

STAGE 10

Entering the Marketplace with Arms Hanging Loose



Introduction

He closes the thatched gate to his hermitage so that even the thousand sages do not know of him.

He buries the light of his own knowing and goes against the tracks left by former sages.

Carrying a gourd, he enters the marketplace; holding his staff, he returns home, Bestowing Buddhahood on barkeepers and fishmongers.

Verse

*Shoeless and bare-chested he enters the marketplace;
He is daubed with earth and ashes, and a smile fills his face.
Making no use of the secrets of gods and wizards,
He causes withered trees to bloom.*

We have finally reached in our study the tenth of the Ten Ox-herding Pictures, "Entering the Marketplace with Arms Hanging Loose." A person is going into a market with hands swinging loosely by his side, that is, as casually as you can be. From the first stage, "Seeking the Ox," through the ninth stage, "Returning to the Source," by practicing extremely hard, you have cleared the head of all concepts such as Buddhist Way, enlightenment, certificate of approval [inka shōmei] and so on. They have all been completely swept clean. And, of course, it goes without saying, that any remnants of the dualistic concepts opposing self to other are completely gone. The depths of a person at this stage cannot be fathomed or seen into by even Shakyamuni himself.

And the person who has reached this level does not show any outward signs of being in such a high or deep or tranquil stage of being. Nor does he or she make any conscious effort to keep the rules of conduct and teachings of the saints and wise people of old. You simply go where you want, do what you want, and live as you like. And yet you do not stray from the right path. You lead a life of total freedom, a life of natural simplicity without striving to do anything - and yet there arise no problems.

As an example of that total freedom in all its naturalness in daily life, there is offered the picture of a fellow swaggering to the market while chatting and swinging a canister of sake at his hip and sharing it with others. By the time he heads for home he will be completely drunk and tottering on his legs. But even so he naturally makes his influence felt on the guests and owners of the bars and fish shops, and convinces all that they are completely saved as they are. Such a power of influencing people for the good is a virtue naturally acquired in such a person. The substance of enlightenment has been totally personalized with no untoward effects remaining. In other words, the person has completely matured in buddha-hood.

Now let's savor Master Kakuan's final verse:

Shoeless and bare-chested he enters the marketplace.

With chest bared, he saunters along barefoot without shoes, and enters the marketplace. Without giving any thought to what others may be thinking of him, he opens himself completely with no premeditation and acts and talks to them spontaneously. All pictures representing the tenth of the Ten Ox-herding Pictures show a fellow named Hotei [?-917, Zen monk in old China]. He is said to have had a big belly. His gut is big and his chest bare. He has a big bag and a staff. And perhaps he has been walking barefooted. The attitude of the dear old Hotei, who is said to be a manifestation of Bodhisattva Maitreya, was presumably as that depicted by this verse. The purpose of your practice is this, and insofar as there still remains even a little remnant of the smell of enlightenment, you are still imperfect and immature and foolish, and it is necessary to add even more practice and discipline.

He is daubed with earth and ashes, and a smile fills his face.

Only after you become such a personality, for the first time you suffer with a suffering person [kaitô-domen: ash-covered head and earth soiled face] and ever so naturally a power to save that person emerges. This is not by any conscious effort of will to do so, but it appears as something you must do as a manifestation of the spirit of compassion. This is what is meant by the term "compassion arising out of the body even without Dharma-bonds" [muen-dôtai no jihi]. As Shakyamuni is reputed to have said: "All lands are my land; and all the living beings in those lands are my children." When you achieve this state you help people realize their own Buddha-hood daily and naturally in every place and at every time. Because such a person is at all times peaceful and calm at heart, there is always a smile playing on his or her face even when not laughing, and the lips are always smiling. This is the meaning of the phrase, tenka-taihei (all is peaceful under the sun).

Making no use of the secrets of gods and wizards.

To reach such a state and live in such a way there is no need to have supernatural powers of a holy hermit. That is the meaning of the third line of the verse. In days of old many of those who did Zazen practice earnestly were able to achieve such mental power of concentration that they could have many kinds of supernatural powers. Shakyamuni himself in his Dharma-combats with his non-Buddhist opponents made use of such powers. But these are, in the final analysis, byproducts of zazen, and not the purpose of the practice of the Buddhist Way. And even should you achieve them it is certainly not a thing of great importance.

Ten Ox-herding Pictures

Verses Composed by KAKUAN Zenji | Teisho by KUBOTA Ji'un

Accordingly in the Ten Ox-herding Pictures, far from emphasizing such powers, it is proclaimed quite clearly here that they are not necessary at all.

He causes withered trees to bloom.

The achievement of this state is that you can help even those who, like a withered tree, have lost all mental zest come to "blossom" again with a new breath of life. The vow expressed in the words: "Living beings are numberless, I vow to save them" is truly the prayer of all buddhas and bodhisattvas and is none other than the font of the practice of the Buddhist Way. And the fact that this capacity is already perfect in all men and women and all have it, is what Shakyamuni preached, lived, and passed on.