

# 2009-09-28 Ten Ox Herding Pictures Zen Images of The Path

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ox, picture, people, stage, world, disappear, taming, peace, deep, compulsions, bestowing, rainbow, buddhism, mind, home, zen, possibility, person, beautiful, circle

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

For maybe after rainbow in the coming time, see for a year or so I gave a talk. And in the year since then she periodically asked me, Gil, you give that talk again. And I said, Yeah, I'll do it sometime. And I was kind of i thought was a good idea to give it again. But I kind of wanted to wait until I was really in the topic. And, and so it's been 16 years. For a long time, I didn't want to give it because I just given it some years before, but so I thought I'm not exactly in the topic in the way that I thought I would be. But in thinking about what to talk about today. It's the only thing I can think of talking about and maybe she's still alive. And so in any case, dedicated To rainbow, I'd like to give the talk that I gave 16 years ago, a few of you are here from them. And I mentioned it to Terry, that it is their lesser before I came in here that I was going to give this talk that I gave 16 years ago and she broke up this big smile and say kill. I wasn't going to stay for the hug. But you did kill. That was that. That's the favorite, my favorite talk of all your talks, something like that, if you've been to a lot of my talks. So maybe it's a few people here from that time. I don't know if you remember. Megan, you remember this is the 10 Ox herding pictures Maggie do the 10 Ox herding pictures.

You're ready. So I haven't given it any thought of it. In 16 years, I mean, it's a great that, I think the great teaching. So in Buddhism, there's a lot of different depictions of the path of practice, starting from kind of being a beginner to the combination. And in zen, in Chinese, and they developed these 10 cartoon like, pictures that kind of beautiful, usually, sometimes very many, many Zen teachers or Zen masters or artists would make this brushstroke paintings depicting these 10 stages. And it's called, and so that they have these beautiful drawings. And each drawing is in a circle. And these beautiful Zen circles that on one hand, represent completion, complete completeness, wholeness, but also represent freedom and they're usually kind of depicted as great freestyles. You know, that brush is kind of spinning around and coming up The page at the very end. And so they're called a 10 Ox herding pictures, because it has to do with being an ox herder and hurting or finding the off the ox. And the ox is symbolizes the practice or the awakening and liberation that Buddhism points to. And so in the course of these 10 pictures, a variety of things happen to this ox. And to the person who's hurting the ox or looking for the ox. It can be seen as being progressive stage by stage that, you know, you can go into, you know, over time you can go from stage one to stage 10. But, in other way, especially in zen, sometimes they don't like so much the idea of a graduate pap and before and after, they'd like to see that, that the fullness of reality can be encountered right where you are right here. And the very idea of stages, and gradual is a little bit of a delusion, because it implies that you don't really inhabit and fully be present and right here for this experience that you have. So another way of seeing these pictures is that they are 10 perspectives from different angles are the same thing. And your job is to find yourself in each picture,

not to stay and guess while I might use stage three or stage five or maybe seven, you know, and she certainly is not at stage seven. I know that competitive staging the, but rather they're all relevant for And they're all true in their own way. And as we go through these in going to these circles, these beautiful Zen circles, that is it, take a plunge into each one and, and find yourself completely in each one. So the first stage, the first picture is that of a beginner, raw beginner. And for those of you who've been practicing for 16 years and heard this before, and not plunge into the first one, and be a beginner, just, you know, just take that part of you that can be a beginner. And then as you go and go, go go into these pictures, imagine yourself kind of, you know, just inhabiting this this stage or, or seeing how it really fits you or something or kind of some aspect of you. So, the first picture is that of a young child who's old enough to herd ox, oxen and it's The child is looking for the ox. That's the picture. And so each of us is in some ways a spiritual child. And we're supposed to fight we're supposed to be tending the ox, but the ox is gone. And so we start searching for the ox. The idea is that at some

