

CASE 12: DIZANG PLANTING THE FIELDS

From *The Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues*, translated by Thomas Cleary.

The introduction:

Scholars plow with the pen, orators plow with the tongue. We patch-robed mendicants lazily watch a white ox on open ground, not paying attention to the rootless auspicious grass. How to pass the days?

The case:

Dizang asked Xiushan, "Where do you come from?" Xiushan said, "From the South."

Dizang said, "how is Buddhism in the South these days?" Xiushan said, "There's extensive discussion."

Dizang said, "How can that compare to me here planting the fields and making rice to eat?"

Xiushan said, "What can you do about the world?"

Dizang said, "What do you call the world?"

Notes:

The reference to a white ox may be to the story of Yaoshan's enlightenment, found in Cleary's translation of Keizan's *Transmission of Light*, the account of the transmission of the dharma down the lineage. On page 38, he writes about an anecdotal exchange between a teacher and student, "By this story it should be clear that the two schools of Qingyuan [Shitou's teacher] and Nanyue (Mazu's teacher) are not different. There are really two horns of Huineng (teacher of both Qingyuan and Nanyue), who was **a white ox on open ground**, standing alone.

A deeper reference is probably to the white ox drawing the cart in the Lotus Sutra parable about the father and the children in the burning house.

In the 10 oxherding pictures, in the traditional version, the ox changes from black to white.