

Zen Ox-Herding Pics – Part 1 of 3 ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 The Chan or Zen school sometimes calls itself
00:00:27 the school of consciousness.
00:00:36 In other words, it teaches the nature of consciousness.
00:00:45 There is a famous set of drawings that show one paradigm or one possible
model for the
00:01:00 path of coming to understand the nature of your consciousness.
00:01:10 And it's called the Ten Ox Herding Pictures, 十牛图 in Mandarin pronunciation,
十牛图
00:01:18 in Sino-Japanese.
00:01:21 牛 means an ox, and the ox symbolizes the nature of consciousness.
00:01:33 So they call it the 心牛, the ox of consciousness.
00:01:38 The consciousness symbolized by the ox.
00:01:45 But to understand consciousness, in other words experience, our senses, is
also enlightenment.
00:01:56 So the Ten Ox Herding Pictures can be interpreted in two different ways.
00:02:01 One is they show you stages on the path to enlightenment.
00:02:07 The other is they show you the process of understanding or truly grasping
what consciousness
00:02:17 is.
00:02:18 But of course those are exactly the same thing.
00:02:22 I would like to go through them.
00:02:29 I don't know if you can all see this, but this is the first picture.
00:02:35 And this is called Searching for the Ox.
00:02:41 Notice that there is no ox to be found.
00:02:46 The Chinese verse that goes with this says, the ox herding boy is completely
lost.
00:02:56 There's no trace of the ox.
00:02:59 There's only the cicadas chirping.
00:03:04 Do you understand who the ox herding boy is and what the cicadas chirping?
00:03:12 This is the situation of most people on this planet at this time,
unfortunately.
00:03:20 They know they want something, but what they think they want is not what they
really want.
00:03:29 Everyone's searching.
00:03:31 Like that song goes, everybody's looking for something.

00:03:36 But what people think they want is happiness dependent on conditions.
00:03:45 But what they really want is happiness independent of conditions, symbolized by the enlightenment
00:03:54 ox or the consciousness, the nature of consciousness ox.
00:04:01 But there's no ox at all, not even any trace of the ox.
00:04:05 He's just wandering around, searching for something, looking for something, and just
00:04:12 hearing the twittering of the cicadas, which is unfortunately the situation for most people.
00:04:25 Some people though, in their wanderings, get fortunate.
00:04:35 They see the tracks of something.
00:04:41 They haven't seen the nature of consciousness.
00:04:45 They haven't seen the ox.
00:04:48 They haven't experienced enlightenment.
00:04:51 But something gives them an indication that there is this possibility.
00:05:00 Maybe they heard a dharma talk.
00:05:03 Maybe they had some experience when they were little that they never forgot, or when they
00:05:10 were grown up.
00:05:12 Maybe they had a friend that came to a retreat, etc., etc.
00:05:18 They get some indication that there's another possibility beyond the transient fulfillment
00:05:32 of the twittering world.
00:05:35 So this is called seeing the footprints.
00:05:41 Every one of you has seen the footprints, or you wouldn't be here.
00:05:47 You might guess what the next step is.
00:05:52 He sees the tail on the ox, the tush, and a few hairs of the tail.
00:06:00 Hasn't really seen the whole ox yet.
00:06:05 But can you see?
00:06:07 There's the tush and the tail.
00:06:09 And it's like, oh my god, it really exists.
00:06:14 I haven't seen it all, but I have seen a little piece of it.
00:06:19 Most of you are at least in this category.
00:06:23 You've gone beyond just seeing the footprints.
00:06:26 You've actually gotten a little visage of who you really are.
00:06:33 Or you wouldn't have survived two weeks in silence.
00:06:39 So you've seen the ox, but that's not the same at all as catching the ox.
00:06:56 You see, he's got the whole ox, and he's got a hold of it.
00:07:05 Now we could say that this would be perhaps one's first glimpse of no-self, stream entry,
00:07:20 or Kensho-type experience.
00:07:28 You've actually seen the whole ox, the nature of consciousness, which is no-

thingness.

00:07:41 And you've got a handle on it, but it's still running wild.

00:07:48 At least you've captured the ox.

00:07:53 And it's in your ken.

00:07:56 You can see it any time you want.

00:07:59 But that's a far cry from ...