



June, 2006

## ***A LIFE WELL LIVED***

**Cheri Desmond-May, MSW, LP**

*Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?*

And so Mary Oliver, poet extraordinaire, calls us to examine just what we are about in this life, asking us the most poignant of questions, how do we want to live the one life we have been given? It is a profound question, and one that challenges us to stop and listen deeply, to enter into self reflection and contemplate what is most important in our lives.

Our focus for this 2006 June edition of *East West Connections* is purpose. In the feature article, Sandy Kosse explores ways for herself and her clients to address the existential and spiritual questions confronting us as human beings. "What is worth giving my life to? Who am I and who am I becoming?" Susan Bourgerie interviews Gregg Krech, the director of the ToDo Institute and a leading authority on Naikan and Morita therapies. One of the hallmarks of these Japanese therapies is a focus on purposeful living. And, finally, Jil Leverone reviews Richard Leider's book on purpose, *The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work*. We hope that this exploration into purpose inspires you to reflect about who you are, where you are going, and what you ultimately want to do with the time and energy you have been given.

The truth is that in this body, in this lifetime, on this historical and relative (vs. ultimate) dimension, we are the authors of our own autobiographies. So, how

do we live congruently with that which is highest and deepest within us?

An ancient Buddhist injunction instructs us:

*Wake up! Wake up!  
Life and death are urgent matters.  
Take heed!  
Do not waste this precious life!*

Stephen Covey suggests that we write our epitaph now. Buddhist philosophy teaches us the value of directly facing death, our own death in particular. My understanding is that this instruction is to wake us up to the possibility and opportunity each human being has to make a difference in the world, however intimate or grand we define the world to be. We never know when our time will be up, but we do have each moment of every day we are here.

I recently met a 42 year old man who, at 26, left his life as a student at Carlton College to go to Thailand and become a forest monk. He has lived the last 16 years cultivating an inner tranquility that simply radiates from his being. In the process he discovered that, for him, renunciation was inherent in finding happiness. He chose to dedicate his life to harmlessness, meditation and the cultivation of virtue and wisdom. We may not move to Thailand, but we also only have our "one wild and precious life." What shall we do with it? ☺

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*Cheri recently celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her one wild and precious marriage.*

## book review

**The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work.** Richard Leider, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997.

**Jil Leverone, PhD, LP**

The power of purpose. What does that mean? Richard Leider dove into this question and more in the late 1990's as he articulated a spiritual dimension to one's work life. Satisfaction with work and consequently with one's life, Leider says, comes from asking yourself the question, "*What is my purpose?*" Purpose, for Leider, means "Your aim. Your reason for being. Your reason for getting up in the morning."

Early on, Leider shares with us his purpose in writing this book; "I chose to write this book based on my deepened personal belief that we live in a spiritual world and that every individual in that world has been created in God's image with unique gifts and a purpose to use those gifts to contribute value to the world." He links purpose with having joy and meaning in one's life and "committing to something larger than our own success."

Leider attaches the element of will to this commitment to purpose. He says that "we get purpose by deciding to have it." He suggests that it is our intention to be open to our calling that allows us to hear our purpose.

Leider then spends the middle section of his book talking about living and working "on purpose." Leider proposes that our purpose questions change as we grow older, from "What do you want to be when you grow up?" to "What legacy have I added to people's lives?" He offers an "aliveness questionnaire" to direct the reader in assessing his or her ability to live life to its fullest – which would reflect one's ability to live out one's purpose.

In the final chapters, Leider offers some strategies. These include self-exploration in identifying strengths and gifts, and what moves a person intuitively – or as he phrases it – "from the inside out". Leider also suggests that the reader develop a

daily practice of solitude that might include deep breathing, visualization, and reflection on the day's events and personal goals.

So, what do I think of this book? Leider writes from a business/vocational perspective. Although he defines purpose as "our contribution to life", his approach focuses on purpose as expressed in the work world. He writes to an audience of adults looking for a transformative way to be successful in the work environment. His examples are primarily those of men who are searching for something more in their work lives than monetary success and individual enhancement.

