

MISSION MEANS TO USE ONE'S LIFE

In this perspective, Lisa Jones explores the difference between one's job and one's mission. 'An important aspect of my mission, I feel,' she writes, 'is to help people live the lives they dream of living. How can I spur others to turn their dreams into reality, if I'm not doing it myself?'

BY LISA JONES, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When I showed up for work that day, I didn't expect to leave my full-time position at the *World Tribune*. So what happened?

In one moment, less than a snap of the fingers, I saw that my job was not necessarily my mission. Then, call it faith or foolhardiness, I simply let go.

When monkeys move through the jungle, swinging from vine to vine, they do it in one of two ways, I'm told: They either hold on to a vine until they have the next one firmly in hand, or they completely let go and let momentum carry them to the next vine.

I swing through the jungle of my life in the latter fashion, releasing my grip, becoming airborne between two things, between this job and the next, flinging myself forward.

And I'm fine — until fear occurs to me.

"That was a wonderful vine you just let go of," fear says. "Don't you miss it already?" This is the fear of irretrievable loss. Or "What makes you so sure there's going to be a 'next' vine to grab?" This is the fear of falling. (Someone once said that all fears are ultimately a fear of death. And so it is with me.)

In the past, fear has sapped my momentum. Fearful, I would hesitate, contemplate the likelihood of blunt impact with the ground and, naturally, become distressed. At such times, the voice of so-called practicality would say: "See!? It's better to hold on until you have your next job (or lover or whatever) in hand. Better to be safe, to hedge your bets." As if security can be ensured in this way.

Buddhist practice, of course, is what enables us to attain a secure state of life, no matter what our circumstances. In one sense it's a safety net. To me it's a pair of wings. And my mission, I feel, is to stretch those wings and fly.

For a couple weeks before I took the leap, I was in a state of generalized discontent. I had nothing specific to complain about. Even so, that old Peggy Lee song "Is That All There Is?" followed me around like the soundtrack to my personal life.

I wanted to open myself up to a new world of possibility, so I told one of my co-workers, "I'm going to change all my karma by Monday."

"Why do you always want to change yourself?" he asked. "Why don't you want to understand yourself instead? When you come to understand yourself as you are, transformation occurs naturally. Don't say, 'I'm this way, and that's good,' or 'This is a bad thing about me.' Don't pass judgment. Just see things for what they are."

This reminded me of a line from Nichiren Daishonin: "*Kanjin* means to observe one's own mind and to find the Ten Worlds within it" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 49). By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, we can observe our minds and come to find Buddhahood within our lives. To truly perceive our own Buddhahood is indeed to transform our state of life.

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I wondered as I chanted: What is the nature of my life? What do I really want? I had no specific prayer other than “Gohonzon, use my life.” Whatever that meant.

Incidentally, the Japanese word for *mission*, *shimei*, literally means to use one’s life.

I had assumed that my mission was to be staff writer. But that’s a title, a function, a job. If there’s a distinction to be made between job and mission, maybe it’s this: You can quit a job, but your mission is inescapable. A job has parameters and consciously defined objectives; mission is free-flowing and, in my opinion, directed by love rather than ambition.

I’m not saying that job and mission are mutually exclusive or even that they’re essentially separate. Gandhi once said, “My life is my message.” And, to paraphrase him, I would venture that one’s mission is one’s life, and one’s life is one’s mission.

A job brings a paycheck (which supports one’s life) and provides opportunities to create value. So a job is an undeniably important aspect of one’s life and, therefore, one’s mission. Yet just because one is jobless doesn’t mean that one lacks a mission....

Ultimately, our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth is to lead all living beings to enlightenment. An important aspect of my mission, I feel, is to help people live the lives they dream of living. How can I spur others to turn their dreams into reality, if I’m not doing it myself? My dream is to make a good living as a freelance writer. The only person who can make this happen is ME. So I’m going for it.

My co-worker once said that our lives are like flowing water, like a stream. In the course of our lives, we construct walls to control the flow or to steer the water in the way we want it to go.

In other words, we set a lot of rules and limitations for ourselves and others.

While these barriers may serve a valuable purpose for a time, they can end up creating stagnant pools or silt deposits — things that become more of a problem than the problem that we wanted to solve in the first place. So it’s important to see where and why we’ve built walls and to remove them if we can.

In a way, I feel that leaving this job was like blowing up a dam. The roaring, raw power of an avalanche of water was wondrous yet terrifying and not entirely pleasant for my family and friends over the holidays, I must admit.

Of course, I’ll still be writing for the *World Tribune* as a freelancer. And I feel as if I can accomplish anything.

Now that I consider it, I think I would like to be a river — that is my new career track.

I can see myself being a trickle (working in the mailroom of riverhood, as it were), then becoming a stream, then a full-fledged river — nimble enough to shoot around anything in my path, yet tenacious enough to carve canyons in solid rock — growing ever broader, ever deeper, more complex, until at last I merge with the wide blue ocean.

Then I’ll start all over again, as I feel I am right now, as one tiny drop.

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