point in our life, we feel that something is amiss. Something's wrong, something that's not quite right. The way I'm living the way I understand myself, my life, the way I relate to this world, the way the world is, something is off kilter, something's not quite right. And I need to find something I need to find an answer I need to find different way of living. I need to find something that can make things right or I can find some peace in this in this world. And then we start searching. We start looking and the It's a beautiful thing to search unless all you ever do research. Some people are eternal searchers. And some people identify so strongly with being a searcher. And some people get scared when they get close to finding. And so they pull back and they search some other direction. And, and know that you know, or they identify so strongly with being the seeker that they get stuck there. But if you search Well, at some point, you see the footsteps to put tracks of the ox at the second stage, second, second circle, seeing the footprints of the ox. So then you know you're on the trail of the ox. We haven't seen the ox yet. But you at least know you know, where the where the trail is how you know, if you follow that trail, you probably see the ox at some point. So at some point in our life, we get some inkling of the possibility. We see something, oh, there's something I can do. There's an approach. There's understanding, there's something to embrace. That's helpful for my life. Maybe it's from a book, or maybe it's listening to an audio talk on the web. Or maybe it's meeting a friend who is a practitioner and you really impressed by your friends transformation or change. Or perhaps it's somehow stumbling upon some experience, accidentally, perhaps, maybe going to the bedside of a friend who's dying and feeling how much peace there is there or feeling how strong that situation is. There's gives you some indication there's another possibility than what you've what you've known before. And so you get a spill kind of intuition, or inkling, always another possibility. There's another way. You see the footprints. You're not searching anymore. You have some sense for people who are into some people get stuck at this stage because the inkling the intuition, the sense of it, sometimes can be very strong. And people can identify very strongly with that they can read books or they can just eat read endless books. This is it. It's so great that you feel the identify so strongly with the book, The Great teachings of the book and this great teacher and get this wonderful contact high and this you know and feel like they've really kind of you know, are sharing in the wisdom and they got it, they got it and everyone should get it. And, and then they finished the book and next day, they need to get it again. So they get another book and, and then to get a strong hit again and they never leave the inkling stage. But anyway, it's a great stage to kind of get us initially to kind of get a sense of that there's a possibility. The next I keep wanting to say windows rather than circles. The next window is Seeing the ox. So it's not seeing the artist to really see the past, not just not just the potential, but it's somehow realized somehow experienced, it somehow directly encountered this possibility of freedom of liberation of peace of somehow fulfilling the path. But it's only seen the ox is only seen. And some people stop at the seeing. Wow. Because sometimes the vision is so powerful and so convincing that they own and now I've seen that they're not to do anything anymore. But there is another window, another circle. And that is once you see the ox, you have to

catch the ox and that's a long stage. Because that's realizing that that's working with all the different monkey minds in your mind. So it's working with all the different attachments and preoccupations and pulls to your heart takes you this way, in that way. So say for example, you've had a real sense real experience of the possibility of abiding. The heart settled on itself

at peace. Wow, I didn't know that was possible. I see. That's possible. Maybe it was only for a few moments. And then you know how that's possible. Let me come back to the present moment. Let me come back to that piece. And as you tried to do that all the different compulsions of your mind take over. So you Oh, I think I want to think about all the things I desire, sir The sex is better. And sexual fantasies or the people I'm really angry with. That's, you know, it's not better but it's justified. And you think about them. And, or perhaps all the fears come up, and anxiety come up to me think about, you know, things we're anxious about. Perhaps it's memories, perhaps it's deep feelings that are unresolved. Perhaps it's conflicts we have with others and people around us, a lot of things will pull us away from the present moment and from this place of peace. So this place of connectedness perhaps, and so taming the ox. So once you've caught the ox, the next one today is taming the ox, which is that great the process of coming to terms of working with oneself, is polishing. Really taming oneself From our monkey mind or our wild ox nature some people give up at this stage, because it can seem so difficult. It can seem so challenging to work with myself. But it's a really worthwhile challenge smarter than most noble and beautiful things a person can do is to really tame their own wild mind. And it takes a lot of patience. One of the first requirements is patience. And if you don't develop patience quickly when you do the spiritual path,

