

Mastering The Double Within

The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures

The Ten Ox-herding pictures date from the 12th century. I see them as more than an airy – fairy description of the path to enlightenment. They give a description of how one can control the Double, the ‘Animal Mind’ that lurks inside our body and fights with us (like an untamed wild bull) for the control of our mind and activities.

The text quotes that are used in this essay are the commonly accepted ones. The interpretations that I make of the text are personal and unique. I believe the text is a ‘user’s guide’ on finding, mastering and the benefits controlling the wild animal that rests inside us.

The textual translations into English are suspect. An obvious example is in the first image where locusts are heard chirping at night. Locusts are voiceless. The alternative translation which I have seen is cicada, an insect that doesn’t sing during the night. A better translation is cricket – the nocturnal insect that chirps out good luck when the sun sets.

Similarly, the ox used in the images is by my estimation a bull – not at all a passive castrated animal. An animal that quickly moves from a peaceful slumber to manifest aggression with little provocation. The line, in picture 3, “What artist can draw that massive head, those majestic horns?” creates in my mind the image of the easily aroused male sex organs with its penis (massive head) and twin testes (majestic horns). The pictorial nature of Chinese script strengthens the allegorical images the material creates in the mind of a native reader. The Chinese classic “Journey to the west, the Monkey stories”, dating from the same period is also richly allegorical as describes the vicissitudes associated with taming the ‘Monkey soul’ ... more about this in a later section.

One; Searching for the Bull.

In the pasture of the world, I endlessly push aside the tall grasses in search of the Ox. Following unnamed rivers, lost upon the interpenetrating paths of distant mountains, My strength failing and my vitality exhausted, I cannot find the Ox. I only hear the chrickets chirping through the forest at night.



Lost, confused and in disharmony with himself. Under internal stress the monk exhausts himself looking aimlessly about. But good luck – in the voice of a singing cricket offers hope in the night.

Two; Discovering footprints.

*Along the riverbank under the trees, I discover footprints. Even under the
fragrant grass, I see his prints. Deep in remote mountains they are found.
These traces can no more be hidden than one's nose, looking heavenward*



To start with the last line. No one can see one's nose by looking upwards; but yet we know it is there. And so it is in searching for the 'Animal Double' in ourselves. We know it is there but cannot see it.

Three; Seeing the Bull.

I hear the song of the nightingale. The sun is warm, the wind is mild, willows are green along the shore – Here no Ox can hide! What artist can draw that massive head, those majestic horns?



Again, to start at the end. "... that massive head, those majestic horns". This suggests the male sexual equipment, with its penis head and two testes which can rise unbidden to action with minimum stimulation.

The green willows can be seen as pubic hair.

The nightingale – nocturnal like the cricket – offering good luck making it possible to reflect on the bull like animal force that resides within ourselves.

Four; Catching the Bull.

*I seize him with a terrific struggle. His great will and power are inexhaustible.
He charges to the high plateau far above the cloud-mists, Or in an
impenetrable ravine he stands.*



The task of coming to grips with the Bull's impulses. Ignoring them and so being in danger of being carried off by animal impulses is daunting.

Five; Taming the Bull.

The whip and rope are necessary, Else he might stray off down some dusty road. Being well-trained, he becomes naturally gentle. Then, unfettered, he obeys his master.



Discipline (the whip) and ritual (the rope) are needed to help the mind's rational consciousness to the Bull's need for independent action.

Six; Riding the Bull.

Mounting the Ox, slowly I return homeward. The voice of my flute intones through the evening. Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony, I direct the endless rhythm. Whoever hears this melody will join me.



Music, chanting, drumming helps. Knowing the right instruments, notes, chants and spells makes it possible to control Bull's independent impulses.

Seven; The Bull becomes successfully controlled.

