see that pain results from the conflicts created by ego and discover the footprints of the bull, which are the heavy marks of ego in all play of events. You are inspired by unmistakable and logical conclusions rather than by blind faith. This corresponds to the Shrivakayana and Pratyekabuddhayana paths.



見^三
牛

3 - Perceiving the Bull

You are startled at perceiving the bull and then, because there is no longer any mystery, you wonder if it is really there; you perceive its insubstantial quality. When you begin to accept this perception of non-duality, you relax, because you no longer have to defend the existence of your ego. Then you can afford to be open and generous. You begin to see another way of dealing with your projections and that is joy in itself, the first spiritual level of the attainment of the Bodhisattva.



得^四
牛

4 - Catching the Bull

Seeing a glimpse of the bull, you find that generosity and discipline are not enough in dealing with your projections, because you have yet to completely transcend aggression. You have to acknowledge the precision of skillful means and the simplicity of seeing things as they are, as connected to fully developed compassion. The subjugation of aggression cannot be exercised in a dualistic framework - complete commitment into the compassionate path of the Bodhisattva is required, which is the development of patience and energy.



五
牧牛

5 - Taming the Bull

Once caught, the taming of the bull is achieved by the precision of meditative panoramic awareness and the sharp whip of transcendent knowledge. The Bodhisattva has accomplished the transcendent acts (paramitas) - not dwelling on anything.



六
騎牛
歸家

6 - Riding the Bull Home

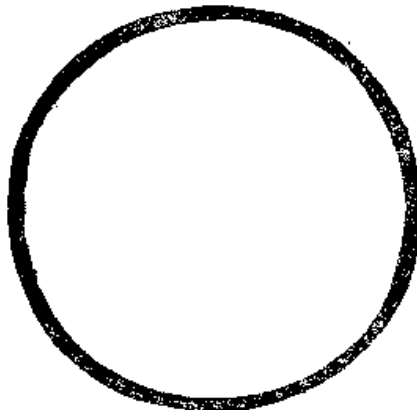
There is no longer any question of search. The bull (mind) finally obeys the master and becomes creative activity. This is the breakthrough to the state of enlightenment - the Vajra-like samadhi of the Eleventh Bhumi. With the unfolding of the experience of Mahamudra, the luminosity and color of the mandala become the music which leads the bull home.



忘^七
人^牛

7 - The Bull Transcended

Even that joy and color becomes irrelevant. The Mahamudra mandala of symbols and energies dissolves into Maha Ati through the total absence of the idea of experience. There is no more bull. The crazy wisdom has become more and more apparent and you totally abandon the ambition to manipulate.



人^八
忘^牛

8 - Both Bull and Self Transcended

This is the absence of both striving and non-striving. It is the naked image of the primordial Buddha principle. This entrance into the Dharmakaya is the perfection of non-watching - there is no more criteria and the understanding of Maha Ati as the last stage is completely transcended.



還返^九
源本

9 - Reaching the Source

Since there is already such space and openness and the total absence of fear, the play of the wisdoms is a natural process. The source of energy which need not be sought is there; it is that you are rich rather than being enriched by something else. Because there is basic warmth as well as basic space, the Buddha activity of compassion is alive and so all communication is creative. It is the source in the sense of being an inexhaustible treasury of Buddha activity. This is, then, the Sambhogakaya.



昭^十和^入辛^手卯^入夏^廊
富^重吉^手郎^廊
画^重非^手刻^廊摺

10 - In the World

Nirmanakaya is the fully awakened state of being in the world. Its action is like the moon reflecting in a hundred bowls of water. The moon has no desire to reflect, but that is its nature. This state is dealing with the earth with ultimate simplicity, transcending following the example of anyone. It is the state of "total flop" or "old dog". You destroy whatever needs to be destroyed, you subdue whatever needs to be subdued, and you care for whatever needs your care.