Secondly, despite his insistence that he is writing based on interviews with both men and women, he seems to have relied primarily on the responses of men to weave his theory and practice. There is only one example of a woman's process in the book mixed in with dozens of men's examples. This gives this reader reason to stop and think. If his research and writing were framed primarily by men's experiences in the workforce, how did these experiences shape his questions and interpretation of the answers? For example, what about asking individuals not only to define purpose for themselves, but also to identify how purpose is lived out in their life roles?

And finally, this is an American work – written by a Minnesota businessman working with and learning from American businessmen. For example, the developmental questions that Leider uses in his "Spiral of Core Questions" to demonstrate the continual re-framing of "purpose questions" at various developmental points in life, reflect a Western individualistic perspective. In this diagram, the questions include "How do I measure my success as a person?" and "What legacy have I added to people's lives?"

So how would these questions be addressed from an Eastern perspective? Although Buddhist teaching does not use the word *purpose*, much of the teachings and writings reflect a deep sense of purpose. For example, the Eight-Fold Path is a profound statement of how to foster enlightenment and save all sentient beings. But the specific paths of action talk about “right livelihood” and “right intention”, no “right purpose.” However, “right purpose” seems inherent in the entire teaching.

I think of the bodhisattva vow as written by Shantideva in the 12<sup>th</sup> century work, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

*And now as long as space endures,  
As long as there are beings to be found,  
May I continue likewise to remain  
To drive away the sorrows of the world.*

That is purpose in the broadest, most essential sense.

While Leider does not challenge us to drive away the sorrows of the world, he does make it OK through his writing for us to look for purpose in our work lives and ask the deeper spiritual questions. Leider intends to assist the reader in identifying an inner sense of purpose and meaning and in finding ways to live out that purpose. While there are limitations in *The Power of Purpose*, we can read this book and find a blueprint for self-exploration and identification of our life purpose and meaning. Leider is hopeful that this pursuit will enhance not only our work and personal life, but the greater good as well. ☺

*Jil's life purposes seem to merge, weave, and intersect in all parts of her life.*

#### **For further information:**

Leider has continued to coach, lecture, teach, and co-author other books about purpose and human potential. Leider has authored or co-authored six other books, including Leider & Shapiro's *Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose*, Berrett-Koehler, 2004.

Leider also is a founding partner of The Inventure Group with an informative website: [www.inventuregroup.com](http://www.inventuregroup.com).

## **excerpts**

*from I Will Not Die an Unlived Life,  
by Dawna Markova*

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*I will not die an unlived life.  
I will not live in fear  
Of falling or catching fire.  
I choose to inhabit my days,  
To allow my living to open me,  
To make me less afraid, more accessible;  
To loosen my heart  
Until it becomes a wing,  
A torch, a promise.  
I choose to risk my significance,  
To live so that which came to me as seed  
Goes on to the next as blossom,  
And that which came to me as blossom,  
Goes on as fruit.*

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*No one can tell you how to find your purpose. It can only be found, slowly, in your own dark sky, in whatever is sacred to you, be that church or woods. It can't be found by searching around for a role model or learning how cultural heroes handled their difficulties. It is seldom found by following anyone else's rules. It lives in the place where music is born, the fertile void, the silence between notes. It is simple and basic. It emerges slowly as a sunrise, as we search through our gifts, our darkness, our losses and loves. Your job and mine is to be quiet and alone from time to time. To be present in ourselves and the natural world, and to be in conversation with what is hidden in us in such a way that we can explore what brings us more alive.*

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## feature article

# “ WHO AM I, AND WHAT MUST I DO?”

Sandra Kosse, LICSW

*There is one thing in this world  
that you must never forget to do.*

*If you forget everything else and  
not this, there's nothing to worry  
about; but if you remember every-  
thing else and forget this, then  
you will have nothing in your life.  
- Rumi*

*All day I think about it, then  
At night I say it  
Where did I come from, and  
What am I supposed to be doing?  
I have no idea.  
-Rumi*

I say if even Rumi, so on fire with life and so wonderful a poet that his work stirs us after seven hundred years, if even Rumi is stretched between ignorance of purpose and certainty that we must find the “one thing...we must never forget to do,” well, I’m in exalted company. I should probably lighten up on myself for all these years of finding and losing a sense of purpose.

