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Zen and the art of selling, software or searching the spirit

A story goes that the Buddha's last words were, "Work out your own salvation."

Doing that, however, takes a little help from your friends — or, that is, people who will be honest to your face and let you return the favor. Doing it yourself, as it were, is not a solo act.

And if that sounds kind of like one hand clapping, well, the thought was expressed by a disciple of Zen, a guy from Raleigh who also stummed up what he has to say in wisdom from his own steelworking father:

"Pay yourself first."

And if that sounds at all interesting, you can catch some more first hand at Duke University tonight or in Raleigh next week — or look him up on your own and see if August Turak can sell you some software.

Take your checkbook. After all, he has been profiled in *Selling and Success*

magazines, and he did found the 2-year-old software company that is No. 8 in *Triangle Business Journal's* current ranking of the 50 fastest-growing businesses in our corner of the world.



JIM WISE

Columnist

And take your breath. A story goes a request for time to catch it was the first reaction he got to his talk, "Five Years With a Zen Master."

Not to mention the two years he spent working for Lou Mobley, founder of the IBM Executive School and, as Turak put it, "one of the

first people to retire at 55." Turak was there to sell the ground floor for MTV, and

now he's here to tell you:

"The religious life, spiritual life, whatever you want to call it, is a wonderful, wonderful adventure. And you should do it yourself, but it takes work. ... The search for God, the search for meaning, the search for truth, the search for something that's not just ephemeral."

And if you think that's kind of neat, he'll say:

"Then get off your butt."

Talking by phone from his Raleigh Group International office the other morning, Turak went on about God and Zen and spiritual questing with matter-of-fact enthusiasm and occasional one-liners. He might have been talking about the widgets in his briefcase.

"I like people. I've always been a good communicator," he would say. But then

he'd say, "Zen really prepared me for sales." And then he'd say, "Sales and marketing is a good way to study human nature — if you assume emotion, the market behaves in a rational way."

A man Duke Chapel Dean Will Willimon compares to Socrates, who'll tell you, "I want the money," who honed his communicating skills so he could explain why he dropped out of college to study with a Zen master from West Virginia ("I wasn't off my rocker"), and who spends a lot of his time now explaining what he learned there to college kids.

"There is a tremendous, tremendous hunger among students, whatever you want to call it, for what I'm offering," Turak said. A lot of kids out there thinking there's something wrong with them because they're worrying about God while

all around them are wrapped up in *Mutual Combat*.

So he's talking at 7:30 tonight in the Bryan Center and the same time Tuesday week at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Raleigh, and you don't have to be a student to hear him, just buy a ticket. Those are \$4 and \$6, respectively, but the message is the same.

"Put your spiritual life first and what is left, you fill up with baseball games and whatever else you do with your time," he said. "I think the spiritual life is the most incredible adventure, the most marvelous activity, any human can undertake."

And then he added, "A certain percentage is going to hate me and hate this talk."

Have a comment, or a suggestion for a column? You may contact Jim Wise by phone at 419-6680 or e-mail at jew@herald-sun.com