

Ten Ox Herding

I. Searching for the Ox

Alone in the wilderness, lost in the jungle, the boy is searching, searching!
The swelling waters, the far-away mountains, and the unending path;
Exhausted & in despair, he knows not where to go,
He only hears the evening cicadas singing in the maple-woods.



Comment: *The ox never has been lost. What need is there to search? Only because of separation from my true nature, I fail to find him. In the confusion of the senses I lose even his tracks. Far from home, I see many crossroads, but which way is the right one I know not. Greed and fear, good and bad, entangle me.*



II. Noticing the footprints

By the stream and under the trees, scattered
are the traces of the lost;
The sweet-scented grasses are growing
thick -- did he find the way?
However remote over the hills and far
away the beast may wander,
His nose reaches the heavens and none
can conceal it.

Comment: *Understanding the teaching, I see the footprints of the ox. Then I learn that, just as many utensils are made from one metal, so too are myriad entities made of the fabric of self. Unless I discriminate, how will I perceive the true from the untrue? Not yet having entered the gate, nevertheless I have discerned the path.*

The ox is the eternal principle of life, truth in action. The Ten Ox represent sequent steps in the realization of one's true nature. An understanding of the creative principle transcends any time or place. The Ten Ox is more than poetry, more than pictures. It is a revelation of spiritual unfoldment paralleled in every bible of human experience. May the reader, like the Chinese patriarch, discover the footprints of his potential self and, carrying the staff of his purpose and the wine jug of his true desire, frequent the market place and there enlighten others.

(Attributed to Shubun (n.d.) Japan, Muromachi period Handscroll, ink and light colors on paper copyright Shōkoku-ji Temple <http://www.shokoku-ji.or.jp>.) English translations adapted from the preface by Nyogen Senzaki & Paul Reps www.iloveulove.com of poems by Chinese patriarch Kaku-an(1100-1200AD;bull/ox used interchangeably)