As a concept, purpose is also in exalted company: purpose, vision, calling, passion. All of these evocative words stimulate that place in us that senses, hopes, even *demands* that we are here for *something*. We long for a life that is rooted deep in an earth of meaning, informed by energies that are large and, preferably, luminous and moving.

And we wake up every morning to brush our teeth, play with our hair, decide yes or no about makeup or choose between the razor that scrapes our morning skin or the shaver that is kinder but duller and gives stubble a head start on the day.

Because I am sometimes thrown by moods and often disheartened by the daily-ness of life, I frequently long for a grand sense of purpose and certainly feel the need for something greater than subjectivity. Not everyone is strongly affected by their inner ebbs and flows, but all of us are subject to the larger rhythms. Even if we are

blessed with a placid disposition, we still ride nature’s annual cycles, respond to personal and family developmental milestones, and grieve our loss of alignment with political and cultural leaders. In other words, we live in tumult and constant change. It is when we recognize that this is indeed a *floating world* that we are nudged, prodded and outright driven to ask “*What, if anything, lasts?*” And, with Rumi, “*What am I supposed to be doing?*”

It is frequently at such times in their lives that clients come to see us. When people come into my office afflicted by a mood disorder, an unwelcome transition, or a sudden demand from life that they become bigger than they have been, I need to know my purpose in that room and I need to be able to help them clarify their purpose at that time and in the larger space of their lives. At times that my clients feel small, buffeted, and mundane, I need to be able to help them remember that they are larger than their current predicament.

Where might this sense of a larger identity come from and how might it relate to our topic of purpose?

*A digression:* It’s gardening season now and I’m moving plants around like mad. When I dig one up I am touched by the plant’s vulnerability and

dislocation, and especially its exposed white roots that are so clearly out of their element and threatened.

I sometimes think of clients as going through a process like that of the plants - destabilized by inner or outer challenges and nudged, yanked or flung out of the familiar. At such times I want to help them stay viable during their transition and help them find the best new place to re-root - preferably a spacious place with plenty of room for expansion. To do this, I want both of us to know who they are and what their purposes are at this point in time.

At such times I may ask them identity and purpose-eliciting questions, "*Who have you been? How did you come here (to this room, to this place in your life)? What decisions have shaped you?*"

Then, with the help of what Minneapolis psychologist and narrative practitioner, Walter Bera, has called "scaffolding questions", I can ask more questions about who they have been, what values guide and support them and who they are becoming.

I may ask, "*What guiding principles have you used to help you make these decisions?*" Less helpful principles, like not making waves, never disappointing anyone, or coming out on top in all power struggles may emerge.

From the slightly "stepped back" position these questions help them to achieve, clients can evaluate the efficacy of these principles. "*So, in your experience, has this been a good way or a bad way to make decisions? Or maybe some of each? What has been helpful? What hasn't been so helpful?*"

I think of questions of purpose and identity as closely linked. The more I name and know who I am and "who I am becoming" the more aligned I feel with *the one thing I must never forget to do*, which turns out to be something more like *becoming the one person I must become*.

I wonder if identity and purpose don't co-create each other, each contributing to the constriction or enlargement of the other. Or, maybe they are the yin and yang, the being and doing of our existence. If I have a small and petty purpose - wealth and fame, for example - my identity as a

success or a failure depends on my achievement those purposes. If I have a fear-based purpose - avoidance of failure and disappointment - my identity is rigid and must be guarded and protected. Conversely, if my purpose is to act courageously, who I think I am gets larger as I incorporate "courageous person" into my identity. Perhaps then I can shift from hoarding to giving. Purpose helps us to answer the question, "*Who are you becoming?*" And who we sense ourselves to be suggests what we're here to do. Aren't we seeking alignment with who we sense we are and what we are doing with our lives?

I mentioned above that it is important that I know what my purpose is in the therapy room. I am highly subject to unbidden forces and I need to have something that I can return to, something that sustains me when my energy has died down to doldrums and that directs me when I am fresh and sparkling and just itching to do good. The most remarkable purpose I know is contained in the *Vow of the Bodhisattva*:

*Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them all.*

This is a really absurd striving. What could be a more apparently hopeless task than saving all sentient beings? It is my desire to participate in this purpose that leads me out of my smallest self—the one that thinks she is responsible for all my client's outcomes. It reminds me that being a therapist and participating in doing therapy are both a high calling and a daily practice.

