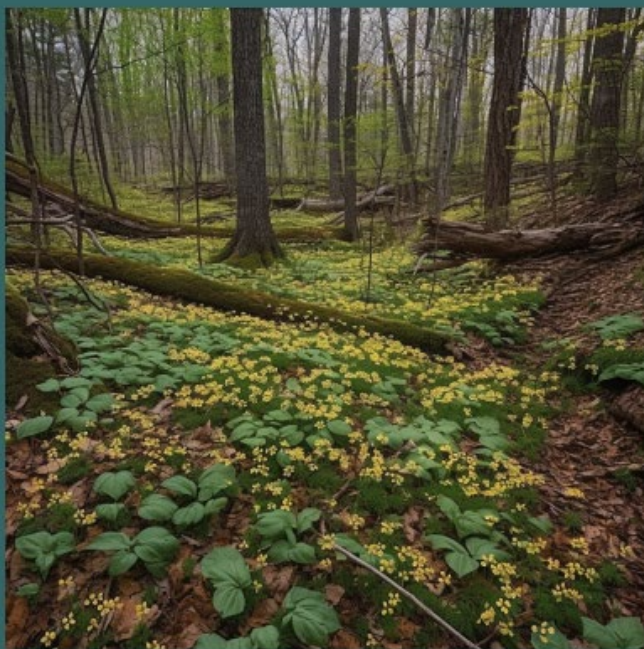


# BLOGS 2022 SPRING



by Michael Erlewine

**2022**  
**Essays**  
**SPRING**

by Michael Erlewine

© Copyright Michael Erlewine 2022

These are not all, but they are the most useful essays from 2021, sorted by the seasons.

I don't have time to 'fine edit' them and still get them out there, but these are certainly in good-enough shape to be readable.

And I don't expect many, but hopefully 'any' folks will find these useful.

They are eclectic, yet the overriding theme is dharma and dharma practice. Those of you who reach a certain point in your own trajectory of dharma practice may find some of these useful.

Michael@Erlewine.net

## Contents

THE JUPITER CHAKRA: GURU .....	7
THE MARS CHAKRA JOURNAL: I AM LED TO THE SEA OF LOVE .36	
JOURNAL: AWAKENING OF THE EARTH OR 'HEART CENTER' ....	59
ADDENDA TO "ASTROLOGY OF THE HEART" .....	82
THE LIGHTS: SUN AND MOON April 4, 2022 .....	87
ANN ARBOR'S FORGOTTEN JAZZ SCENE .....	97
THE FIXED STARS AND BEYOND THE FIXED STARS.....	105
THE TRAP OF TECHNIQUE .....	118
A TRIBUTE TO BARBARA LEWIS.....	122
THE ASTROLOGY OF SOLAR INFLUX.....	126
TOUCH THE SKY, TOUCH THE EARTH.....	132
INTERESTED?.....	135
GETTING TO KNOW YOU .....	147
A DHARMA STORY -- THE DRAWING.....	157
MAKING BLUES TIME .....	192
ARE PLACES SACRED?.....	207
THE ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVAL The First of Its Kind.....	223
INTERVIEW WITH HOWLIN' WOLF.....	247
GROOVE AND BLUES IN JAZZ .....	263
JUKE JOINTS AND SATURDAY NIGHTS.....	304
THE DARK OF THE MOON .....	316
ENJOYMENT BODIES .....	319
ONE TASTE .....	325

DHARMA: THE POLE STAR.....	328
HELD TO OTHER’S EXPECTATIONS .....	331
STAY IN YOUR OWN LANE?.....	336
USE IT OR LOSE IT.....	341
I’LL TAKE MINE NEAT, PLEASE.....	346
"I’M TIRED AS A RETIREE" .....	352
A SPIRITUAL GROUNDHOG’S DAY .....	357
THE ZEN OF ZEN .....	360
SOLAR OVERLOAD.....	363
HAIR-TRIGGER EMOTIONS .....	367
THE WELL-TEMPERED BLOG .....	370
WHEN THE MND IS AT REST.....	374
RELAX, AS IT IS.....	376
‘FILLER UP PLEASE’ .....	379
SOMETIMES A FEELING .....	383
BEAUTY IS A WAY TO THE HEART .....	386
THE GRAVITY OF DHARMA.....	389
WELTSCHMERZ (WORLD SORROW).....	392
NOT FADE AWAY .....	396
DHARMA SCAFFOLDING.....	401
LET BEAUTY IN.....	403
THE DARK OF THE NEW MOON .....	406
BRIDGING A DREAM.....	411
TRANSFORMING SAMSARA .....	416
TIMELESS.....	422
GETTING THE POINT OUT OF LIFE.....	425

NOT FADE AWAY .....	433
THE DEFECTS OF REIFICATION .....	437
FIRE & BRIMSTONE .....	447
ME AGAINST THE WORLD .....	451
YOU DRANK THE KOOL-AID, WHAT NEXT? June 6, 2022 .....	455
'REGINA' -- THE ORCHID QUEEN June 9, 2022.....	463
DRIFTING TOO FAR FROM THE SHORE.....	467
CAN YOU HEAR THE MUSIC?.....	470
PULLING THE PLUG ON THE JUKEBOX OF LIFE.....	474
ESCAPE VELOCITY AND SAMSARA.....	480
THE CHEESE STANDS ALONE .....	486
DHARMA AS WIDE AS THE SKY .....	490
THE TERRIBLE CRYSTAL .....	492
CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM .....	499
WE BECOME WHAT WE WANT .....	502
FREEDOM FROM BEING 'SPECIAL' .....	511
A MANDALA OF WORDS .....	515
"TALK LOW, TALK SLOW, AND DON'T SAY TOO MUCH" .....	518



## THE JUPITER CHAKRA: GURU

April 1, 2022

[This section represents the most nitty-gritty detailed account of one of the main chakras, Jupiter, complete with journal entries from my 1960 writing as examples, although some entries are quite graphic. Again, we are using the maxim that the key to each planetary chakra is the next planet immediately within the orbit of the

planet chakra being considered. For example, those who are stuck in their Saturn Chakra, struggling to exist, the key to the Saturn Chakra will be to explore and invoke your Jupiter Chakra (career and life path), and so on. I have used this method for doing client readings for many decades with great success.]

### The Key to Your Saturn is Your Natal Jupiter

Life, for one lost in the Saturn chakra, was briefly described above in the previous blog. While most astrological clients that will seek you out may not be so completely lost in the Saturn realm, many will have had or still have some problem traversing that realm, perhaps the most common being difficulty jump-starting their Jupiter function, establishing and maintaining their career.

For these folks, an introduction to their natal Jupiter is what is required, a reading from the Book of Jupiter, so to speak. Using the concept of the inner being the key to the outer, here is some Jupiter prose, which should help you get the idea:

#### THE SANSKRIT WORD IS 'GURU'

The Sanskrit word for Jupiter is "Guru," so that tells us a lot already. Jupiter is the KEY which unseals and overcomes our natal Saturn. Jupiter is in a very real sense the heart of Saturn turned inside out. It is the



guide and light (the guru) that sees each of us through the darkness of time or Saturn — the straight and narrow path by which we are able to pass through Satan's test.

Jupiter is our particular way of going or our religion — our dharma path. It is the way we go or continue, our particular "luck" or solution to time's (Saturn) test.

Jupiter is the only way or doorway open to us and through which we may pass through time. Jupiter is expansion, because life unfolds or continues at this point. It is here that we find the extension of the present situation: the way through or on. Jupiter is continuity, how we may continue.

## SUCCESS OR SUCCESSION

Jupiter is the endlessness of life regardless of the particular form. Jupiter is how and where things continue or happen. Jupiter is an endless round of passage, the lamp or light that will see shadows fail. Jupiter is above all the KEY or reverse of Saturn. It is the recognition or realization and use of Saturn for: Jupiter is the way we must go through life, our way to go, the recognition that: that through which we have to pass is the way we go through life. Jupiter is success or succession through time.

## THE VISION OF JUPITER – BAPTISM OR REBIRTH

The invoking or awakening of Jupiter is somewhat of a big deal for each of us. It is how we first awaken from the 30-year sleep of Saturn, learn to take care of ourselves, and begin to find our own way through life.

Many will have an active Jupiter long before the Saturn return, for Jupiter takes about 12 years to make a return, so by 24 years of age, each of us has been shown twice how Jupiter can work for us, how we CAN make it through the obstacles of Saturn. From those two complete Jupiter cycles, we should have extracted or at least be on the path to a vocation or career that will work for us, one that will handle our particular Saturn.

Regardless of when that awakening experience is, the opening of the Jupiter chakra, the finding of the life path or career is a major initiation for each person, for at that time we are, for the first time, born above or get beyond Saturn's rule. Here are some details:

Through the two-fold repetition of the Jupiter cycle (24 years), thus the invoking of Jupiter in the natal chart, we first overcome Saturn and begin to awaken from within the womb of time itself. Up to that point, we have been wrapped in the sleep of time, Saturn's womb, going through what have been aptly called our "formative years."

**BORN AWAKE IN TIME**

When our Jupiter chakra opens (as we start to get the idea), we are still within (or under) time, but we are gradually being born awake, yet still within time, and from that point onward we hold in our hands the key to the unraveling of time. We have figured out how to succeed in this world. This Jupiter awakening to faith is like the crowning (in childbirth) and appearance of the head of an infant, and that first breath of life.

In its own way, this is a baptism, but not an immersion, but an emergence in the waters of Spirit for the very first time, and with it, the resulting knowledge and ever-growing faith that we can overcome time, it can be done: this is the message or 'Word' we hold. In the beginning was the Word, and all that.

What is faith? In this case faith means that once we have seen the light beyond Saturn, that we can overcome Saturn, we cannot (we will not) ever forget that experience. We will never go back to that sleep, for something within us has stirred. We will ever hold out for more of what we have only now glimpsed.

#### FAITH AS A FORCE

Faith, no longer an endless waiting (or hope) for something good to happen for us, but now a force itself (this faith) more powerful than time: for through faith, we end all time. Once in the Jupiter chakra, we begin for

the first time in this current life to awaken to our eternal life, call it awareness, our true self, what-have-you, and, although still living partially embedded within the world of time, we have now open eyes (awareness), and this amounts to the proverbial word of God or Spirit that, when it shall be made flesh, will set us free over time, for all time. It is no wonder that the world's religions value faith. Faith is fueled by insights, an awakening.

After our Jupiter chakra is activated, we shall never again fall back to sleep in total ignorance, for our eternal memory has revived, stirred, and **WE CAN NEVER FORGET**. We have awakened in time, for all time. We have time, and not vice versa!

## THE SWORD OF FAITH

To use the Christian metaphor: with this first seal of the seven seals laid open, we rise above Saturn (Satan) or time as a warrior in the army of the Lord of Life, our Spirit, and can now wield time mortal blows as long as life lasts. We are now, as it is written in the Bible, one of the warriors of God's Word, carrying forth his sword of faith that cuts at time's heart, and always opens Saturn's seal and, even now, today, is forging ahead into eternity. The lightning quick sword of the awakened mind can never rest, but rides from victory to victory over time's rule. Jupiter is succession through all time. Jupiter is succession, continuity — simple continuing, success. Jupiter is the key to Saturn or time.

## POEM: THE FORCE OF FAITH

When we begin to awaken from under Saturn's seal, our mind stirs, and we glimpse life in a new way. This is what all those that have born-again experiences are referring to. Our eyes are now open, and we cannot close them in ignorance again, but we are still a long way from mastering the Saturn chakra. At this point in our journey, faith becomes about the only way we can cope with our experience, as this poem shows.

A poem by Michael Erlewine:

### THE FORCE OF FAITH

The form of force enforcing form,  
Finds freedom from that form in fact.  
And in fact forced is freed,  
A form of force with faith in form, that finds in fact:  
Faith itself a force.

Thus, force finds itself in form on faith.  
And force enforcing faith in form,  
And form informing faith of force,  
Faith is that force in form.  
Faith is our form of force.

## EXPERIENCE OF JUPITER: AWAKENING AND TRIAL

The opening of the Jupiter chakra, being the first of the chakras or seals to be opened within Saturn, can be a major life experience and initiation. For one, it opens up, perhaps for the first time, the whole world of spiritual awakening. It is the first breath of life beyond Saturn, and it can be somewhat of a big deal for each of us, although, for reasons unclear to me, our society does not openly celebrate this inner opening.

This whole idea of spiritually awakening in the middle of life, of being, somehow, as the Christians say, "born again," is not a just a passing phase, and it is not just for Christians. It happens to each one of us and this opening is more or less permanent, and although it may take months or years to stabilize this insight, once the awakening has occurred, many (if not most) are at first very sensitive, and so vulnerable. It is like a baby's skin, a skin that is very, very sensitive.

## HANDLING SATURN

With the Jupiter awakening, each of us begins to get the idea of how to handle our Saturn, how we might actually be successful working in the world, and just what we can do to be a success. We get it. For most, however, it is a long way from the initial insight or awakening to stabilizing that vision and becoming an experienced person in this new-found world or chakra.

Those of us who are at this point in our lives older,

encounter this every day in the young person who has an intellectual understanding of life, the "idea," but no real-life experience. They have all the answers, right out of the books, but they don't yet know what they are talking so glibly about, and they don't know that they don't know. They get the idea, and they think they now know, and that is all there is to life! As we say: they still have a lot to learn. They have the "word," but that word has not been made flesh and yet lived. This is similar to what happens in the Jupiter awakening.

#### JUPITER IS THE LAWYER

In fact, it is a very long journey indeed for most of us, from having an intellectual grasp of what makes life tick, an idea of how we might handle Saturn, to becoming a grisly old veteran of life, with deep experience, and what we might call: wisdom.

Perhaps this can be made even more clear by pointing out why Jupiter belongs to the realm of lawyers and all those who are quick with the mind, those who use the mind to outwit the world, that is: to manipulate Saturn. The Jupiter lawyer handles the law. It is like handling poisonous snakes. This is not intended to knock lawyers, who perform a real and necessary task in this world, but to point out that often their sheer facileness and slickness, while successful in getting around the law, leaves something to be desired in the way of life wisdom. Agreed? This is what I am pointing to. Of

course, there are good lawyers.

The journey from the slickness and intellectual power of the Jupiter chakra through the search for the meaning and sense-of-it-all in the Mars chakra to the stability and union of the Earth chakra is for most of us a long and often difficult passage. It is the process of learning what life is all about. What follows is just a brief sketch of some of the possible phases that may occur in that journey and includes quotes from my own journals from experience in the Jupiter chakra, so if this kind of writing is not your cup of tea, then skip on to the next sections.

## JUPITER PHASES

After the initial Jupiter awakening, it seems that no step of the way is easy, yet the hardest may to be the test each soul goes through AFTER that first awakening has taken its course, as we begin to get the idea of how we might make life work for us (and not vice versa) and begin to settle down to daily living. Once we awaken and begin to discover or glimpse our inner self, our awareness (whatever you want to call it), we are forever changed in our approach to life, yet we find ourselves still living in (within) the same lifetime and the same old personal habits that we had before our discovery. This is almost always somewhat of a problem.

Our old personality (by definition) is never strong enough to hold the force and power of our new insights



and approach to life. Our existing personality, with its bad habits of old, too easily breaks under the strain and demands of this newfound awareness, plunging us into instability and all the possible hells or stages of purgation and house-cleaning. We can see that all our old habits have to be purged and cleaned up, that there has to be some kind of reformation, where we reform our personality. This holds true, until we build a new body-of-personality or life to hold and reflect our newfound enlightenment, our awareness. Our habits cannot contain our new awareness.

## THE ASTEROID BELT

It is astrologically significant that relatively the longest stretch of space exists between Jupiter and on inward to the planet Mars, passing through the wide asteroid belt filled with broken dreams. There are many who awaken to this new faith in life (Jupiter), and of that awakening much has been written. Stories of being "born again" are common. Less writing is available concerning the journey of the soul who has been awakened (has somehow heard the word, gotten the idea, been born again) through to the realization of the word, the idea made into reality, locked into real flesh and solid reformed habits.

This is the great desert, the guardian at the threshold (of the beast itself) that must be slain and overcome as we each cross this seeming endless stretch of life in

accordance with our own personal mistakes or errors.

Catholics call it purgatory, and it is good concept. I can only present to you my own experience to give you some general idea and feeling of this journey. Your story will, of course, be different, but the end or goal for each of us remains the same, regardless of the path followed. Here is one story of that rite-of-passage:

#### JOURNAL: FIRST MOMENTS OF JUPITER AWAKENING

Context: Like the lives of the stars in the heavens above, some burn slowly, some flare outward, and some supernova. They are ways to live and die. I have done many hundreds of one-to-one readings over the years and can testify that there indeed are many ways to wake up.

For me, there was almost total darkness for most of my young life, and then, one night, in the middle of a bar scene, standing on stage, playing music, it came all at once. This is a rather vivid and poetic account of the Jupiter chakra awakening, in this case a sudden awakening, rather than a gradual one.

"All I remember is haze — red shifting to orange — as I strained under the infinite pressure of my past, like a baby being born, and then, through the strain of this labor (so intense that time slowed) in which somehow I was involved, through that slowness like the head of a

child in birth, I crowned, and for the first time came I, me, a glimpse of my eternal self — real awareness. I saw myself. I found myself.

"Emerging right up through the top of my head, I was born as through a veil and vale of tears, surrounded on all sides by people living in eternal slowness. Tears stood in all our eyes, for I was them — huge catlike creatures, winking and blinking in the slowness of expanded time. We moved together in this, the rhythm of our birth, rising and falling like the cry of some great beast. Living was so slow that it took forever. We were all, together, one, born out of suffering, born out of and beyond time itself, born through a veil of tears, itself an endless rain."

#### JOURNAL: IT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TWICE

Context: Here is more journal of my own Jupiter awakening from within the Saturn chakra.

"And I remember one white-hot-flash-like-electric blast that went dead in my mind. I could never have it happen twice. I was absolutely not (as if all stopped) and then it started again. And after, I wavered, awash like a flower on the sea — a lotus. And as I found faith in my new awareness, I rose above time in knowledge of myself, in this new awareness. And as I lost that faith, accidents of a deathly kind became very possible. It was not subtle."

"There was I, born again and living, alive in a world that I

never really knew and that knew me not at all. I was still in the world, but I was no longer of that world. Like a newborn child, I searched everywhere for those who would recognize me and welcome me alive. Mine was a back-room birth, enacted in a century that could no longer afford to act out a drama as old as time itself."

## JOURNAL: THE WORLD KNEW ME NOT

Context: Awareness, awakening, insight, these experiences are very addicting, as in: we want more of it. We don't want to slip back into the endless sleep out of which we just emerged, and we search through our world for any signs of recognition, to see if any others can verify what we are experiencing. Can I find a witness?

Getting a witness is very difficult to do, and this lack of acknowledgement, lack of recognition, can make life and confidence very difficult. It is very easy to go overboard, trying to verify if we are just dreaming or really awake in our new vision. Here is a journal entry from that time:

"The fulfillment of this ancient ritual of awakening and the celebration of it was a bother in this time. The world knew me not, and everywhere all I got were short services, the barest sign of recognition, and then: ignorance. I became my own welcoming committee, born alone above a sea of persons. I wrote:

"Ah! Who could let such a bargain pass,  
As this poor century will allow,  
On coming in, I'm asked to leave,  
And when asked to leave, I bow."

"I never thought to wonder what others might feel or think. I shared my newfound openness with all I contacted, never doubting that they experienced what I was experiencing, and that I was the only Johnny-come-lately. At best, we laughed and cried together, and paused in our lives of time to celebrate some moments of eternity. I wandered where I would and went searching through the towns and universities for men who shared my realization. I just walked into their offices and caught them in their lives, some too stiff to share, but others wept with joy, and held my hand in encouragement and thankfulness for the grace of life. They had been there too!"

#### JOURNAL: ETERNITY'S DOOR

Context: Once the Jupiter awakening occurs, we could not go back to sleep, even if we wanted to, and become prone to all kinds of highs and lows, in particular: dualisms. And dualism kind of creeps into the picture, as we cannot keep our new eyes open, but, against our will, slip back to sleep, time and again, only to reawaken, terrified that we have somehow agreed to forget what we found so hard to remember. Here is an entry:

"Eternity's door lay open before me, and, for weeks I went all through the nights in a celebration of the end of my personal darkness and the return of the prodigal son - awareness itself.

"I cannot remember exactly where the first doubt crept in as regards other people — dualisms. I guess it came with the realization that the rift of time (this openness) remained open only as long as I endured in a conversation and that, if I let it go, it just closed, and there was no curiosity forthcoming from those around me. I was subtly told that most persons would just as soon I left them alone, that my vision was my own, and was too them painful to behold. Gradually I was ignored."

#### JOURNAL: READING FROM THE OUTSIDE.

Context: Falling backward or wandering into zones of fear and terror can be very much a part of any shamanistic-like experience, where we have entered a new state of mind, but are unprepared to hold it, unable to stabilize ourselves. Stabilization, depending on the degree of awakening, can take many months and years, and is often accompanied by much fear and trembling that we will forget again. Here is an entry:

"Somewhere along here I tripped, stumbled, and I know now why I have such an intense fear of high places, for I plunged from eternity back into time's hell like a

lightning. I doubted."

"Up to that point, I had been taking from within myself, bearing out the new-found truth, and surrounding myself in an atmosphere or aura, itself protective. But from some point, I began the fatal error of reading from the external — taking the outer as a sign to follow. I began to follow the external, and, without realizing it, I ceased to draw from within myself. I was suddenly cut off, separated from my own well of awareness and self, veiled from grace once again by time, yet unlike before, I had now known what is called by believers the 'Grace of God,' known something of my true self, and I seemed like a fallen angel separated from all I loved, yet not understanding why. What had I done to deserve my fall from grace?"

#### JOURNAL: MY TRIAL OF FAITH

Context: A very common experience in the Jupiter awakening is the sense of having tasted real awareness, only to fall back into where we came out of, but not quite back to ignorance. We are only one mind shift away from grace but trapped in the past. I call this: to fail ignorance, by a meter or a foot. I could no longer be blissfully (or painfully) ignorant. I wrote:

"We slide through it all, the state of grace I sought to regain appearing and moving in unison beside me, yet now not within my reach. At my strongest moments, I

can offer a vessel, hope for more, and yet gnash at what I have. The blood is in us all. And I taste blood when time quickens, and I am born again. I smack it inside me and laugh the laugh, insane as it is, that announces my arrival, and my remembering that I have been here before. I am back. I have found myself again. Then I am happy."

"Try me. Take more of me. Give me again a show of strength and let me learn endurance in your favor, so that I may taste again of my only hope and life."

#### JOURNAL: THE BEAST CLAIMS THE WHOLE

Context: Here is more on being locked out of our new state, held to the past by our own bad habits. Spiritual awakening, like a swan looking for a lake, can only rest in a personality that is somehow purified and stable. I am not speaking here of "holier than thou," but the simple fact that a lifelong set of inefficient or "bad" habits cannot be changed by one glimpse of freedom. In that glimpse of awakening, I could clearly see what I had been doing wrong (where I wasted time), but the changes required were vast, nothing short of a great change in attitude, and this kind of change cannot be perfected in a day, a week, month, or even a year. And given that about half the time I ended up off course and causing as many problems as I was solving, it is no wonder that I did better than one step forward, and two steps back.



I understand that to many of you this will not make a whole lot of sense. Yet, a few of you will have had or be having similar or related experiences. This is the primary work of shamanism, to catch the stragglers who fall through the cracks of society, let them know they are not alone, and help them to stabilize and rejoin that society. This is why this story is shared. An entry:

"Without this pure awareness, I am lost, alone, and wait on its coming as on the break of day. I hear it breathing, and know I am often only steps away from the health of the spirit, yet I am bound in my pattern, unable to move the least inch to it home.

"It knows this. I am trapped in this form, and yet the form holds all my bid for its favor, trapped so close to the Lord of Life. Yet, it is everywhere perpendicular to myself. If I were stronger, I would come at it, and be forever in its hands. More of it, I cannot but cry for more of it. It breathes and moves under, around, and over all of me, yet I cannot grasp it. It is behind me, then in front, yet I cannot hear it direct. It moves in the corners of my eyes yet defies my pursuit. I must get back to a clear state."

"The wolves of the flesh howl for my soul, for the beast in us stands forth at every handout and claims the whole. Way be clear to my heart. Open. Open up."

## JOURNAL: TEST OF FAITH

Context: And, in the beginning, our faith, no matter how strong that faith may be, is tested, because our personal vehicle cannot yet reflect or sustain our new vision. The ensuing instability sends us careening off path, only to wake up days or weeks later, remembering that we forgot to remember. And worse, we can end up in very real and dangerous life situations. Here is another experience, one that came waist deep in the middle of an icy rushing trout stream.

"Surrounded on both banks with overhanging trees, I rose and fell, step by step along that stream, as my faith was or was not, as I kept faith or lost it. It all came at once. Again and again I snagged (and hopelessly) my fishing line in the overhanging branches. And, as I found my faith, that line would melt like cobwebs, falling back into the water. And, as the experience peaked (and this is no drug experience), I began to lose my footing, and be pulled away into the rushing waters.

"And as, in my fear, I would open my mind, humble myself, and trust myself, that ground would catch on, hold, and raise me up. You would think perhaps to read this that there was no danger. But the thread of my lifeline was so tenuous during this whole period of conversion, that this entire adventure was lived in like a dream state. I was awake and living in my own dream, and I would fade in and out of the possibility of

existence, as I believed or did not believe in myself, as I opened myself to trust, as I had faith. And I did! And after, I took off all my clothes, and dove again and again in those ice-cold waters in celebration of my decided life of faith."

#### JOURNAL: A WORLD THAT KNEW ME NOT

Context: Spiritual progress, once an initial opening or realization takes place, is most often very slow, as we struggle to escape our own past. And that we cannot escape. Problems of self-reference, dualisms between our self and others are unavoidable and very painful. Here is a journal excerpt:

"Like an animal trapped in a net struggles in vain until exhaustion, so I struggled against all restriction. The harder my struggle, the more polarized my hell became — the 'other,' the 'they' and the 'them' quality. I was born into a world that knew me not, a world that shut me up, that turned me away, ignored me, and it rapidly became for me a world of the devil. And I was to fight for my life in a world hard-edged to cut me off from myself. The joy of my birth was turned to bitterness, as I realized there was no place for me, no room in the 'in.'

"I just had to get free from the world in which I seemed to be trapped. I wanted desperately to somehow confirm my spiritual insight. The more I tried, the more my world became a living hell."

## JOURNAL: DO NOT DO A THING

Context: In the mind's map, one of the most painful places to be is where our own reaction or suffering becomes how we know or recognize that we live, our reaction to others. For instance, I then wrote:

"They were all around me now, waiting on me, easing my pain. But my pain and suffering were all I had left of my awakening experience, were the only ways I knew I still lived — that I could still feel, when I could remember. To lose my sense of aloneness or uniqueness might mean never waking up again, becoming average, lost in vanilla.

"And they asked me in every subconscious under-the-counter way to: DO NOT DO A THING. Relax, be still. Do not struggle so. Yet, at this time, it was only in the struggle that I knew myself (great stallion that I was), when there was a 'them' and a 'me,' I against them, me, and the devil. And now they wanted me to let go and even cease from that struggle. Not gonna happen."

"I was overflowing energy, and they came in endless lines like ants to each take a part of my nervousness, my energy. They consumed me, willing it seemed to suffer any abuse from my person, but they kept on eating me, taking my pain away."

## JOURNAL: I WAS MY PAIN

Context: When we become (identify with) our pain, and if pain is how we know ourselves or remember, then to lose that pain or to let it go is synonymous with dying or falling back unconscious — a terrifying thought and state of mind. Entry:

"And at this point, I WAS my pain. My pain was all I had, all I had ever known up to that point. Pain stood between me and that melting sea of mediocrity, where no difference remained. I did not have the faith that I could let go and still be distinct, still be me if I let go and fell into that sea of silence. I fought all attempts, signals, and messengers of peace.

"After a life of nothing, of being no one, at last I had tasted real life and was 'someone.' I had known myself and the joy of overcoming time or Saturn. It was as if I had taken my first breath and was afraid to let it go out, so much did I value it. I did not have the faith that another breath would ever come. This is why they used to spank newborn infants, to get them breathing. Life was kind enough to knock my breath out for me."

## JOURNAL: REFUSING TO BREATHE

Context: Becoming attached to our spiritual experiences and clinging to them is another common way to suffer in the Jupiter chakra. We all do it to some degree:

"Not ever having known the experience of breathing, I was indeed being born, but this infant refused to breathe, refused to accept breath or change — the rising and falling cycles of our lives. Life had to knock the breath out of me to start me breathing. And so, it did, and gradually I could breathe."

"I wanted so badly spiritual knowledge and enlightenment that I clung to the high side of each life experience, clawing to get away from the heavier material side of this world until, exhausted, I would fall senseless back into time's arms, only to awake later, terrified, and struggle all over again. It was like trying to climb up out of the center of a deep lake. I wanted out of the body forever. I did not know that all out ends turning in, or returning. I knew nothing yet of the returns of life."

#### JOURNAL: ROAMING PURGATORY

Context: Something we all are intimately familiar with, but seldom discuss, are questions of personal power or the lack thereof. Not being able to let go of people and experiences that strike us, and struggles with personal power, the power of the personality are pretty much standard fare, and have to be negotiated on a daily basis. Spiritual experiences and insight, before these experience have settled into some kind of stable realization, are fraught with all manner of very real

problems. For example:

"And so, I roamed the purgatories of my existence, just burning and burning. And rising through this waking dream came the great spinning wheels of Pride, as I attempted, again and again, to lay personal claim to the power of the spirit, to make it 'mine.' Again and again, I would know awareness for seconds or days and yet, sooner or later, I would make the fatal attempt to associate that power as somehow my 'personal' power, only to plunge into yet some new kind of hell."

"And there I remained, in that torment, until I could find some way to surrender, let go again, and to open myself. This was never more obvious than when I was with others. I was, during that time, in total confusion as to who I was. And, if I was who I, in moments, knew myself to be (having had some realization), what did this mean in my personal life? Was everyone like me? Was I the only one? The answers to these questions found me struggling through other persons with my self and my 'God'."

JOURNAL: PRIDE'S EXAMPLES.

