



## Meaning: Where Monk and Child Meet, by David Steindl-Rast

The monk in us is very closely related to the child in us or, if you want, to the mystic in us – and we are all meant to be mystics. We do a great disservice to mystics by putting them up on a pedestal and thinking of them as a special kind of human being. The truth is that every human being is a special kind of mystic, and that creates a tremendous challenge for each one of us to become precisely that mystic we are meant to be. [...] Now when I say that this has something to do with the child in us, I mean that there is in the child a longing to find a meaning, an openness to meaning which tends to be lost or at least overshadowed by our preoccupation with purposefulness. I should say right at the outset that when I use these two terms, purpose and meaning, I'm by no means playing off purpose against meaning or meaning against purpose. [...] When you have to accomplish a particular purpose, the main thing is that you have to take things in hand. If you don't know what it's all about, somebody has to show you the ropes, as we say, so you know how to handle the thing. You have to take things in hand, to handle the matter, to come to grips with the situation, to keep things under control – otherwise you are never quite sure that you are going to accomplish your purpose. All this is very important for dealing with the situation in which a particular purpose has to be accomplished. Now think of a situation in which something becomes meaningful to you. [...] Now you are not the one that keeps things under control and handles them and manipulates them; instead the experience does something to you. "It really touched me," or if it is very strong, "It hit me over the head!" or, "It swept me off my feet!" – something like that. That's when something becomes meaningful to you. So what really happens is that you give yourself to it, and in that moment, it, whatever it may be, reveals its meaning to you. Again let me stress, this is not an either/or proposition. The two have to go together, but certainly in order to find meaning in our purposeful activities we have to learn to open ourselves, to give ourselves to what we are doing. And that is typically the attitude that the child takes. --David Steindl-Rast, From The Monk in Us  
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