Astride the Ox, I reach home. I am serene. The Ox too can rest. The dawn has come. In blissful repose, Within my thatched dwelling I have abandoned the whip and ropes

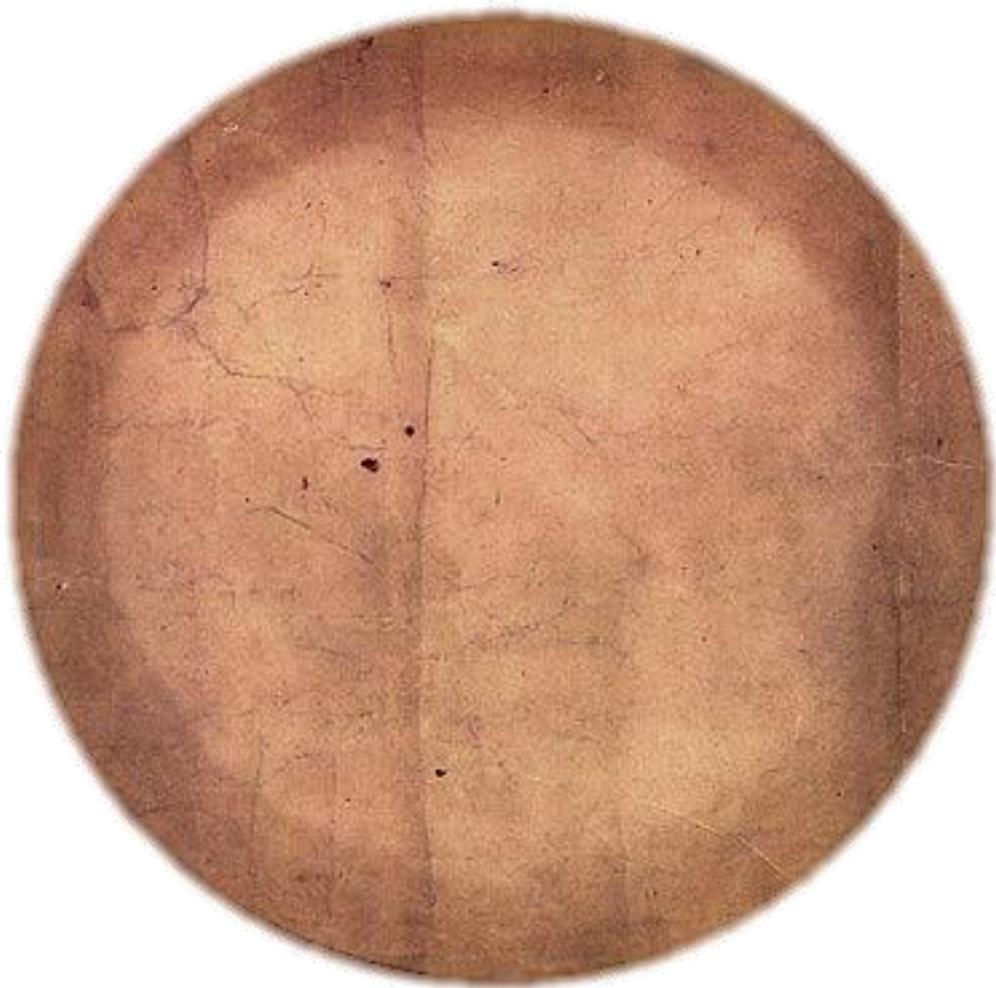


After a while discipline and ritual can be abandoned. A simple harmony is then established between the integrated self and the environment.

The Double being part of nature brings the wisdom of nature into the mind.

Eight; Integrated Consciousness sees deep into reality.

Whip, rope, person, and Ox – all merge in No Thing. This heaven is so vast, no message can stain it. How may a snowflake exist in a raging fire. Here are the footprints of the Ancestors.



Full integration of the Animal Double into the personality allows the totality of reality to be grasped. No longer is there Yin and Yang, or black and white – the totality can be seen.

Nine; Beyond knowing all there is more.

Too many steps have been taken returning to the root and the source. Better to have been blind and deaf from the beginning! Dwelling in one's true abode, unconcerned with and without – The river flows tranquilly on and the flowers are red.



Being transcended is not the reason for existence in a human body on earth. Knowing wisdom does not fulfil man's destiny on earth. One lives and enjoys the harmony and the beauty that integration brings.

Ten; Doing in the world.

Barefooted and naked of breast, I mingle with the people of the world. My clothes are ragged and dust-laden, and I am ever blissful. I use no magic to extend my life; Now, before me, the dead trees become alive.



Keep it simple, move around and radiate the good vibrations. Thus bring the first shoots of the spring of inner harmony and enlightenment to people. The bag of enlightenment is full of gifts that one gives Santa Claus like to one and all.