



Do You Understand Your Job?

I've been reading a lovely book by Richard Shrobe (Zen Master Wu Kwang) who is the guiding teacher of the Chogyo International Zen Center of New York. It's called "Elegant Failure, a guide to Zen koans." The book contains a selection of koans, and Mr. Shrobe notes that in his Korean tradition, talks on a koan are opened with a four-line presentation encapsulating the koan. The final lines reveal the essence.

In one of his presentations, he completes the introductory phrases with the following:

A dog understands a dog's job.

A cat understands a cat's job.

Do you understand your job?

This struck me as the most basic question we can put to ourselves, greater even than the familiar "Who am I?" Indeed, who I am is deeply entwined with my job in this life, whatever

that may be. For we are what we do even more profoundly than what we think or feel. So how am I to understand my job?

The cat or the dog, bless them, have a well-defined range of activities that constitute their job. Eating, sleeping, hunting mice, barking warnings, being petted with tails wagging or throats

the weather. Every moment offers new challenges and what I once understood to be my job may suddenly seem inadequate to the new moment.

So how do I understand my job? As a follower of the Buddha Way, I aspire to serve all beings as a bodhisattva. And on what does the

freedom from the bonds of ignorance. The first of the bodhisattva's four great vows is: "Beings are numberless. I vow to free them." Earlier translations used the term "save them," but this has been dropped. In today's society, the word "save" used in a religious sense can mean conversion to a particular creed. The bodhisattva's vow on the contrary, is to free all beings from their self-created prisons of mistaken views.

So here we have the bodhisattva's job as freeing all beings. The first method is "giving". Dôgen begins with what may seem to be a mysterious statement: "Giving" means *nongreed*. *Nongreed means not to covet*. *Not to covet means not to curry favor.*" Dôgen is making it clear that giving has nothing to do with personal gain or personal advancement. Sometimes we give by not taking, by allowing things to flourish in their own way, without meddling:

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**A dog understands a dog's job.
A cat understands a cat's job.
Do you understand your job?**

purring make up the bulk of their jobs. Their job may also include reminding their human friends about things like meal time or time for a walk. And in their own way, they understand that their job may include offering seemingly boundless affection.

The world of the dog or cat is relatively circumscribed in scope. Ours is not. Ours is as big as the universe, as complex as society, as changeable as

bodhisattva rely? Dôgen gives his answer in the fascicle in Shôbôgenzô entitled "The Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance". He is giving instruction to both monks and lay people as to how a bodhisattva understands his/her job in this world.

Let's start with the title. These are "Four Methods of Guidance." They are the means utilized by the bodhisattva to guide all beings toward

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When you leave the way to the way, you attain the way. At the time of attaining the way, the way is always left to the way. When treasure is left as just treasure, treasure becomes giving. You give yourself to yourself and others to others.

So to give sometimes means not to take, but rather to allow things to follow their own path. Dôgen goes on to highlight the myriad forms of giving: “to launch a boat or build a bridge...making a living and producing things...to leave flowers to the wind, to leave birds to the seasons, to give yourself to yourself, to give to your family.”

And in so doing, the bodhisattva’s mind is transformed. “Mind is beyond measure. And yet, in giving, mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms mind.”

Next is “kind speech.” Dôgen’s definition is succinct: “Kind speech means that when you see sentient beings, you arouse the heart of compassion and offer words of loving care.” And he urges the bodhisattva: “Be willing to practice it for this entire present life; do not give up, world after world, life after life.” “Ponder the fact that kind speech is not just praising the merit of others; it has the power to turn the destiny of the nation.” This may seem unattainable in our current age of incivility, slander and outright lies. But the bodhisattva must persevere.

Number three is “beneficial action.” “Beneficial action is skillfully to benefit all classes of sentient beings; that is, to care about their distant and near future, and to help them by using skillful

means.” All classes, not merely those of “my” class. And acting skillfully means part of my job must be to understand the difference between skillful and unskillful actions within endlessly differentiating situations. Dôgen puts his finger on why we engage in beneficial action: “Foolish people think that if they help others first, their own benefit will be lost, but this is not so. Beneficial action is an act of oneness, benefiting self and others together”.