Context: Pride and feeling superior to others is another very painful state of mind, filled with intense suffering, and one that can take years to work through:

"... As he rises above them, they raise their weapons. As

he sinks back, they relax. As he becomes in all his strength, they unite to hold him back. As he gives away his strength, they once again support him. He controls himself = self control. His struggles attract their attention, and they seek to ease his pain, to assist him to relax."

"They guide and direct his energies. They give all they can to him. They take away his pain, his nervousness, and share it with him. They take his pain on themselves. The light of spirit does not penetrate the flesh. They flock to him, because he is dead to this world and cannot hurt them, yet he does not know this yet ..."

#### JOURNAL: SELF-RELIANCE

Context: At this point in the Jupiter chakra, we can't yet live with our new realization and we sure can't live without it, so we are torn between two seemingly opposing worlds, the world of God and the world of the devil, push me, pull you. Matters of self-reference are thorny, even to philosophers and psychologists. Imagine what they are like to a young person, trying to figure out which piece of the pie might be his or hers. This is when shamanic counseling can be a real help. Journal entry:

"I left off at listening to my inner dictation and became fascinated and terrified at what I saw reflected in the mirror of my exterior world, especially through interpersonal relationships. I sweated through moments



in total fear for my life, in fear that all would pounce on me, and tear me apart for what I was thinking about them. I knew that all thoughts were a common experience, and that there was no such thing as privacy, but had not yet been able to accept others as I accepted myself, as a reflection of me. I was dualistic, and it hurt:"

"I was lost in thoughts about personal power and self-reference, in checking the IDs of every person I met to see if they 'knew' what I now knew, when I could remember to know it."

"I became the censor of all persons. I tested them to the quick. I fought to keep possession of my powers, and never even thought that this might be what is called "personal power" — the power of the personality. I became enamored with being a "great" person or genius in my own time:

"You are too much for this century, little man. You bloom embarrassingly along Main Street. You delight to pain and terror the businessmen. You ARE too much."

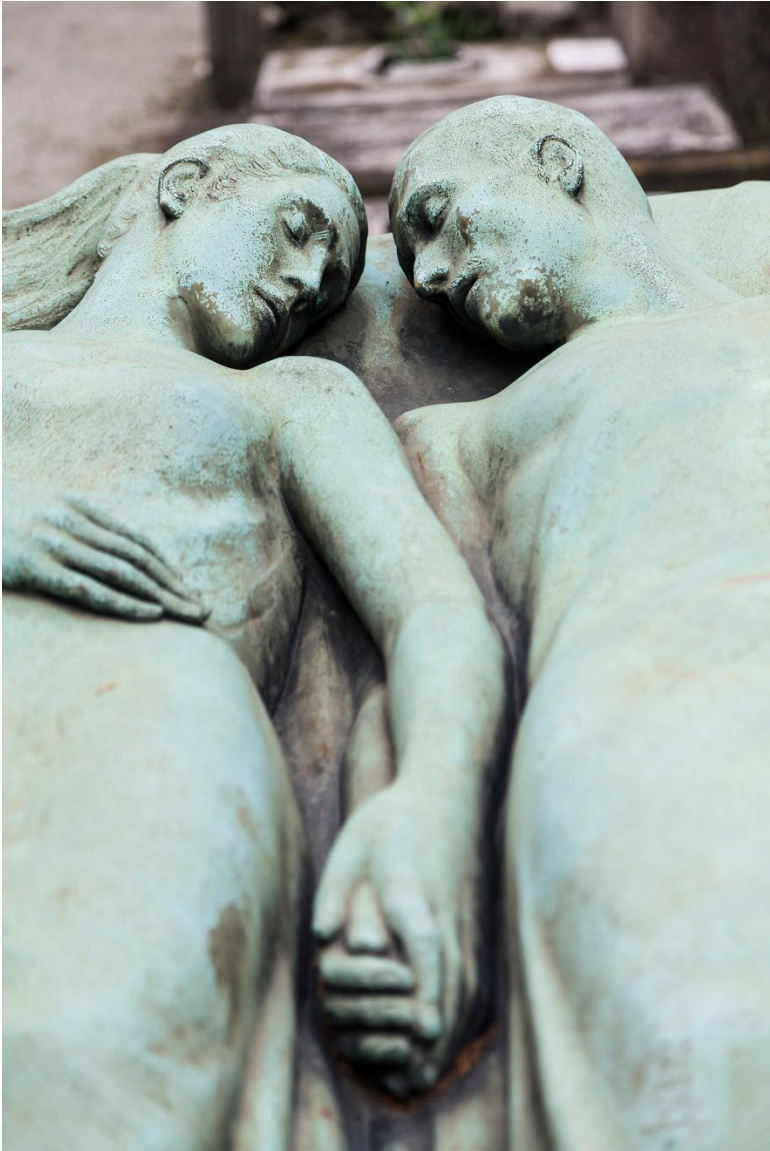
"How could they bear you at once? But a pinch is all they will ever know. You have seized the time, and your grasp froze to life itself. Your happiness, time and again, emerges behind them, yet first. You hold them in a cloud and waft them on to nowhere, hold them back from their future, their fate, and their destiny. You kiss them on the fly, and they are so shocked that they

emerge in that moment. A conversation and meeting, and then they fly on over life in their coffins. What woman waits senseless fated for your love? "

And now, we are going to transition to the Mars chakra.

Or, here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart"  
(2022)

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>



## THE MARS CHAKRA

### JOURNAL: I AM LED TO THE SEA OF LOVE

April 1, 2022

[This is the next-to-the-last article in this series on esoteric astrology, the Mars Chakra, which is concerned with the activity that generates space, and this includes activity and reaction, as well as emotions, meaning, and marriage. Mars (emotion) is the key to Jupiter (Intellect and direction), and Earth (non-dualism) is the key to Mars, which will be the final article.]

Context: Trial and error, trial and error, that is how we learn. In time, very slowly, and usually through a lot of personal anguish, we gradually stabilize and do move forward. Our stability is commensurate with our unbalance, with our "sins." I wrote:

"Gradually, I righted myself and slowly built a vehicle in which some kind of normal life was possible. I gathered around me the whole body of occult literature and searched through endless thousands of pages for the meaning in it all. I was certain that, given time, I could figure it out. The new god which, I came to worship was the god of 'Meaning' — deeper, deeper meaning, deepest, heavy, grave. Through all of my search, I thought to find the very bottom of, the grave of, truth — gravity. Across this vast intellectual framework crawled I, and became an expert on verbal gravity, the specific

density of words and phrases. Gradually I came to this (for me) most shocking realization: All thought depends on its meaning."

## JOURNAL: THE SENSE OF LIFE

Context: Jupiter maps the vast extent of the mind, of thinking, and complicated intellectual frameworks. It is no accident that the most terrible lightning storms in the solar system occur on the planet Jupiter. The lightning of the mind strikes again and again, but the life of the mind gradually dries up, ceases to satisfy, and, in time, is gladly traded for actual real-life experience. I was finally getting stabilized:

"The essence of thought was what it means or conveys — the sense of it. The world of thought stretching around eternity all finds its end or meaning in the sense it makes, the sense world — the senses. All thought and thinking only ends in action or simple existence — experience. This was, for me, a profound realization. I would never have guessed it."

"My joy in the life of the mind slowly had dried up, for all my intellectual studies, however refined, depended on what it all meant. Meaning is not intellectual, but sensual. I could intellectually talk about what it meant, but unless I had experienced myself what it meant, I didn't 'know' what I was talking about. In other words, MEANING is a simple act of referral, nothing more than

a pointer that says: over there is the sense of it. Experience it for yourself. Go and see for yourself. Feel of it. Know it."

#### JOURNAL: BALBOA AND THE SEA OF SENSE.

Context: Reaching the brink of the Mars chakra is a major initiation, which amounts to getting engaged and beginning, perhaps for the first time, to understand what the term marriage might actually be all about. It is humbling for the intellectual to discover that all thought, all words of philosophy or what-have-you, are dependent on what they mean, and meaning is a simple act of referral, a pointer that points out where this can be experienced and known. Amazed:"

"Suddenly the world of the senses stretched before me, an almost unknown and discarded item in the diet of my life. I had done all I could to avoid physical contact and had driven myself high into my head to keep from feeling anything 'wrong.' And now, in all justice, my thoughts (and esoteric studies) had led me (their every conclusion the same) to that ocean of feelings, the senses — the sea of love. I had no idea!

"I stood like Balboa before an endless sea of sense, all the sense in the world. All I had to do was to jump in. It was the end of the intellect, for I was about to lose my mind forever, and no longer to mind every last thing that came to pass, whistling through my world, into

eternity. I entered this sea of sense like a middle-aged old maid enters a very cold swimming pool, by inches and degrees, and shivering all the time. In my own way, I TOOK THE PLUNGE."

## MARS IS THE ACTIVITY THAT GENERATE SPACE

Mars is the energy that moves us. The kind of energy or activity that we have determines our personal atmosphere or aura: the kind of room or space in which we have to live, our living room. The kind of our living room determines how we feel about our life — comfortable or cramped.

Mars is the bringing across of spirit or room into matter, the injection of space into time, of anti-matter into matter. An injection of Mars energy frees things up and creates an atmosphere for things to move and re-form. Mars expands time with space or room. The kind of room or atmosphere in which we have to work determines the way we work — the kind of our action. Mars has come to represent the sphere of action, the kind of way we do things. Mars is our way of working, the possibility of work. Mars is the energy or room that makes work possible.

## MARS IS MEANING

Adrenaline, activity (Mars) creates space and space orders (Jupiter) time (Saturn). The room or space we

each have to live in - call it our aura - "effects" how we experience life, how life feels to us. Mars is how we feel about life, the kind of "living" room we personally have.

Mars is meaning, or the direct road to meaning. The meaning of something is how we feel about or toward it, like a blind man feels about a corridor. It is an active feeling of a thing on our part, an action or movement.

The Martian world is the world of sense and feeling or pushing our way along. How we feel about life is the key to success. Mars is the Key to Jupiter.

#### JOURNAL: THE VISION OF MARS IS OUR MARRIAGE

Context: The following is pretty much self-explanatory and self-documenting, as marriage is something our society does celebrate, but not much is spoken of about the process of engagement, the road that leads to marriage.

When the Mars chakra is awakened, one begins to feel and not think so much. Jupiter is about thinking and calculating, without feeling — handling the law. With Mars, one learns to feel and not always think. The world of feelings and the senses is the path to actual experience, and experience leads to knowing.

Marriage is a change of life or perspective as natural as the physical change at puberty. The vision that leads to



engagement and marriage, union, and yoga is a major initiation in any lifetime. Some take another person as a sign of their marriage, and others are married to their work in this world. Any way you spell it, marriage is the end of personal affairs. Mine was like this:

"It was that fast! One minute I was talking to another person that I had just met, and the next saw me through her person standing in eternity. Bells rang and lights went on, just like I was always told. I finally got the point. After having spent years at constant attention and worry that I might miss my wife in the shuffle of life (pass her by in an awkward moment of non-recognition or inattention), the reality was ironic to say the least. How could I have ever missed her, for she was to be my very wife. In fact, there was no way in the world that I could have avoided HER."

JOURNAL: MARRIAGE IS QUITE AN AFFAIR.

Context: The discovery of the unity in all dualisms marks the point of engagement with the actual physical body of life itself. It is the end of living only in the mind. By "unity in all dualisms," I simply mean that after a lifetime of dualistic thinking (you versus another), you realize that in fact that the two are already (and have always been) one. Here is an example of how that might come about:

"The actuality of the moment of marriage was nothing

like I had anticipated. For years I had sponsored an impression that marriage was like the joining or fusion of two spirits into a union or 'One'. The great spirit that I had come to recognize as my real self was looking for another 'great one,' with whom to join together in a marriage of the two. But that was not it!

"What WAS totally clear when I met my wife, for the first time in my life, was that there were no two spirits to be found. We were already, everlastingly ONE. There is one and only one Spirit. Not some spirit over there in her body tying up with my spirit here, but one Spirit and two bodies. My 'alone' had become 'all-one.' I was 'one' with my wife. We were already one and not two. Or as the great Les McCann jazz tune puts it: 'Compared to What?'"

#### JOURNAL: THE DEWROP SLIPS INTO THE SHINING SEA

Context: The bigger the front, the bigger the back is an old Macrobiotic axiom. I suppose that "the bigger they come, the harder they fall" says the same thing. That's what falling in love is all about, once you tip over the top and start to fall, it is one heck of a ride. There is no going back! Responding to another person is the key to the Mars chakra. Journal:

"My overriding experience was one of response, response to her person, and not to her spirit. Not another spirit. For the first time in my life, I responded

and cared for another person as much as I did for myself. I responded to, rather than resisted, her personality, and in the opening of that second was swept away a lifetime of fear of OTHER persons.

"The dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

"So, this is what that dreaded word "responsibility" really meant -my ability to respond or love. After a lifetime of pushing forward, I was at last responding, and all I wanted to do was to endlessly care and provide for the unfolding of this person before me. I felt protective for the first time and wanted to forever serve and assist in the care and the fulfillment of the one spirit. And this particular person just happened to be the one through which I first realized this experience. I took it as a good sign, and she became my wife. I was never to fear persons and the power of persons again, although the purification process was to go on.

And so far, so good. As of 2022, we are looking at our 51st wedding anniversary.

#### JOURNAL: WHY MARRIAGE IS LIKE A FUNERAL

Context: As we move out of the intellectual sphere of Jupiter, where handling a problem was more a matter of manipulation (how to handle it) than understanding, we increasingly engage the experience of life itself. Where before it was "us or them," now we are beginning to see,

in reality, it is "us and them," and search for a unified solution. Once the dualistic concept of two becomes one in our experience (when we are engaged), we have no more enemy "out there," and have to change our behavior. Entry:

"Marriage is the end of our personal existence. I had been a warrior of truth, wielding the sword of the mind (Jupiter) and cutting any excess to the heart. I spared neither persons nor institutions but went from victory to victory over time in my mind.

"Marriage is the union between subject and object. The two are seen to be, in fact, one. No more 'enemy.' I was out of a job, so to speak, in that, by the fact of marriage, I chose to 'lay down my sword and shield... down by the river...' of life and to study war (Mars) no more."

For I had become one with the Martian sphere. It was the end of life as I had known it. It was like being at my own funeral.

#### JOURNAL: RELIEVED OF DUTY

Context: When we begin to get beyond the reach of time or Saturn, that is, after we are about thirty years of age, we gradually lose the push and rush of time that drove us all these years. If we do not know to look for it, to expect it, this experience of peace can be frightening, as this entry shows:

"To be relieved, finished, the one thing I had never expected. Maybe at life's long end of eighty or ninety years, sure; it might make sense. But now, in the prime of my powers, in the middle of my life? To be relieved of duty? Are you kidding me?"

"No one ever told me about it. I heard no talk of it. I didn't read about it anywhere. Am I the only one? Am I to remain silent? Who is even interested? No one seems to notice.

"Relieved of duty in the middle of the war, I must be a traitor. I must have made some terrible mistake, to be relieved. I mean, I looked forward to a life long-filled with searching and suffering. And now this, this terrible guilt of non-involvement, of really not caring like I used to care, and I would rather die than not care. Caring did not mean love to me; it meant worry and suffering continued. To be carefree, this I never thought to ask for. I had lost my edge, my suffering."

## PEACE TERRIFIES

Context: When time stops at thirty years of age, we begin to enter the "silence," as it has been called. It is easy to fall into the view that we have lost something, and that we are of no use, when in reality we are just beginning our voyage of spiritual discovery. Here:

"It is like someone turned off the engine, as far as we personally are concerned. All at once, this great silence and sense of peace, and when you first begin to hear the silence, it terrifies. We can now see younger persons still driving and pushing their birth, yet we don't feel that old drive like we once did.

"There is the feeling that we are somehow washed up, finished. We have lost that old drive or 'thing' which made us, ourselves. And all of this unspoken or, unmentioned in public conversation, simply ignored. As I can see, many just cannot accept this change, and wander stunned in a stupor and state of shock for years, or fill their lives with noise and activity — anything to drown the sense of silence and rest that they feel.

"Lifted out of our life's sorrow, we refuse to acknowledge the incredible and obvious lightness of being we now feel. Unburdened, enlightened, we feel no gravity or weight. Up until now, life beckoned and lured me running fast through time's meanings. What does it mean? What does it all mean? Where is it all leading to? What exactly is the point? And then, this: Silence."

#### JOURNAL: THE SHELL OF THE SELF.

Context: What is called the middle-age crisis can come much earlier than that, and many who experience this make all the noise and busyness they can, in an attempt to cover up the sense of inner peace and silence they

now feel coming over them. For myself, I struggled hard against it, with all my might:

"I tried desperately to get back into my old self, to get into other people, into my work, anything but face what was actually happening. I was forced to continue living in the shell of a body, the life of which had now passed on into the hands of younger persons who cared for life now like I used to. I simply wanted to be alone, and to not be disturbed in this, my terrible loss. It was like a funeral, and I was in mourning.

"Perhaps more than anything else, I was mortally embarrassed that, after all my years of fierce aggressive intent, of meaning well, better than average, 'BEST!', to be now caught short, found empty. Me, who had always been so full, now empty. I did not have the heart to continue on in my life's direction, which had suddenly just evaporated.

"There was no 'more' out there. I turned aside, hoping to lose myself in hard work. I had no plans, no future, no 'more.' But I was to discover that I could not even rest in peace in the grave I had made for myself. After some extended period of time, disturbed by every passing thing, I at last gave up 'giving up,' and resigned myself to return to the world to do what I could."

AWAKE IN MY OWN DREAM

Awakening to the Martian or emotional sphere is the end of ignorance. It is like rising from some torpid dream, rubbed awake by our attention's endless demands. We wake from our dream of ignorance, much like when, in our daily sleep, we dream of getting up and getting ourselves a drink of water. Again and again we get up and drink that water, yet we are thirsty, for we are still asleep and cannot raise ourselves to the physical act.

Spiritual awakening, at least after that first flash, is like that. We try to shake off the irritating demands on our attention, so that we might dream on undisturbed, but these demands become increasingly sharp, until we are literally rubbed awake in response.

This constant nagging at us is just plain annoying, and at first we attempt to get rid of it, to quickly attend to these irritating demands on our attention, so that we can return to our sleep. Yet, they only increase in strength, and in the end, their persistence is stronger than our ability to sleep. We find ourselves forced to wake, and reluctantly responding more and more of the time, until our entire life seems to be one of complete response to the demands and questions of our person or of other persons. Our action has become passive.

## A LIFE OF RESPONSE

And many come to this, the ability to respond, very slowly. For most young people, "responsibility" has long been something to be avoided and put off. Yet we soon



find ourselves identifying more strongly with our waking state of perpetual care and attention to life's demands, than for our once-longed-for dream of more sleep. One day it strikes us that we are now living what we had only dreamed about before. We have made our dreams real or have somehow awakened in our own dream. We are now taking care of ourselves, like we would take care of a garden of flowers, giving constant care and attention to whatever needs and demands present themselves for our attention. In this state of constant attention, we discover the heart of all meaning to be: simple existence itself. We are waking to the Earth sphere and the Heart Center chakra.

#### JOURNAL: AWAKENING IN RESPONSE

Context: When we cease to struggle with our new-found peace, and allow ourselves to fall to rest, to accept, all the remains of our previous life, what has been held down, what we could call our subconscious (or placenta) begin to rise to the surface and has to be looked at and dealt with:

"Bobbing at the surface to bloom. Opening now. Letting go. Letting it go. Letting it go on. Allowing it to go on. As if I could stop it anyway."

"My acceptance and cessation of struggle against the world released all of the material that I had repressed or ignored through all of the years of my intellect's

domination. All of the unrealized desires began to present themselves in an endless procession before me, each with its very plain demand. The world of sense, of the flesh and body that I had ignored for so many years, came to mind. A phrase that my teacher had told me over and over now began to make sense. He said, "Michael, the student closes the door. The teacher never closes the door, and the day will come when the winds of change will blow that door wide open, and there will be nothing we can do to stop it."

"I had no alternative but to look. I feared that, as I started to look, I would be swept into that sea of sense, never to be heard from again —tormented by lust and unfulfilled desires, a pornographic idiot staring till doomsday at all the bodies that he wouldn't let himself see enough of before.

#### JOURNAL: TAKE A GOOD LOOK

Context: Whatever we have pushed back or under in our past, that which has been subconscious until now, is free to rise to our attention, and cries out to be taken care of, once and for all. As we take an ever-increasing embrace of life, we are no longer clinging to the top of the pyramid, but begin to accept more and more of the raw stuff of life that we have put out of our mind (and experience) previously:

"The corner of the eye glance became the: 'TAKE A

GOOD LOOK FELLA.' All of this came to a head as I was led into the sea of senses, or should I say: at this point I lost my head for good. I was at last losing my minding of every last thing. My head had roamed far in front of my heart for many years, and my heart found it very hard to carry out all of the dictates or orders of my head. It became clear to me that just because I was ahead (a head) of my times did not mean that I personally felt like carrying all these ideas into effect. It became a choice between a life lived in slave labor to ideas that I did not feel like or have the heart to follow, and sacrificing some of my ideals of conduct to get the sense of it, some feeling."

"It seemed preferable for me to perhaps die several years earlier (and perhaps from a worse disease), but to have enjoyed my life in the fulfillment of what I personally was able to do, that is: to have relaxed, than to live to be a hundred and yet be totally uptight in discipline — a curse to myself and to all who had to know me. I guess you would call my new reasoning: moderation in all things, including moderation. I was to have a little excess."

#### JOURNAL: OUT TO PASTURE

Context: Along with whatever else from our past comes up or rises to our attention, our own personality is at the top of the list. Even with a new vision, there is only so much we can do to retrofit and modernize our person.

We have to learn to care for it as we would a stranger:

"The metaphysical point I am elaborating here is simple: I turned my personality out to pasture at this point. I began to care and love and give it what it needed to be happy, what it needed to fulfill itself. I did not give it what my intellect thought it should have (to be strictly correct), but I gave it what it needed in order to feel some sense of relaxation. I let my person do more or less what it felt like doing. I respected its needs, as I would those of a stranger's needs under my care. I began for the first time in my life to put on a little weight, to get over my fear and avoidance of money — to enjoy myself. I had steadfastly refused everything of a physical or sensual nature for so many years in some vain attempt to deny my materiality."

"You would be wrong if you interpret this as indicating that I thought the dictates of my intellect were not true. I know they are very true. I still plan to take all the changes that my head can see, only gradually, as I am able to feel like taking them, and not just because they are there or possible. And I can see some changes will remain for my children to take, that I may not get around to feeling like enacting. I have learned that we must be able to feel our changes as well as see them. I have nothing to offer my children, if I cannot give them a whole, full-feeling and joyous father. It is better that I have all the vices of my century, but have love for my

wife, children, and this creation, love not just in my mind, but acted out, in the flesh and with feeling.”

## CLEARING THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Context: Opening up our own past subconscious is not something we have any choice about, if we want to have a clear mind. Opening our mind means allowing whatever we have kept out to rush in, and so it does:

I have too little space to present here all of the material that I feel should be reviewed in approaching the opening out of the subconscious. The psychic world or world of our subconscious is just that: sub or beneath our consciousness, beneath the ground of our conscious mind. By definition, we cannot take our conscious intellect into this sphere, but must leave it by the shore of the senses and proceed farther by feeling our way, very much like you might feel around for your shoes in the dark. Learning to feel our way around without thinking (to experience life) takes a whole lot of bravery and practice. It is like learning a whole new sense, and it takes years of experience to become confident in what you feel. I want briefly to mention some of the material we might encounter when we first accept our feelings, actively experience them, and permit them to rise into our consciousness, after perhaps years of ignoring them.

## THE SEWER

First, it is very like taking the seal off a sewer, in that there is in most modern consciousness a lot of rotten material that has spent years stagnating and dying to come up. So, don't expect a beauty parade when you first begin to feel and experience this material consciously. This is not something you can just do in the privacy of your own home, but, once you begin to relieve yourself, it is something that will happen wherever you happen to be. You will be in everybody's subconscious as well, with all the cesspools in the world at your fingertips.

What do I mean cesspools? I mean the countless strangled desires, thoughts, and dreams that were cut off by the tyranny of the intellect or conscious mind, or that society insists we repress. All of the bodies that were never looked at, never felt, never loved — all of the gentle wishes that were shoved out of realization to become twisted characterizations of themselves, all of the many parts of yourself that you have ignored or that your society and upbringing ignored. All of this material desperately needs care and attention or at least the last rites, if not complete resurrection — all of the anger, frustration, horror, and hells we have repressed ourselves to live in.

## OPEN SUBCONSCIOUS

The subconscious, first viewed, can be like a raging beast, openly realizing all the wounds of a lifetime. We

cannot personally realize all of these broken dreams. Many of our desires will have been so twisted that it is very hard to find any way to bring them out to relief. What we can do is to look directly at them, recognize them for what they are and, in this realization, put them to rest, one by one, forever. We can trace our feelings down through all this frustrated material to find the source itself, the fountain from which all life and feelings flow, and redirect this flow to good use and a new life. It is like water that muddies when stirred. The stirred-up mud will flow off and there will, in time, be just clear water in its place.

In summary, through the Mars chakra, we learn to "feel" all over again, to feel pure and true. When we say all parts of ourselves, we mean to say that this extends to all persons, to everyone, for we are it all. We all share the same subconscious, which is little more than the product of our times, a social convention. There is nothing weird about subconscious work. It is all too ordinary, all the obvious that waits for someone to recognize and care for it — a great shadow. Only those who can respond to their own feelings and subconscious content can pass through this great shadow to know the light of the heart within.

#### JOURNAL: THE POETRY

Context: What is left after the subconscious, which is nothing but our own personal past, is clarified as quite

clear, a free-floating consciousness, like a lotus, riding on top of the flux of life. It can be put into words:

"No matter what you think about me, about my person, I know in time you will learn to recognize me as yourself, and you will love me, as I have learned to love myself, as I have learned to love you, like it or not. My person has not changed. How could it, truly? For person is the product of time, and my person — like a freight train — rushes on at the future. It always has. Only I, stepping off my person, am with you now.

"I am myself. I turned off time's endless matter at thirty. I dropped my body or sense of gravity. It proceeds on without me or rather: with my perpetual care and love.

"But I am not only my person. I am, as well, one with the creator of my body, of any body.

"My faith informs me. Each day's passage frees and reveals my past, 'presents' my past, and clears it open. Where before was but an endless accumulation, layer on layer, is now removed with every passing day. And as the layers lift, it is clear to me that there is nothing there worth worrying. All the past lives I have are presently living, are become clear. Nothing to go back to, no place to hide, no cover.

"I am born free, held awake by all that lives. Where before I could not keep my eyes open, so now I cannot



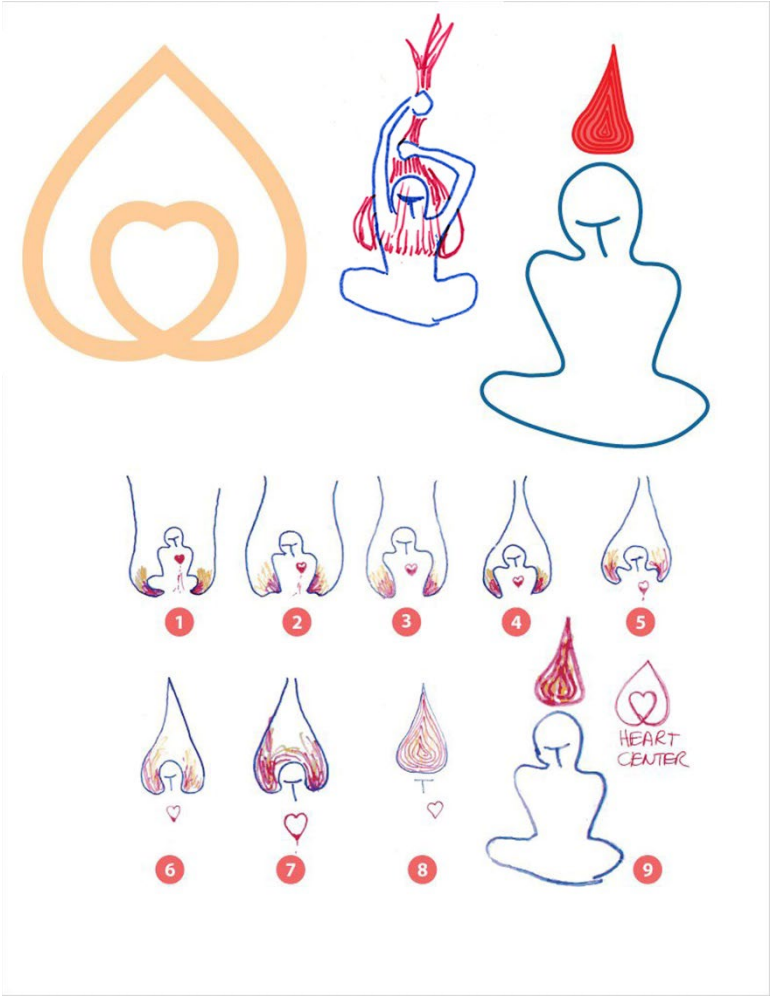
shut or close them. No closure. From my subconscious pours my past. Cloudiness clearing, it is my present. My placenta is being born, turning out all of that which nourished me.

"I can clearly see all that clouds this stream of consciousness is but a searching, is itself but a frowning, a looking to see, a pause, a hesitation that, caught and unfurled in the eddies of time, becomes clear and, laughing, I leave it go clear and turn from a darkening or dimming of my mind to light. And it came to pass, and I let it pass."

And the next post will be about awakening to the Earth Chakra or 'Heart Center.'"

Or, here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>



## JOURNAL: AWAKENING OF THE EARTH OR 'HEART CENTER'

April 2, 2022

[This is the final article for this brief course in esoteric astrology. I know; it is a lot of reading and can probably only register with the very few, yet those few may find it useful. At the end of this piece is a link to the complete course of these and other articles on this esoteric topic. Thanks to those who powered through. May it be useful. The enclosed illustration, which I made decades ago is a signature of my own access to the Earth Chakra, and resulted in the logo for this initiation. It is the logo for our dharma center. ]

### THE HEART CENTER

Context: After our Saturn return, we can float above and just beyond time, held aloft by all that is. This is not something that requires any action on our parts, but just the reverse: we must learn to sit back and ride, pushed forward by all the changes of life around us. Journal entry:

"The morning's brightness lights the day. And when that day is gone, the quietness of evening here approaching settles to sleep this restless world. Hard can I hear the frantic rush, as I turn away from the edge out into

floating rest am I. It is not my conscious direction doing this, but as a head down-turned all life now turns up a blossom to the night. The night of time urges me open, at last a flower, too, open to life. Already the dawn.

