



### Purpose and Meaning

We humans commonly ask, "What is the purpose of human life?" We seek guidance, looking for the script we're supposed to follow. We hope that somewhere, somehow, there is someone or something with a plan that we are to follow, if only we can access it. We yearn for a purpose that is greater than anything of which we can conceive, yet which, at the same time, will tell us what we should be doing. In short, a purpose not of our own making, coming from a source that knows what it is and which will, if we

seek hard enough, reveal it to us.

In February, I served on an interfaith panel presenting our views on our religion's relationship to the environment. The keynote speaker, Rabbi Waskow, made reference to the one of the oldest symbolic representations of the source of life, the ancient word, "Yahweh." Yahweh, later to be known as Jehovah.

Rabbi Waskow said that in fact the original word was not Yahweh, but YHWH. The vowels were added later to make it pronounceable. This 5,000-year-old designation for the source of all things was considered unpronounceable. But, said Rabbi Waskow, he decided one day to see what would happen if he tried to pronounce this word without vowels. He did so for us. What happens is a long inspiration...yyyyhhhh...and a long expiration... wwwwhhhh. YHWH is the breath. Our deepest source is the breath of life.

This reminded me of something I witnessed

last fall at the anniversary celebration at Zenshuji in Los Angeles. Part of the program was a public exchange of question and answer between some of the participating priests and Itabashi Roshi, former Abbot of Sojiji. The first question was strongly delivered: "What is the purpose of human life?" The answer was immediate: "The purpose of human life is the in breath and the out breath. Why do you ask such a stupid question?" Of course, the questioner were not stupid, but the Roshi's answer forcefully rejected the question as invalid, for it supposed something the Buddha never addressed, i.e. a plan or purpose for life coming from beyond life itself.

The purpose of life, the glory of life, is life itself. The in breath and the out breath. This breath is the expression of my interdependence with all things in the universe. As I breathe, the universe breathes with me. The purpose of an individual life is to participate in the great

web of life.

Yet what is its meaning? While we sometimes confuse the two questions, asking "What is the purpose of human life?" is not the same as asking "What is the meaning of my life?" Life as a whole may be its own purpose, yet we as part of the whole also have our individual, distinct lives. Given the great gift of breath, it is our own actions, thoughts and speech that give meaning to our lives. Beyond the breath itself, we each offer an individual response to life. This is to carry out our responsibility to the living, changing, interconnected nature of the whole. How I do this, the way I lead my life, is the meaning that I give to life, the individual notes that I add to the great symphonic whole.

But what about guidance in carrying out this awesome responsibility? Zen strongly emphasizes the need for a true teacher. But what is a true teacher? Again and again, Dōgen Zenji and Uchiyama Roshi say



it is zazen. This is the experiential base for our understanding. In addition, there are other sources of guidance. Some religions have books such as the Bible or the Qu'ran to offer guidance and we, of course, have the sutras.

Dôgen Zenji, in the Jisho-zanmai fascicle of Shôbôgenzô, has something interesting to say about sutra study:

“In general, when we follow and practice the sutras, the sutras truly come forth. The meaning of “the sutras” is the whole Universe in the ten directions, mountains, rivers, and the Earth, grass and trees, self and others; it is eating meals and putting on clothes, instantaneous movements and demeanors. When we pursue the truth following these texts, each of which is a sutra, countless thousand-myriad volumes of totally unprecedented sutras manifest themselves in reality and exist before us.”\*

Just as the purpose of life is life itself, the meaning of life is its myriad manifestations. The in breath and the out breath are the warp and woof of the loom of life upon which I embroider the meaning of me.

–Tonen O'Connor

\*Nishijima & Cross, *Shôbôgenzô*, Book 4

## Glimpses of the Gift

When I started my journey towards enlightenment about 5 years ago, I had a lot of expectations and misconceptions about what attaining it would be like. I knew it was a gift I wished to receive, and I was sure that if I read the right books and meditated the right way, I would be enlightened. I also thought that being enlightened meant that all the secrets of the universe would be revealed to me. Ahh... such delusions I had!

Soon I asked myself if enlightenment was even possible, and if I achieved it, then what? If I had all the answers I desired, what would my motivation be for continued existence? Then I had my first real glimpse of the gift. The more I sought out the answers, the more elusive they became.