then it's gonna be harder. So, the work of taming the box then the next window is that of riding the ox. So once you've tamed the ox, you ride the ox, the ox is willing to be rich to be to carry you. And it says in that little poem that goes underneath the picture sometimes that the ox will carry you home, you can ride on the ox home and the ox will not be interested in any of the grass is on the side of the trail. So it still tamed even the alluring kind of promise of the grass that green lush grass doesn't distract one from what's the job of going home. Now going home, of course has deep symbolic meaning, you know, go really going home to yourself. And how is it How often is it that our thoughts, our concerns, our fears, our worries, our desires, in some way, takes us away from ourselves takes us away from feeling at home in this life of ours. So when when the mind is tamed, mine is quiet Down, when the compulsions of the minor no longer no longer have the upper hand, then the mind becomes a wonderful companion that supports us and helps us and we set our course we set our intention to go home. And we're not maybe home yet completely, but it'll take us mind it's easy to get concentrated, it's easy to be present. There's kind of purity of being, there's kind of simplicity of being that that the commitment is really easy to follow to be to do walk the path then. So it's searching, seeing the footprints, seeing the ox taming the ox. Seeing the ox catching the ox taming the ox, and then writing the ox and the seventh one is being at home. Where the ox disappears. And this picture the ox herder is at home outside kind of in the shade under a tree or leaning against the house or something resting, kind of taking a snooze, kind of resting content happy, nothing to do not don't want to be nothing to get arrived here. And in this picture the ox has disappeared and says in the caption there neath the ox is forgotten. So to be so for the heart to be so settled on itself, that the very idea of enlightenment and freedom. No longer are ideas out there things we think about and we hope for and they want to get just disappear and there's a deep, abiding subtleness or contentment and that separation between me and enlightenment me and freedom, me and peace disappear and religious left settled as At home here with ourselves seems pretty good. Should that be the ultimate the end? So then the next picture, the eighth one is that of where it says the caption says, both the ox and the ox herder disappear. And this picture is the Zen circle, swishing around and nothing inside just empty, a vast emptiness. So even the idea that you know, I'm settled, I'm Oxford disappear, that we're so integrated with a piece that there's no longer any

need to think about peace. Or to ride it or do anything with it. You've arrived. The very sense of someone who's arrived disappears. And who are you when you're not there to tell you? Who are you when you're so at peace. So it is that the compulsion to think about self and to find oneself and to measure oneself and to evaluate oneself and to compare oneself. And to have some ideas about self just are not needed anymore just fall away. In Buddhism, it's considered to be quite a profound experience. And the idea of an empty circle, rather than being some kind of kneelism is thought to be quite profound

because of the freedom that resides in that kind of deep, deep letting go. The now in China when they were coming up with these ox herding pictures, initially, there are only eight and the ended at this stage. But as Chinese Buddhism I guess, developed or something, they added two more to make it complete. And the next one is the caption underneath, it says returning to the source. And the picture has no oximeter and no ox. But it has a really beautiful kind of pastoral idyllic painting of a natural setting, river and sea and mountains and meadows and just kind of really beautiful kind of, kind of stereotypic beautiful, natural safe, astral setting, nature and nature returned to the source. So here it is coming out of emptiness coming out of a deep deep, letting go when experience The world in different way. where the world is not seen as being a problem. The world is just the world, the world is a natural place. And things unfold in the natural order and way in the world. And there's a deep sense of not being in opposition to the world. But finding that sense of being in deeply at home, is also to find a sense of being at home in this world of ours as well. And it's the source. You know, it's not like we're looking for a source that's beyond this world. I'm looking for a great realization that's beyond this world. But with realization, we can see the world with different eyes, different eyes, and rather than seeing it as a place of endless suffering, it can be seen a little bit more as a place of the world itself as a place of peace or beauty. Then the last picture is this picture of the Oxford or returns And but now the Oxford is no longer a child, but now is an old person and is an old, very happy person. And they smile kind of laughing. And it's kind of like looks like like a homeless person maybe a big bag and like a big bag over the shoulders and kind of walking the streets in the world and, and a big smile and. And in the marketplace in the world of marketplaces like in the middle of the marketplace represents, you know, the middle of the hustle and bustle of social life. Picture nine was the natural world. Picture 10 is the human world depicted by the marketplace. You know, like Lehman Brothers

