



PICTURE 5 – TAMING THE OX

Allow yourself to be drawn into the picture.

PREFACE:

Once one little thought arises, another follows. Adhere to awakening and all becomes truth; reside in ignorance and all is unreal. This happens not because of the world, but only because of your mind. Keep a firm grip on that rope and do not waver.

VERSE:

Not for a moment put down whip or rein,
Lest the ox wander back to dust and desire.
Pull again and again, till it's tame and gentle.
Of itself, it will follow without bridle and chain.

[Daido Looi/Tanahashi Verse]

The whip and tether cannot be put aside or the ox may wander into
mud-filled swamps.
When patiently trained to trust, it becomes gentle and unfettered.
Then, freely, it follows your way.

[M.H. Trevor/Kennedy Verse]

The herdsman must not for a moment drop whip or rein,
Or else the ox would stampede into the dust.
But if the ox is patiently tamed and gentled
He will follow the herdsman by himself.

WAKA:

Days pass, even the wild ox comes to hand,
And becomes a shadow to my body,
How gratifying!

Picture 5 – GUIDING QUESTIONS

In picture 5, you practice the art of taming – you are no longer pulled around by your mind or entangled by the conditions of the world. How do you bring yourself and the Ox into one pure whole in everyday activities?

What is your greatest obstacle to self-mastery – the total unity of yourself and your everyday life? How are you taming this obstacle?

Do you see when you are caught in your self-created world or conditioning? Consider these things & how to tame them:

- Are you acting from your idea of what a Zen person is?
- What habitual debilitating belief resonates silently through your mind? e.g., “I don’t matter.” “I am worthless.”
- What behavior do you continue to self-justify?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Allow yourself to be drawn into the picture: feel yourself practicing the art of taming, in complete unity with your everyday activities.
2. During the coming month, practice applying the rope: tighter when you are too loose; loosen when you are too tight. What is the right amount?

BALLAD OF THE ABSENT MARE by Leonard Cohen

Say a prayer for the cowboy, his mare's run away
And he'll walk 'til he finds her, his darling, his stray
But the river's in flood and the roads are awash
And the bridges break up in the panic of loss

And there's nothing to follow, there's nowhere to go
She's gone like the summer, gone like the snow
And the crickets are breaking his heart with their song
As the day caves in and the night is all wrong

Did he dream, was it she who went galloping past?
And bent down the fern, broke open the grass
And printed the mud with the iron and the gold
That he nailed to her feet when he was the lord

And although she goes grazing a minute away
He tracks her all night, he tracks her all day
Oh, blind to her presence, except to compare
His injury here with her punishment there

Then at home on a branch, in the highest tree
A songbird sings out, so suddenly
Ah, the sun is warm and the soft winds ride
On the willow trees by the river side

Oh, the world is sweet, the world is wide
And she's there where the light and the darkness divide
And the steam's coming off her, she's huge and she's shy
And she steps on the moon when she paws at the sky.

And she comes to his hand but she's not really tame
She longs to be lost, he longs for the same
And she'll bolt and she'll plunge through the first open pass
To roll and to feed in the sweet mountain grass

Or she'll make a break for the high plateau
Where there's nothing above and there's nothing below
And it's time for the burden, it's time for the whip
Will she walk through the flame? Can he shoot from the hip?

So he binds himself to the galloping mare
And she binds herself to the rider there
And there is no space but there's left and right
And there is no time but there's day and night

And he leans on her neck and he whispers low
"Whither thou goest, I will go"
And they turn as one and they head for the plain
No need for the whip, ah, no need for the rein

Now the clasp of this union, who fastens it tight?
Who snaps it asunder the very next night?
Some say the rider, some say the mare
Or that love's like the smoke, beyond all repair

But my darling says, "Leonard, just let it go by
That old silhouette on the great Western sky"
So I pick out a tune and they move right along
And they're gone like the smoke
And they're gone like this song. ■