Around 2 years went by and I was traveling deeper into the realms of Taoism as well as Zen Buddhism. I was borderline obsessed with studying ancient texts, and I would meditate for hours on end. I was convinced that I was close to attaining enlightenment, but deep down I knew something wasn't right. As a matter of fact, a lot of things were wrong. There was no harmony

in my life and I needed to figure out why.

Then I got another glimpse. I was so consumed with attaining enlightenment that other areas of my life were suffering. I was in a box with blinders on, and life was passing me by

I had some hard, drastic choices to make, which I did. For awhile I wondered if the decisions I made were the right ones. I felt like I was trying to navigate through thick fog in the darkness, and harmony still eluded me.

Then one day almost a year ago I woke up in the middle of the night, and everything changed. I caught my biggest “glimpse” to date. In one single instant, I “got it.” My life was clear and in perspective. I had a profound understanding of myself and everything around me. Answers to questions I hadn't even asked yet were revealed. I had received some of the gift!

I had become enlightened because I wasn't trying to become enlightened any more. It occurred naturally and in its own time. It was an enormous turning point in my life, and the fog that haunted me for so many years had finally lifted. Harmony was restored.

I'm sure enlightenment is different for everyone. For me, there are two elements involved: the curtain and the gift. The curtain conceals one of life's most mysterious and sacred gifts. I'm not sure if I could handle the whole gift at one time, so when it's time for me to become enlightened about certain things, the curtain opens. Not all the way, but just enough to give me what I need at the particular time, in the form of what I call “glimpses.” Although these glimpses may be brief, they are immeasurable.

I know that if I continue to follow the path the way it leads me, I will continue to receive my gift of enlightenment and I will be able to implement whatever manifests in my daily life. This is what I look forward to each day and I hope that I can use what I've learned to help someone else glimpse the gift.

Sun-bin (Randall Toth)

Green Bay  
Correctional Institution

*(Note: Perhaps the gift might just as accurately be termed “great clarity.” When the curtain of our delusion lifts, clarity shines forth.*

–Tonen O'Connor)

The Japanese term for a large monastery, “sorin.” literally translates as “monks’ grove,” but perhaps can also be viewed as the great forest of practice of the Dharma. It is with deep gratitude that we note below the “sorin” whose donations have sustained our practice over the past year. If we have overlooked anyone, please know that our thanks include you.

Monica Adams  
 Rev. Tozen Akiyama  
 Bob Balderson  
 Bast Accounting Service  
 Berkeley Zen Center  
 Chiyoko Bermant  
 Charles & Mary Bernau-Eigen  
 Rev. Tony Bland  
 Julie Bokelman  
 Colette Brown  
 Milton Clapp III  
 Timothy Cobb  
 Judy Conti  
 Lynn Crawford  
 Brian Curtiss  
 Frank Dawid  
 Patricia Deevy  
 LuAnne DePons  
 Dorothy Diggs  
 Richard de Ranetz, D.F.  
 Dorothy Diggs  
 James Dorr  
 David English  
 Dian Ericksen  
 Margaret Fite  
 James Futransky  
 Yuliya Galperina  
 Linda Gee  
 David Goggin  
 John B. Gray  
 Gunnar Groth  
 Timothy Hancock  
 Blanche & Lou Hartman  
 Jami Hanreddy  
 Robert Hanson  
 Terry Harvey  
 Ihab Hassan  
 Pamela Hunter  
 Steven Iverson  
 Peter Johnson  
 Dan Kaemmerer  
 Barbara Kalwaitis  
 Jack & Haruko Kashihara  
 Daniel Kaufman  
 Margaret Kennedy  
 Dean Kowalkowski  
 Kubose Dharma Legacy  
 Gisele Kuenecke  
 John Lang  
 Peter Lee  
 Tinghong Lee  
 Joanne Lehman  
 Joy Levy  
 Marilyn Libman  
 John Longeway