*May I be a guard for all those who are  
protector-less,  
A guide for those who journey on the road;  
For those who wish to go across the water,  
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge;  
For all those ailing in the world  
Until their every sickness has been healed,  
May I myself become for them  
The doctor, nurse, the medicine itself.*

--Shantideva

Now that's purpose! ☺

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*For today, Sandy has chosen a pale peach blusher and being the medicine itself.*

## interview

### *Gregg Krech, Executive Director, ToDo Institute*

Susan Bourgerie, MA, LP

*Gregg Krech, Executive Director of ToDo (pronounced “toe-doe”) Institute, is a leading authority on Japanese psychology in the United States. ToDo Institute offers residential training programs, uniquely designed and effective web-based courses, books, audio programs, and a quarterly journal called Thirty Thousand Days. I have studied with Gregg in a variety of these ways since 2003, and asked him to share the Eastern perspective on the theme of purpose as expressed in Naikan and Morita therapies with me.*

**Gregg, what attracted you to the study of Japanese psychology – specifically Morita and Naikan therapies – in the first place?** *I have been a student of Eastern religion and philosophy since college, and spent many years studying Buddhism with wonderful teachers. When I discovered Morita and Naikan therapies I found psychological approaches that blended elegantly with the spiritual traditions I was studying. But it was really my first Naikan retreat in Japan in 1989 that firmly set me on this path. It helped me clarify my purposes but also showed me the importance of bringing this work into a world that was in desperate need of honest self-reflection.*

**From the perspective of Morita and Naikan, what does it mean to live “on purpose”?** *Living on purpose involves the conscious direction of our energy to discovering what our important purposes are, and devoting our efforts and attention to carrying them out. In many cases we find that to carry out those purposes that are meaningful to us we must do things we don’t feel like doing. So living on purpose involves developing a level of self-discipline that allows us to co-exist with our feeling states, even the unpleasant ones, but still honor our commitment to what it is that is important to do. Too often the driving force in our lives is emotion. This becomes a problem when feelings dominate choices and our purpose goes unfulfilled.*

**How does one find purpose? Hold on to purpose?** *There is no set equation for finding one’s purpose, but I can offer two valuable suggestions. First, we need to take more time to step back and reflect on our lives. Naikan is a method of reflection from Japan that provides a structure for such reflection. In the retreats we hold here at the ToDo Institute people spend a week and do nothing but reflect on their lives from the time of their birth until the*

*present day. For many people this is a profound experience and they often get clarity about their purposes or discover new purposes. Even if you can’t go on such a retreat, you can still build in time for quiet self-reflection.*

*The second suggestion I have is that people look for purpose in the world, rather than in their heads. People who are intelligent often believe they can figure out life in their heads, but you can’t really do that, no matter how smart you are. Finding your purpose is more likely to be successful when the process involves engaging with the world around you, rather than intellectual analysis. Combining self-reflection with engaged action is a powerful avenue for discovering your purpose.*

*As for holding to your purpose, this is a matter of self-discipline and commitment. Whether you wake up on Sunday morning and you feel motivated to exercise or you don’t feel motivated doesn’t really change your purpose of keeping your body healthy. Your purpose can be something you are grounded in as you ride the roller coaster of fluctuating feelings.*

**There are many Westerners who have written on the subject of purpose. Is anything unique or different in the way purpose is viewed in the East?** *Broadly speaking, in the East purpose is more commonly seen in the context of what the Universe (God, Buddha, etc.) needs us to do; we become vehicles for carrying out some higher purpose. This idea is found in many other spiritual traditions as well, including Western spiritual traditions. But Western culture tends to view purpose in a more limited way - a more materialistic and self-centered way in which a larger universal context is absent. In the West, purpose is often considered only from the standpoint of the happiness*