"Still, around me, urging caution, a retinue of persons set my spirit, like a jewel is set, in time. But where before my worry, now my rest. The tide rolls on beyond me. Ever changing, it rocks me now asleep. And in my sleep, awake am I, so clear a bell is ringing.

"The smart of person's lash and crack to drive me at time's edge. My personal ties are slipped, as floating out, I'm gently tugged. Too long have fought to force my thought, and not, at ease, arising like some cloud to pass. My work undone, yet done, I rise. Drifting through strains, I sieve, and pass myself, open out to nothing thoughts to touch back not once more. A clear sleep is soft, it's ever blooming sound is silence. Now to find my way among the slips of time. And slip I will, now lost to striving, and lounge in this room of emptiness. To lie back in time, behind its edge, and ever look eternally.

"No way to pass this on. This is: passing on. Slamming against the walls of time, I shove off into eternity.

Spread open a flower, so wide."

THE EARTH CHAKRA

## The Earth Is the Heart of Meaning

The Earth or Heart Chakra is the KEY to Mars. Mars is feeling, directionality, and meaning, and the Earth is the essence of what it all means — the heart of meaning.

Earth is itself what it means, where it all leads to — meaning, motion and Mars is ever referring itself onward. Earth is the end of that referral, where the buck stops and the 'Silence' begins..

Earth is its own meaning. This is where we are, the Heart center of Buddha, the Christ Center itself, the "I AM THAT I AM," and for no other reason — simple existence. This is it! On the planet Earth, we stand between the inner and outer planets, the balancing point, the middle way, the son, the communion between the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We cannot see with our physical eyes beyond the Earth center, for all that is visible is the blinding Self or Sun of the eternal union between matter and spirit. The Sun is shining! Beyond the Earth (Sun), veiled behind this flashing Sun, is the mystery of the godhead itself.

The Earth sphere is where the crucifixion takes place, what has been called by poets the "terrible crystal." The personal ties of time (the dragon), in this center, lose their hold and merge with the divine will.

## JOURNAL: EVERLASTING LIFE

Context: The concept of the Monad, very briefly presented earlier in these articles is that of the entire process of the Sun endlessly generating life, tended by the souls who happen to be spiritually awake at any given time, as this poem portrays:

### EVERLASTING LIFE

What will in words not wake,  
Clear sleeps,  
And clear, sleeps on.  
What wakes stands watch to see that sleep as sound.

What wakes will serve to set a sleep,  
Inset a sleep with standing words,  
That wake, if ever, last .  
And on that "last," in overlay, our life.

Yes, to lay at the last a life that ever lives,  
To ever last that "last" of life,

And in ever "lasting " life, everlasting,  
We have a life that lives at last.

## JOURNAL: THE CONSUMMATION OF THE MARRIAGE

### THE CHILD OR 'HEART CENTER'

Context: Reaching the Earth or Heart Center is what our life's journey is all about. We cannot know peace or rest until we have achieved this, until we have taken possession of Earth, our heritage by birthright. At this point, we have come a long way. Our awakening within Saturn, and the struggle for simple survival and to somehow find a way through life, the province of the Jupiter chakra, is behind us. We have mastered that.

Our search for something more meaningful, through the Mars chakra, has led to our embracing (accepting) all of life, just as it is — marriage. We accept life as it is because that is how it is. It would be foolish to do otherwise.

All of this has led us to the very center of our self, or as Hegel said so well:

"We go behind the curtain of the Self, to see what is there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen."

The opening of the Earth of Heart center is what follows, which involves holding life within us, as we would hold a newborn child. Here is how it was for me:

"The birth of our first child was heralded by a spectacular series of visions and revelations. It was like waking up repeatedly from dream within dream. The finale at the fireworks display is stunning!

"I had accepted our pregnancy in the traditional way: I hoped for the best and prepared for the worst. It never occurred to me that childbirth was a sign of deep change in my spiritual nature, or that it meant anything more than the physical act of learning to care for a child."

#### JOURNAL: CHILDBIRTH

"What did I know about kids? I knew nothing of children. I avoided them, like I avoided every other part of my life that commanded my attention, and whose attention I could not command. I had seen children around, in the outskirts of my life, but never where they could get at me, never where I had no choice. I guess in my accustomed style, I prepared myself for the worst, and yet hoped for the best."

"As a matter of fact, childbirth has changed me in deep and real ways, changed me beyond recognition. It is change itself. I now understand why the world has a population problem. I was not (perhaps) married when I married, but I did become a father when I had a child."

"As if my life were not hectic enough, I had no job. My wife and I knew little better to do with our time than to fight with one another. Our dog was pregnant again, and again, against our will. And now a child. I guess I had all of the typical thoughts about children, of the cynical variety, that this was the living end of our



freedom, that we had really done it this time, had finally done something that we couldn't easily wriggle out of. Along with this programmed variety of thought came others of a more uplifting nature, basically an acceptance of the fact as a sign of its necessity. As I like to tell myself: it was permitted."

#### JOURNAL: LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW

Context: More on the opening of the Earth or Heart chakra.

"And there was an ever-growing joy (at first hard to feel) that this was really the most important thing that had ever happened to us in our lives. This last idea grew, shattering the shells of all the others before it, and progressively overcame us with the steadiness of love."

"Our child was conceived in a rare moment of deep tenderness and openness between us. As the pregnancy moved along, it drew us together and gave us something more substantial to relate to than our own endless differences. This pregnancy was a very happy time for both my wife and I, a time during which we enjoyed each other more than we had ever before. And time after time would find us sitting — during those last days — like high birds looking out the window at: absolutely nothing at all."

#### JOURNAL: THROUGH GOD'S LOOKING GLASS

Context: More on the opening of the Earth or Heart chakra.

"I had an interesting experience one evening, while visiting my brother and his wife who had a newborn little girl. This was not long before we became pregnant. And as I was talking to him, I noticed he was not really listening to my conversation. I turned to see what could be more important and found him looking into his little daughter's eyes like he was looking out an open window from a stuffy room. It was at that instant (unconsciously perhaps) when I realized that there was more to having a child than a headache. I believe I wanted one too."

#### JOURNAL: A MIDWIFE OF THE SPIRIT

One very important event that happened just before our child's birth was our meeting a 'Unity' minister, a Black woman in her fifties, who was to be our teacher in so many ways. I don't think there is an easy description for what she was or did. She was a very strong believer in what she called "Divine Love."

I thought nothing out of the ordinary when I first met her (I was interviewing another astrologer on a radio program and she came along to support him), until she began to retell an account of how she had removed a tumor from her own body. I went on with my own thoughts. There were several of us listening. When she

had finished her account, everyone gathered around remarked at what a powerful story they had just heard. At this point I realized that, although I had felt the power in what she had said, I could not remember one single word of it. I had not been listening to her words at all. Instead, I had been looking deep, very deep within her at her feelings or emotional state — her subconscious. And, as I gazed, I saw that she was so deeply expressive and so careful not to let the world know how deeply she had been hurt and had suffered.

#### JOURNAL: MY HEART WENT OUT

Context: This entry has to do with how we can recognize when we have found a mentor or teacher.

“My heart went out to this soul, for certainly did I understand the state of her being. I understood so very well indeed. I felt that I could help this person to become stronger and to bear her inner sufferings out into the world. She had so much love inside her, if she could only realize that the ideas and thoughts that she presented to others, that she felt so important to maintain, were not important at all. The sheer immensity of her very presence dwarfed anything her intellect had to say about it.”

“This is how I met one of my life teachers, and need I tell you that it was many, many months before I could stand to realize that much of what I saw in her was just my

own self, reflected in her long-gone mirror. She was able to reflect in its entirety my whole personal drama, without a ripple of confusion, and I saw inside myself how it was with me, although I thought I was seeing her and how it was with her.”

“My wife and I saw a lot of this woman directly after our meeting. She would drive all the way from Detroit to our house in Ann Arbor, time after time. At first, I insisted on ministering to her, and giving her my readings of her problems, but in time, as I realized that all I was seeing as her was but my own reflection, I ceased to feel obliged to lecture her, and took up actively the contemplation of this great window of eternity.”

And, for those interested, this is one of the primary ways one knows when one has encountered a mentor or life teacher, by reflection. Real teachers reflect not their nature, but our own, and we are not used to seeing our own reflection through others. We think we are meeting them, but we are finally meeting ourselves. Watch for this.

#### JOURNAL: THE HEART CENTER

“One morning, not long after meeting this teacher, and after a particularly unsatisfying long night of conversation with an occult scholar, I awoke feeling as if my head were encased in cement. Then something very different occurred. I found myself (without thinking)

dropping to the floor and going through quite automatically some very odd contortion-like exercise.”

“And as I worked, my body began to shake and nauseate me, and slowly I worked over my head — like pulling off a sock inside out — and cast off the heavy sickness of feeling that had occurred from the night before. I was shedding my mental skin just like a snake. With this experience came a symbol to my mind that expressed this process and it has become the symbol we are using in our work here.”

“When I told my teacher about this strange exercise, she laughed, and told me the name of it, and that it was one of her exercises. This was the first of the many truths that came to us through her, quite unconsciously on my part, almost by a system of osmosis. We continued to work together for many years, and my wife and I have spent some of our dearest moments with this woman.”  
We named our first child after her.

## JOURNAL: THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Context: Opening up the Earth or Heart Chakra.

The weeks before our daughter's birth was one continuous waking vision. I was finally breaking through the end of my Martian sphere and opening into the Earth or Heart Center. Together, my wife and I consciously walked into and through the valley of the

shadow of death. Not death itself, for there is no death, but the shadow or shade we fear and call death. This great cleft opened, like the Red Sea once opened, parted, and, arm in arm, we walked through this valley and into the light beyond and behind all appearances. The entire world of wincing pain and personal suffering was laid open in our vision.

#### JOURNAL: HARD THOUGHTS

Context: Looking to look pain and death in the face brings its own rewards.

Up to that point in my life, whenever a painful thought or "bad" feeling had occurred, I always turned inward and experienced that thought alone — took it personally. Now my eyes were open and, as I watched people in their daily intercourse, I saw that all experienced these painful thoughts at the same time. They were like waves that swept through a room -- pure energy.

And that, as a hard thought arose, everybody winced and turned inward, each taking this thought in his or her way, each taking it personally, as their own fault or problem. All turned inward until the thought was absorbed, and then, all opened out again as might some plant or animal that had stopped to digest or absorb a piece of food. All opened out again at once, like flowers, and conversation went on as if nothing had ever

happened. But something did happen.

No one seemed to be aware that this had been a common experience. Each thought it was their separate problem and sorrow. And in those moments of pain (or whatever we can agree to call them), I looked on through the experience into life itself. It was simply a moment of truth or growth, like a plant might shoot forward suddenly in a spurt of energy. What we call psychological pain is, for the most part, simply the fear to share the thought — the loneliness of not sharing the experience.

#### JOURNAL: PAIN IS FEAR

Context: More on awareness of pain. "Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow."

The experience I witnessed was not intrinsically painful in itself. It simply was exactly what it was. The experience of pain was the fear to share the thought or feeling in common and to acknowledge a common life. Fear itself was the pain. Each took privately what they feared to recognize together. We all agree to forget what we find so hard to remember.

The growth process of life itself is like some great amoeba growing, separating into two, and flowing together once again. The pain of separation was simply the process of knowing the Self, splitting into one —

endlessly dividing to join again. We could call the pressures of this process not pain, but tone — feeling our self. It was simply the process of physical growth, separation, and greater union endlessly going on.

What astounded me was that practically all the pain and suffering was man-made. It was the pain of being alone, of taking these changes inwardly or personally. The pain came from ignorance of the common life and communion, not from the life process itself. Needless to say, this was a revelation for someone who had come to consider pain as a necessary evil.

This endless life process was lie the Bible's 'Revelations', the trumpets of the Lord of Creation forever blowing our mind. It was the tree of life set in paradise, and although my mind is not conscious of this revelation most of the time, I have never been as afraid of life since.

#### JOURNAL: THE VISION OF THE HEART CENTER

Context: We have mentioned earlier on about discovering the silence, as we move beyond the grip of Saturn, around thirty years of age. Beyond the Saturn Return comes the experience of what is called "Entering the Silence," which is what this entry is about:

"The silence had been there all along and was especially present since my marriage. Yet, as I have previously written, I ignored it or, if unable to ignore it, I viewed it



as the end of everything I had known, which in a very real sense it was.

"I began to accept this vision at a birthday party for my two-year-old niece, just for family. The adults stood around the room's edge, while the children played in the center. I suddenly saw the children as a radiant source of life energy and the adults as shells or relative ghosts on life's periphery. When we went home that night, my wife and I had to shake our heads to be sure that we had ever even gone out that evening. It was like a dream."

#### JOURNAL: COULD CARE LESS

Context: Beyond the Saturn return comes the experience of what is called "Entering the Silence," which is what this entry is about.

"With the next night came the main load. I had been a performer of popular music for many years and, although I had lost my interest in performing music at the same time I got married, I still, on occasion, would perform. I had been invited to sing a few songs at a local benefit and together, my brother and I got on stage — just like we used to, a team."

"My whole singing career had been one of intense concern for the quality of the music and its expression. I never ate before a performance. I never was satisfied with any performance and, almost without exception,

when I had finished a set, I was ashamed of the reality of what had gotten across compared with what had been my intention and my vision. I invariably could not look anyone in the eye after singing or else would endlessly apologize for what I considered to be the faults of the performance. I felt like I was wearing a scarlet letter and glowed red with indignation that the circumstances could affect my intent."

"Well, this night was to be very different indeed. We got up and did a few songs. The rush and flurry of the evening (and the fact that we had not played together for a time) made some of the songs come off a little poorly. Poorly, in that they failed to reflect in justice the potential beauty of the songs. But as I sang these songs, instead of looking down to dig deep and find my meaning, I just sang and looked out at the sea of bodies before me. I just sang the songs. And a friend came up to sing with us and, when she stumbled in her delivery (as it sometimes happens) and turned to me for some kind of company in her "misery" (which I had always been good for), I just looked at her and I did not care. I just understood what was happening.

"It was not that I was glad that she felt bad or that I would not help her. I already was doing all I possibly could to make the music as good as possible and more than that I could not do. I was not going to worry that it was not what it should have been. I accepted it for what it was."

## JOURNAL: THE SILENCE

Context: Beyond the Saturn return comes the experience of "Entering the Silence."

"And when it was over, I got up, stepped down, and walked into the crowd with no apology whatsoever. I went up to another performer friend of mine and the "old" me started to apologize and managed to stammer out something about how it had been "up there" on the stage. My friend looked me straight in the eye and said, "Yes Michael, it was exactly what it was!"

"There was nothing and nobody to whom I need apologize, not in the whole world. And that entire night, in the mad wild atmosphere of that bar, I experienced complete calm and silence. Silence. It was as if I was the only one there. I don't mean that I was high above it all and somehow untouchable at that time. I mean there was no resistance of any kind at all. I had to snap my head to see if I was dreaming. It was so very silent there."

"And that is how I first began to enter the Silence. I was in the world, but I was no longer of the world in the same way. I am living in and getting used to my Earth or heart center and open to learning something of that next planet: Venus, not the planet of physical desire as some think, but of love and compassion. And so here my

personal story ends for now. For me it is always still the beginning.

## THE INNER CHAKRAS

### Venus Is the Key to the Heart or Earth

Well, there you have it. I am afraid the best I can do is point out, as best I can, the chakras from Saturn into the Earth/Sun. I am still stabilizing my own Earth center life. After all, that is where we were born and where we live, on Earth.

The planets (Venus and Mercury) within Earth's orbit are just that, inner planets, and they are in fact our inner life. They shine within us, as the Sun itself shines within us. I can't say that I have much experience in these inner realms, but I have studied them, so let's go through them, at least in outline.

Venus is the essence of the heart and the Key to Earth. Venus stands behind the veiled Sun of the Earth or Heart Center and there is no material here. Venus is a rendering or loving of all that is — irrespective of the personalities. The idea to understand here is that Venus is beyond the material world of Saturn, and beyond Earth.

Perhaps the best I can do is to point out what all of the great poets and artists, throughout the centuries, have

been telling us about Venus, and that is: the key to life on Earth is love. Love is all there is. The wise men and philosophers have said this repeatedly and forever.

Love is the key to life here on Earth or as we might say here: Venus is the Key to Earth, being the next planet within the earth's orbit. It is that simple.

There is no way to grasp through our material senses what Venus represents. We can only experience it as we come to know our own mind, as we find awareness within. Venus is all the love there is, the Holy Mother, and Immaculate Conception, for it endlessly conceives in love all that is. The Holy Mother or spiritual force has not ever, is not now, and never will "matter" in this world, for it is itself beyond the reach of matter. It is the support or womb of all matter. It is the uncreated or unborn cornucopia out of which all life endlessly pours itself, forever immaculately conceiving all life.

## THE BODHISATTVA

Matter or form resides with Saturn and learning to find our way around in form is what Jupiter is all about, our path. Feeling beyond that took us through Mars journey for meaning all the way to Earth itself. Don't expect for your inner life, life within the Earth chakra, to matter materially. It never will because it only "matters" spiritually. Beyond Earth, it is all about love and light, no matter how twisted these concepts may appear in life.

Behind or within the form is the love and the light,  
Venus and Mercury.

Venus is the Bodhisattva, pure compassion, which is total appreciation or love. This planet is the key to our earth life and to our natal horoscope. It is the essence or divinity itself from Earth's viewpoint. It alone is the key and mother of Christ, forever giving birth to the Christ within us. It is for divine love that we pray and worship, for this love is the key to our life. Venus is divine love and compassion.

#### MERCURY IS THE LIGHT OF LOVE

The same is even more true for Mercury, a planet or chakra that is within Earth, within Venus, and very close to the Sun-source itself. Mercury is even less physical.

The Sanskrit word for Mercury is "Buddha," awareness. Mercury is the Key to Venus, the very throne of God or spirit itself. Mercury is the light of love, the divine light of eternal truth, the eternal corona and radiance of the Sun center itself. It is the Voice and direct Word of the Father itself sent forth — God's messenger or consciousness and awareness itself. Mercury is the light of the mind, the light we see shining in each other's eyes.

#### THE SUN CENTER IS ITSELF THE WHOLE

The Sun, the center of it all, is more than just another planet or chakra. It is the source and creator of the whole system, and the entire system of moons and planets hangs on the Sun. Sure, we can say that the Sun is the Key to Mercury, but also to all creation. It is the center itself and only nothing can be said here. It was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

We do not simply mean the Sun as we find it in our horoscope, for that is the representative of the Earth/Sun/Moon relationship. Here we mean the Sun as it exists in itself (timeless), itself the eternal messenger of all time. A poem I wrote.

"I am round and such so:  
A treading finally and letting go,  
As spreading circles open so,  
An even inward outward flow.

A CODA: Much of the above, in particular the journal entries were written in the 1960s. At that time, I was still trying to filter my experience through the Christian view of things, which is nothing to ignore. However, in the early 1970s I found myself outgrowing that view, like a caterpillar leaving a cocoon, and emerging into the view which I can only call the dharma.

I needed more than words. I needed to be taught to use my mind and to become more aware. The dharma was how I did that.

Or, here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart"  
(2022)

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>

[Drawing and logo by me. This image came to me spontaneously through my dropping to the ground and assuming a particular yoga practice I had never done before. Out of that very physical process came this state of mind, which lasted for some days and delivered this image.]



Astro-Shamanism



Astrology  
of the  
Heart

By  
Michael  
Erlewine

## ADDENDA TO “ASTROLOGY OF THE HEART”

April 3, 2022

Here is the link to final book as of now, including these important addenda:

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>

A lot of time has passed, water over the dam, so to speak since much of the text for the book “Astrology of the Heart” was written. It has been some 55 years since then. I am amazed at how little has changed in my understanding and implementation of the interpretation of the planets, both the planets Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and Earth, as well as the outer planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

What has changed, however, is my view and experience as to the inner planets, Venus and Mercury, and of course the Sun, which I am always learning more about each day.

This was because when I wrote most of this, I did not know enough or all that much about the inner mysteries of Venus and Mercury. Since that time, I have done little else but learn about these inner planets and their nature. Of course, in my case, the way open for me to do that was not so much through astrological lenses and views as through the views and lenses of the dharma. These planets are the natural province of the dharma, if only because it seems they require the rigorous techniques that only dharma practice provides. We have to earn it because as a society we know so little about the inner mind

itself.

And so, as a kind of addendum to my book “Astrology of the Heart,” it seems only fitting that I (briefly) add what I can, based on what I have learned these last many years.

In the original text I pointed out that these inner planets, Venus and Mercury, are ‘inner’, inside our mind and not outer planets like Earth and on outward to Pluto. And it seems few of us know all that much about the mind and what’s in it. If we have run out of things to master outside, mountains to climb and oceans to delve, it is time to turn our attention to the mind itself, certainly more important than even exploring distant galaxies, etc. although my guess is those two explorations (Deep Space and Mind) are intimately related.

#### VENUS CHAKRA

On the surface and in the literature, in the traditional astrology literature, the planet Venus has been linked to ideas of love and value, and this includes valuation, appraisal, appreciation and all that material sensing. I believe we have these outer descriptions nailed down by now. What is not well-enough known is the real inner nature of Venus, the esoteric meaning, and to learn about that I had to turn to the Tibetans and their take on dharma practice.

In my early writing for this book, I was sensitive enough to link Venus with the concept of compassion and in particular the role of the Bodhisattva in dharma. What I failed to understand well enough at the time, but which I am clear about now, is that the key phrase for me concerning Venus (at least at this point) is what is called Bodhicitta. That is the term that rings the bell for me with Venus exactly.

In the Tibetan teachings, there are two forms of Bodhicitta defined, 'Relative Bodhicitta' and 'Absolute Bodhicitta' and they are as different, IMO, as night and day, and pretty easy to understand. In a word, Relative Bodhicitta has to do with more of an intellectual view as to our intent to benefit this world and all the people in it. We intend or mean well, better, best, to the degree we can intend that. Yet, this is mostly intellectual and conceptual. It essentially is an intellectual practice for the real thing.

And "Absolute Bodhicitta" (the real thing) seems, in my experience, to only occur after we have had the actual nature of the mind pointed out to us by an authentic guru, so that we actually are empowered with what is called "Recognition," our own recognition as to the true nature of the mind.

When that takes place, it seems "Absolute Bodhicitta" naturally clicks in and what before (in relative Bodhicitta) manifested as good (mostly intellectual) intentions suddenly galvanizes into what I can only call an unstoppable and unceasing desire to share dharma with and to benefit other beings.

And it is THIS that I have come to understand is that natural nature of the Venus Chakra, pure 'Absolute Bodhicitta'.

#### MERCURY CHAKRA

As to the Mercury Chakra, there is more of a deeper dive into the mind to consider than even Venus. And again, I have only learned of this through dharma training and not through astrological training, except for some nice words astrologically, perhaps.

And the particular technique through which I was able to better understand the Mercury Chakra was based on the special form of Insight Meditation which is part of what the Karma Kagyu Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism meditation calls Mahamudra Meditation.

Of course, being a slow learner, this took me many, many years to even approach and prepare to effortlessly practice this special form of Insight Meditation, and more years after that to actually implement it to the degree that I could actually meditate and stop practicing. And this mostly required me to reduce my many obscurations to the point where I could (to some degree) see beyond my own Self, which was the major obscuration for me. Without a doubt, this particular journey (to implement Insight Meditation) was perhaps the most difficult thing I have ever done in this lifetime.

As for what Insight Meditation entails, I have written (so it seems) endlessly about it over the years. And it involves immersing myself in the nature of the mind to the exclusion of me as a subject (Me, Myself, and I) and something or someone else as an object. In other words, Insight Meditation is non-dualistic.

Or its like resolving my ingrained habit of dualism (subject and object) into the non-dual natural state that is intrinsic to the mind itself. As all the pith dharma texts say, Insight Meditation cannot be defined in words, no matter how hard we try, and of course all the great masters have tried.

I have said to myself that Insight Meditation, instead of seeing 'something' (an object), is our seeing the 'Seeing' itself seeing. However, we word it, it all resolves recursively into 'insight' Seeing itself. I could go on and on and probably not get much

clearer because, as mentioned, words can't suffice.

Anyway, THAT is what I understand the Mercury Chakra to be all about, what in dharma terms is called the special form of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) as defined in the Karma Kagyu form of Mahamudra Meditation. Insight Meditation has, so the dharma pith texts point out, the admirable quality of while in that form of meditation (which is non-dual) NOT recording karma and perhaps even reducing karma we have already accumulated. It is also more addictive than any drug we might imagine, this non-dual resting in the nature of the mind. Insight Meditation brings true rest and healing.

[Book design by me.]



## THE LIGHTS: SUN AND MOON

April 4, 2022

[I neglected to say much about the 'Lights', the Sun and the Moon, so I will say something about the esoteric meaning of the Sun and Moon for those interested.]

### THE MOON

As some of you may have already wondered, where is the Moon in all of this? That is a good question. For the most part, these articles have been about the larger-scale life of our solar system, with the incendiary Sun and the planets bound in orbit to it. The Moon is really part of the Earth system. In fact, the Earth and Moon are

such a binary system that the shared center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system is not even within the Earth's surface. It is out there in space, and at a fair distance! Does the Moon not have an esoteric side and meaning?

To be sure it does, and a very important one at that, one that would require and deserves a whole article of its own. This study of the chakras is not the place for such a work. However, it may be helpful to point out some general guidelines when considering the Moon from an esoteric perspective.

First, when I speak here of the Moon, it should be kept in mind that I am speaking of the Moon-Earth system and, actually, the Sun-Earth-Moon system, for most references to the Moon, such as the lunar cycle and orbit involve the phase angle of the Moon with the Earth, and this requires the Sun's position as well.

It is an interesting astronomical fact that, from Earth's perspective, the relative size of the Sun and the Moon in the sky as seen from Earth are about equal. This is what makes total eclipses of the Sun possible. In fact, there are all kinds of facts about the Moon, the lunar orbit, and its relationship to the earth and the Sun that are interesting and call out for us to explore their more esoteric meaning.

THE LIGHTS



In the tradition of astrology, the Sun and Moon are called "The Lights" and, as we mentioned, we need to read that as Sun-Earth-Moon in every case. The Earth's place in all of this is always assumed.

Looking at the esoteric meaning of the Sun and the Moon has to be distinguished from the use of the Sun in the chakra system, where it represents the peak or crown chakra. In the chakra system, as I have presented it in this article, the Sun represents the entire solar system as a single entity and the process of interdependency between the planets and our fiery star. Esoterically, this process and state is called the Monad, and I have given some information about its meaning earlier on. In a similar way, where we spoke earlier in this text of the Earth chakra and the Heart Center, we were referring to Earth as a planet in the chain of planets that make up our solar system.

However, when we speak here of the Sun and the Moon, the astrological "Lights," we mean here the Sun as the Earth, in the same way we consider Sun signs astrologically. My telling you that I am a Cancer sun sign actually says that Earth sees the Sun in the zodiac sign Cancer. It is the Earth that we really mean, when we say the "Sun and the Moon." We mean the "Earth and the Moon" as a unit, but in relationship with the Sun.

In this section, therefore, we are leaving behind the concept of the Sun as the monad and all that we might

have to say about that and are looking at the relationship of the Sun-Earth axis and the Moon. Please make this distinction. Here the Earth is not being looked at as a chakra, but as part of the Earth/Sun-Moon pair, "The Lights."

That having been said, the esoteric story and meaning of the Lights, the Sun and Moon, offer a different perspective and rendition of the same material covered in the chakra sections, the same story, only with a somewhat different view. All of this will come into focus for you by my just jumping in here with some specific esoteric concepts.

#### THE MOON AS OUR MOTHER

In the history of astrology, again and again, it is said that the Moon is a mystery in that it is both a mother and a child. The Moon is our mother, because (similar to the womb of Saturn) everything and every body issues forth or is born from it. The Moon represents the subconscious and unmanifest regions from which all life, literally all 'stuff', comes forth. Like an endless cornucopia, the Moon mothers forth.

The Moon is our support system, all that nourishes us, in the sense that we literally form ourselves and arise from within its womb. There are all kinds of historical paintings, drawings, and text images about life (bodies) arising and issuing forth from the womb of un-

manifestation, from out of the great void. In this sense, the Moon is our mother. How then is the Moon our child?

## THE MOON AS OUR CHILD

As each of us is born from the Moon stuff, we draw around our spirit whatever kind of form or body is appropriate. We individuate or extract our self from 'Mother Moon' and take on our individual form. We are no longer part of the great matrix or womb from which we came, but at some point have been born and begin to separate from the mother. We are an individual, now separate from our mother, and living on our own.

The Moon then, once separated from us, is something we can remember or look back on. In fact, we can see by the light of the Moon, by the sunlight bouncing off the Moon and illuminating it so that it can be seen. Otherwise, it is lost in the darkness of the heavens.

And as we gaze on the Moon, we are looking at where we, ourselves, came forth from, looking at the past where once we were. And here is the point:

Life is a process. As we separate from the Moon, the process of the Moon giving birth does not end. The Moon is the womb from which all things emerge, aside from the place we came. Looking back on that Moon, we see others, much like we were, now being formed, and in

the process of extracting themselves from the womb, just as we did.

In the Western esoteric texts, the Moon can also overcome or suffocate us, if we cease to individuate and move onward, but instead fall back into her arms. I remember Robert Heinlein's science-fiction novel, "The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress." Yes, she can be.

I am trying to paint here a word picture, and the point is that we not only push forward in our lives, always extracting ourselves from our Moon. In addition, by the light of the Sun, we also often gaze upon the Moon. We look back at ourselves, as we once were, and see younger souls (souls like us) who are now being born, just as we were. By the light of the Moon, esoterically speaking, we can see ourselves young. The process is ongoing, continuous.

In this way, the Moon is our child, because we are no longer of the Moon, but we came from that Moon. We remember back to then, and the Moon is all about memory, about the past, and about where we came from.

