

STAGE 7: Ox Forgotten, Person Remaining



Introduction

In the dharma there is no duality; the Ox is the foundation.

It may be compared to the rabbit and the snare; it is expressed in the difference between fish and weir.

Like gold coming from ore, like the moon emerging from behind the clouds.

The Single Way of cold light has been shining ever since the time of Ion beyond the kalpas.

Verse

*You have mounted the ox and already reached your home in the mountains.
The ox is gone and the person has nothing more to do.
Though the morning sun has already risen three bamboo lengths, he dreams on.
The whip and the halter, no longer of use, are hung up in the stall.*

In the stages of the practice of the Buddhist way we have at last reached the seventh stage, "forgetting the ox." It goes without saying that the ox refers to what may be called the original self or the true self. It is Mu which all of you are looking for. This is the stage of forgetting the ox. But what does it mean to "forget the ox"?

We began our practice by seeking the ox. We discovered the ox (catching sight of the ox), took hold of the ox (seizing the ox), brought the ox under control (taming the ox), and have been training the ox to do, to a certain degree, what it is told (riding the ox home). In this process you have handled many koans, knowing the joy of passing them as well as the pain and anxiety of not getting through them.

When you seek in such a thorough fashion the true self (the ox), that self which is doing the seeking disappears, and only the true self remains. More exactly, you enter the world in which the true self also does not come into consciousness. This is truly that world in which you have forgotten the self completely, a world of complete emptiness, "without even a wisp of cloud to obstruct your vision" [manako ni sayuru kumonohamo nashi].

Were you to compare this world to something concrete, you might think about extracting pure gold from base ore. It is totally pure and without blemish. The whole universe is pure gold. The ore from which you extracted the gold, the tools you used to extract the gold are

all gone. Or again, it is just like the moon moving apart from the clouds and shining in the fullness of the heavens completely white. The whole world is a world in which there is only the moon with no clouds at all. The sublimity of a world completely void is beyond verbal expression. It is a world which can only be savored by actual experience.

When you arrive at this point, the koans with which you have struggled and labored become completely useless [kankagu: "unnecessary pieces of furniture"]. However there is always room for greater attainment. At this stage there still remains as a residue [kasu] the self-consciousness that this world is without any substance. That is the aspect of this stage expressed as zainin ("the person remains"). YAMADA Kôun Roshi has expressed his own experience in the following way:

"In terms of my own experience, for about a week after my enlightenment it seemed as if my whole body was trembling. And like a fish put in to the water to swim, I was able to live without any hindrance. I felt very free and happy. However, that did not continue long. After about 10 days or a month, the self appeared again. It was not so much the consciousness of the egoistic possessive ego, but rather the consciousness of the self. You are conscious of the self. That remains."

In my case I realized that koans were totally "unnecessary furniture," and for a while I felt that doing koans was completely foolish; as I remember, the self-consciousness that the thinking self was there continued for quite a long time. This is not yet the real thing.

Let's now go on to Master Kakuan's verse:

You have mounted the ox
and already reached your home in the mountains.

In the verse on the sixth Picture ("riding the ox home.") it was said, "You mount the ox and want to make your way slowly home." The words "want to" convey the meaning that you try to go home but can't. And why is that? I said it was because there is still a self which is looking at the ox. When you do away with this self which is doing the looking, you actually understand that you have already reached home. I want you all to really grasp how important it is to have had the experience once of thoroughly forgetting the self.

The ox is gone and the person has nothing more to do.

Both the ox to be sought (the true self) and the seeker also are totally void and empty of content. Once this is understood, the ox and the seeker are totally one. We could say, "When you stop seeking, the whole thing appears." The world in which there is no one and no thing manifests itself clearly and vividly before your eyes. It surely expresses the spirit of "the leisurely person of the Way, who, having finished learning, has nothing more to do" [zetsugaku mui no kandônin - a quote from the Shôdôka].

Though the morning sun has already risen three bamboo lengths,
he dreams on.

Absolutely nothing more to do! Even though the bright red sun climbs in the sky as high as "three bamboo lengths," you are still in dreams and sleeping. This attests to the level of realization at which the entire universe is intrinsically safe and sound.

The whip and the halter, no longer of use, are hung up in the stall.

Accordingly, the whip and halter used to control the ox are not needed any more. They are left alone at a corner of the hut where the grass is growing. Formerly, with a great effort using the whip and binding with the halter you trained the ox. But now that is completely unnecessary. Yet there can be no slackening of effort! There is still that self-consciousness of the self that "no longer needs to train the ox."