Ox-herding in the Time of Coronavirus
AABCAP Retreat R3
A Zen Buddhist Retreat
with
Subhana Barzaghi and Jeff Ward
Saturday 10 October 2020 – Wednesday 14 October 2020

Riding the Ox Home, Mayumi Oda
Ten Ox-herding Pictures

The print on the cover of this booklet is entitled Riding the Ox Home by Mayumi Oda, who is a Japanese American artist and Zen teacher. The image has been taken from a copy of the print owned by Subhana Barzaghi.

The pictures and the appended verses in this document have been sourced with permission from Jeff Shore (2009). No bull: Zen oxherding pictures for the modern world https://beingwithoutself.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/tenoxpics.pdf

As Jeff Shore explains: “The ten paintings reproduced here are attributed to the Japanese Zen monk Shûbun, a fifteenth-century abbot of the Shôkokuji Rinzai monastery complex in Kyoto and one of the greatest painters of his age. Each picture is accompanied by two short verses attributed to Kuo-an Shih-yuan [Jp.: Kakuan Shion], a Chinese Zen monk of the Sung Dynasty. These verses have become a standard text in the Zen tradition, and are included in the classic Four Texts of the Zen School [ Zenshû Shiburoku ], and in the two-volume Poison-Painted Drum [ Zudokko ], the handbook for Rinzai monastic practice.” (p.2)

NB – Please do not reproduce or circulate these images without permission

FURTHER READING
Kawai, Hayao. (1996). Buddhism and the art of psychotherapy. USA: Texas A&M University Press. This book is by Japan’s leading Jungian psychologist and he provides a commentary on the ox-herding sequence from a Jungian perspective.


Yamada, Mumon. (2004). Lectures on the ten ox-herding pictures. USA: University of Hawaii Press. This is a series of lectures given by Mumon Yamada, one of the leading Japanese Zen teachers of the 20th century. The lectures were originally given to monks in training.
SUTRAS

Ti-SARANA

Buddham saranam gacchami
(I take refuge in the Buddha)

Dhammam saranam gacchami
(I take refuge in the Dharma)

Sangham saranam gacchami
(I take refuge in the Sangha)

THE GREAT PrajNA Paramita HEART Sutra

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, practising deep Prajna Paramita,
clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty, transforming anguish and distress.
Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form;
form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form;
sensation, perception, mental reaction, consciousness are also like this.
Shariputra, all things are essentially empty –
not born, not destroyed; not stained, not pure; without loss, without gain.
Therefore in emptiness there is no form,
no sensation, perception, mental reaction, consciousness;
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind,
no colour, sound, smell, taste, touch, object of thought;
no seeing and so on to no thinking;
no ignorance and also no ending of ignorance,
and so on to no old age and death
and also no ending of old age and death;
no anguish, cause of anguish, cessation, path;
no wisdom and no attainment. Since there is nothing to attain,
the Bodhisattva lives by Prajna Paramita,
with no hindrance in the mind; no hindrance and therefore no fear;
far beyond delusive thinking, right here is Nirvana.
All Buddhas of past, present, and future live by Prajna Paramita,
attaining Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.
Therefore know that Prajna Paramita is the great sacred mantra,
the great vivid mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the supreme mantra,
which completely removes all anguish.
This is truth, not mere formality.
Therefore set forth the Prajna Paramita mantra,
set forth this mantra and proclaim:
Gate Gate paragate parasamgate Bodhi Svaha!
METTA SUTTA

This is what should be done
   By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
   Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
   Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,
   Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm and wise and skilful,
   Not proud or demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
   That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
   May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
   Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
   The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
   Those born and to-be-born —
May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
   Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
   Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
   Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
   Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
   Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
   Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
   Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
   One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
   By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
   Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.
GREAT VOWS FOR ALL

The many beings are numberless, I vow to save them;
greed, hatred, and ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them;
dharma gates are countless, I vow to wake to them;
the Buddha’s way is unsurpassed, I vow to embody it fully.
1. Seeking Ox

Never gone astray –
What need to search?
By turning away from awakening, the split occurs:
Covered in dust, finally all is lost.
Hills of home ever more distant,
Diverging paths proliferate:
Flames of gain-loss,
Blades of right-wrong.