Perhaps this will be clearer, if I give an example: As kids, we tend to group together. Those of you reading this who have been through what is called "Middle School," the intermediate levels of school, like the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, know well what a fierce rite of passage that

is. At that age, we are socially more a pool or a group than we are yet individuals, and individuation is just what happens in those years. As puberty is reached, the first Jupiter return at 12 years of age, but more physically the opposition or halfway point in the first Saturn cycle (15 years of age), we begin lose our childlike and group-clinging tendency and start to take on some of the characteristics of an adult, facial hair, menstrual cycles, and so on.

The intense peer pressure that rules the group mind of the early teens begins to break down as the more independent souls struggle to leave the group and become individuals. The image that many sculptors have worked with of an amorphous mass of clay, out of which individual figures are emerging, should be familiar.

Perhaps you can see in this image where the idea of the Moon being both our mother and our child comes from. We each go through this birthing process, and we end up as individual adults, sooner or later. We emerge from the group mind, differentiate ourselves, and can look back not only at where we came from, but also see others now as we once were. We are gazing at "our" Moon. If we fall back, if we get too close to the past, to the way we were, we run the risk of getting caught in the Moon mass and stifled.

Earlier in this article, I gave the example of when I used to return to see my parents, wanting to show them all of

the progress I had made, I would often slip-up and get caught up in my old habits with them, resort to stupid arguments, and having them tell me: "See, you have not changed." This is what I mean when I say the Moon can suffocate or pull us back into what we have struggled to get out of by individuation.

## THE SUN

Now we have looked a little bit at the mystery of the Moon, but really, we have only presented one half of the equation. If you remember, it is always Moon-Earth-Sun, and we need to bring the Sun into this discussion.

Just as we pointed out that our life here on Earth needs to keep an appropriate distance from our Moon, less we fall backward, the same is true with the Sun. We cannot get too close to the Sun or, like the Greek myth of Icarus, we will be burnt by the solar rays. The Earth is always somewhere between the Moon on one side, and the Sun on the other, located at just enough distance from the Moon to remain an individual, and just enough distance from the Sun to feel its warmth, but not be burnt up by the solar rays.

If the Moon represents, our mother and where we came from, then the Sun represents the father principle and where we are going, what we will become. In the tradition of astrology, the Sun represents the father, the mentor, the one in authority, what we look up to, what

we hope to become, and, in general, our future. We come forth from the Moon and we go toward the Sun.

The Sun is also said to represent the Self, and everything about us that is future oriented, what we will become when all is said and done, how we will turn out. When we have finished taking all the changes possible to us, the Sun (our Self) is what remains, our potential realized.

By this point, you should have the idea that this Moon-Earth-Sun relationship is all about how we are balanced between our past (the Moon) and our future (the Sun), not too far and not too close. We are strung out between the past and the future, the Moon and the Sun. Our life on Earth is always somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. We keep our distance from each one. That distance makes life possible.

When the Moon is strong, we remember and are pulled toward our past, perhaps getting caught up in reverie and old habits. If the Moon is too strong, we lose out on our future and remained mired in the past. When the Sun is strong, we put all that behind us and surge toward the future, coming ever more into our own, but perhaps risking burnout, if we move too far, too fast. The balanced or middle way is the way of even growth.

As astrologers, you already know how to examine the positions of the Sun and the Moon in the chart, their angular separation or phase angle, and measure how

strong or weak these two bodies are in the nativity. Is the Moon so strong that it keeps one from the future? Is the client drowning in their past? Or is the Sun too strong and scorching every attempt to get ahead before it can amount to anything? These are examples of how this esoteric knowledge of the Sun and Moon can be used to advantage.





## ANN ARBOR'S FORGOTTEN JAZZ SCENE

April 6, 2022

[I wonder if any of you youngsters remember Ann Arbor before liquor by the glass, when the jazz was in the houses and not the bars. ]

How could the repeal of prohibition in 1933 affect the onset of The Sixties in Ann Arbor? It sounds like Chaos Theory, where the flapping of a butterfly wing in Brazil affects the amount of snow that falls in Greenland. But such an effect did occur. And the sad thing is that the scene I am about to describe is hardly remembered. I keep waiting for someone to write about it, but it might have to be me! That is a scary thought, because what took place back then is pivotal to understand how Ann Arbor grew up in the late 1950s and early 1960s, so here it is:

Prohibition was repealed at 6 P.M. May 11, 1933 at the Court Tavern on 108 East Huron Street, and simultaneously at some nineteen other Ann Arbor beverage businesses that day. But there was a catch. Although Ann Arbor would no longer be a dry city, liquor by the glass could not be sold at bars, but only in private clubs like the Elks and the Town Club, so that meant that most bars were cut out of it. And here is how it affected the onset of The Sixties:

Because liquor by the glass (a cash cow) was illegal, it meant that bars did not have the extra money to hire musicians and their bands. The result of this was that for a long time the jazz scene in Ann Arbor was not in the bars, but instead in private houses (usually student rentals) around town. This "liquor by the glass" law was finally repealed on November 9, 1960, but up to that point there was a special music atmosphere in Ann

Arbor that only existed privately. Even after the law was repealed it took time for music to move back into the bars again.

As a high-school student interested in all things Beat, including jazz, I found my way into that private scene, albeit only as a tolerated bystander, a youngster. So here was this vibrant music scene happening in private around Ann Arbor for those who knew about it.

I can remember one large rental on the north side of the street in the first block or two of E. William Street, just west of State Street. Hanging from the second story, out over the front steps, was an enormous flag with a photo of Thelonious Monk and (if I remember right) just the single word "Monk" or did it say "Thelonious Monk?" Then again, it may have only had Monk's image. It was in houses like these that the forefront of jazz was taking place. Jazz players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob "Turk" Pozar, Bob Detwiler, and many others played there. Small informal groups formed and improvised far into the night. Yet you couldn't find this music in where you might expect, in clubs or bars. It was hidden away in houses, and it all depended on who you knew. Not everyone found their way there or was invited.

As a high-school kid, I was allowed in, but had to keep a very low profile, sitting along the floor with my back against the walls and just taking it in. No one offered me any of the pot they were smoking, but a friend and I

used to snort the ashes left by their joints. Or maybe we would find a roach or two in the ashtray, but very rarely. That was how dedicated we were in our wish to emulate everyone there. Aside from smoking pot, there was lots of wine and always the music. When they were not improvising jazz, they were playing classical music on the stereo, and a little bit of folk. And although the atmosphere of those parties was not pure Beat, it was all serious and "down" as the beats liked it. The sunlight and nakedness of The Sixties was nowhere to be seen. "This was heavy stuff, man, so be cool."

The point of relating this story is to point out that these underground jazz sessions were just one of several indicators that pointed the way from the end of the Beat movement forward to what was to come in just a few years, the full-blown Sixties Movement. I am talking here of the late 1950s and very early 1960s. What we call The Sixties didn't start until the summer of 1965.

These houses and their jazz parties were usually held in one or two largish rooms. The jazz players would set up in a corner.... drums, a standup bass, and a horn, usually a saxophone, but sometimes a flute. And of course a piano, if one was present. There was very little vocal jazz as I remember. The drink of choice back then was wine, red wine at that, and you would usually find it out on the kitchen table in gallon jugs or bottles. We just helped ourselves or chipped in if we had any scratch.

And, as mentioned, there was pot, something that a high-school boy like myself (who was reading Kerouac) desperately wanted to get a taste of. And these parties went late into the night. Time was something we had back then, with nothing better than that particular night waiting for us the next day, so we were not in a hurry to sleep. The right-now of the late nights was just about perfect. And it was so serious. All of the dark mood of European movies, art, and literature had rubbed off on us until "down" was our form of cool. The word "cool" says it all. We were not hot, not even warm. We were cool.

And let's not forget the poetry. Words were big with the beats, and literature and poetry were the coin of the realm. It was not all about music; it was cigarettes, coffee, and endless talking until the bennies or Dexamyl wore off. And it is not like we had any real experience in life at that point (at least not me), so it was pure speculation. We were all entrepreneurs investing in the promise of the future. And it was hard for me to be cool or "down," when the future looked so bright.

If I was on speed and also drinking wine or coffee, some sort of high nausea would take hold of me as it got toward morning. My hands would shake, but I also knew that in that state no sleep would come for a long time yet, and any attempts to rest would find me lying there wide awake, slightly in the zone, when dawn came, staring at the ceiling. Any sleep would only be a half-

sleep. By that time I would be telling myself that I never wanted to take speed again, but I probably would. And I am talking about those little rolls of Benzedrine wrapped in aluminum foil... about ten or so, the size of aspirin. It was like a tiny roll of Lifesavers, only these weren't life savers, but life burners.

So those were the two places where I felt (at the very least) the presence of the Beat muse, in those all-night house parties in Ann Arbor and sitting in the Michigan Union Grill (MUG) by day. For Ann Arbor, that was it. And although the beat stereotype image might be of the solitary thinker, the beats (or wannabes) I knew were remarkably social. They seemed to like gathering together. Of course there were one-to-one talks in apartments or even single rooms, but as often as not they were about administering drugs. The rest of the time we grouped together... somewhere.

And many of the Ann Arbor Beats were just university students, although students that were conspicuous by their berets, long hair, and Navy Pea Coats. And of course the folks I hung with seemed to always be older than I was. That was because there were. I so much wanted to be older and to be part of all that.

And then there were the women. I was too young to really deserve much attention from the Beat women, although they were so beautiful. As I was really just a townie, I gravitated to the townie women who, like

myself, hung at the edge of the student scene. And there were not many of us and we were treated a bit like a minority, which I guess we were. We townies knew each other on sight.

I remember a tall skinny blonde name Francis that I kind of hung out with. Fran was shared by a number of us, and she was more a friend than anything else. I do remember spending the night with her at this or that place, but we were just crashing together; probably nothing much happened. She was also a townie.

And places to have sex or even cuddle in Ann Arbor when you were in high school and living at home were very hard to come by, the empty room or apartment, the tiny side room off from where others were partying, the back seat of a car, the summer grass – anywhere possible. It was a constant problem. I can remember my grandmother who lived at the corner of East University and Hill Street had a little basement room that she would rent out to students. Sometimes it would be empty and I would sneak in with my current girlfriend (if I had one), file down the basement steps and past the old furnace and slip into that tiny room. What a godsend it was to be out of the elements and alone with someone you wanted to make love with. Of course grandma, good Catholic woman that she was, would have hated the goings on there, or would she? Yeah, she would.

Back in those times the world was vast, but the places we met were few. This was before coffee houses and there were no dance clubs. There were places like Drake's Sandwich Shop at 709 N. University, but these were preppy student tea houses, where you sipped a soda or had a sandwich from which the crust had been cut off. They did have booths with tall sides, so private conversations could happen there, but none of the folks I knew ever went there.

Really it was only the Michigan Union Grill and live music at private houses on the weekends back in the late 1950s and early 1960s where we hung out.

[Photo by Torben Hansen.]





## THE FIXED STARS AND BEYOND THE FIXED STARS

April 6, 2022

The space beyond the outer planets is not empty, but filled with all kinds of matter: stars, nebulae, quasars, black holes, and other deep space matter. Although

there is a lot of matter scattered out in space, it is not evenly distributed, not even remotely so. Most of the matter in the universe beyond our solar system is severely grouped or clustered in just a few areas of the heavens. In fact, clustering is the rule, not the exception with stellar matter.

Stars tend to occur in small groups. These groups are themselves part of still larger groups and, as the size of the groups increases, it is clear that they cling to one another to form vast stellar planes. The most obvious plane is the plane of our local galaxy. When the galactic plane is overhead on a summer night in the Northern hemisphere, it is a blazing mass of stars, packed together in a single narrow zone.

As mentioned, stars are not randomly placed out in space, but hang out together in a group. Even stars that appear as singletons are usually just stars so near that we can't pick up on the group to which they belong. We are right in the middle of the group ourselves.

'Everything' out there in space is all about stars, about their lives and deaths. Stars, like people, are born, live for a while, and then fade out and die. Even exotic stellar objects like black holes, quasars, neutron stars, and supernovae are simply stars in one stage of their lives or another. And the vast gaseous wraith-like nebulae are nothing more than clouds of gas in which proto stars (young stars) are being born. It is all about the life and

death of stars. That's all there is. Period.

In our inner and esoteric sky, the fixed stars that shine are what serve to guide us through the dark hallways of life. Here there is not space for a thorough discussion of the fixed stars and other deep space objects. I wrote a book on this deep-space astrology that was published in 2006, called "The Astrology of Space," and even more detail can be found there.

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/The-Astrology-of-Space.pdf>

If you have read this far in the article, you must have some general idea as to how to approach getting at the esoteric meaning of exoteric facts and signs. Let's give you a test. In what follows, I will present a rough description of the fixed stars, along with their life and death cycle. I will stick more toward the scientific facts about these bodies. Let's see if you can follow the life story of the stars and apply it to your life, based on the chakra-based material given earlier in this article. I will give you some hints as we go along.

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STARS

Once born, each star must live and die, much like us. The death of stars is inevitable, and the life process is often conceived as one of thwarting or putting off of this inescapable death and thus prolonging life. The most

fascinating aspect of a star's life is the intense struggle between the forces of gravity and contraction on one hand (so called outer forces -Saturn) and the internal forces of radiation pressure on the other (solar). As long as there is radiation coming from within, the forces of gravitational contraction are resisted or balanced, and stellar life as we observe it continues. The star shines. In fact, the entire life of the star can be conceived of in terms of a continuous conversion process.

Within each star, these two archetypical forces form the stellar shell, which is well below the actual surface of the star itself. The thickness of this shell as well as its position near to or far from the inner stellar core suffers continual change and adjustment throughout the life of the star. In the end, the inner comes to the surface and is out.

The incredible weight of the many layers of gas first initiates and then continues to contain and maintain the radiant process — a cosmic crucible. This pressure and the inevitable collapse that must occur in time is forestalled and put off by an incredible series of adjustments and changes going on within the core of the star. First of all, hydrogen burning (initiated at the birth of the star) continues for around ten billion years. This constitutes a healthy chunk of the stellar lifetime.

Our sun is about halfway through this stage at present, and we can expect the sun to continue as it is today for

another five billion years or so. However, the eventual exhaustion of hydrogen signals the onset of drastic changes in the life of the star and brings on the next stage in that life.

The radiant pressure of burning Hydrogen within was all that held back the initial contraction of the protostar, and when this is gone (like with the Saturn return) the star's core continues to contract. It then has no material strong enough to stop this contraction and the core again shrinks, causing increased pressure, density, and temperature. When the temperature at the center of the star reaches 100 million degrees, the nuclei of helium atoms (products of the Hydrogen burning stage) are violently fused together to form carbon. The fusion of this helium burning at the stellar core again produces a furious outpouring of radiant energy, and this energy release inside the star's core (as the star contracts) pushes the surface far out into space in all directions.

The sudden expansion creates an enormous star with a diameter of a quarter of a billion miles and a low surface temperature between 3,000-4,000 degrees — a red giant (the Jupiter Chakra). Born again.

In about five billion years, the core of our sun will collapse, while its surface expands. This expansion will swallow the earth and our planet will vanish in a puff of smoke. The red stars like Antares and Arcturus are examples of this stage and kind of star.

This helium burning stage (red giant) continues for several hundred million years before exhaustion. With the helium gone, the contraction process again resumes and still greater temperatures, densities, and pressures result. At this point, the size or mass of the star begins to dictate the final course of the life. For very massive stars, the ignition of such thermonuclear reactions as carbon, oxygen, and silicon fusion may take place, creating all of the heavier elements. These later stages in stellar evolution produce stars that are very unstable. These stars can vary or pulsate in size and luminosity.

In certain cases, this can lead to a total stellar detonation, a supernova.

A star may end its life in one of several ways. When all the possible nuclear fuels have been exhausted, all conversions or adjustments made, the inexorable force of gravity (the grave) asserts itself and the remaining stellar material becomes a white dwarf. As the star continues to contract, having no internal radiation pressure left, the pressures and densities reach such strength that the very atoms are torn to pieces and the result is a sea of electrons in which are scattered atomic nuclei. This mass of electrons is squeezed until there is no possible room for contraction. The resulting white dwarf begins the long process of cooling off.

Becoming a white dwarf is only possible for stars with a

mass of less than 1.25 solar masses. If the dying star has a mass that is greater than this limit, the electron pressure cannot withstand the gravitational pressure and the contraction continues. This critical limit of 1.25 solar masses is termed the Chandrasekhar Limit after the famous Indian scientist by that name.

To avoid this further contraction, it is believed that many stars unload or blow off enough excess mass to get within the Chandrasekhar Limit (middle-age crisis). The nova is an example of an attempt of this kind. In recent years it has become clear that not all stars are successful in discarding their excess mass, and for them a very different state results than what we find in the white dwarf. We have seen that the electron pressure is not strong enough to halt the contraction process and the star gets smaller and tighter. The pressure and density increase until the electrons are squeezed into the nuclei of the atoms out of which the star is made. At this point the negatively charged electrons combine with the positively charged protons and the resulting neutron force is strong enough to again halt the contraction process and we have another type of stellar corpse: a neutron star.

We have one further kind of "dying" star. There is a limit to the size of star that can become a neutron star.

Beyond a limit in mass of 2.25 solar masses, the degenerate neutron pressure cannot withstand the

forces of gravity. If the dying star is not able to eject enough matter through a nova or supernova explosion and the remaining stellar core contains more than three solar masses, it cannot become a white dwarf or a neutron star. In this case there are no forces strong enough to hold up the star and the stellar core continues to shrink infinitely! The gravitational field surrounding the star gets so strong that space-time begins to warp and when the star has collapsed to only a few miles in diameter, space-time folds in upon itself and the star vanishes from the physical universe. What remains is termed a black hole.

It should be clear at this point that all of the many kinds of stars and objects in space could be ordered in terms of the evolutionary stage they represent in the life of the star. Just as each of us face what has been called the "personal equation" in our lives, so each star's life is made possible by the opposing internal and external forces. In the end, it appears, the forces of gravity dominate the internal process of adjustment and conversion that is taking place, just as in our own lives the aging of our personal bodies is a fact. And yet fresh stars are forming and being born, even now. The process of life or self is somehow larger than the physical ends to the personal life of a star or a man and our larger life is a whole or continuum and continuing process that we are just beginning to appreciate. Some of the ideas that are emerging in regard to the black hole phenomenon are most profound and perhaps are the closest



indicators we have of how the eternal process of our life, in fact, functions. Hint: true teachers are like black holes.

In conclusion, a very useful way to approach the fixed stars, as pointed out above, is to determine what stage in stellar evolution a particular star may be. Is the star a young, energetic newly formed star in the blue part of the spectrum or an old dying (red colored) star? Are we talking about a white dwarf or a super dense neutron star? I have found this approach to the endless millions of stars so much more helpful than ascribing particular characteristics to existing stars and objects, most of which are too new to have any history in astrology anyway. As mentioned earlier, learn to read the writings of science from a personal or esoteric astrological perspective. It is very instructive.

## THE SOLAR MYSTERIES

### OUR SELF AND THE SUN

In this modern era, the esoteric traditions of the West and the East are being examined and compared. For the most part, Western thinking is becoming aware of Eastern thought and rightly so; we are going to school on that. This difference between these two views, East and West, is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the concept of the Self.

Here in the West, the concept of the Self has been, and

still is, considered important, if not central to our thinking. I would vote on “central,” and it is very much a love-hate sort of thing.

On the one hand we are, from childhood onward, exhorted to get to know our Self, to find or discover our Self, and above all to “be” our Self. At the same time, we are told by almost every spiritual and religious persuasion to not be selfish, to not think of our Self too much, or not think only of our Self, but rather to think of others. In fact, we are asked to put the needs of others above those of our own self. And then we wonder about schizophrenia. What is this all about?

In modern Western astrology, virtually in all traditions, the identifying of the Self (whatever we might agree that is) with the Sun is standard. The Self, at least in standard geocentric astrology, is considered synonymous with the Sun. A legitimate question might be: are we talking here about the Sun as in “Sun Sign” astrology (where Earth sees the sun in the sign opposite where it is), or are we speaking of that great fiery orb, the center of the solar system?

The answer from my understanding is: both. The Sun as the Self is a standard correspondence in Western astrology. This is not so in the East, and we will get to that in a moment. For now, let’s say more about this Western astrological identification of the Sun as the Self, and the Sun having to do with self-development and the

like.

The Sun, so most astrological definitions go, is who we are in essence, our very Self. It is also our goals, who we are aiming to be, what we will become in the future, after we finish going through all our major changes. We will end up there. The Sun is as much into the future as the Moon represents the past. I won't spend a lot of time on the common definition of the "Sun as Self," as most of you already know this or can Google it in a few minutes.

I want to return to this dichotomy of the Sun as being who we are in essence, or the essential Self we will (or are trying to) become, and the endless admonitions on every side to not be selfish. How can we be asked to find or discover ourselves on one hand, but to not be "self-ish" on the other. Which is it?

Well, the answer, of course, is both, and this is the source of the confusion here. It would seem that, no matter how we try to be unselfish, every road of inward discovery leads to our Self. It is our Self that is somehow "in there" and stands like the proverbial guardian on the threshold. When we try to find ourselves, and to look inward, we come across no other than our Self. That is what we have been told to find.

And yet, we are told not to take our Self too seriously, not to get too enamored or attached to our Self, and to

try to put thoughts of our Self out of our mind, or at least on the back burner. Hey, don't be so selfish!

And did not Copernicus point out to astrologers, some 500 or so years ago, that everything does NOT revolve around us (the Earth), but rather that we revolved around the Sun. Astrologers, even in the 21st Century have yet to be empowered with that thought!

I THINK I AM

"I have gone to paint the sunrise in the sky,  
To feel the cool of night warm into day,  
The flowers from the ground call up to me,  
This Self I think I am is hard to see.

A poem I wrote. And I wrote another poem more about the dark side of our Self as a personality.

PHOENIX

Personality,  
Bright beauty of the night,  
That terrible crystal,  
Burning in the darkness,  
At the very edge of time.

Watching,  
In rapt fascination,  
Fires,

Impossible to ignore,  
Forever frozen,  
On the face of age.

It is a dark light,  
Indeed,  
Funeral pyres,  
Signifying nothing,  
But impermanence.

This is a fire,  
That does not warm.

[Logo by me (Saturn and the Sun) for an astrology  
group in Ann Arbor, Michigan, "An Ann Arbor  
Astrological Association."]



## THE TRAP OF TECHNIQUE

April 7, 2022

Everything is right here and right now. This is it! What it depends on is our sensitivity to and ability to be aware of what's here and now, such as the influx of solar radiation, or what-have-you? We can conceptualize it as much as we want, but can we feel it in the flesh? Is it part of our actual experience or is it just another theoretical pursuit for which we have no physical familiarity?

Astrology is strewn with 'blue sky" theorizing for which there is no experience, much less any realization of that experience. Because astrology is filled with what are called 'Great Circles," imaginary divisions of space that an aspiring astrologer can parse and divide into imaginary circles as much and fine as they wish. Whether they have any sensitivity to these divisions, these imaginary lines, is another story. Most often not, IMO.

It's the same with dharma or anything for that matter. Thinkers are many, yet those who can actually experience what is thought about are rare, and even more rare are those who actually realize what they experience. So, there is some sorting out that has to be done, sorting the conceptualizers from the experiencers, and then the realizers from the experiencers to find the tip of the top of that pyramid.

Nothing is more potent than a technique, astrological, dharma, or otherwise. A technique is the residue, what remains, from someone who has not only experienced what they at first only conceptualized, but they then became aware of their experience to the point of realization. The resulting technique, the concise list of the steps involved, if followed, will produce 'some' kind of result, but nothing approaching actual realization. The problem with using techniques we have not realized is that we don't know what we are talking about. Unrealized technique is like a black box. You put something in one end and some result comes out the

other end, but that does not mean you know how it works, much less are actually empowered by the technique. We live in layer upon layer of unrealized technique.

To me, this is kind of a crippled way of doing things, to use techniques we have not personally realized. Of course, this is done all the time, but if you are a master of your field, astrology or otherwise, more is required than bare repetition and duplication of techniques. In my experience, empowerment is required before we use a technique, and that is not so easy to find or acquire.

To repeat, nothing is more powerful than the technique that is the result of someone's realization. The resulting technique of an actual realization is like freeze-dried realization and seminal. It is the residue of a full-grown realization reduced to a series of steps that if done correctly will produce a result. Yet, even that result, while perhaps useful, is only dimly similar to an actual full realization. Techniques are everywhere. We and our society are rule-ridden.

If we mindlessly are using techniques for which we have no realization, all we have to do is add the waters of realization and awareness to restore the technique to its actuality as something fully realized. Of course, for most of us that is like trying to put the toothpaste back in the tube. We don't know where to begin.



And when we build a life of techniques that we have not ourselves realized, its like walking on thin ice, IMO. Or it is like making a house of cards. Sooner or later that house of cards is going to collapse, and we don't have the fundamentals to rebuild it. So, I feel it is better to build our practice from a few techniques that we have actually realized and been empowered in rather than to have a bag of techniques that we have never grounded in actuality.

How rare is authenticity? How far do we have to go to be authentic? What is it about authenticity that makes it authentic? Why do we hunger for that? There is something about authenticity that satisfies us, through and through.

The human condition is fragile enough as it is, assumptions built on assumptions, an elaborate veneer of meaning that only serves to hide our essential emptiness. As the pith texts say, our 'being' is becoming. It never has been here. A little poem I wrote:

#### ON LOCATION

Can you locate where the mind is?  
If not, can you find where the mind isn't?



## A TRIBUTE TO BARBARA LEWIS

April 8, 2022

This is just a brief tribute to Barbara Lewis, one of my all-time favorite singer/songwriters. I have been listening to a lot of her songs these last few days. You all know "Hello Stranger," but there are a lot of great songs that you may not have heard. My daughter May was brought

up on Barbara Lewis tunes. Lewis and Irma Thomas, along with Billie Holiday, were my favorite woman singers and May heard them a lot. Yesterday, I posted May singing out in L.A. at the Moroccan Lounge, where I believe she is recording an album or a group of songs.

Barbara Lewis is from the Ann Arbor area where I grew up. She was born in Salem Township, part of Washtenaw County, and just outside Ann Arbor. Lewis was managed by Ollie McLaughlin, a local DJ that we all knew. McLaughlin not only produced Barbara Lewis, but several jazz players, and also Dion Jackson, a local singer who was a friend of ours. And our one-time manager Hugh "Jeep" Holland and McLaughlin worked together in the same Ann Arbor music scene.

I could give more bio details, It is best to just listen. Here are three from Barbara Lewis that I feel are among her best, so if you have time, these are the tunes.

Barbara Lewis: "Just the Way You Are Today"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRHDo3\\_aDU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRHDo3_aDU)

Barbara Lewis: "Oh, Be My Love"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4SbPHn\\_U6E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4SbPHn_U6E)

Barbara Lewis: "How Can I Tell"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqyGbc6aG0w>

As for me, up here in north Michigan, it's still too wintry,

blowy, snowy, and cold, with not much sun. Not much for me to do outside as of yet. Spring cleaning here indoors is up for grabs and I'm going for it. The 'feel' of spring is hardly what I would call near yet. My internal clock tells me that I should be outside. I need to be active, just to feel physically well, so I'm digging into to whatever has to be done around our place.

We haven't moved north yet, because we can't find a house we want to live in that we can afford, so it's too soon to pack our house and the dharma center next door, although that would keep me busy, so it's what should I do?

I guess what I am doing I would call 'consolidating', sorting the keepers from what we will sell, give away, or donate to 'Habitat for Humanity'. And I can label things that need labeling. I can do that.

I just don't feel much like just sitting around, although obviously I have done that all winter with no problem. Now I have a problem with it because it should be warm enough to go outside and do a hundred things. Yet, it's not.

I found a lot of my old leather boots and shoes, all pretty stiff and dry, so I rubbed lanolin into them. That was something to do. And I completely reworked my upstairs workroom, quite the task, physically moving everything in the room around, and its better now, or at

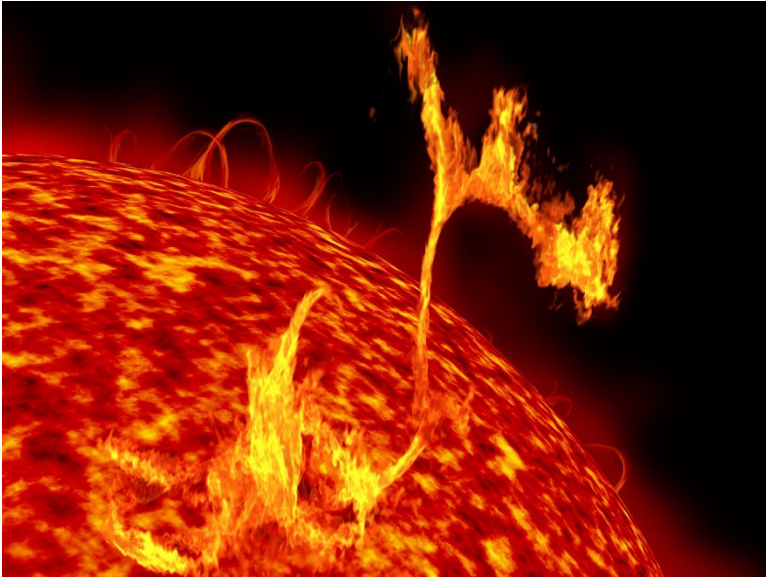
least I am better for being active.

I can count the days until we drive north, way up to Whitefish Point at the tip of the top of the Michigan's Upper Peninsula. This is where the great raptors (eagles, hawks, etc.), flying north, come to where they have to fly across a part of Lake Superior. Margaret and I want to see them as they funnel down to the tip of this peninsula to cross over to Canada, and I will try to photograph some as well.

One of these weeks, two of my granddaughters (Emma, Josephine, and their mom Anne) will visit and I plan to make potholders with them, either that or if we can go outside and search for micrometeorites.

As you can see, I'm just treading water, biding my time until the sun comes out. The permafrost (or whatever we call it) is out of the ground, so we can turn the outside water back on. That's about all the news I have. Enjoy the Barbara Lewis tunes and thank the lord she was there with the music!

[Promotional photo of Barbara Lewis.]