See this old guy, old person, you know, a big smile and laugh and a big bag and going into Wall Street. not staying out in the woods, you know, and, you know, you know, we Buddhists, we just stay out in the woods, even the forest traditions stay peaceful and quiet and, you know, looked down at these people in the Wall Street, you know, rather you enter into the marketplace and, and the marketplace, and then it says, but it says, entering the market. So the captioner nice says entering the marketplace with gift, bestowing hands. Beautiful expression, gift bestowing hands. So, coming into coming into the world, the world, the human world, the world as it is full of suffering and challenges that the world has and coming in order to help and support it. Not to stay apart from it. But to enter it and be part of it in a way to be helpful. And so going from a child to an elder and I like the expression elder because an elder someone I feel, who has wisdom, but also has a kind of stewardship has something to offer, as a mentor as support to others, to be a model to guide and support with this world, based on the deepening deepening of practice experience of life. So enter the world with gift bestowing hands. And there are many ways to be to offer our gifts to the world. There's no shortage of ways infinite number of ways to be of service and to help. So this whole path of finding the ox ends with

You're you becoming the gift, you becoming a wonderful offering service and help to this world of ours. So 10 stages, from searching for something to finding something that's worthwhile to pursue, to beginning to really then see and then experience and then came and then integrate what's been

sought. So it's no longer something being sought, but something that becomes you so deeply you that it disappears. I think one of the great blessings would be for people to be so integrated with But Buddhism points to that Buddhism disappears. I mean, it's kind of mixed thing because I like what was meant to offer to people. But you know also have this idea that the world without Buddhism would be good too. You know, but to be So, integrated with the deeper truths of Buddhism is talking about that one doesn't need you know Buddhism anymore and then to have some Buddhism disappears. But then you disappear to get that one you know, and not the other. And, and to have such a deep integration such a deep settling on oneself, the heart settling on itself, that that deep settle next settling of the heart, allows the heart to to let go of itself. That any ways in which the heart or the mind holds on to itself defines itself limits itself falls away. So this is the picture of the emptiness, the empty circle. And then as the mind is empty, the mind is liberated, then it gives a chance to the world to come back to it, to see it or just sit, we see the world in a different way. And then as we start seeing the world in different way and encountering our friends and companions along the way, our society, then hopefully there's an impulse to lend our hand to others and support them as well. Which takes care of you and I hope you're in all of them. So, we have a couple of minutes few minutes here. Do you have any questions or comments? Because this is your chance next hands will be in 16 years.

Please.

Hi, I've been thinking about it a lot. And you know about this process well learning and nobody I've been teaching and it seems like all the time we always finish as I see it as energy, like, well, not necessarily human body, right? Well, not necessarily a human body anymore, but just positive energy that

we're not even that

but it seems like the 10th window when you Yeah. And you get into Wall Street.

I hope with no

energy to change the system. Yes, somehow.

Yeah, I hope so or change the system or some people, some people, some people are motivated there can you know change the system? Some people help their neighbor. Everyone has their own way.

Is that enough? I'm complete. So if you're complete, then we'll call it a night and I will go and visit rainbow. And yes. Yes, let's do a couple of minutes here. Those of you don't know we have a practice of sending our goodwill, our wishes, good wishes to others. And so a way of remembering them and holding them in our hearts and perhaps there's some way that indirectly or directly that our good wishes are supportive for the people that we direct it towards. So you might close your eyes gently and perhaps feel a place of caring or tenderness within yourself perhaps is a place where you can feel goodwill. And then considering this person that some of you know, some of you maybe don't know, but have been here together with her many times. And some people have never met her. But a very good person who has practiced well and hard and very, very, very appreciative of how much he grew and matured in the years that we've known her. And she was a great support to our community. she volunteered many ways, including for quite a number of years. Rainbow was a person, the point person for offering assistance to people in our community who are in need Sancha care. And so now it's her time turn to receive our care. So as rainbow lays in the hospital in Redwood City, it is let it be our wish that she be at peace. May rainbow be happy May rim rainbow feel the love that so many people have brought to her bedside and that so many people feel for the rainbow, be safe and May she feel safe

a rainbow be at peace and makes you feel that piece and May she relax and let go into the peace so that both the peace and rainbow disappear

Rainbow brought her gift bestowing hands to our community. We appreciate it, value it. And now we wish her only the best as she continues may rainbow be happy.

So thank you and I wish all of you a lot of happiness and well being and peace as well. Thank you