Wading through thick weeds, searching, searching.
Rivers swell, mountains tower, paths mending.
Exhausted, in despair, without a clue.
Only the drone of cicadas in autumn leaves.
2. Seeing Traces

Through sutras, the meaning is understood,
Looking into the teachings, traces are found.
It’s clear: various vessels are all one metal,
All things are one self.
But unable to tell right from wrong,
How to discern the true from the false?
Not yet having entered the gate,
At least the traces have been seen.

Tracks scattered all over the riverbank, under trees.
Thick in sweet grass – Ah! What’s that?
However deep in the mountain depths,
Snout reaching heaven, nothing can conceal it.
3. Finding Ox

By listening, an entrance found;
Seeing through, the source encountered.
It is this way with all six senses,
Every act crystal clear.
Like salt in water,
Or glue in paint.
Open your eye:
There’s nothing else.

Nightingale singing, singing in the treetops.
Warm sun, soft breeze, river-bank willows green.
Right here, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.
Majestic head and horns no artist could capture.
4. Catching Ox

Long hidden in wilderness,
Today finally found.
Yet hard to keep up with it wandering off:
Longing for meadows of sweet grass,
Refusing to be broken,
Wild as ever.
To bring into complete accord,
Lay on the whip!

Putting all energy into it, grab the beast.
Yet so strong and stubborn, won’t be broken.
Now taking the high ground.
Now descending into misty depths.
5. Taming Ox

Once a thought arises,
Another surely follows.
Wake up and all becomes truth,
Abide in ignorance and all is false.
This is not due to external conditions,
It arises from mind.
Hold tight the rope,
Do not waver.

Don’t let go the whip and tether even a moment,
Or alas, the beast may wander into worldly dust.
Properly tend till tame and gentle,
Without entangling bridle, following of its own accord.
6. Returning Home Riding Ox

The struggle is over;
Loss-gain vanished.
Humming rustic tunes,
Playing a child’s ditty.
Astride the ox,
Gazing at boundless sky.
Even if called, won’t turn round,
Though enticed, will not stop.

*Astride ox, leisurely wending the way home."
*The tune dissolves evening glow.*
*Sentiment unbound in each beat and verse.*
*In tune with each other – need it be said?*
7. Ox Forgotten, Man Remains

There are not two Dharmas,
    And the ox is symbolic.
The trap is left when the rabbit is snared,
The net abandoned once fish are caught.
    Like gold from dross,
Or moon emerging from clouds:
The single beam shines
    Prior to the world arising.

Astride the ox, the hills of home at last.
    Ox vanished, you’re at ease.
Sun already high in the sky, yet dream on.
Rope and whip idly lie under thatched roof.
8. Man and Ox Both Forgotten

Worldly sentiment shed,
Empty even of holy intent.
Not hanging round where Buddha resides,
Quickly passing where no Buddha is.
Without abiding in either,
Not even the thousand eyes can penetrate here.
A hundred birds offering flowers –
What a shame.

Whip and rope, man and ox – all gone.
Vast azure heavens beyond reckoning.
Snowflakes can’t survive flaming furnace.
Here truly one with the masters of old.
9. Return to Origin, Back at Source

Originally pure and clean,
Without a speck of dust.
Seen through, the growth and decay of all forms.
At ease in the unconditioned.
Without illusory phantoms,
What is there to embellish?
Waters blue, mountains green.
Sit and see through the change of things.

Return to origin, back at source — what wasted effort.
Far better just to be blind and deaf.
Inside the hut, no sight of things outside.
Streams flow their own accord, roses naturally bloom red.
10. Entering Market with Open Hands

Alone behind brushwood door,
Not even the thousand saints know.
Hiding his light,
Not following the tracks of past sages.
Carrying his gourd, he enters the market.
Leaning on his staff, he returns home.
Hanging round honky-tonks and fish stalls,
   All become Buddhas.

Entering market with bare chest and bare feet.
Smeared with mud and ash, broad face beaming.
   No display of magic powers.
Yet withered trees burst into bloom.