## THE ASTROLOGY OF SOLAR INFLUX

April 9, 2022

An astrologer friend said what's with this solar influx, like the sun with its solar flares and CMEs (Corona Mass Ejection)? We can't predict them. Of course, we can't predict solar variation to the degree we can predict the moment of the New or Full Moon(a momentary event), but that does not mean that solar intensity is not predictable. With solar activity, we are working with a continuing process that varies constantly, which is no reason not to become aware of it. For one thing, as astrologers we don't get to ignore heavenly events that

we don't know how to interpret. Cosmic events don't cater to us, but quite the reverse: we cater to them, whatever is out there. That's the role of an astrologer, interpreting celestial events, if we can.

In fact, our Sun is a variable star, meaning the energy output of this sun varies by one-thousandth of its magnitude (0.1%) over an 11-year solar cycle. And this has been dutifully monitored for centuries and ever increasing as we come to understand the importance of the variation of solar energy.

The fact that astrologers don't study the solar variation is a mystery to me. It's staring us right in the face and the Sun is literally the source of life for us. The problem is probably that we don't know how to interpret solar intensity and variation, even though it's not exactly rocket science. We are unfamiliar with studying our Sun.

What kind of astrologers are we? How can we ignore something so prominent and invasive as the effects of solar flares and the CMEs that our Sun hurls at Earth, huge masses of energy that literally change us, yet we seem dumbfounded when it comes to interpreting these effects.

I believe that astrologers don't know how to work with the solar variation and the 11-years sunspot cycle of solar intensity. We can rectify that. Here are two sources through which you can easily monitor the state of the

sun's activity and solar variation:

[SpaceWeather.com](http://SpaceWeather.com) (general overview)

[www.solarham.net](http://www.solarham.net) (detailed graphs)

I have come to understand that solar variation, ranging from the quiet sun (normal daylight) to an 'angry' sun (CMEs) is best understood in its effect on us as 'change', meaning the quiet sun provides a normal amount of change in our lives, while the active or over-active sun also provides an injection of enhanced change, and much more energetically, usually enough change to overwhelm us and possibly upset our current apple cart.

We can only take so much of a change overload before we, well, perhaps are forced into a change of course. The conservative in us likes everything to remain constant in our lives, while the liberal in us may welcome change. We get both. Yet, in the next few years we will get a lot more overload of change, since the sunspot cycle is on the rise and, according to scientists, this particular rising cycle appears to be unusually strong, and not vice-versa. And so, we best hold on to our hats.

As mentioned, I find it helpful to equate solar intense influx with sheer change, and it can be harder to absorb (without blinking) large packets of change than the average amount of change of the quiet sun. Lately and for the next couple of years we can expect 'big' change and we best learn how to deal with it.



Because intense change can be overwhelming to folks, many just go and lie down or otherwise find some way to weather the incoming increased change, like stick our head in the sand or otherwise denying change. It is our habit to ignore what is too difficult to acknowledge or absorb, so that can be our first step in learning to cope with increased change in our lives. Take it standing up, so to speak. Look change in the eye. Allow yourself to become aware of it.

The awareness of the incoming effect of solar change to us psychologically and emotionally is something we can develop consciously. It's like hardening off a plant in the garden that has grown too 'leggy' and thin. We are going to get hardened-off in the next few years of increasing change. We learn not only to accept change as it comes, but to use bursts of change to further our trajectory through life. In other words, we don't have to take it lying down. We can learn to handle change.

As for myself, I find that when the scientists tell me (see above links) that a large solar flare (or CME) has occurred on the surface of the sun and about when it will reach Earth, I should not only pay attention to the when the energy surge will hit Earth, but to also pay attention to when the solar flare or CME originally occurred on the surface of the sun. We all know it takes about 9 minutes for sunlight to travel from the Sun to Earth, and I seem to experience the effect of these solar

explosions when (or soon after) they actually take place on the sun, and not just when they are predicted to hit Earth's atmosphere some time later. This is an important finding, IMO. Somehow, we are connected with the sun so intimately, that any change in the sun's output is felt by us.

And so, I am speaking to those astrologer Facebook 'Friends' out there, of which there are a couple thousand. It's time that we astrologers as a group upped our game and learned to account for, measure, and monitor solar influx. It goes with the turf of being an astrologer in this modern world. Of course, how we use solar influx is up to us, yet we first have to become aware of it.

And I find it fascinating and very helpful, not only for myself, but also of use to others who don't know what is happening psychologically and emotionally when times of sudden change can overwhelm us. Here are three free books that may help:

"Solar Flares: Their Inner and Outer Effects"

[http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Solar\\_Flares.pdf](http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Solar_Flares.pdf)

"Sun Storms: The Astrology of Solar Activity"

[http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/sun\\_storms.pdf](http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/sun_storms.pdf)

"Solar Biology: Monitoring Space Weather"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e->

[books/SOLAR%20BIOLOGY%20pdf.pdf](#)

And of course, I am here to do my best to answer any questions, if you will just ask them.



## TOUCH THE SKY, TOUCH THE EARTH

April 10, 2022

Of course, reach for the sky, because as we know, the sky's the limit, at least the limit of 'UP', yet before you do, the sage advice is to first reach down and touch the earth as the Buddha Shakyamuni did, rather than just

starting off reaching for the sky. With the Buddha, this is called the 'Earth-Touching Gesture'. As the historical Buddha of this age, he did that for a reason that is worth understanding.

Reaching up into the mind or seeking out-of-body experiences without first being grounded is like flying a kite without a tail. It makes sense to reach up only when we are firmly grounded on Earth, yet if we are already too high, already too much into thinking and our head, reaching up will not benefit us at all. On the contrary. Like the image of the full lotus, which can only bloom on the surface of the water because its roots are established in the mud.

Our taking refuge (hiding high in the head) in the conceptual mind until the life of the flesh passes might be some form of cosmic humor, if only it were not so sad. We can't assume that we are automatically grounded when we enter this life as a child and that we have nowhere to look but 'up'. Many, if not most, folks would benefit from first looking down and make sure they are secure, firmly grounded, and have touched earth as the Buddha did and pointed out.

I know that was originally the case with me, that I was too much into my head, spent too much time out-of-the body and that, later in life, it is much harder to get grounded than when we are young and full of energy, under thirty years of age. Over thirty, past the prime of

life physically, it is much harder to move things around because we have already entered the space beyond time's grip (Saturn Return) on us and have less grip. The time to get grounded is when we are younger.

Of course, sooner or later, life will ground us anyway, and I am reminded of a poem the artist Michelangelo wrote (yes, he also wrote poems) which said something like "What if a little bird should escape death for many a long year, only to suffer a crueler death."

That is the food for thought I bring to this piece. As my first dharma teacher would say to me, again and again, using this circus analogy. "Michael, if you spend all your time in the sideshow, the main tent will be gone."

[Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha for this age, as drawn by the Bhutanese artist Sangye Wangchuk during his several years stay at our dharma center here in Big Rapids, Michigan. Some 500 drawings like this by Wangchuk are now a part of the permanent collection of the Ruben Museum of Art in New York City, specializing in the culture and art of the Himalayan regions.]



## INTERESTED?

April 13, 2022

As I have mentioned many times here, when in doubt, examine your interests. Even when not in doubt, look to your interests. The threads of our interest all lead somewhere important to us. They are like tributaries that lead to a larger river that will eventually sweep us away into the sea of effortless activity.

What may start as a trickle of interest, if followed, as mentioned, lead to larger and larger veins or tributaries that indicate where we want to go. It's not like attention to our interests is just a sidetrack or a waste of time.

What naturally interests us is, IMO, key, although like everything else, we may have to become more sensitive and actually learn how to recognize our own interests. One thing about 'interest' is that we are interested in it, meaning interest is self-propelling and needs no other fuel to keep us going.

Obviously, if we, for example, are not interested in working our current job, we better tread carefully, lest we blow up our current situation with no forethought to the future. We will certainly learn from such an action (turning over the applecart) but perhaps not the things we most need to learn just now.

It is best to have a plan about turning our interests loose and going hog-wild about following our interests. In my case, following my interests has been a lifelong endeavor and I have moved very slowly, but steadily, in the direction of what interested me.

Of course, there is some purification that has to take place, like if we are interested in eating Hostess Twinkies until we fall over, that will have consequences that we don't need just now. So, some common sense has to be maintained.

My point here is that, based on a lifetime of following my interests as best I can, I can assure you that, as mentioned, little trickles of interest (at first), lead to



streams, which lead to tributaries, which lead to rivers, and end up in the ocean of interest. That idea.

I don't know of any other way get the job done. Of course, we can read books, where we are told to do this or that and we will get a result. Good luck with that! It sometimes works, but just as often it is a waste of time, and we give up on rote instructions. There is no driving energy there.

With 'interest' we never tire because we are interested in following any thread of interest farther. As mentioned, it is as close to a perpetual motion machine as we will ever find. We do have to find out (until we can learn to trust) our own interests and prove to ourselves that our interests, no matter how circuitous, lead in the general direction we need to go in life. We each have to prove that to ourselves. I can only tell you about it.

"Interests" work like magnets, pulling us in this or that direction. We don't have to trump up the energy to keep going. Our interests are naturally self-propelling and sustaining.

What more can I say? I have done this my whole life, starting very young and being raised out in the country, where there were no neighbors and no kids my age. I ended up studying nature and without realizing it, just naturally began to hone my interests. The whole process was self-directing, and just naturally unfolded.

By the time I was any age at all, I was already onto following my own interests and these only became clearer as I wound my way through school, being carefully to protect and follow my natural sense of interest all the way.

By the time I was a young man, I knew of no other way to live than by following whatever I was interested in to where it led. Also, I became very skilled in differentiating what interests led to the future and which did not.

So, there you have it, something about my view of interest and following its threads. If you come up with a better approach, do let me know, but until then I will continue to stick to what interests me. Nothing else is of interest!



TRYING TO BE KIND

April 14, 2022

Here is a point that deserves some clarification, IMO, the idea of making an effort to be kind, to be kind by intent rather than actuality. We mean to be kind. We intend to be kind, yet we are driven to this intellectually, because we feel we ought to or should be kind, rather than that we are impulsively kind by nature. There is always this 'middle-man' of making an effort.

This may be hard to describe, yet you should instantly understand what I am pointing at when I say "make an effort to be kind." I'm not saying we should not make an effort to be kind (or whatever), only pointing out the conceptual effort. In fact, the dharma teachings even have a word for this kind of effort, which is 'Relative Bodhicitta' as compared to the more natural 'Absolute Bodhicitta'.

As mentioned, this is not meant to demean relative bodhicitta, our going through the motions of kindness and so forth, basically intellectually or because we 'think' we should or that it's socially correct, rather than being driven to kindness by nature and acting without a thought.

Understanding the difference between the two definitions, as mentioned, is not to shame us for being unable to rise to the occasion of what is called absolute bodhicitta, but rather to point out to us that we may be well-meaning and going through the motions of kindness by design or obligation, rather than just being

kind. It is best not to confuse the two.

In other words, just going through the motions of kindness or compassion in an obligatory manner, which basically amounts to “kindness sounds like this” when that’s the best we can do for the moment, is part and parcel of relative bodhicitta. We can’t help but do this because we are learning to be kind, trying it out, or feeling that is what we should be doing as opposed to just already doing it.

In other words, relative bodhicitta is OK to do, if only because we have no choice. We don’t know better. And so, I guess the big question is how do we make the transition from relative to absolute bodhicitta? How and when does that happen? This blog is clarification on this point.

You might imagine that the transition from relative to absolute bodhicitta is just gradual, meaning that gradually we shift from well-meaning to meaning well or however you want to phrase this. Yet, as far as I can tell, in dharma terms, that’s not how it works. We don’t just shift from relative to absolute bodhicitta gradually, like watching the sun rise.

Instead, there seems to be a specific event that triggers this transition, rather than a gradual morphing that brings this on, and that event traditionally in the dharma is called ‘Recognition’, which simply means our

recognizing the true nature of the mind after having this nature pointed out to us by an authentic dharma teacher.

That little cog in the wheel is far reaching in its implication and amounts to one big fly in the ointment of dharma practice. While almost everything in dharma practice is gradual and graduated, the trigger for 'Recognition' as to the actual nature of the mind is more like a switch, a switch that is either on or off, and not a graduated seamless process.

And this is made even more of a sticky point because 'Recognition', at least in all the pith dharma books I know, requires each of us to actually seek out an authentic dharma teacher that can point out to us the true nature of the mind, and that pointing-out is what precipitates 'Recognition' in us. And of course, we as students have to be able to receive these pointing-out instructions, which itself is not a small task.

In other words, there comes a point in learning the dharma where we seek out these pointing-out instructions from an authentic master. And thus crossing this impasse or bridge can be a problem or pickle that each of us are in, the fact that we are just waiting around for something like that to happen to us, which is not the same as our getting off our duffs and seeking out an authentic dharma teacher to work with us. And by 'authentic' I mean authentic for us, finding a teacher

whose direction or help works with us. In other words, one that we can learn from.

And for those of you new to the dharma or who have no dharma teachers where you live that appeal to you, what I am saying here may have to be just information that you take in for now. I am doing my best to inform you. In fact, I am here pointing out the 'pointing-out instructions', so at the very least you are aware such a situation and instructions exist.

As to why recognition of the true nature of the mind exists and how that enables Absolute Bodhicitta, all that I can tell you is that, as far as I can tell, that's just the way it works. It is an age-old tradition, being introduced to the mind's nature by an authentic lama.

Perhaps this is because once we have been successfully introduced to the true nature of the mind, we begin to actually become familiar enough with our own mind to become more confident. 'Recognition' marks the beginning of a process of realization that will continue until we are, perhaps lifetimes from now, enlightened. It is an articulated event, with a before and after.

With 'Recognition', it's also like we have finally realized something after perhaps years of work, and that's a huge load off our mind. We are no longer paying it forward or kicking the can of realization down the road. We can afford to stop striving, give effort a rest, and

actually look around.

And what we see when we look around is that, finally, we have at least reached some kind of resting place, a turning point. Let's call it a view. If nothing else, at that point, after Recognition, we also want to share our 'view', with other fellow travelers, and spontaneously at that, sharing what we have confidently now experienced and we have a place to stand from which to do that.

At least, that's the best way I can express what 'Absolute Bodhicitta' is all about and how it differs from 'Relative Bodhicitta', the imitating of kindness and compassion. Instead, with absolute bodhicitta, we cannot but have a deep urge to share and be of use to others, if only because we have finally had some actual dharma results ourselves.

I know... talking about a result in the midst of an ongoing process is like taking a freeze-frame out of motion-picture movie. Perhaps this is why explaining this inner change in view is so difficult, and yet it happens. With greater confidence, our view does change, and one of the byproducts of that change is that suddenly we have the time and energy to step beyond our own self and struggles, at least enough to be of use to fellow travelers.

And, as condescending as that may sound, I find it to be true. When we have something like a result with our own



dharma practice, such as 'Recognition," along with it comes space and time to think about someone other than ourselves. In fact, it is better than that. The moment we can see beyond our own needs and confusion, there is nothing else to see other than the needs of others and we cannot but recommend what we ourselves are finally seeing. We want to help others have the same view as we are realizing.

To me, it is that simple: beyond ourselves there is, by definition, something 'beyond ourselves' and that is everyone else. And this insight does not require any thinking or conceptualization on our part. It is as direct as the sights we see with our eyes or the sound we hear with our ears. There is no 'middle-man', so to speak, between our view and how things are. Take away our own need and we find the needs of others and respond to their needs naturally. We find that we are naturally compassionate. That is what is called "Absolute Bodhicitta." I can share this story.

This is something I learned many years ago at some 15,000 feet of altitude in the high plateaus of Tibet, when I first met the 17th Karmapa face to face. I was used to experiencing, when I met powerful spiritual leaders, the majesty and power of their presence, and I expected the same to happen meeting H.H. the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje.

Yet, this is not what happened. When looking the

Karmapa in the eye, as I sat there before him on the floor, panting from the thin air from having climbed up the steep ladder-like stairs (several flights) Tibetans use. What I realized in the presence of the Karmapa, was not how spiritually powerful he was, but rather, to my total surprise, what I realized is that at heart, despite my often brusque and direct manner, I was a deeply, deeply compassionate, and caring being. That was the Karmapa's form of effect, to cause me to realize my own inner nature. "Who woulda' thunk it," as they say.

That's the power of the Karmapa, not to communicate his strength, but to help me to realize my own inner nature, just how deeply compassionate and caring I am at heart, and all of us are that. I had never realized this before and have never forgotten it since.

[Photo of the "Water and Moon Guanyin," the Bodhisattva of Compassion, at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.]



## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

April 16, 2022

In this piece I am talking about getting to know our own Self. Something any LSD-taker (like we did back in the 1960s) should be able to attest to is that on acid we can see that we project our inner values out onto the world and then proceed to watch them and live in our own

movie.

For those without that insight from LSD, it may be more difficult to recognize that the objective world is actually quite subjective and very much all about us, because basically what we see in the outside world is essentially our own inner projection. It's easy to say that in words yet realizing this can be a lifelong task.

How to unwrap that situation of our watching our own movie is not easy, although still possible. Any way you look at it, eventually the two must become one, meaning the outside (outer world) and inside (who we that are looking at it) are joined at the hip, one and the same. The problem is that we can't see this.

Once convinced of that (a feature of LSD), it is only a matter of time until, as Sir Edwin Arnold pointed out, "the dewdrop slips into the shining sea," that is, until we stabilize and become familiar with the nature of our mind. Although with the aftermath of acid, that can still take a good 10-20 years to stabilize. However, it can get the job done, but so can a supervised dharma practice.

Although, first catching ourselves in our habitual dualism of me inside here and the world (you) outside there, can be tricky, and that was one of the values of psychedelics.

It's so easy to fall into the habit of reifying our own Self,

so that the dummy (our Self) ends up controlling the ventriloquist (our true nature). This is why so much space in literature is devoted to defining just what is the Self. We could just say that our Self is the sum total of our attachments, likes and dislikes. And we equally could say that 'attachment' (for or against) is the glue that holds the Self together. Attachment is the whole deal.

And it is helpful to point out that what we call our Self, as a kid might include attachment to our new bike, while at 24 years or so, it could be our new wife or husband. Our attachments are constantly changing and so is what we call our Self. The Self is not a permanent or static thing, but rather an ongoing process of attachment.

And so, if we are landlocked into regarding our Self (with all of our reification) as something more interesting than life itself, we have a problem, a Catch-22. If we can't see beyond our Self (which is made up of attachments that we chose), then we are stuck with an endless self-referencing instead of the freedom of life itself. In other words, we are stuck on ourselves.

In some of the dharma practices, we imagine an image of our lama or the Buddha himself in front of us or on the top of my head; this is at least an attempt to short-circuit our habit of always referencing our Self. It is hard for us to tear ourselves away from our Self.

And no one is going to stop us from doing that,

referencing our Self, yet I am pointing out that we are not about to learn from a collection of our own attachments that we, ourselves chose and put together. It's just kind of a foolish waste of time. There is nothing there that we don't already know and nothing to learn except what I am mentioning here, that this has to be a colossal waste of our time.

Yet, how do we distract ourselves from our own habitual distraction of constantly reifying (building up) and glorifying our Self? It's been there for so long and the Self is so carefully manicured, that apparently, we can hardly take our eyes off our Self.

Yet, every now and again, some kind of external (or Internal) shock will jar us awake and offer us a brief gap or opening to see beyond that Self to what, so to speak, is out there.

This is the veil or problem that faces all dharma students, to find a way to look beyond (or through) our Self and mostly this takes a gradual thinning out of the obscuration or cataract that a Self imposes.

In my own case, my approach was first to learn to accept myself, just as I am (warts and all), and (much harder) to actually like my Self that I was more or less worshipping. In other words, make friends with yourself or at least learn to treat your Self as we would any other person, with acceptance and hopefully kindness. That should

make sense.

Next, put your Self out to pasture like you might an old and well-known cow. Give your Self plenty of hay, water, sunshine, and just let it fade out in its own time, as we learn to become interested in other factors in life other than our own Self.

If you don't just fight yourself, hate yourself, or otherwise keep interacting, in time the Self will become increasingly transparent, meaning we will begin to see through it to what is beyond ourselves, which of course includes other people, the world, and life itself.

The Self admits to fading out, while if we struggle with the Self, it only grows stronger. It's sad to see folks struggling with themselves, hating themselves, and any and all other self-involvement. All they think about is ego, ego, ego or hate ego, ego, ego. The more we struggle with the Self, the more we take it with us everywhere we go.

In dharma practice, we learn to, as mentioned, see beyond our Self, or better put, see through our Self. We begin to transfer our identity from exclusively our Self to everything else: other people, places, things, and life in general. We change our focus, so that the Self becomes transparent (fades out) and everything else comes into focus. That amounts to a change of venue.



## ROLLING WITH CHANGE

April 17, 2022

Now is the beginning of solar excess, as this new solar cycle takes charge by today throwing off the first X-Class solar flare, the strongest class of flares. And by 'solar excess' I mean 'change' within us and probably too much of it to easily absorb and toss off without some awareness of it happening.



This recent flare emerged from a very active sunspot nest that is just now reaching the sun's northeastern limb, thus emerging from the far side of the sun into view. Even though not directly aimed at Earth, it managed to cause a shortwave radio blackout over southeast Asia and Australia and was accompanied by a CME (Corona Mass Ejection).

As many of you know, although of course I note the physical effects of solar activity, my main interest is how this intense solar activity affects us emotionally and psychologically. How do we accept change? And I equate solar activity simply with what we call 'change', the internal impetus to change and with intensive solar change, our inability to deny or avoid the increased rate of change within us.

Of course, the normal, 'quiet' sun with its steady rate of light-flow takes about nine minutes to travel from the Sun to Earth. With these more extreme bursts of change, not only do we absorb the regular light from the sun, but these additional packets of extreme energy and change take varying amounts of time, usually a few days of travel, to reach Earth's atmosphere. That's the mechanics of intensive solar activity.

How this surfeit of change affects us and the world's events, scientists have finally gotten around to beginning to study our internal response to change in

the last 20 years or so. And astrologers, as a group are just as tardy as the scientists in telling us what this change can mean for us psychologically, although I believe we can no longer ignore what is right before our eyes.

And, as mentioned, this is just the first of many volleys of X-Class 'change' that will mark the rise of the current sunspot cycle's activity. It would be redundant to say that it would help for us to wake up and take notice of what goes on internally within us with such change. After all, astrology can be defined, and has been, as cultural astronomy, what celestial events like solar flares mean and how they affect us.

So, it would be helpful to us if we could learn the way this solar change rolls and what it means for us to be inundated by these waves of more extreme change because they are just going to keep coming (and increasing) for the next several years.

Of course, as mentioned, we can watch the external physical effects of solar change as they affect radio transmissions or at times the electrical grids, yet I direct your attention to our internal changes and the emerging awareness that these packets of excessive change affect us beyond our ability to simply ignore them and toss them off.

The point here is that with such extreme change, we

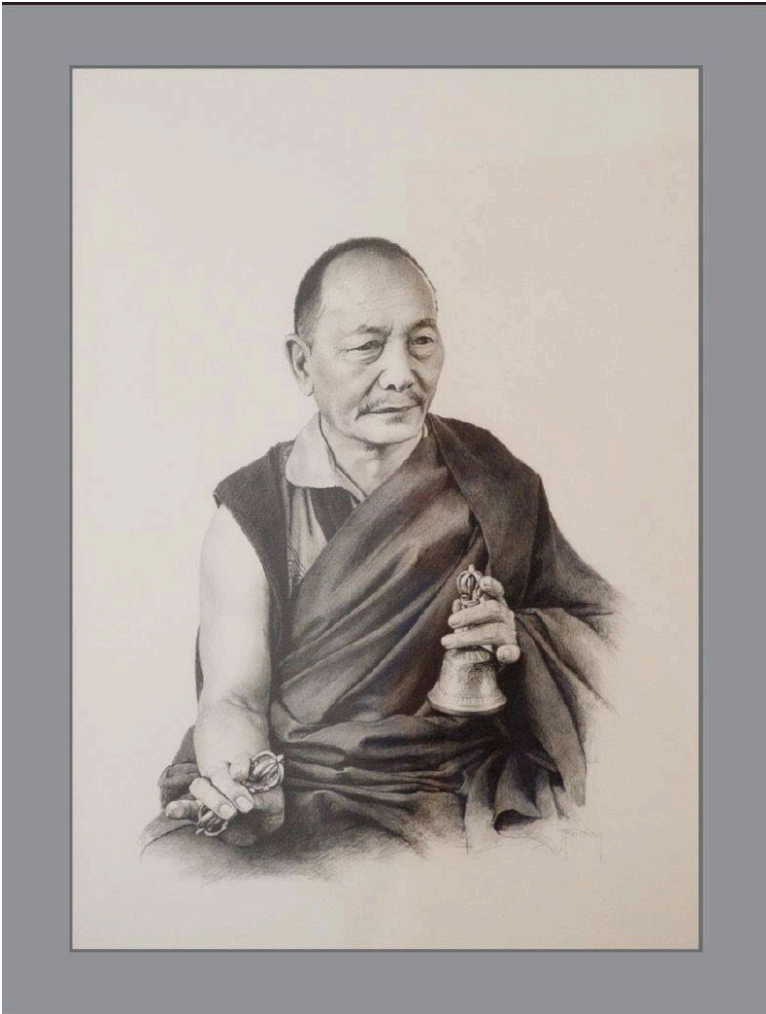
change at core (we change), and are easily overcome by more change than we can handle and, so it appears, we seem to seek refuge in lying down or otherwise ignore being buffeted by the waves of change as they arrive. We do our best to soldier-on, when at some point we have to just stop ignoring change and wake up to handling it.

And this affects the whole earth and every one of us on it at roughly the same time. As mentioned, I feel it is time that we learn to monitor solar change with our awareness rather than seek to avoid (put it out of our mind) recognizing this change moving within us.

How such change affects something like Russia's attack on the Ukraine, I can only imagine; being pushed beyond our limits requires discipline by all of us. Of course, those of us who are teetering on the edge changing our lives will appreciate the shove of solar energy, making that change unavoidable, while others not wanting change will struggle against it. This is how it has always been.

Either way, change is coming and not in small increments, but in large packets and quanta like we have not see for a while. Up to now, these quanta of change have more or less gone without saying on our parts. I believe it is now time for us to, instead, acknowledge this coming change and learn how to use it.

And we have a solar eclipse coming on April 30, 2022.



## A DHARMA STORY -- THE DRAWING

April 18, 2022

Although I have shared this story some time ago, it's a fun read. Many years ago, it was in the 1980s, I had a

dream. It was very vivid. And in that dream, I presented my dharma teacher the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche a drawn image or portrait of himself. It was one of those dreams that is magical, somehow more real than waking life. It left a deep imprint.

For that reason, I felt it was important that this dream be made real and acted out in actual life, if I could figure out how to do that. After the dream and its imprint in my mind, I began actively to consider how this could happen. I tried on many ideas.

I finally settled on a sketched portrait but finding an artist good enough was not easy. I only knew of a single such artist, one of the finest draftsmen in Michigan, a man named John Felsing who was renowned for his life-like portraits of wildlife, especially birds.

I contacted Felsing and asked to visit him. Then Margaret and I traveled to Lansing where he lived and sat down with him. I explained my dream and what I was hoping he might do. After some discussion, he agreed to do a drawing and I gave him a really nice photo of Khenpo Rinpoche.

Several months went by and I heard nothing. Then one day a large envelope came in the mail. It contained a rough sketch of Khenpo Rinpoche. To my dismay, the drawing he sent was a sketch of an elderly oriental gentleman, but not the dynamic rinpoche I knew. This was disappointing and would not do. I got on the phone and carefully explained this to John Felsing and he said

that he would try again. To assist him I then sent him some of Rinpoche's dharma teachings and one of his books, a book I also worked as an editor called "Dharma Paths."

Again, several months went by and then one day another large manila envelope showed up in the mail. I hesitated to look inside; and then with bated breath I carefully opened the package. When I did, this time the image was actually of the Khenpo Rinpoche Margaret and I know and love.

Apparently the books and Rinpoche's own teachings helped to communicate the idea of the man himself. I let Felsing know that he could now do the finished drawing. And the ending to this story is remarkable.

When the artist Felsing finished the final drawing, he personally called to notify me of that. And as it happened Khenpo Rinpoche, who (of all things) was visiting our dharma center that very day, and was about to do an empowerment for our local group that evening.

Felsing did not hesitate a moment, but said he was coming to Big Rapids to see Rinpoche. He jumped into his car, drove through the oncoming night to our center and, when he arrived, he formally asked Rinpoche to give him "Refuge." Refuge is a short ceremony that takes place when someone discovers that they have great respect for the dharma, respect not only for the historical Buddha, but also for his teachings (the dharma), and the sangha (those monks and nuns who

embody the living teaching). It is a request you make of a teacher. Felsing's request was honored and Rinpoche gave the refuge ceremony, which includes giving those who ask for it a dharma name.

Apparently during the months that John Felsing was working with Rinpoche's image and reading some of the teachings, he was moved by what he learned and had developed a true respect for the dharma. He was inspired to become more actively involved in the dharma and so asked to receive the refuge ceremony. I am struck by how a simple contact with Rinpoche, even at a distance, made such a difference.

[Here is the drawing that the artist John Felsing made of Khenpo Rinpoche]





## THE FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL IN ANN ARBOR

(The late 1950s-early 1960s)

April 18, 2022

[For those of you who are younger, I can stretch Ann Arbor's music history back at least to the late 1950s, for those interested. Try this out.]

## THE PROMETHEAN COFFEE HOUSE

These days when I visit Ann Arbor it takes twenty minutes just to drive across town. If I have one phrase to describe the difference between Ann Arbor back then and now, it is "overly caffeinated." Today there seems to

be a coffee shop on almost every corner and it makes a difference. Back then there was just one coffee house and that was Mark's Coffee House on East William Street, and for those of you who are as old as I am you might remember the actual first coffee house in Ann Arbor, "The Promethean" on the other side of William Street from Mark's and about a block west, just down from where the Cottage Inn pizza place is today.

The Promethean Coffee House served (non-espresso) coffee, mulled cider (with cinnamon sticks!), and played jazz albums, not to mention the Shelly Berman comedy albums. Once in a while folksingers like Al Young (today Poet Laureate of California) would play there. This must have been in the late 1950s. I went there as often as I could just to sit around, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, look serious, look for beatniks, and (most of all) hope that I would meet the love of my life.

