



Riding the Ox Home: Stages on the Path of Enlightenment

By John Daido Looi



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Maps and guideposts are helpful when we undertake a journey. The ten Ox-Herding Pictures, the accompanying ancient poems, and a modern commentary by John Daido Looi, sketch the spiritual path encountered in Zen training, a path of exhaustive study of the self and the realization of the ultimate nature of reality. The Ox-Herding Pictures can be our companion on the Way of self-discovery, our compass and perspective when we need one. They are a bottomless source of mysterious wisdom to which we can return again and again for inspiration, and they translate easily into the gritty reality of spiritual practice that emerges from and grounds us in the inescapable relevance of our daily lives.

The exquisite versions of the pictures found in the book are traditional Chinese *nanga* brush paintings by Gyokusei Jikihara Sensei, a modern Japanese master of calligraphy and a teacher in the Obaku School of Zen. The traditional verses accompanying them have been translated by John Daido Looi and Kazuaki Tanahashi, translator and editor of *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen*.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Influential Zen Buddhist teacher Looi, abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York, offers a clear commentary on "The Ox-herding Pictures," a traditional series of (usually) 10 pictures from 12th-century Chinese Zen master Kuoan accompanied by verses. The pictures form a characteristically wry Zen parable about the process of enlightenment. Looi successfully demonstrates his mastery of teaching: he makes the process simple and accessible, even while issuing cautions about how very, very hard the journey actually is. Looi is also a photographer, so his aesthetic sensibility lends richness to his use of the pictures as a teaching device in Zen study and practice. The herd of Zen oxen books continues to grow: Looi's nicely complements *How to Raise an Ox* by Francis Dojun Cook (Wisdom, May), an introduction to 13th-century Japanese Zen master Dogen that is more conceptual but equals Looi's in being a key to unlocking the considerable treasury of Zen heritage. (Indeed, both authors are students of Japanese Zen master Taizan Maezumi Roshi.) True, there is literature aplenty on Buddhism, but Looi is an authoritative and respected teacher and this small book, with illustrations in traditional brush painting style by Japanese calligrapher Gyokusei Jikihara Sensei, is effectively visual. It will make a great gift for a Zen student.
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Review

"Looi is to be commended for his wise and succinct assessment of the spiritual journey and the important role of spiritual practice."

—*Spirituality & Health*

About the Author

John Daido Looi (1931–2009) was one of the West's leading Zen masters. He was the founder and spiritual leader of the Mountains and Rivers Order and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery. His work has been most noted for its unique adaptation of traditional Asian Buddhism into an American context, particularly with regard to the arts, the environment, social action, and the use of modern media as a vehicle of spiritual training and social change. Looi was an award-winning photographer and videographer. His art and wildlife photography formed the core of a unique teaching program that integrated art and wilderness training by cultivating a deep appreciation of the relationship of Zen to our natural environment. He was a dharma heir of the influential Japanese Zen master Taizan Maezumi Roshi and he authored many books.

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