

AWAKENING OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS (10 FIGURES OF THE BULL)

Zen explains, in a series of ten drawings of a bull and his cowherd (ju-gyu-zu), the stages or levels that the practitioner must reach on his way to nirvana. The bull is equated in the drawings (and in the accompanying commentaries) with the spiritually awake mind or Buddha mind and, the cowherd, with the spiritual seeker. These ten drawings are:

1. AWAKENING OF THE BULL

This first drawing is of capital importance, because it indicates that if man does not seek for himself the awakening, it is useless to try to lead him to it.



2. PERCEPTION OF THE TRACKS

The commentary for this drawing indicates that the sutras (texts that contain the words of the Buddha), the teachings of the masters of the past and those of the student's teacher, are essential for the seeker to "find the traces of the bull".



3. PERCEPTION OF THE BULL

This drawing shows the first moment in which the spiritual pilgrim (cowherd) awakens the Buddha mind (the first sign of the bull).



4. CAPTURE OF THE BULL

The commentary to this drawing indicates that the Zen practitioner can now remain awake in the Buddha mind (trapped the bull), but not permanently. In this period, the intensive practice of zazen (Zen meditation) is indispensable.



5. TAMING OF THE BULL

This drawing shows that now man, at last, is permanently awake in the Buddha mind.





RETURN HOME RIDING IT

This drawing and its commentary imply that man now not only remains permanently awake in the Buddha mind, but he achieves it with absolute naturalness. That is, finally "the fight is over".



6. THE BULL IS FORGOTTEN, ONLY THE COWHERD IS LEFT

This drawing and its comment make it clear that when the Zen practitioner has fully awakened the Buddha mind, this is no longer a goal to be achieved (the bull is forgotten); now, he simply remains awake in the Buddha mind, knowing that he is (only the cowherd remains).



7. OBLIVION OF THE BULL AND COWHERD

This drawing and its commentary imply that the sensation "I am awake in the Buddha mind" fades to give way to "awake" (Buddhahood); hence the title of the drawing: "forgetting the bull and cowherd." That is, in this level of achievement, the Zen practitioner merges into unity, into the emptiness of being.



8. RETURN TO THE ORIGIN

This drawing and its commentary imply that when the Zen practitioner reaches this level, existentially realizes in the conscious experience the effective presence of the original perfection. This original perfection or origin is the identity (quality of identical) of the Absolute and the relative, of the Transcendence and the manifest universe.



9. ENTRY TO THE MARKET WITH CHARITABLE SPIRIT

This last drawing and its commentary imply that the deeply enlightened man, who has returned to the origin, returns to the world of the common man (the market) to guide him towards the path of Buddha.