Nothing much really happened there aside from all of the sitting around and sneaking glances at one another, and after a while it just closed. It was not really much of a hangout. It had somehow already been sanitized and stiff, too formal. It was a business, not a place to hang, and few of us hung there. Ultimately, it was uncool, not "down" or real enough.

The Michigan Union Grill (MUG) was where the real "beats" hung out anyway. As a high-school student I used to work there busing dishes and what-not. When not working, my high-school buddies and I would hang

around in the Michigan Union, either playing pool on one of the upper floors or having fun in the tiny bowling alley that was there. I suppose we were trying to pass for college students, but with our antics, I doubt that was successful except maybe in our own minds.

Still, for someone like me, who was reading all of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and the Beat writers, this was as close as I could then get to joining up with the Beat Movement. I was still in high school. Unfortunately, the beat movement was already almost over, only I didn't know that yet. I still hoped I could catch a ride on that train before it left the station. But I would have to wait for the next wave, which turned out to be the Sixties and (I hate this term) the "hippies." I was never a hippie. I am a couple years older than the hippies, so call me a pre-hippie or a post-beat.

And at that time in Ann Arbor, I would be at parties with Anne Waldman, Norman Mailer, John Cage, Bob Ashley, Bob James, and others. And I read anything that had to do with alternative spirituality, books on Zen, Existentialism, Confucius, astrology, numerology, etc. -- things like that.

And I inhaled the beat literature. It was everything I was not. Where I felt that I was trapped in a middle-class button-down society with crew cuts and permanent waves (the 1950s), Kerouac and kind were out in the real world glorifying the blue-collar working types, the

Blacks, or those not working at all. And I liked that. Instead of a future of fitting into some job that I could not imagine, how about no job at all? How about that for a future?

The beats dreamed of an intellectual life of poetry, music, the arts, and they talked and talked, staying up late, smoking cigarettes, drinking wine, and taking substances. Meanwhile I was facing the status-quo head-on and didn't even have the status of a high-school diploma as a door opener. My lack of a diploma had already sealed my fate to working outside the middle-class, so the beats indeed seemed like an alternative: little to no work at all. What a wonderful idea!

Back then I was not in the least phased by "down," by living on the edge or even beyond it in relative poverty, forced simplicity, and even discomfort. It was all cool to me at the time. The fact that it was mostly a drug and alcohol scene while living on next to nothing and (a dirty nothing at that) seemed something of a solution to me. A little dirt never hurts. Picking up and smoking other people's cigarette butts was kind of cool in a way, at least to tell others about. It was what beats did. Getting handouts at a shelter or free health care at a clinic was just beating the system. Pilfering some food here or a little wine there was what everyone did. I had no trouble with that. I was an apprentice to that.

Back in 1960, as I have pointed out, there were no hippies and for that matter it was not even the Sixties when I studied up on the Beat Movement; it was still the 1950s and a life (up until then) lived in school, forced to study (which I did not), made to hide under the school desks because the Soviets might bomb us with atomic bombs any day, and having ourselves labeled by the idiot psychology of the time as manic-depressive, paranoid, schizophrenic, etc. I was not personally these things, but these were the kind of terms that were applied to our minds and psyche by society. This was my introduction to the mind – sick labels. So, I left. I just dropped out. It was a relief.

All that I cared about is that I was at last out of boring, boring school, on my own, and free to experience for myself what I could only read about and imagine in the books of Kerouac and the poems of Ginsberg. As mentioned, the Beats were very educated in the liberal arts, often self-educated. They were not academics, but amateurs in the truest sense, in love with literature, music, and the arts. That is what I deeply wanted as well. I have always educated myself in all things. Back then I was my own teacher.

In 1957 freshman student Al Young and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Young went on to become Poet Laureate of California, and unfortunately passed on April 17, 2021. The Folklore Society was a natural interface between the University

folk and the townies – music. As a high-school dropout, I had no trouble integrating and being accepted in the folk circles. No questions were asked. We were all just ‘folk’ and it was a culturally rich scene.

And Michigan was not the only campus with a folklore society. Folk music was popping up on campuses all over the nation and we were interconnected by what came to be called the ‘folk circuit’, a constant stream of folk enthusiasts that traveled from campus to campus playing and sharing folk music. The circuit went from Cambridge to New York City to Ann Arbor to Chicago to Madison to Berkeley and back again. We were hitchhiking or piling into old cars and driving the route.

Musicians like Bob Dylan would hitchhike into town, hang out, play a gig or two, and be on down the road. And well-known folk singers came, folksingers like Ramblin’ Jack Elliot and groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were regular visitors to Ann Arbor and this was before anyone was famous. They didn’t stay in fancy motels, but with us. They stayed in our houses, slept on a couch or in the spare bedroom. We all hung out together and played music or sat in the Michigan Union Grill (MUG) and drank coffee all day. Whatever music and culture they brought with them really had a chance to sink in. They shared themselves and their time with us. They were just like us.

Ann Arbor had its own players. The president of the Folklore Society was Howie Abrams and we sported folk musicians like Marc Silber, Al Young, Dave Portman, Peter Griffith, and Perry Lederman. Marc Silber is still playing. There was also an important lady named "Bugs," but I can't remember her last name. Anyone know? And we put on festivals and events.

For example, the folklore society raised money to bring Odetta to Ann Arbor where she gave her first college performance. And a young Bob Dylan gave an early performance as part of a small folk-music festival in Ann Arbor put on by the U-M Folklore Society. I can remember sitting in the Michigan Union with a very nervous Dylan, drinking coffee and smoking, while we waited for the review of Dylan's performance the night before to come out in the Michigan Daily newspaper. It was something like 10:30 AM when the review surfaced, and it was positive. With that good news Dylan proceeded to hitchhike out of town. And when Odetta sang at the Newport Folk Festival in 1960, Al Young, Perry Lederman, and Marc Silber hitchhiked there to see her. And there was also a subtle change taking place.

Folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s was part of what is called the "Folk Revival," and those of us who were part of it were very much aware of the need to protect and revive our musical heritage. A player like Dylan was not writing his own tunes back then but rather reviving and interpreting songs that harkened

from other generations. What made you a good folksinger back then was the ability to authentically reproduce or reenact a particular song. The keywords then were "authentic" and "revive." Folksingers went to great lengths to locate and reproduce the most authentic versions of a song.

Writing our own songs came years later. We were busy rescuing this part of our cultural heritage from oblivion. Folk music at that time was mostly White folk music with maybe a peppering of Black country-blues artists or a virtuoso Black singer like Odetta. They were the exception, but they were treated like the rule: revive them and be authentic. When we heard the country blues, we also wanted to revive and sing them as authentically as we could, Ebonics and all.

So, it was somewhat confusing when we eventually found out that the blues not only didn't need our reviving, but were alive and well, playing at a bar just across town where they were perhaps separated by a racial curtain. We didn't go there because... well, just because. Another insidious form of racism.

But in fact, blues, especially city blues, was very much alive, very seminal, and very, very available. In the early and mid-1960s, young White Americans began the trek to the other side of the tracks, took the trip downtown, and eventually the journey to Chicago and other places where electric blues were being played. Ann Arbor



played a very significant role in introducing White America to city blues. The original two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970 were landmark events and the three succeeding Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festivals just opened it all up to a wider audience.

There is more on this general topic in my book "Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals," which was picked as one of the top 20 books published in Michigan in 2011. You will find it here:

[http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8 &qid=1321295671&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8 &qid=1321295671&sr=1-1)

And of course, there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first. The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger.

During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000

people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's experience and enjoyment of the tune. "Sing Out!

Magazine" was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective-heritage. It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged perhaps in the late 1940s, and exploded toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what we felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for something a little more real. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadow and the counterculture

hippie revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already emerging.

## The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961.

And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that. For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a

mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed. Dylan's album "Highway 61 Revisited" was released in August of 1965, including the hit single "Like a Rolling Stone."

[To be continued as I find time.]

[Photo of the Michigan Union, inside of which was the M.U.G., the Michigan Union Grill, which is where everyone we knew hung out.]



THE FOLK REVIVAL (PART II) -- LOOKING FOR ROOTS,  
"THE BLUES"

April 19, 2022

Here is a continuation of the preceding article on the Ann Arbor folk scene. I will repeat a couple of facts I mentioned in the previous article to set the stage, so hang in there. This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to

revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included.

The goal then was to do them well, make them live again, i.e. to revive them. Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the

future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a folk revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who then was already a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars, and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments, and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union, the place called the M.U.G, the

Michigan Union Grill. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way, hitchhiking out of town.

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in New York. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan was obviously jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say that we needed to hear.



Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were 'wanna-be' Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old.

### The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like "Freight Train" (Cotton) and "San Francisco Bay Blues" (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, the country blues just sounded like really good folk music – 'really' good. Back then we didn't know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk-blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to

appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric folk music was an oxymoron.

### Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived – learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had an emptiness inside us to fill.

We had no idea that modern electric-blues music was not only 'not-dead' but was playing 'live' most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few Blacks in it (other than perhaps a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present.

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most

musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms. It was not yet out time.

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall.

We didn't yet rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

### Searching for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz

we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk-blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – still alive, well, and incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must already be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing also lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us, and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, a kind of folk music that lived now, in the present! And this music

revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s, as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace.

Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues. My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was

music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy

Reed's "Honest I Do," "Willie Dixon's "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "I'm a King Bee," plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like "Under the Boardwalk." It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, "Time Is on My Side." In 1965, the album "Rolling stones, Now!" had the Dixon-Wolf classic "Little Red Rooster."

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, their album "Out of Our Heads" had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, "December's Children." It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular that first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it's when my own band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact, the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass. IMO, the Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record.

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal through all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues, if they could. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern electrified city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, resuscitation, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation.

Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of



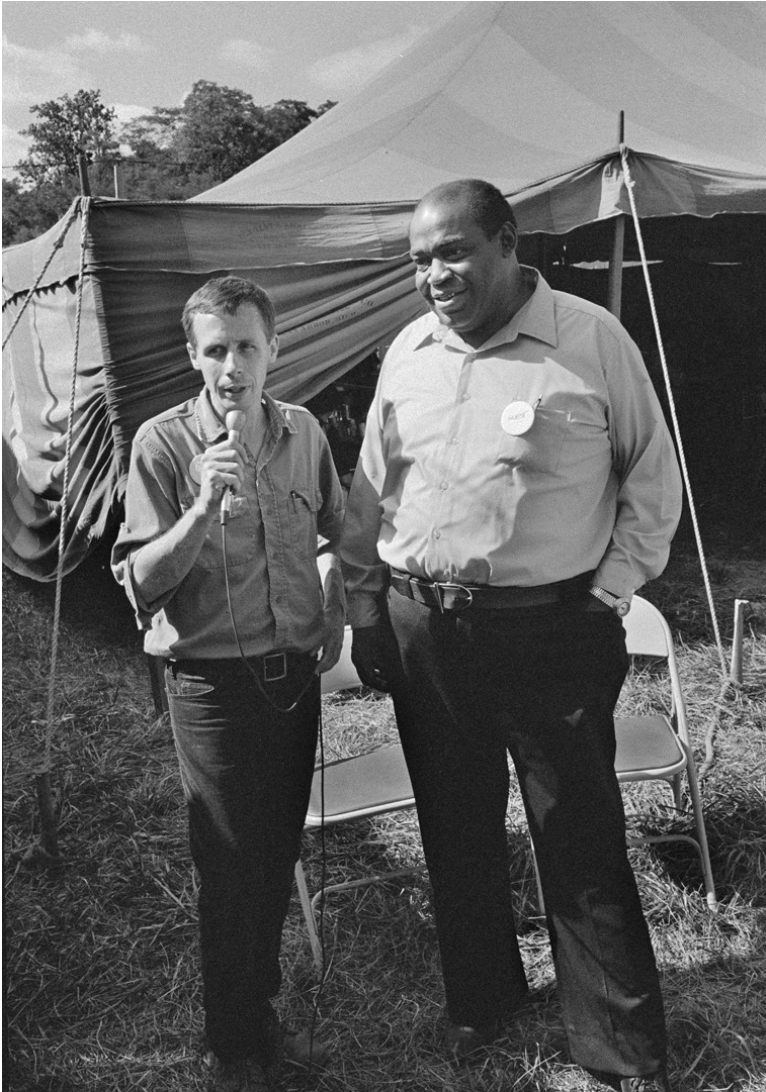
Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late '60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was recorded by Michael Bloomfield and the tune "East-West " on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed. My brother Dan and I recorded an early version of East-West sitting behind a black stage curtain in Chicago before the album ever was released. It later came out on a compilation by the Butterfield Band's Hammond B3 player Mark Naftalin.

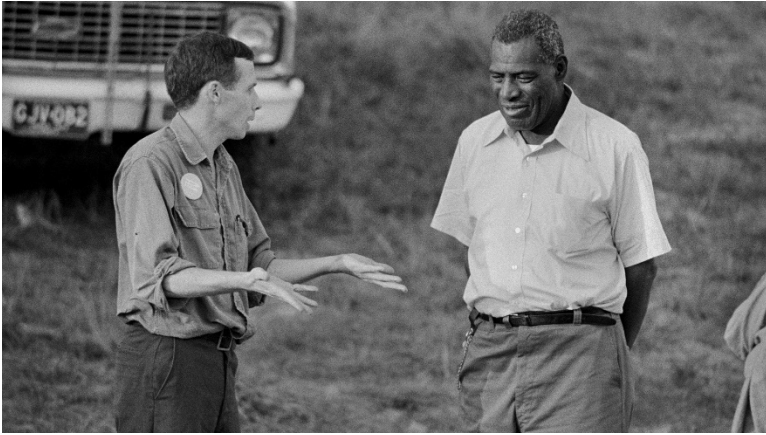
[Photo of the first Butterfield Blue Band album in late 1965]



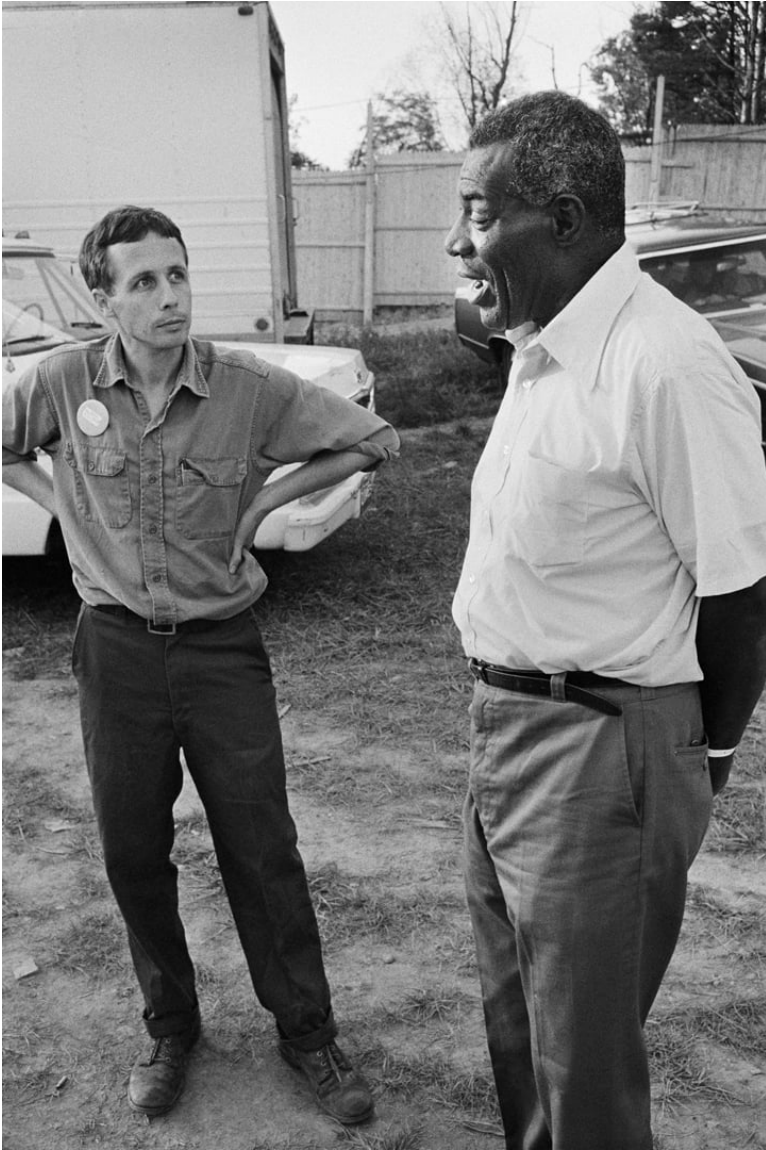
Michael Erlewine interviewing the legendary Muddy Waters.



Michael Erlewine interviewing legendary songwriter and bass player Willie Dixon.



Michael Erlewine sharing thoughts with blues singer Howlin' Wolf.



Michael Erlewine sharing thoughts with blues singer Howlin' Wolf.



Michael Erlewine interviewing blues singer Koko Taylor.



Left-to-Right: Michael Erlewine, Johnny Shines, Daniel Erlewine.



Michael Erlewine standing at back with legendary bluesman Robert Pete Williams. Brother Philip Erlewine on right. On chairs, Lazy Lester and Johnny Shines (closer).

## MAKING BLUES TIME

April 20, 2022

This article is about musical time, something we might agree to call "making time." The classic blues players, like all great musicians, literally "make" time with their minds. They don't just follow along in time like most of us do when listening, tapping their foot. They set the time, inset the time with their music, but it goes deeper than that. Every once in a while, you and I might look at our watch and see what time the clock says, but the time in between those clock checks goes unchecked. It just passes, like the old song from Sandy Denny, "Who knows where the time goes?" I certainly don't know where it goes. My point is that while clock time seems to be regular, what goes on when you and I are not watching the clock can be anything but regular. In other word time contracts and expands like an accordion, especially when it comes to musical time.

The really great blues players, and we all have our favorites, actually can 'make' time. Time is also something we make. My favorite for "making" time would have to be Big Walter Horton, the Chicago blues harmonica player. In my opinion he could make the best time I have managed to hear. He could show me the best time I have ever had musically, the very best time I have ever experienced.

And I have of course (like we all do) my own sense of time, you know just going along each day, like each of



us are doing now, reading this – taking our own sweet time.

But with Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and other blues greats, somehow their music takes over time as I know it. They can overtake my personal sense of time and replace it with the kind of time that they make, which is for me a much more vast sense of time, you know, more time, time enough to do other things in -- extra-ordinary time. I can synch up or resonate to their time and it becomes (for the moment) my time. Big Walter Horton (for me) is a great director or conductor of time and I gladly groove along with him to his beat. You can experience this on the Vanguard "Chicago/The Blues/Today!, Vol.3, the cuts with Big Walter Horton and Johnny Shines, like "Black Spider Blues."

Great blues players can expand or stretch time and, in that expanded time, these musicians give us more room to experience or listen, creating an envelope (almost like an aura) with their music, an envelope in which we have more room or space to know ourselves, to relax, to be ourselves, or to just think and be here now. Making time and being in the time that is made (whether our own or made by others) is what this article is about.

### Musical Time Beyond Time

'Making' time is one of the hallmarks of the great blues musicians. Most of them are gone and I have resigned myself to not hearing their kind of expanded musical time played live any longer, although I can still hear it on

some recordings. It is gone. However, to my surprise, I actually experienced this form of blues time live some years ago after a very long hiatus. It was at a Michigan music festival called "Wheatland," held not far from where I live here in mid-Michigan. Perhaps 20,000 people attended it.

They had a musician there named Aubrey Ghent, a lap-steel player from somewhere in the southeast; I believe it was Florida. Ghent plays gospel music and, sure enough, that day he was making time like the old masters. I was spellbound. I had not heard profound "blues" time like that since back in the day around Chicago and places like that. And Aubrey Ghent was sitting up there on the stage making blues time, making it just like they used to.

Sure enough, Aubrey Ghent was 'making' the time. It immediately put me back in a musical space when I used to listen to players like Muddy Waters, a space where a blues player would take over time as I knew (and lived it) and would put me through something I could not put myself through, taking me on a trip and to a place where I sure liked to go, but did not know how to get there by myself.

Aubrey Ghent had that kind of sense of time and one of the songs he displayed it on was, to everyone's surprise, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," the Bobby McFerrin tune. The whole audience just stopped whatever time they were having and went on Ghent's special sense of time for a while. And of course, the rest of the night we were all

telling each other about that incredible music. What I am after here is what makes that kind of music time incredible?

Maybe at the end, after you listened to Ghent, you would say to yourself, "Wow, that music was 'really' good," yet, IMO, it is way more than just the music being 'good'. Most of those present had just experienced something that they never had before and that some of us hadn't heard for a very long time. And maybe they can't quite remember it or maybe they remember it later, slowly, over a period of time, calling it back into memory with satisfaction, a little bit of that time, reading it back to themselves.

Anyway, Howlin' Wolf would put me through something like that when I was with him. And another blues player who did that to me was Chicago's Magic Sam. Some of you may not know of Magic Sam, but he was one of the most virile, seminal guitar players that have ever played the guitar. And he also was an incredible singer, and I 'mean' incredible! You can hear what I am pointing out here on the Delmark album "West-Side Soul" by Magic Sam here:

[http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd\\_sim\\_m\\_2](http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd_sim_m_2)

And in the re-release of his Cobra and Chief Recordings from 1957 here:

<http://www.amazon.com/Essential-Magic-Sam-Cobra-Recordings/dp/B000059RVO>.

I first heard Magic Sam live in Chicago back in the mid-1960s in one of these large rooms like you used to find in some of the Chinese restaurants in the major cities, the ones with really low ceilings. I am talking about big rooms, where they have all these little tables and chairs that kind of go way back in the distance. You can't even see the end of them and in this case, everyone was already standing. I couldn't see Magic Sam. I had just squeezed in the door and was flat up against the back wall, and the place was packed. All I could make out were heads as far as I could see. Yet I could hear this incredible sound coming from somewhere way up front. It was Magic Sam's voice, which immediately made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I had never heard anyone sing like that. It was literally a shimmering sheet of sound. It was Magic Sam making his own special time. That kind of time was rare then and almost impossible to find live now.

In my opinion what we are getting from blues players today, and I don't mean to offend anyone, so I will try to say it gently, is that with the blues music as it is today, "it sounds like this," as in: "it sounds like Howlin' Wolf." To myself, I just call it "reenactment" blues. Today we are now reenacting something that used to be there but no longer is like: Howlin' Wolf used to be there, but he is no longer with us, and so on. Or we could just say that no one sings like the Wolf, and those who try are just reenacting Wolf, trying to sound like Wolf. Obviously, they are not Wolf.

The problem with younger players re-enacting Wolf's songs is that they always make me think of Wolf, and whoever is singing does not really sound like Wolf. This spoils it for me because there is no comparison. I would rather these young players just sing Wolf's songs in their own voice and with their own experience, so I could hear 'them', and not hear them through a Wolf filter, and almost by definition a lousy one at that. That's just me.

Consider this: Most musicians listen to someone like Howlin' Wolf or Big Walter Horton and they set about to learn Wolf's style, to play Wolf's licks, and so on, perhaps in hopes that they can make the kind of music Wolf makes. But this is just exactly backward to what would actually be needed to create the effect of a Wolf or a Muddy Waters, and this point may be a little subtle.

Playing Wolf's licks, and so on, will never get you there. Wolf was not doing that. Aside from some earlier influences, Wolf was not trying to resemble anyone. He has managed to get his mind and consciousness (whatever we want to call it) into a certain state so that ANYTHING he played already has that sound and perfection. It is already perfect "Wolf" because it was Howlin' Wolf. You can't imitate perfection and why would you want to?

Therefore, to play like Wolf played, you would first have to perfect not just your guitar, voice, and harmonica licks, but your very mind, your consciousness, pay your dues, and get yourself into a state where anything you do, including playing music, will already 'sign' and be

significant, and will exactly signify you and where 'your' head is at. Do you understand? Don't work on the licks only, but work on perfecting yourself, your life, your consciousness, and where your mind is at. Then whatever you do will sound right, at least right for you. Anyway, back to "making time."

The main blues players from back in the 1960s were all incredible, but the greatest time-maker of all time (for me personally) was the harmonica player Big Walter Horton. He could set or make time better than anyone I have ever heard. I refer you to Volume Three of the "Chicago/the Blues/Today!" album on Vanguard, and the song "Black Spider Blues," as an example.

Horton is playing there with Johnny Shines and the two of them are making time together. Here is a link:

[http://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Blues-Today-Various-Artists/dp/B000000EJ0/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1291988413&sr=1-4](http://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Blues-Today-Various-Artists/dp/B000000EJ0/ref=sr_1_4?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1291988413&sr=1-4)

And it is perfect. If you were to add someone else, another player, the time would probably immediately change for the worse and the expanded sense of time that I can clearly hear on the record would be lost, unless that player too was of the same caliber and vintage.

And by "making time," I mean this: We all have a sense of time. Musicians who play regularly know that on the really good music nights they can make time slow down

or somehow expand; time stretches. I may not have the best words here.

The energy and effort put out by the musician to build or create the musical time actually creates not just a slowing down or expanding of time, but also produces some kind of mental or psychological space in which the audience can think or exist in. It's like making some space, clearing out the mental cobwebs when I listen to one of these masters; they somehow give me a timeout from 'clock time', time to perhaps know more about myself. I learned this years ago in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood's Party.

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play, and I looked out at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like "Michael, you're doin' good man!" But there wasn't any of that.

As I looked at the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly realized what was happening and said to myself: "Oh, I get it now. It's not about me!" I realized that, like everything else in life, even music has a "what's in it for me" quotient, and in this case, it was about what was in it for them, the audience. My music only gave them the room or a

expanded space to experience their own thoughts more fully than they could without the music. I just happened to be playing the music well that night. That's what music is about.

Great musicians make space in time. They expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us to live in. They 'make' time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to. We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I work a lot. And I get up like at two or three in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap. And then somewhere around 6 PM I like to watch a movie. It doesn't have to be a whole movie, or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course, watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over that happened that day in my mind. I am resting the mind or resting in the space of that movie watching.

Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people, because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what meditators do? Anyway, in that down time I get things done in my mind that I need to do, while I am watching the movie. I am processing the day's events. For me, it is very relaxing and actually quite necessary.

When great blues players play, they create a similar kind of time in which we, the audience, can get into and experience with and through them. So, the great time



setters, the great blues musicians (great musicians of any kind) take over our sense of time, take over what we can call clock time, this time or that time. They take it over and supplant our time and replace it with their sense of time, what they know how to do. They're setting or 'making' the time. They are creating or making the time for us and suddenly our mind is caught up by their sense of time. We are into it, if only for the length of a tune. This is why live performances can never be replaced by recordings.

We might say afterward, "Oh, isn't that an incredible guitar player" or we could also say "Wow, he or she took me on a trip." Musicians make time and, in that time, we have our own personal experience. It is not only about 'their' music, but also about our life. That is the point here. That is what great music is all about.

I can remember one example and it's a good one. In Chicago, back in the mid-1960s I went into a club, a tiny little place (I forget the name of it; it might have been "Mother Blues") that Howlin' Wolf was playing in. There was nobody there. There was only Howlin' Wolf and next to him there was his wonderful guitar player Hubert Sumlin. That's it. So, we came in and it was almost totally dark. There was just a little bit of light up near the stage. Wolf was sitting on a wooden chair way up front and singing like only Howlin' Wolf can sing. And for a while, time just stopped. It was not so much that time stopped, as it was that the walls, that whole place I was in, faded and gradually became transparent.

Not just the walls, but from the walls on out forever. What remained was this consciousness (I guess it was me) floating in an ocean of translucent space. And scout's honor, I was not on drugs! Everything just went void. For that time, I forgot where I was in my life. I had to reach inside to get a hold on myself, and there was nothing to get a hold of. Wolf's voice and the power of his musical time had taken over mine. I could have been anywhere in the universe – somewhere, and yet there still was no place. Place had nothing to do with it.

I was transfixed by Wolf's time. And of course, I came out of it, but it was like: how could I forget this? That's what I mean by time. Wolf's time was better than mine. I wasn't even prepared for the experience; it just happened. He took me deeper than I could get by myself. It is like one of those times when somebody dies that is close to you. Those events kind of stop you in your tracks and make you, for a time, more open. You are popped out of your groove and open to alternatives. Life is new again. That's what happened in Wolf's time.

Toward an Explanation

What am I talking about here and how does it work?

This is where words can fail, but I will give it a try. You may have to meet me halfway. Have you ever been in one of those car accidents or near accidents when you see it coming, but maybe can't avoid it? It is easy to find these events when driving on ice. Your mind concentrates and you are "right there." Time slows down

and everything seems to be taking place in slow motion. That is somewhat similar to what I am pointing at here when I use the term "making time." In times of stress, intense awareness, or extreme concentration, time stretches and slows down. You can see it all happen. Time just somehow expands or makes room. "Making time" with the blues is like that for me.

The standard blues progression is just twelve bars which keep repeating themselves over and over. In order to take control of that progression and go deeper with time, the blues musician has to concentrate (be aware) and articulate each bar of that blues progression, putting the brakes on here and rushing to catch up there. What matters is to emphasize and willfully stress, accentuate, or push the time leading up to this or that chord change here, and drag out the turn-around or what-have-you over there.

If a musician is aware or present enough, and has enough experience, he or she can articulate the blues so that, although clock time just ticks on along as it always does, the end result of the effort is to expand time, slow it down, and we go between the clock-ticking seconds into what can only be described as expanded time, time in which we are beyond the distractions of the moment (our regular life) and able to taste or experience what is beyond, beneath, above (use your own words here) the normal. I don't want to call it eternity, because that term has been overused, but it is somehow outside time, however marginally or temporarily, our normal sense of time is.

This then is what I mean by “making time.” Musicians do this all the time (pun intended). And really great musicians give us such great time or can make time so well that we can hitch a ride with them, even if only for the length of a song. For those moments we are on their time, traveling with them, part of their mandala, and they are taking us deeper within conventional time to something greater than that. It is easier to experience this than to put it into words. Let me try another metaphor.

The discipline, energy, and articulation of making music can create more room in time than we normally have – expansion or extension. Think of it as an aura or envelope of normal time that somehow expands time as we know it (and the moment) into something deeper and wider – stretches time. It doesn’t stretch time longer, as in making a song last longer; it stretches the time deeper as in going beyond normal time into somewhere else. I don’t have a word for it. In other words, when time appears to slow down, the song in clock time does not slow down or get longer in duration. That stays the same. It is our consciousness and experience that stretches or reaches deeper inside ourselves. We expand time.