*of the individual person.*

**What role does purpose play in mental health and well being?** *I think it plays an important role, but has been undervalued in much of Western psychology, which puts much more emphasis on feelings. I've worked with so many people who have relatively comfortable lives but are so unhappy. It's not really unhappiness, as much as a lack of meaning and fulfillment in their lives. There is no psychotherapeutic solution for this dilemma. The challenge is how they can devote themselves to a meaningful purpose - one which makes their lives worthwhile. Finding a meaningful purpose and devoting yourself to it won't give you happiness, at least not all the time. But it will give you a sense of fulfillment, a sense that you are doing what you were meant to do. And now we are at this point where the psychological becomes the spiritual. Because living on purpose is a spiritual question. It requires us to confront the question, "What am I here for?" I often give my students this question to reflect on, "How will the world be different as a result of my having lived?"*

**What prompted you to develop your long-distance learning course "Living On Purpose"? How would you describe that course?** *Purpose has been a central theme in my work for the past nineteen years, but there was very little I was able to offer people who weren't able to work one-on-one or in a residential program here in Vermont. So I designed a month long-distance learning program that uses a course website for reading materials, lectures and participant dialogue. We ran the first course this past January and had 100 people from six different countries participating. The theme really has two main elements. First, how do we discover our purpose(s)? And second, how do we live on purpose or hold to our purpose? All our distance learning courses are grounded in experience. There is a calendar for the month and a different exercise each day. The centerpiece of the course is doing the exercises and then we use reading materials, lectures and dialogue to supplement our personal experience.*

**I notice that you often use the plural – "purposes".** *I use the plural because most of us have more than one purpose, and that's where some of our confusion and conflict comes from. We have multiple purposes that have to do with the roles that we play, and these may be in direct conflict with one another; we often have to choose between competing purposes and that's just how life is for most of us. It's interesting, because there are people who are*

*struggling and suffering because they aren't clear about their purposes, or are depressed or apathetic because they don't have purpose. There are others who have moved beyond a feeling centered state to find purpose, but now have too many purposes. Sometimes we need to ask, "What purposes shall I give up?" When you take on a new purpose realistically you have to be willing to give up something, otherwise you load yourself up and your life becomes chaotic, disorganized, and overwhelming. Many of us are greedy; we want more but we don't want to give up anything. Realistically, you only have so much energy. When you see people like Schweitzer or Jonas Salk - there are lots of folks we could make that list - they have one clear purpose and everything else gets little or no attention. They have singleness of purpose. But for me, there is no singleness of purpose. I also have kids I'm raising, a marriage I'm devoted to, and aging parents.*

*I think some people are fortunate enough to become clear about broader life purpose or mission and that's wonderful. In other cases, where people aren't so clear about a broader purpose, you work with purposes that aren't so expansive. Either way it comes down to the day, the hour, the moment, because the bottom line is when you get out of bed what are you going to do today? In that sense, for purpose to become real it always has to do with the present moment. . ☺*

*Susan continues to aim at living on purpose – moment to moment.*

#### **EXERCISES FROM "LIVING ON PURPOSE"**

-Sit down for 45 minutes with pen and paper and reflect on the question: "How will the world be different as a result of my having lived?" This shifts the attention from what you want to do towards what the world needs.

-Once a week, pick a day to do one thing that is important yet not urgent. This is something in line with your values and purposes but is not a crisis or driven by a deadline.

-Look at a particular room or section of a room from the standpoint of purpose. Ask: "What is the purpose of this space?" Is it serving that purpose well? Do the items in that space facilitate or interfere with that purpose?

**For books and more information check out ToDo Institute's website at [www.todoinstitute.org](http://www.todoinstitute.org). The next offering of "Living On Purpose" is planned for January, 2007.**



**East West Connections** is a joint effort of Loring Psychotherapy & Mindfulness Center and Great River Therapy and Consultation. We publish information of interest to our colleagues, clients, and others on the integration of Eastern wisdom and practices with Western approaches to psychotherapy. Please contact any one of us if you have comments, or wish to have your name added to or removed from this list.

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## **ANNOUNCING...**

**3/3 = A Whole.** *Sandy Kosse is forming an 8-week group on finding and sustaining purpose in the last third of life. Contact Sandy at 612-874-8608 for details.*



**Great River Therapy  
and Consultation**  
*is the new name for the joint  
practices of Cheri, Jil and Signe.*