Mary Lux  
 Michael Mahoney  
 Francis Mariner  
 Joseph Marshall  
 Thomas Clinton-McCausland  
 Scott Miller  
 Victoria Miller  
 G. Milliette  
 Barbara Minor  
 Edward Mondini  
 Edith Moravcsik  
 Leslie Morris  
 Steven Moran  
 Y. Sandra Nettekovan  
 Jack Norman  
 Neil Myers  
 Michael Newhall  
 John Nomura  
 Rev. Tonen O’Connor  
 Lise Olsen  
 Robert Osterman  
 Natalie Pender  
 Thomas Peralta  
 Thomas Pilarzyk  
 Daniel Putman  
 Robert Ragir  
 Fredrick Rappe  
 William Rassieur  
 Daniel Retoff  
 John Rhiel  
 Marvin Roberson  
 Scott Rutherford  
 John Sabin  
 Fereshteh Sadr  
 Fritz Sauter  
 Don & Ethel Schantzen  
 Earl J. Seymour  
 Vernon Shabunia  
 Chester Sheard  
 Sylvia Sherman  
 Gloria Simon-Kuzma  
 Michelle Simonson  
 Heidi Sjostrom  
 Mariann Storck  
 Thomas Tolan  
 Pearl Tuma  
 Francisco Valenzuela  
 Myron Waite  
 Katherine Warden  
 Scholarship Fund  
 George Werne  
 John Wiley  
 Shoken Winecoff  
 Jane Xiong

## News Notes

The Milwaukee Zen Center Annual Meeting took place on April 3, 2004 and the following Board members were elected: President, Peter Johnson; Vice-President, John Rhiel; Treasurer, Colette Brown; Secretary, Linda Gee; Member-at-Large, Dian Ericksen. Minutes of the meeting are available on the MZC web site and at the Center.

The past few months have been full of speaking engagements for Tonen, notable among which were a presentation on Buddhism at a Department of Corrections meeting of approximately 50 chaplains and program

supervisors; a dharma talk at the Cedar Rapids Zen Center and a retreat and dharma talk for the Bristol Ch’an Group in Bristol, England.

April 10 we celebrated the Buddha’s birthday with flowers, bathing of the baby Buddha and a special treat for study class.

Thanks to John Rhiel’s good efforts, the garden is beginning to come alive with the planting of early peas, cilantro etc..

The May two-day sitting will be the last until October, but Saturday classes continue as usual.

## Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

### May

3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.  
 8 & 9 Two-day sitting

### June

4 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.

### July

7 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.

### August

4 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.

*To see the entire 2004 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at [www.milwaukeezencenter.org](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org)*

# Milwaukee Zen Center

2825 N. Stowell Ave. Milwaukee WI 53211-3775

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
MILWAUKEE, WI  
PERMIT NO. 2686

## Wed., Thurs., Fri.

6:15 am Zazen  
(Zen sitting)  
6:55 am Kinhin  
(Zen walking)  
7:05 am Zazen  
7:45 am Service  
8:00 end of practice  
  
6:30 pm Zazen  
7:10 pm Kinhin  
7:20 pm Zazen

## Saturday

6:15 am Zazen  
6:55 am Kinhin  
7:05 am Zazen  
7:45 am Service  
8:00 breakfast, oryoki  
8:25 work period  
9:15 break, coffee & tea  
9:30 study class\*  
10:30 end of practice  
*\*except on all-day sitting days*

## Introduction to Zen

An informal presentation on Buddhism and Zen, followed by instruction in zen sitting, tea and discussion.  
6:30-8:30 p.m.–first Wednesday each month.

Zen sitting instruction and private interview available by appointment. Call 963-0526.

### Contact information

For messages: **Phone:** (414) 963-0526

**Fax:** (414) 963-0517 **E-mail:** tsoc@execpc.com

For information and schedules: [www.milwaukeezencenter.org](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org)

## Membership Information / Order Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip+ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

### I am interested in a membership (tax deductible):

- General - \$25/month
- Supporting - \$30 or more/month
- Out-of-town - \$10/month
- Participating - any amount you can afford \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make a one-time contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Please add me to your mailing list
- Please remove me from your mailing list
- Please change my mailing address

| TITLE                                       | QTY | PRICE   | TAX* | TOTAL |
|---|-----|---------|------|-------|
| Sweat-shirt (size: available only in large) |     | \$25.00 | 1.40 |       |
| Eiheiji Incense — Short 5.5"                |     | \$ 5.00 | .28  |       |
| Long 10"                                    |     | \$ 5.00 | .28  |       |

\*Only Wis. residents need include applicable sales tax. TAX \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping - \$3.00 first two shirts or boxes of incense and 50¢ per item thereafter.

SHIPPING

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Milwaukee Zen Center

MILWAUKEE ZEN CENTER 2825 N. STOWELL AVE  
MILWAUKEE, WI 53211-3775