In other words, intense musical activity and articulation creates space, an envelope or aura, and the ‘kind’ of our musical activity (the kind of blues we play) creates the kind of space or room we can experience or rest in. Different musicians create different spaces for us. Think

of it as a living room, room to live, room to move around in, something like a timeout from whatever trajectory or line of life we are usually travelling along.

The more that the musician is able to work the time, the more of an aura or special space surrounds the moment, and in that space or in that extra room, there we are, experiencing it, living it. We are experiencing not only the music, per se, but the music allows us to experience ourselves as well, to go where we can't usually get to on our own, except perhaps rarely. And this brings up the question: what is music?

I won't go there just now, but when great musicians make time, and we experience that expanded time, we use it like money to think about or spend however we like. It is not only about their music; this experience is beyond the music, if you mean labels, lyrics, notes, song titles, and albums. Music is not only about what it means, as in the words of a song, but those words and notes are only references, means and ways to experience the heart of music, the purpose of music, which is to experience what I can only point to here.

The words and sound of music depend on what they mean, the sense it makes. And 'sense' is always an experience, not an idea or thought. When great blues musicians make time, we sense it, hear it, and have a deeper actual and sensual experience. We live it with and through them. Often that experience is 'special' because we can't get there from here, not from our day-to-day experience. That is why we listen to music. A

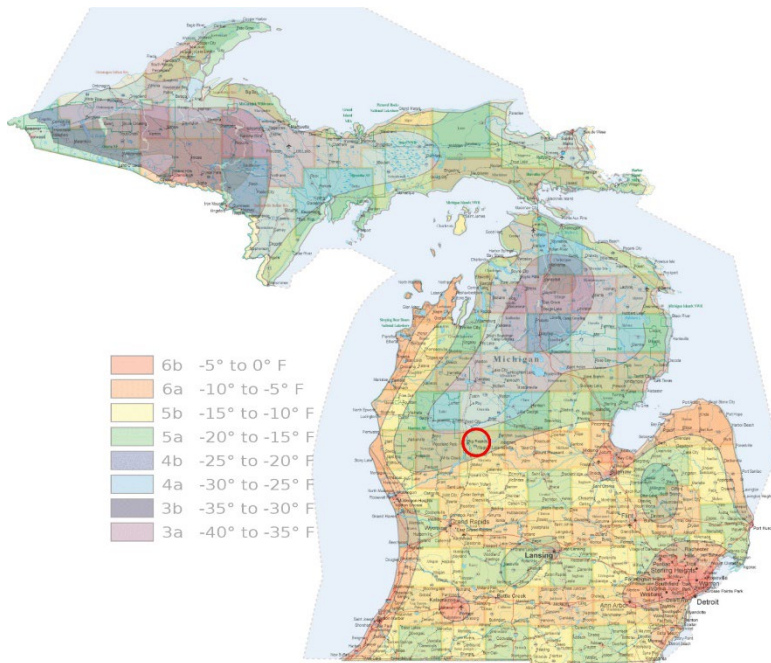
great musician is capable of transforming our day, sending us back home in the mind with a deep experience and sometimes with a new sense of direction

There, you have the general idea of making time. Please don't read this article as a know-it-all statement from me, but more as a question, something I am thinking about and interested in, something to be discussed.

Making Blues Time (PDF with photos).

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Making%20Blues%20Time%202022.pdf>

[Interview photos by Stanley Livingston (C) All Rights Reserved]



## ARE PLACES SACRED?

April 21, 2022

Ever wonder about the place where you have lived most of your life? Places do have qualities and are we also a product of those qualities? Is the state of Michigan where I live also a state of mind? I didn't used to think too much about this, but I got my eyes opened a bit back in the 1980s, plus back in the 1970s I developed an astrological mapping/relocation technique called "Local Space," which is now used by astrologers all over the world. Here are three things that I have learned about

Michigan (where I live in a small town called Big Rapids) that I consider interesting.

## PENINSULAS ARE SACRED

We all know that Michigan is the only state that is a peninsula surrounded by fresh water, in fact two of them, appropriately called the Upper and Lower Peninsulas. I never thought too much about the fact that Michigan is a peninsula until some years ago when I put on what I have been told is the first conference on Hindu Astrology in the United States (August 1986). This was before Hindu Astrology was called Vedic astrology, as it is today. And I put on a second Hindu Astrology Conference in 1987. People came from all over to attend, especially India.

In the course of putting on those conferences I invited a number of Indian astrologers, some of whom traveled, as mentioned, all the way from India. Hosting these conferences is a story in itself, but I will tell that another time. I can, however, remember late summer nights as these Indian astrologers would stroll arm-in-arm (six persons wide) down the center of the street where I live, something I would never think to do. I was worried they would be run over by some American in a hurry. Fortunately, that never happened, but I didn't want to spoil their fun.

In the course of welcoming these Indian visitors, they seemed to have no idea where Michigan was, even though here they were. They asked me if I had a map



and would I please show them where in the world Michigan is. I soon dragged out an atlas and pointed to the state of Michigan. There it is, I said. And to my surprise, my Indian visitors, almost every one of them, began to ooh and aah about what they saw. Now I like Michigan, but why would these perfect strangers make eyes over it? It was the shape of Michigan that caught their attention; in particular that Michigan is a peninsula.

Apparently in India any peninsula is considered a sacred place because it is in the shape of a lingam or phallus, not something that Americans are (or probably want to be) aware of. They went on and on about it, and ever since that time I have been curious to see what possible benefits or consequences there might be for living in a state that has this sacred shape. If ancient India declares peninsulas sacred, what is the effect of that? They are an ancient culture, so it must be something.

## THE LAKES AND WATER

Of course, I have always loved that Michigan has more than 11,000 inland lakes, and this is not counting ponds, which are lakes of 25 acres or less, and marshlands, well, forget counting them. And also forget about the fact that Michigan itself is surrounded on three sides by water, the Great Lakes.

In fact, as a kid, Michigan license plates used to have blazoned across them the words "Water Wonderland." I believed it. Other states have many lakes, but none are a peninsula and closely tied to 1/5th of the world's fresh

water supply.

The Great Lakes (also called inland seas) are the largest-surface freshwater system on Earth. Only the polar ice caps contain more fresh water and those caps are now slowly melting into and becoming salt water. Meanwhile, the Great Lakes contain 84% of North America's fresh water, not to mention 21% of ALL the fresh water in the entire world, enough water to cover the 48 contiguous U.S. states to a depth of almost ten feet. Lake Michigan, nearest to where I live, is almost 1000 feet deep at its greatest depth. Now that's a lot of water.

#### YOU CAN'T SALT THE SALT

And to go with that water, we have salt. Some 1200 feet beneath the city of Detroit is a vast salt dome, said to be part of the largest salt deposit in the world, some trillions of tons of unmined salt, the Detroit Salt Mine.

The Detroit Salt Mine has over 100 miles of subterranean roads, and is an industry that predates automobiles, with a product older than the dinosaurs, some 400 million years. Many miners were killed building that 1200-foot shaft down to the deep mine and any equipment that was lowered down in the 6'x6' shaft never came back up, and this includes the mules they needed, who once down there, lived out their sad lives in its depths. What a grotesque thought.

And it is not just Detroit that has salt. Geological studies

estimate that beneath the 55 counties of the Lower Michigan Peninsula are over 30,000 trillion tons of salt, more than any other place in the world. The entire lower peninsula of Michigan sits on a bed of salt.

Salt is not valuable today, but in the past, it was as valuable as gold in China, which used salt coins for payment. Roman armies were once paid with salt, which is where the term "salary" originated. It came from the Latin word for salt, 'sal'.

So, there are three things about Michigan I have been pondering, the fact that it is a peninsula, is surrounded by 21% of all the fresh water in the world, and that it sits on top of the greatest deposit of salt on the planet.

Maybe Michigan needs all that water to quench our salt thirst. Just the fact that Detroit sits on a vast dome of salt is enough to say that Detroit is Yang, as in Yin and Yang. Right? In fact, Michigan itself has to be very Yang, because all of it sits on salt. Does this salt and all the water (Yin) mean anything to those who live here, and what about this idea of peninsulas being sacred? "Inquiring Minds want to Know," as the pulp magazine says.

Does America have naturally holy places as India and other ancient countries do? America is not that old, but the land beneath our feet is as old as China and India, so what about that?

I have some thoughts about this sacred peninsula we

call Michigan, but I will have to share it in another post, as I can organize my thoughts. And I hope to post about what sacred places America has, spiritually.

What do my Michigan friends think?





## A SENSE OF SACRED SPACE

April 22, 2022

Yesterday, I posted on this special place I live in, which is the state of Michigan. I'm sure we each have our own special places that we may hold sacred.

For those interested, I would like to discuss further what we might call, for lack of a better word, 'sacred space.' The word "sacred" comes from the Latin "sacer," which means for something to be set apart from the ordinary as 'holy' or sacred, as in to consecrate, venerate, dedicate, or associate a place and time as special or sacred.

To some degree, I believe we all do that. Actually, it is not so much something that we 'do' (or can do), but rather we find ourselves in such a space or place and, when there, can then distinguish our experience there apart from what appears as our ordinary sense of space and time. What we feel in a sacred space is somehow 'special', and in time becomes sacred to us. A better way to put it is that 'we' feel special in that space and time. We like how we are when we are there and it becomes sacred to us.

Many countries, mostly ancient societies like China and India, have sacred places or sites. That is what pilgrimages are all about. I have been on pilgrimage to Tibet, China, Nepal, and India (West Bengal and Sikkim), etc., yet have heard very little about making pilgrimages to sacred places here in North America. Why is that America does not have more of these?

Of course, we have places like the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Elvis's home, etc. that we 'pilgrimage' to. And I

have been to places of natural beauty like Western Canada, Alberta, Banff, Lake Louise, and Calgary, etc., which I also consider special or sacred, at least to me.

Perhaps it is as simple as that North America, being still such a relatively young country, we have never taken the time to find and consecrate those places here in America that we might consider sacred. Certainly Native Americans have their sacred places and the sense of sacred.

We who are immigrants probably don't even yet know where these places are (or if they are), but they no-doubt exist for us too. I very much believe that the form of the land itself determines the space it represents, and we are influenced and imprinted by this as we become aware of those places.

As mentioned, in the U.S. we have done this with many of our places of natural beauty and have scores of national parks and other physical attractions but have perhaps not had the time yet as a nation to discover those places with an 'inner' beauty, sites that somehow distinguish themselves from the profane as special by how they affect us spiritually.

However, it is fair to assume sacred space and places in this country do exist and are even now radiating whatever inner beauty they inspire, while they wait to be found and personally known by each of us. Aside from



many Native American sacred sites, I don't know of many spiritual sites in America that are so heralded. Or were the Native Americans just the first to find such places. I'm sure that's it.

The sacred shows itself as sacred by standing out from the ordinary, usually by transporting us beyond our everyday sense of time into a special sense of place and time. The sacred is somehow distinct from what we ordinarily experience and expect. It stands apart. When something stands out to us from its surroundings (either as a person, place, or a natural form), causing us to become aware of it ourselves, it is sacred to the degree that we are aware of the change in our consciousness that it creates. In other words, the 'sacred' is consecrated or imprinted by the experience itself that it puts us through. It's effect is how we know it.

And just how this works is pretty easy to see in our own life. To begin with, we can become aware of what moments or places are already special or sacred to us as individuals, simply because we feel a sense of the sacred there. When in that place we experience the sacred. It makes us aware of ourselves in this special way when go there.

For example, check out where you go to find peace, whether it is in the beauty of nature or just to a favorite chair or corner of the house? In other words, what have we already set apart or aside as being special or find is

special? We set these places or moments aside because when we are there, something is special for us. Most of all, 'we' are special there.

IMO, sacred is as sacred does. Ultimately places are declared sacred by individuals who experience or find increased awareness or intuition when in their presence and note that or point it out to others. Places are consecrated through this process of our increased awareness, not awareness of the places themselves so much as the awareness of ourselves when we visit these places, and our state of mind, in these places, an important point.

If we have few sacred spiritual sites here in America, this is a reflection of our own state of mind and the fact that we are just not yet aware of these locations, for such places must certainly exist. At this point in American history, we may have to be pioneers of inner space and discover them for ourselves. Perhaps those most sensitive or aware among us will locate these sacred places in North America by experiencing them ourselves, and pointing them out, so that others can travel there, and see for themselves what makes it special. Does it work for us too?

After all, is this not why we go to the lake or river or pond or stream, to mix our mind with whatever natural awareness we are capable of experiencing at that place and time? There is definitely a mixing of our mind with

what we consider sacred going on all the time. Each of us must have people, places, or things that we experience (and have consecrated) as "special." Or perhaps we just have yet to become aware of them. As the dharma teaches us, it is all about awareness on our part, sensitivity to, being able to receive, receptivity.

Our opportunity to become aware of the sacred always comes at the borderline between the ordinary and extraordinary, at the threshold between these two worlds. In those moments, we cross over. The great writer on these matters, Mircea Eliade, used the word hierophany as the manifestation or appearance of the sacred in this profane world, what Gerard Manley Hopkins called "inshape," the way inward beyond the profane to the sacred. A whiff of the absolute always brings relief from the relative and the ordinary. We wake up in those moments and are imprinted by those sacred places.

Places that can be sacred to us as a nation undoubtedly exist, as the Native Americans have pointed out to us, yet like all sacred places, they must be discovered and individually consecrated by individuals who become aware at them, one at a time.

As mentioned, sacred is as sacred does, so to speak. We can easily see this in our own lives. Perhaps the place where we first meet a loved one is sacred to us by that meeting, or the house and town where one of our children is born. The "sacred," as the root of the word

itself suggests, is that which is set apart in our experience from all that is not sacred, from the ordinary or profane. It stands out as an axis from which we can "see" beyond our ordinary Self. We do this all the time, ever creating a personal hierarchy of what is spiritually important (and thus sacred) to each of us. These special places enable awareness in us and self-discovery, so they are hard to miss.

My point is that places of eventual pilgrimage must first be consecrated by those who are aware of and actually changed by them. Just as we flock to national parks, drawn by their natural beauty, places that invoke inner awareness must first be found, experienced, and then consecrated (verified) by people like ourselves. This has to involve our own inner wellspring or spirit.

In other words, someone has to actually do it. Countries like India have had thousands of years to find their sacred places. Americans have yet to do this, although Native Americans certainly have. We non-native Americans go to the indigenous Native American sacred places because we have not yet found any (or many) on our own. Can we use theirs? Of course, yet there also must be others places yet to be known that we individually find.

Just as the Buddha did not create the Dharma, but only became aware of it, Native Americans did not create their sacred spaces, but became aware of them,

something we can do as well, through their guidance or on our own.

Each of us is already well on our way in this process, which we can see by just making a mental list of those places and/or rituals that we personally consider important and thus somewhat sacred to us. What has affected us?

This could be as close as our favorite author, book, poem, or any of the visual arts that transport us, and of course music and movies that move us. Anything is fair game, but we must consecrate it by being aware that it is important to us by how it transforms us when there and treasure that. For sure, awareness is something that can be sensitized and honed.

Sacredness does not just go without saying. Rather, we must say it again and again and again by consecrating and re-consecrating our loved ones, families, wives and husbands, children, and pets – whatever makes life worth living for us. This is what is most sacred to us and we must articulate that space. We don't have to be religious to have the sacred in our lives. Sacred is whatever we value above the ordinary. In that sense, we are all religious.

For example, I know I love to live here in Michigan but may be unaware of all the reasons why. And I know that I have little areas of nature that I like to visit that I find

restful. It may not be a national park, but just a shady nook by a small stream nearby. Again, sacred is as sacred does. It is up to me to consecrate what is sacred with my awareness of what stands out in my mind. In other words, these special places wait for me to be aware of my own inner nature when I visit them. Like a natural 'treasure finder' and magnet, we can feel our way to what is sacred to us.

If nothing is sacred to us, it is because we are not sensitive to the awareness these places offer and make possible. But even the most unaware among us has his or her favorites, those special places or objects in life that we love and where (or through which) we find peace, places we have consecrated and that are imprinted by our own enhanced presence when we are there.

But in my case, for the record, the most powerful, the most consecrated places I have ever experienced, aside from family and climactic life events, were not just locations or places but rather also special people, those beings consecrated by lineage and capable of causing people like myself to realize who we are, right on-the-spot, so to speak.

And then there is the most sacred space I have known, the wellspring of my own mind, and thanks be to these great teachers for pointing the nature of the mind out, showing me just where and what sacred is.



## THE ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVAL

### The First of Its Kind

April 23, 2022

[Some have asked for a sample of what happened in all of the scores of interviews I did with both audio and video.] Here is a sample of how some of the players and participants responded to being asked what they thought of the event]

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern-electric, city blues (in fact, all

types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival, held in the late summer of 1969. It featured blues artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J. B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin' Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and many other modern-electric blues players. The festival also featured traditional blues artists like Son House and those in between, like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, Lightnin' Hopkins, and many others.

In Ann Arbor at the time, the accent was off folk and country blues and on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. While the Newport Folk Festival featured more than folk music and to a degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to more modern blues, it was in Ann Arbor that the first all-out extravaganza of modern-electric city blues was born.

There is no record of any blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day.

#### ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVAL: WHAT IT WAS

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival was just that: a festival of blues, including (and featuring) modern electric city blues -- the first of its kind. It helped to mark the discovery of modern blues music and the musicians that made that music. However, the festival was something



more than just Black music for White people. It was somewhat of a celebration for the Black musicians themselves and the list of great blues artists present, on or off the stage, reads like a Who's Who of blues musicians of all types alive at the time. They came from all over, to play of course, but also just to be together, to hang out.

Those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970, sponsored by the University Activity Center (UAC) of the University of Michigan and the Canterbury House, were organized by a small group of University of Michigan students. Their leader was John Fishel, a young man who just happened to really love the blues.

Late in 1968, Fishel and a small group of students formed an exploratory committee to create a blues festival, tentatively scheduled for the fall of 1969. Among other things they traveled to Chicago and heard some of the great blues men in the South Chicago bars and clubs. They came back from that trip with their eyes opened, more convinced than ever to organize a festival that next fall.

Their chief worry was whether, in the commotion of the returning to school, students would have time to grasp what a blues festival was all about. Therefore, they decided to hold a warm-up concert in the spring of 1969, so that everyone on campus could preview the music and build an appetite for the coming festival. The

preliminary concert was held in the University of Michigan Ballroom, featuring the Luther Allison Trio, a young blues group from Chicago. It was very much a success and the larger festival was scheduled for the Fall. The University of Michigan approved a budget and Fishel and his group set about making the festival a reality.

### 1969 ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVAL

And what a festival it was! That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 included such great blues artists as B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Freddy King, T-Bone Walker, Lightnin' Hopkins, and many others.<sup>1</sup> The 1969 Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival even made a small profit. It was an enormous artistic success, and it was decided to make this an annual event. A proposed budget for the 1970 concert was formulated and accepted by the university.

It has been said by way of criticism of the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festival's lack of monetary success (mostly by the producers of the subsequent Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival), that the choice of talent was too esoteric and that these artists were not known to the general public. It was pointed out that the roster of those first blues festivals were too focused on the blues, and not designed to best market the events with a wide range of performers, including also jazz or some national act, such as Ray Charles, thereby bringing many

more people to the events.

What these critics say is very true, but that is just the point. In those first two blues festivals, there was no sense of marketing or taking advantage of the event to establish a larger audience. It was a lot more like the movie E.T., where one group of beings came to meet another group, about which they knew precious little. It was not unlike some sort of religious experience. There were widespread acts of kindness in coming to know one another. And it was not just the Black performers sharing with their newly-found White audience. The Black performers were also there for themselves, as the following quotes by some of them at the time testify to:

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

"This festival is like an all-star game."

Louis Myers

"This blues festival is a big family reunion."

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

"I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful."

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

"As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it."

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

"Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will."

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

"When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day."

Jim Connelly (horn player for Otis Rush) -- (August 2, 1969)

"Blues and jazz, they are one, yet still they are different, because to be able to play jazz, a musician has to be able to play the blues first. He's got to know the blues, because blues is soul. It's what you feel, and jazz is just a step farther than the blues. I mean it's musically a step up.

"You see, blues is just the common ground that you meet on, but jazz you get sophisticated and you move out a little more. But if you can't play the blues, then to me you can't play jazz.

"You play the blues and then you go a little farther and you go into jazz. Blues is a simple thing that anybody can understand. Jazz, you have to keep hearin' it, over and over again to really adjust to it, where anybody can understand the blues.

"Whereas blues is a story, a story usually of one's life or somebody's life. And jazz is what a man...it's his life, but it's also what he lives in a dream world. And it's also what he would like to do outside of his life. And he goes into this world of his own, but they are (blues and jazz) still close together that it's hard to separate the two, like love and hate. You can't have one without the other.

"You don't learn how to play the blues. Blues is something that comes natural. You don't go around studying the blues. It's something that comes as natural as a baby sucks his mama's breast.

"Blues is something that's gonna' come natural, anyhow, and the next step you go, you learn to play with rock and roll, and the next thing you know, you are trying to modernize it a little bit. You're tired of that old down feelin' of the blues, and the next thing you know, your gonna' be tryin' to play some jazz.

"Blues is me. Blues is the black man. Blues is what we had. Then you move up a step farther, not what we have, but what we want and that's jazz -- this other world we would like to have, when we can set here and imagine

what we want. Blues is the most common thing that you have. It's a thing which will bring all people together, the common ground.

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

"When all the children get together, oh that will be a day."

Roosevelt Sykes: (August 1, 1969)

"Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lot's of people have the wrong understandin'. They think a blues player have to be worried. Thinks the blues player have to been whipped or something, or worried, or troubled or something to sing the blues."

"That's wrong. There's doctors. He has medicine. He ain't sick, but he makes stuff for the sick people. So blues players. He ain't worried and bothered, but he's got something for the worried people. With a doctor, your can see his medicine. He can see his patient.

"Blues, you can't see the music; he can't see the patient, because it's the soul. So I work on the soul and the doctor works on the body. Do something for your soul. Do something for your body. All is mixed in one. Two makes one.

"I been goin' to Europe since 1960-1961. People all

appreciated the blues every night I played, eight, ten thousand people a night, in Europe, even in the small towns.

"There, nobody could ever become graduated on it, that they can't learn no more music. You just get to think you're finished up, and there is something brand new started that you didn't get. So on and on. It's gonna' be that way.

"The blues is a talent. You can't learn that. There's nobody teaches that. No schools for it. Nobody can teach it to you. God gives every man a talent. It don't come in schools. It's something you born with. It's a feelin'. Can't nobody give you that feelin'. You have to have it. You can't buy it and you can't give it away if you got it.

"Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lots of people have the wrong understandin'. They think that a blues player have to be worried.

Freddy King (August 3, 1969)

"Jazz gets a little too way out. I can't understand it if it gets too way out. You understand what I mean by too way out? Away from the beaten track, the common ground or bond of all men. Away from the heart. Blues is the heart."

Fred Below (August 3, 1969)

"Altogether different beat, difference in chord structure. Modern Jazz is a measured thing. Blues is not measured. There's as much different between blues and jazz as between night and day."

Louis Myers (August 3, 1969)

"Blues is a whole lot different than jazz. I think blues is more so the soul bag than jazz. Jazz is modified from the blues. This [the blues festival] is a big family reunion."

James Madison (August 3, 1969)

"Blues is like something that's happened to you. You feel it. You have the blues each and every day. Jazz is more or less something you learn. You wake up and are worried about something, try to put it in music, it's blues."

Jack Myers (August 1, 1969)

"Improvisation: I think jazz is limited, man. You got certain changes you gotta' make, while if you play the 12-bar blues, a cat can just express his self. Blues is something that is happening every day, that you can understand."

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)



(talking about the blues festival) "I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful."

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

"Everyday brings a little change. As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it."

Charlie Musslewhite (August 3, 1969)

"Blues is a thing by itself. You can express it through music. You can express it by talkin' or paintin' or just walking' down the street, you know. Blues is a thing, separate. Music is a medium for it. Music just happens to be a very comfortable way to express the blues. Jazz is just like takin a tune, it's just messin with it. You take music and mess with it. Takin' a chord and instead of playin' it real conventional, playin' it real crazy. Blues is a thing."

Jimmy Dawkins (August 1, 1969)

"I feel like the blues is the truth, because when a guy sings the blues, he sings what happened. Jazz, you can adlib. You can do the little things you wanta' do to please the public. When you're doin' blues, that's the truth, that's the whole story of blues, tellin' the truth. If something happened to you that sets you back, that's

the blues.

"Blues is standard. Maybe the jazzman makes a little money, so he don't want to be in the bag anymore. So he try to move away from it, but he never leaves blues. He just try to play something else.

"When a musician has not paid his dues, he sounds like somebody else. He does not sound like himself.

"The blues festival gives breathing space for smaller bands to expand and achieve self-confidence and standing.

"When you got the blues, you're always searchin' for happiness, and when I'm up there on the stage, I'm always searchin for something deeper and deeper all the time.

Fred McDowell (August 1, 1969)

"You play with understanding. That's the way I play."

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

"Now I just have to tell ya'. I never knowed anything about no jazz, because jazz never affected my life. In my life, the blues always dwell with me. Now, here's what the blues is: that is a good man feelin' bad. You ever heard of that? Now, I'm gonna' show you and it is true.

Now you can walk right here and have one dollar in your pocket. You going to the store. You loose that dollar, before you get there. then you walk on by and you turn around. Lord, what happened to me? And now what you got? You got nothin' but the blues.

[about the blues festival] "Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will.

Bob Koester (August 2, 1969)

"What is Jazz? The element of improvisation has to be present, blues chord structure has to be present.

"Blues is a vocal music and jazz is an instrumental music, and if you have an artist who is a great guitar player, and he does not sing well, he's eventually gonna' wind up in the jazz field, or somewhere else.

"Jazz is the ability to get away from that chord structure and the 12-bar language. It's a matter of material. But also I think it is the emphasis on the instrumental aspects of the music, rather than the vocal. Blues is not only vocal, it's verbal, where words mean a great deal.

Big Mama Thornton (August 3, 1969)

"Jazz? I don't understand it in the first place. It don't

have no endin'. Here he is up there blowin' and maybe he blow till he get tired, then he just stop. What about rock and roll? Some folks say: It's nothin' but a hopped-up, fast-up blues. That's all it is.

"I like to let my audience be close to me, you know what I mean? And I want them to feel that they are close to me, anyway, because I wants to be close to them, because I want to express myself to let them know what I do and how I do it. And if they can do it, good luck to 'em, is all I can say.

Muddy Waters (August 2, 1969)

"Blues. I lived them. I lived them musically and I lived them lifewise. Blues is the mother of jazz and all those things. A blues performer stays in blues when he loves them like I do. To me, I'd rather remain with the blues and not try to move into the jazz field. I didn't even have it on my mind to try a change, to do something else.

Arthur Big-Boy Crudup (August 3, 1969)

"I'm this a way. If I go to work for you, and just whatever I promise you, that's what I will do. If I promise you that tomorrow afternoon, me and you gonna' fight, we gonna' fight. The reason we don't fight is that I don't meet you, and that's the way I am. I only have nothin' but my word. And through not nothin' being but my word, I have to do as I say. A man's word is his bond.

"And if a man's word ain't no good, he ain't no good. And I've learned that. You know the life of a musician is only thirty-three years, if he live it. Somebody will either poison you; some woman will kill him, or some man will kill him. And if you go beyond that, you got to treat everybody nice.

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

"This [blues festival] is like an all-star game. The blues has been handed down from generation to generation. Blues came from spirituals. It developed and developed. Jazz is taken from the blues.

T-Bone Walker (August 3, 1969)

"Without Blues, there wouldn't be no jazz. Blues is the basis of all jazz.

Clifton Chenier (August 2, 1969)

"Blues gonna forever be here. Jazz goes on and off. See? The blues always standard. Jazz is Ok for those who like it, you know.

Otis Rush (August 2, 1969)

"Blues is the foundation of all music. They keep buildin' and buildin' on it, just like these cars. They didn't use to

look like this; jazz is a thing like I'm saying. They just pep blues up. They speed it up. They cut it up, all kinds of ways and pieces. They got time to go by, nothin' but time, and they can cut it up all kinds of ways. This is what I mean by cutting it up.

Son House (August 3, 1969)

"Yeah, yeah. It's all right, I think. Mostly all the old guys, they mostly all are gone. I think Willie Brown was about the last one."

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival –1969 & 1970

The following is a partial list of the blues artists and music-industry personnel that attended the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. Most were on the program either as featured artists or as sidemen but quite a few just came to Ann Arbor to be with their fellow performers and to hang out.