And, finally, perhaps the most important method of all: “identity action.” Dôgen says, “Identity action means nondifference. It is nondifference from self, nondifference from others.” And he goes beyond suggesting that we identify with others and see that we are not different, he once again turns the idea upside down by suggesting that identity action is nonexclusion, just as giving is nongreed. Citing how this works, he turns to examples from nature:



That the ocean does not exclude water is identity action. Water does not exclude the ocean either. This being so, water comes together to form the ocean. Soil piles up to form mountains. By not excluding one another,

identities merge to form greater entities. Our very existence becomes an action allowing and supporting other actions.

So here we have the Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance as suggestions for the job we are to understand: Giving (nongreed) Kind speech (not slander or ugly innuendo) Beneficial action (benefiting self and others together) and Identity action (non-difference, nonexclusion.)

It all makes sense, yet it’s so hard to do day by day, moment by moment. How can we possibly understand our job? Within this fluid, ever-changing and interdependent world, I think we must expand our expression of the question: **Do you understand the nature of your job as it manifests right now, within this unique moment, newly arisen?**

And the answer is: My first and most basic job is to ask that question. Right now, in this moment, and the next moment, and the next, over and over again. Right now, am I awake enough to seek a truly appropriate response ?

—Tonen O’Connor

Note: All Dôgen quotations are from the translation by Lewis Richmond and Kazuaki Tanahashi



Tonen’s cats understanding their job.

Happenings

In November Tonen concluded the series of five Friday afternoon lectures on Buddhism that she gave at the Schlitz Audubon Center. The lectures were very well attended and people asked good questions.

The Prison Sangha celebrated Rohatsu with special events at Green Bay, Oshkosh, Redgranite, Taycheedah and Racine Correctional Institutions.

Here at the MZC, the three-day Rohatsu Sesshin was well attended and we were pleased that Tomon could be here from Albuquerque to give a dharma talk and that Al Coleman was able to join us from Cleveland. Unfortunately, the third day of the sesshin was cancelled due to a winter storm that roared through the Midwest, although Tomon, Al and Tonen were able to practice that day.

Speaking of high winds, we're happy to report that Reimer Roofing and Remodeling has completed a splendid replacement of the siding that was blown off in October. It's nice to feel secure once more.

Our congratulations to Maud McGraw and Dave Mangin, who were married on December 21, in a beautiful ceremony at the Quaker Meeting House. Tonen officiated.

And our sympathy and good wishes to John Eimes, our sangha member who will be on crutches for three months due to multiple fractures of his foot.

The series of seminars on the Heart Sutra that will take place on Tuesday evenings through January and the first week of

February is completely booked, with 11 participants who will be discussing Mu Soeng's book, *The Heart of the Universe*.

SAVE THE DATE – Feb. 2-5 we will host Kensho and Madoka Miyamae, visiting us from Japan. Kensho will give a public dharma talk on Friday evening, Feb. 4, and be available during the study class period on Saturday morning to answer questions and give a demonstration of *baika*, a traditional form of Japanese Buddhist music.

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

February

- 1 - 6:30 p.m.-Heart Sutra seminar, film
- 2 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
- 4 - 6:30 p.m.-Dharma talk, Kensho Miyamae
- 5 - 9:30 a.m.-Baika demonstration (Japanese Buddhist music) - Kensho Miyamae
- 24 & 25 -Two-day sitting

March

- 2 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
- 12 - 9:30 a.m.-Annual Membership Meeting
- 19 & 20 -Two-day sitting

April

- 6 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
- 9 - Buddha's Birthday celebration
- 16 & 17 - Two-day sitting

To see the 2010 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Candles

1. Color of Flame

*Sometimes fire's white,
but never on a candle.
A candle flame is wheat,
or fox, or common crystal.*

2. Color of Cold

*In the beginning
there was a candle.
It stood on absence,
lit but little.*

*It fed on air
that was not there,
flickered in
the first nowhere.*

3. Comfortable Fire

*Infinity of candles,
snuffed as soon as lit.*

*We think we can save one
forever on a wick.*

*The richest of rich men
fails within a week.*

4. Candle

*For centuries it showed the way,
this drop of sun we took from day.*

*It threw a circle on the table,
fought off ogres in the fable.*

*Now we fetch it from a drawer
when we're cut from grids of power.*

*place it brotherly
on this page in our story.*

–Monica Adams

milwaukee zen center

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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 of each month.

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

MZC Contact Information

For messages: **Phone:** (414) 963-0526
Fax: (414) 963-0517 **E-mail:** kokyo-an@earthlink.net
For information and
schedules: www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Useful Web Sites:

Soto Zen Buddhism: <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/>
Soto Zen in America: <http://www.szba.org>

Membership Information / Order Form

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