Stan Abernathy (trumpet) Otis Rush Band

Dave Alexander (vocals piano)

Luther Allison (guitar vocals) & the Blue Nebulae

Willie Anderson (harmonica)

Carey Bell (harmonica)

Fred Below (drums)

Big Joe Turner (vocals)

Bobby Blue Bland (vocals)

Juke Boy Bonner (harmonica vocals)

Cassell Burrow  
Leroy Campbell (bass)  
Clifton Chenier (accordion)  
James Cotton (harmonica)  
Pee Wee Crayton (guitar vocals)  
Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup (guitar vocals)  
Jimmy 'Fast Fingers' Dawkins (guitar vocals)  
Doctor Ross (harmonica vocals guitar)  
Sleepy John Estes (guitar vocals)  
Lowell Fulson (guitar vocals)  
Paul Garon (blues writer)  
Ernest Gatewood (bass) Otis Rush Band  
Buddy Guy (guitar vocals)  
Phillip Guy (guitar) Buddy Guy Band  
Ted Harvey (drums) Hound Dog Taylor Band  
John Lee Hooker (guitar vocals)  
Howlin' Wolf (guitar vocals harmonica)  
J.B.Hutto & the Hawks (guitar vocals)  
Bruce Iglaur (Alligator Records)  
John Jackson (guitar vocals banjo)  
Calvin Jones (bass) Howlin' Wolf Band  
Albert King (guitar vocals)  
B.B.King (guitar vocals)  
Freddy King (guitar vocals)  
Bob Koester (Delmark Records)  
Sam Lay (drums vocals)  
Hopkins Lightnin' (guitar vocals)  
Manse Lipscomb (guitar vocals)  
Little Joe Blue (guitar vocals)  
Robert Jr. Lockwood Junior (guitar vocals)

Lazy Bill Lucas (piano)  
Magic Sam (guitar vocals)  
Jim Marshall (photos)  
Mississippi Fred McDowell (guitar vocals)  
John Meggs (tenor sax) Otis Rush Band  
Little Brother Montgomery (piano vocals)  
Muddy Waters (guitar vocals)  
Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica vocals)  
Louis Myers (lead guitar harmonica)  
Paul Oliver (blues writer)  
Jim Oneil (Living Blues Magazine)  
Tom Osterman  
Papa Lightfoot (harmonica vocals)  
Junior Parker (harmonica vocals)  
Brewer Phillips (lead guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band  
A.C.Reed (sax)  
Jimmy Reed Jr. (vocals guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band  
Bob Reidy (piano vocals)  
Freddy Roulette (guitar steel guitar)  
Otis Rush (guitar vocals)  
Roosevelt Shaw (drums)  
Johnnie Shines (guitar vocals)  
Harmonica George Smith (harmonic vocals)  
Son House (guitar vocals)  
Victoria Spivey (vocals)  
Chris Strachwitz (label owner)  
Hubert Sumlin (guitar vocals)  
Sunnyland Slim (piano)  
Roosevelt Sykes (piano vocals)  
Eddie Taylor (guitar vocals)



Hound Dog Taylor (guitar vocals)  
Big Mama Thornton (vocals)  
Jeff Todd Titon (guitar) Lazy Bill Lucas Blues Band  
Johnny Twist  
Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (vocals sax)  
T-Bone Walker (guitar vocals)  
Sippie Wallace (vocals)  
Dick Waterman (manager)  
Junior Wells (vocals harmonica)  
Big Joe Williams (vocals)  
Robert Pete Williams (guitar vocals)  
Johnny Winter (guitar vocals)  
Little Johnny Woods (harmonica)  
Johnny Young (guitar vocals mandolin)  
Mighty Joe Young (guitar vocals)

[Photo: the posters for the Ann Arbor Blues Festival,  
1969 & 1970.]



## LIFE AS A PALINDROME

April 24, 2022

Religion (of any kind) is about the truth, the things that last or as I like to tell myself, the 'truth' is the future because it will last until then. In other words, the truth will still be there in the future because it is the truth. Everything else will fall away like fake news.

Even so, it's a little scary, like water off a duck's back, that 'religion' has trouble sticking to me or I to it. Before you jump at this statement, allow me to be very careful with my words here.

For me, what I seem to naturally shed, like it or not, is any effort at authenticity. The accent here is on the word 'effort and not authenticity. The authentic is and has to be (and this by definition) effortless. When I say it is a little scary, what I mean by that is the truth of religion, of the sacred, is like Teflon; it is non-stick by nature and sooner or later, any effort to reify (or improve) the truth will fail and fall away, leaving us right out at the edge of time peering into the void. As for reification, that dog won't hunt.

It is my own foolishness and mistakes that have to be erased as far as I can tell, all the meaningless effort I made over those many years, effort which was to no avail. We make effort in order to find a way, to open the doors of the mind, and all that effort is because we don't yet have the key.

Later, like now for instance, it seems to me that all of that wasted effort has to be walked back because it leaves a scar, and it takes even more effort to erase the effects of all the previous effort, so I don't see an easy solution. Do you? In effect, we have a torus here, something like a perpetual motion machine.

And it's not an easy solution, removing the effects of effort. It took years to accumulate the patina of effort in the first place and it takes even longer, so it seems, to remove those misplaced efforts, something like putting the toothpaste back in the tube.

And the worst part, so to speak, the danger of undue effort, is that it stains our approach to the mind and to the degree that it marks or disfigures us, to that same degree that plaque or veneer must be removed. And all of this has to be done without damaging the mind itself.

Well, of course, the mind itself cannot be damaged or stained, yet our wasted effort seems quite able to leave a trail of debris behind us that no one would want to follow. That accumulated obscuration on our part has to be removed sooner or later.

And this non-effectual effort itself seems to repulse, repel, and obscure the purity of our seeing the nature of the mind. We know that it can take effort to get started in the dharma, what is called 'practice', or so it seems, and the stains of that (often wasted) effort are unforgiving and unforgiven by definition. These stains don't just 'go away'. We have to remove them and do this without making yet more effort, so that in my view is a serious Catch-22, an impasse.

And a tired effort it is, a hangover of our ignorance and a 'bull-in-the-china-shop' approach that is so easy to fall

into. We work so hard to get started, only to find that much of that effort itself can become a major obscuration that we have to undo and somehow remove.

And that word 'somehow' is telling, because we have to do this, as mentioned, without further effort, and that my dear friends, is about as impossible as 'impossible' gets, IMO. It is awkward to, upon finally understanding how the mind works a bit, after developing familiarity with the nature of the mind, to then discover that any (or much) of the effort we made to get where we are today, is itself an obscuration that now has to be removed. Yet, how?

It's like getting to the tip of the top of the pyramid only to find out that there is no where to go from there other than down. And who wants to do that? Yet down we will go, if only because of the effort we made to reach the top that was misguided. I am reminded of the Shakespeare quote:

"The expense of spirit in a waste of shame"

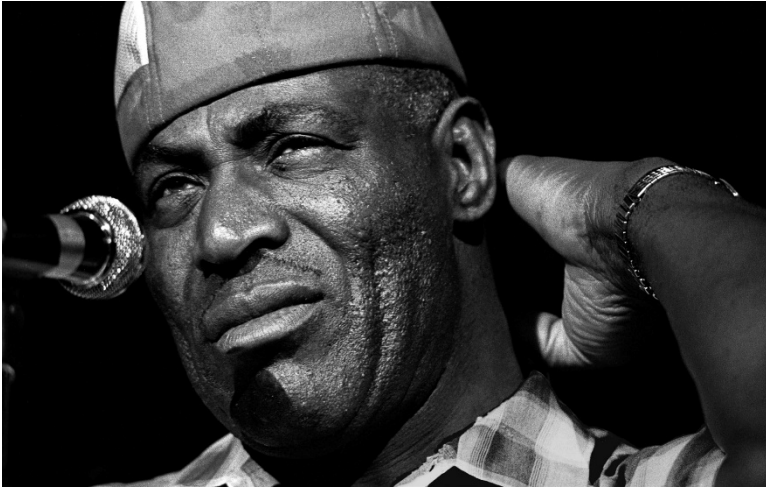
As I used to like to say, it is like charging into the cow pasture only to come tiptoeing back out, carefully watching each step. Or its like putting on a skin-tight glove only to then remove it. When all is said and done, the concept of a palindrome remains. Life reads the same backward as forward. Exactly! This is IMO a key

concept to realize.

In other words, life is a simple gesture or mudra that we make and then dissolve. What's the point? The point (if you have to have one) is that there is no point. When will we grasp that? Well, the answer is 'never', because if we are looking for the point in all this, that is our first mistake. There is nothing to 'get' and no point or end to it all. The effort itself 'to get' is the problem -- attachment.

Life is an eternal process and not a state. And so, I ask you, is that OK? Because it has to be.

[Photo: well-known historical palindrome, much like the sentence about Napoleon, "Able was I ere I saw Elba."]



## INTERVIEW WITH HOWLIN' WOLF

April 25, 2022

August 2, 1969

Interviewed by Michael Erlewine

[Here is an interview that I did with the legendary Howlin' Wolf. It was the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival and there I was backstage talking with Wolf. It was just the two of us standing in the open sun and it was not your normal interview. Blues expert (and poet) John Sinclair says this is, in his opinion, the best interview of Wolf. It certainly is the most far out, IMO.]

Howlin' Wolf:

"Some of them said years ago. 'We will never make it to the moon.' I said: 'You never know.' Today, we settin' on the moon and got a flag up there. You understand? But they told me that we couldn't do that. Don't never say what we can't do."

"Next thing, I'm looking for a man walkin' down the street with no head on his body. And if they say they can't do it, I'm gonna' tell 'em, 'You're wrong.' He gonna' come down sooner or later. That's right. This is of the day. He will have no head and be all heart, just one big heart."

"Because these performers probably have the biggest hearts in the entertainment business, and there were thirty or forty thousand kids here trying to learn about heart, about understanding, about developing their hearts. Thousands of hippies, hipped up children, with great big heads and tiny hearts, trying to lose that big head and get that big heart. The big head and the hard heart of modern rock and roll and psychedelic music has gone as far as it will go. The heart just has to be developed and this, the first of all the blues festivals, promises much to cross the generation gap and bring the old and younger Americans closer than they have been for the last decade. Because blues performers have big hearts."

"I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a



big heart. Because blues is based on the common ground shared by all people, black and white, young and old. Blues is the story of the human life, of its loves and struggles. All rock and roll, all jazz, all American music finds its roots in gospel music and in blues. Blues is not unhappy music."

"A lotta' people sing, but they don't sing with no understandin'. When you repeats your words, make sure to make some understanding of what you're sayin'. Those men played a clear guitar. They made clear notes."

"I've been pushed way back. I don't know why the people wouldn't let me up to the front like they did. I was just dirt. I felt like I was just dirt, so I stayed back, because I was able to back up my own self. I didn't think I had no right to be out there trying to push and scrap. I didn't think I had no right to be out there tryin' to push and scrap up no few nickels, you know, which I needed... never get too many of them."

"But, I'm a funny kind of person. I don't never want to take advantage of nobody, and think I'm takin' advantage of... you know what I mean. Let the peoples have it. Then if anything for me, it will come by, and I'll get that."

"Well, now anytime anything is pushed back, sooner or later, they gonna' bring it to the front. They can't keep it

hid always."

"I'll tell you. when people can't make or use you, they don't need you."

"There ain't gonna be no trouble. Somebody gonna come on up to the front and say "I am the man. I'm sorry," That's right. There ain't gonna' be no hard feelings. He didn't come for no trouble, but he gonna' sure let you know that he are 'the man.' Supposed to be."

"Just like a flower. You see, we're trampin' on this grass. We stay here a couple months and tramp right around here, we gonna' kill it. Just as soon as we stop trampin', the first warm sunshine, and then the grass gonna' start a growin' again."

"You don't never learn it all. You just learn some portion of it, and be able to, you know, entertain. And I play a certain portion of harp and a certain portion of guitar. I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. That's all I need. You take people. When they got a big head, they don't make it far".

"You're supposed to make it pleasin' to the peoples ears, then they don't mind listening to the tune."

"I heard a negro, howlin' and moanin'. I said: I take it from you. He was an old man. I said: I'm gonna' take

that someday and make something out of it. I took that howlin' and that yodelin' and put it together and made me a thing of my own."

"You got to get in the right position to where you can control your voice. I'm not a smart man. You see I got a little head and a big heart. You got to know your keynote. You got to know your notes from staff to staff. If you don't know your notes from staff to staff, I can tell when you pick up your guitar, you really don't know what you're doin'."

"I don't mean to be funny, but if you let me, I'll show you, and tell you, if you will accept it. But if you think because I'm a Negro, and you're not supposed to be told nothin', you understand, you're wrong. You're supposed to be told somethin' by anybody, when you're doin' wrong."

"Take a learnin' from anybody. Somebody can always tell you something that fit you."

"I hope I don't talk too much. No, I don't know. I'm just tryin. So, now that's a lotta' ground your covering, when you say you know better than me. I just know some of the things that are supposed to be done. When you say you know it, that covers the whole world."

"Some people don't want to tell you how it is, but I'll tell ya."

"If we were playin' in a key, tell me your tonic and I'll tell you what else you're supposed to do. All I want to know is your tonic. I'll build the rest of it. See, but you got to have your tonic. That's your startin' off. Without that tonic, when you get ready to stop, you stop somewhere else. Anytime you start on your tonic, when you end your song, you got to be right back on your tonic."

"I don't have no education, see. Now you can take my sense and put it in a paper bag and it'll rattle like two nickels. But you see, understandin', that's all I need. Common sense, that's all a man needs now, common sense. Just get you some common sense and pass on by."

"Some of the music is too loud today, because it knock the eardrums to your ear. Them high speakers, tall as that fence there, is blastin' your ear down, all the time. Boom. Bam. Bing. You know what I mean?"

"That's uncalled for. You hear that? I played on a show one night, and I went home and cut myself all up and down the back, because I heard that thing in my sleep. It's too loud. I'm sorry. Ain't no need in me tellin' you no lie. It's too loud. That go for the white boy, and the Negro boy, and any old Mexican, anybody! When it's too loud, it's nothin' but 'knockness.'"

"Knockness, just some stuff comin' together, and you

don't understand what it mean. That's what you call real garbage. That's the worst garbage in town. That's right, but the peoples eats it up. Just like the rabbit eatin' the carrot. What's up Doc?"

"I don't dominize no musician. I hate to hear a man dominize a musician, but I will say: music is too loud. Whether you playin' good or whether you playin' bad, you know it's too loud."

"Dominize, knockness. Some knockness. Something knockin' together. You know."

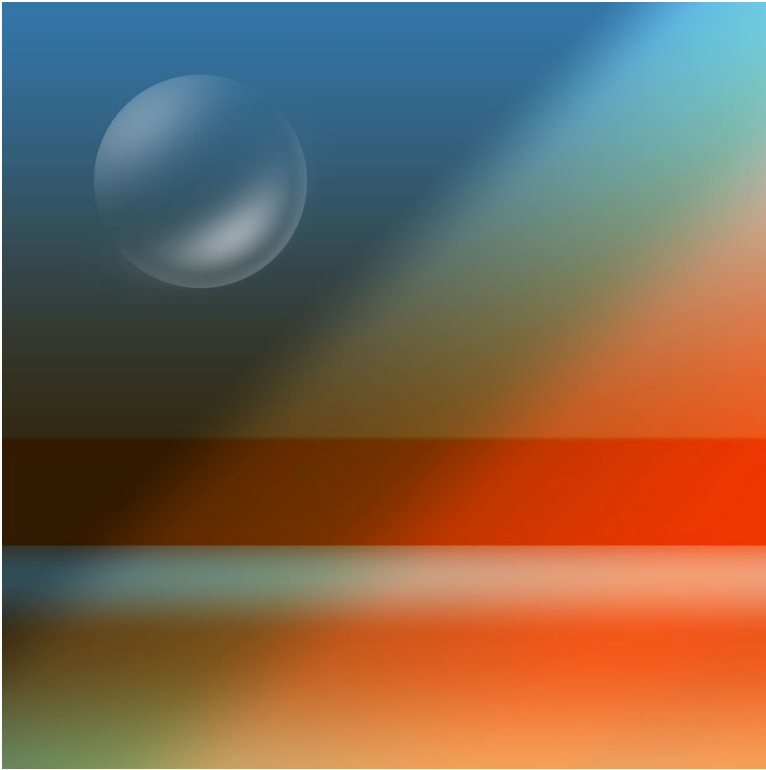
Other Notes on Wolf.

As I stood there listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Howlin' Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place and it was very dark. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows.

And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, and it actually took over all sense of time as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain. For a while, I lost all idea of who or where I

was. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a mind floating there. This was more than just music. This was a life initiation, as I believe you will get a sense of from reading my interview with this great bluesman. John Sinclair, one of a very few blues experts that I credit with being that, says that this is the best Wolf interview there is. I don't know about that, but it certainly blue my mind at the time. Howlin' Wolf and I talked together a number of times. This is one you want to read, IMO.

NOTE: Photo copyright by Stanley Livingston]



## EFFORT IN DHARMA

April 26, 2022

[This is a piece on the effects of effort (rote practice with no mind to mindfulness) on learning dharma or, for that matter, learning anything.]

I feel I have to say something more about the effort we make to learn dharma and some of its drawbacks. And it

has nothing to do with the dharma itself, but only with how we go about learning it.

And so, by addressing the effects of effort in dharma practice, this is not, as mentioned, moving against the dharma itself by our attempting to repair the damage we made becoming familiar with the nature of the mind through undue or continued effort on our part that never worked at all. And at least in my experience, that effort is legion.

I am not saying here that we don't need effort to get started with anything. We do, of course. What I am saying is that once started, our familiarity with the dharma need not be driven by effort, but rather by our increasing interest in the dharma itself. It's something like how rockets launched to space need a booster rocket to get off the ground, yet that booster is jettisoned once we are airborne. Or it reminds me of the bobsled runs in the Olympics, where the crew (one person or a group) push like crazy to get started, but then climb into the sled and hunker down for the ride.

So here we are working with the antidote for sustained effort, which is the price we pay for creating whatever obscuration that undue (continued) effort precipitates. It's like a semi-pliable piece of metal that is first bent one way until it warps, and then has to be bent the other way for it to regain its original shape. That's the kind of pushback I am looking at here.



Again, it's not a dharma problem, a problem with the dharma itself, but rather a problem created by a failure to teach dharma properly or to learn dharma properly on our part. What's needed (and long overdue), is an examination of the techniques for enabling dharma, teaching it.

As an aside, it's not so hard to give up the religion we were raised with and move on, yet much harder to remove the damage done by the force feeding us with it.

Probably much of this problem with effort and dharma came from dharma being, to use an analogy, a 'stranger in a strange land' here in America, and there not being enough authentic teachers to meet the demand, coupled with the general hunger for dharma in the West. Or perhaps too many corners have been cut in an attempt to bring dharma students quickly along the path. Even in my own dharma training, I was more than a little aware that in Tibet (I have been there twice), very much more time and personal instruction, one-to-one, were involved.

As mentioned, America (or so it appears) thirsts for dharma, yet that does not mean we can decipher whatever foreign flavor (Tibetan, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) that dharma appears in. Sure, you and I may be experienced and sophisticated enough to see

beyond cultural difference as for the importation of dharma to America, but many Americans perhaps cannot do this.

Americans by disposition, may wait until dharma appears to them in a more familiar and digestible form. I am probably too close to this problem to see clearly, but the sacrifices you and I made to embrace the dharma (the effort) early in its introduction to the West, may not be possible for the average bear, so to speak. I don't know this for sure, yet I wonder.

The dharma does not in essence have any particular cultural bias. Yes, it originated in India, but has traveled the world around ever since. I don't blame the average American for looking for the dharma in the world they live in and not dharma with a foreign accent. And a local take on dharma has to be in there somewhere too. The dharma may have been first realized in India, but it exists everywhere equally, including in America.

I have learned and become competent in a number of areas of learning, yet for me the dharma is the most difficult area to master that I have ever encountered. I doubt that it would be any easier for other westerners.

And this answer to that question, IMO, is that this depends on how dharma is presented. We know, according to the teachings, that any realization is not about to come from the outside, but rather realization

comes from within us and is filtered through our own familiarity with ourselves, our family, and cultural heritage. That should be a clear indicator of what is required? American dharma has to be right here as well.

Yet, here I am, 50 or so years later, struggling with the side-effects of my own efforts to learn the dharma and realizing at this late date (now) that all of that effort, at least much of it, was unnecessary and instead of clarifying my mind, only added to the patina of obscuration that functions as a cataract, making it more difficult to see through and beyond itself.

That's kind of where I am at, realizing that initial effort and effort sustained are two different things. Once we are started down the path of dharma, our continuation depends on our increasing interest in the dharma, and not by forcing ourselves to do it. In other words, by continual effort to practice dharma is not by definition always a good thing. The effort in such an undertaking should itself not be practiced and made a habit. If we do habituate effort that itself is obscuring, at some point all of that effort (or its effect) also has to be removed, walked back. And so, when it comes to effort in dharma practice, we should IMO tread carefully as this poem I wrote long ago points out.

PRACTICE A HABIT

Meditation,

While not practice,  
Is a habit,  
That can be practiced.

Practice builds habits,  
But should not itself,  
Become a habit.

In other words:  
Practice,  
To form a habit,  
But don't make,  
A habit of it.

And the takeaway from the poem is that to the degree dharma requires effort, aside from our initial effort, to not make a habit of practicing the effort itself, which many forms of rote practice indeed include. We don't want to make a habit of 'practicing meditation', but rather we just want to meditate, and there is a difference.

It's so tricky to fathom, that the effort to practice meditation, itself affects actual meditation. Call it the Heisenberg Principle of dharma practice, that the effort to practice meditation (that by definition must be effortless) itself has a pronounced effect, and not a welcome one at that.

And so, the result of any dharma practice that is done by

sheer rote (and not with mindfulness), that is by making an effort to do it, can at the same time stain the actual ability to meditate, and will, in time, have to be removed or toned back.

In fact, we try very hard not to stain our practice with effort, but that is, IMO, by definition practically impossible. Effort to do what must by definition be effortless is ultimately counterproductive and self-defeating. And if we must apply effort to meditate, it helps to be aware that somewhere down the line, we will have to remove the effects of rote or mindless effortful practice from the equation.

And the ideal way, of course, would be to have an authentic dharma teacher to gently guide us through the steps of learning to meditate without our accumulating so many scars of effort. However, right now, at least in America, that seems practically impossible. And so, we must accept that instead there will be a two-step process, practicing to learn meditation, after which there will be a second step, to remove the residual damage that very effort involves so we can just meditate.

I find that this concept is not so well received by those I have talked to about it, when seem to think I am saying not to make an effort to practice dharma. That's not it.

It may help to understand that I'm not turning my back

on dharma, yet I have come full circle and am now realizing how much my efforts to practice dharma have been somewhat self-defeating after I actually am meditating and not just 'practicing meditation'. Simple dharma housekeeping demands that I remove the scaffolding I have created learning dharma. Our continuing effort is often part of that scaffolding, perhaps very important to get us going, but ultimately not needed after we get the hang of it and are interested in meditating. There is a lot of effort involved, and while effort can enable learning dharma, that same effort also eventually becomes an obscuration itself. What can we do about that?

When we no longer need effort, but are just naturally interested in dharma and meditation, easing up on the need for effort seems the only answer and the next step.



## GROOVE AND BLUES IN JAZZ

April 26, 2022

By Michael Erlewine

Also a PDF :

"The Blues in Jazz'

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/THE%20BLUES%20IN%20JAZZ%202022.pdf>

[This article took a lot of work to put together. I did this because I myself have walked the path of looking for the blues in jazz. Not that I don't like the other forms of jazz, but most of all I like bluesy jazz, but years ago I had no idea where to find it except to listen to jazz until I found

the blues in this genre. I share this with those of you who can appreciate it. This may not quite fit into this group, yet please accept it, if only for the in-depth information on finding 'The Blues' in jazz music. ]

Music is good for the soul. It is one of the best medicines that I know of and the better the music, the better I feel. Hearing the good stuff makes all the difference. And that is what this article is all about -- how to locate the best blues music in jazz. Blues is so radical -- such a root music -- that it fuses with and gives rise to other music genres with ease. Jazz critics point out that the roots of jazz can be found in the blues. This article is about where in jazz blues lovers can hear and feel those roots -- the blues in jazz.

A little background on where I am coming from: I have been a blues and jazz lover for over sixty years. In the late 1950s and very early 1960s there was a strong jazz scene in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I grew up.

This was before liquor by the glass became legal in 1963, after which a lot of the jazz scene moved into the clubs. Most any night of the week, but in particular on weekends, there was live jazz played in houses and apartments. Teenagers like myself were tolerated and we hung out. Players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob Pozar, and Bob Detwiler were playing straight-up bop and exploring some cool jazz. The music and the parties often went on all night. On occasion, I heard Cannonball Adderley and others play in one of the many Detroit clubs like the Minor Key. Jazz records were big too. I can



remember staying up all night listening to John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" album over and over when it first came out. This was about 1960.

I fell in with the folk scene in the early 1960s and managed to hitch-hike all over the country several times. A fantastic guitarist by the name of Perry Lederman, a young singer/songwriter by the name of Bob Dylan, and I hitched together for a stretch. Later I helped to put on the first Bob Dylan concert in Ann Arbor. During that time, I hung out with the New Lost City Ramblers, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, the Country Gentlemen, Joan Baez, and some other great folk artists that you may never have heard of.

It was in those years that I got introduced to blues and gospel music. The Swan Silvertones, an a-capella gospel group of infinite beauty had an enormous effect on me in 1964 when I first heard their records. I had also been listening to classical music for a number of years, yet had no real guidance. I spent all of 1964 listening to and learning in depth about classical music from a real expert. Then in 1965 I helped to form a band called the Prime Movers Blues Band.

Although we never recorded, we were no slouch. Iggy Pop was our drummer, avant-garde composer "Blue" Gene Tyranny our keyboardist, music guitar maker Dan Erlewine played lead Guitar, Jack Dawson (later in the Siegel-Schwall Blues Band) on bass, and I sang and played amplified harmonica.

Sometime in 1965 we heard the Paul Butterfield Blues Band live. That changed my life. We got to know those guys and they introduced us to all of the blues we had not yet found out for ourselves. We became, in an instant, the Prime Movers Blues Band. That was a time.

The net effect of all of this was that, during the 1960s, I listened to blues records day and night trying to learn to play the licks. And I just loved the music. In the mid-1960s, thanks to Bob Koester of Delmark Records, I heard players like Little Walter, Magic Sam, Junior Wells and many others live in the Chicago clubs. Later, working with various blues and jazz festivals, I had the good fortune to interview (audio and video) just about any blues player you could name that was around back then, and most of them still were.

This article is about the blues in jazz, and I am getting to that. My first love is the blues and it took me some time to get much into jazz. At first, about the only way I could hear jazz was through a blues filter, so any jazz I got into had to have those blues elements. Now that I can find my way around the jazz catalog, I know that it contains some real treasures for blues lovers. But don't expect just the standard 12-bar blues progression.

Blue notes are found in jazz, but seldom in the form we are used to in blues recordings. It is the blues as a feeling, the soul-full experience of the blues and gospel elements that can be found in jazz. So, I am writing this for blues lovers who may want to explore jazz through the same blues doorway I went through.

The jazz I love is the blues in jazz whether that means bluesy jazz, funky jazz, original funk, soul jazz -- terms which I will explain in due course. I tend not to like (as much) jazz that does not have some kind of blues or modal element in it. Swing and bop, to the degree that they lack the roots sound of blues and gospel, fail to hold my attention. They are too frenetic for me. I like my jazz with blues, please.

Something I realized some time ago is that jazz (and most kinds of music) are either energizing or calming in their overall effect. If you are the kind of person who needs something to get you moving (to energize you), then you will be attracted to music that is agitating and energizing like: marches, Dixieland, bop, free jazz, and other forms of progressive jazz. It appeals to those who need that cup of coffee in life -- get a move on! It stirs you up.

However, if you are a person (like me) who tends to be very active and sometimes even hyper, then you need music to relax and calm you like blues, original funk, soul jazz -- groove music. It helps to get you in a soothing groove that dissipates energy -- relief!

Regardless of the fact that as a person we may (in general) be drawn to music that either stimulates or calms us, at times all of us may need some pick-me-up music and at other times some slow-me-down stuff.

You will find that the above (admittedly simplistic)

concept works very well. Blues and the blues that is in jazz (for the most part) has to do with the release and expression of feelings. The effect is calming to the system. It is "get down" and relaxin' music. Here is a brief tour of the bluesy stuff in jazz. I hope you find it useful.

## AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF BLUES IN JAZZ

This is an abbreviated history because I want to just skip over the standard playing-the-blues-progression in jazz stuff. There is not much of it anyway. If you like blues, you already know that by now. For now, we will also pass on all of the old-time blues found in traditional jazz -- the early New Orleans jazz. There is plenty of great old blues and blues-like music to hear there and you will want to hear it someday. But it is just too much like the blues that you already know.

The same goes for what few blues tunes came out of the swing and big-band era. You don't need a guide to check swing blues tunes out because there are not that many of them. When you can find them, they are pretty much straight-ahead blues songs or tunes played with a big band. Further, the arranged feeling of the big band is not up to the impromptu kind of blues feeling you may be used to, so let's pass on that too.

When I speak of blues in jazz, I mean some get-down funky blues sounds in the jazz that you have not heard before, so let's just get to that. If this history stuff bores you, skip over it and just read the recommended albums

list. Start finding and listening to some of the picks. As mentioned, we will pass over the earlier forms of jazz including the New Orleans varieties, Dixieland, and swing. However, since a lot of the bluesy jazz that may interest you grew out of bop (bebop), you will need to know what bop is and how this music style came to be. We will start there.

Bop (bebop) -- Bop distinguished itself from the popular big-band swing music out of which it emerged by that fact that it is most often played in small groups. You can hear each of the players as separate sounds. And while swing can have a groove that soothes you, bop is wake-me-up music. Its faster tempos, more elaborate melodies, and complex harmonies do not tend to establish a groove. It is more frenetic, even frantic, than swing. In other words, this is not relaxin' music. Bop has an attitude.

Unlike the large swing bands, where there were a few featured soloists, most members of the small combo could and did solo --- democratic. In addition to an increase in improvisation and solo virtuosity, there was little dependence on arrangements. And fast tempos too. Bop is more energetic (read agitating) than swing, with the rhythm section keeping the time on the ride cymbal. Bop tunes can be very fast, often with elaborate harmonies and complex chord changes that take an expert player to negotiate. In fact, fluency in bop became the benchmark of the young musician. Bop is a sophisticated music that can be, for many, somewhat of an acquired taste. In this respect it resembles classical

music. Here are some bop artists and a sample album of them at their best:

## BOB ORIGINATORS

Charlie Parker (just about any album; the box sets are the best)

Dizzy Gillespie, "Dizziest"/Bluebird

Thelonious Monk, "Thelonious with John Coltrane"/OJC

Bud Powell, "Genius of Powell Vol. 1"/Polygram

Dexter Gordon, "Our Man in Paris"/Blue Note

Miles Davis, "First Miles"/Savoy

Fats Navarro, "The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1- 2"/Blue Note

Sonny Stitt, "Constellation"/Muse

J.J Johnson, "The Eminent Jay Jay Johnson Vol 1"/Blue Note

Max Roach, "Freedom Now Suite"/Columbia

Lucky Thompson, "Lucky Strikes!"/Prestige

Tad Dameron, "Mating Call"/Prestige

## 1950S BOP PLAYERS:

Sonny Rollins, "Newk's Time"/Blue Note

Jackie McLean, "Let Freedom Ring"/Blue Note

Oscar Peterson, "The Trio"/Pablo

Clifford Brown, "Brownie"/Emarcy

Phil Woods, "Pairin Off"/Prestige

Kenny Dorham, "Una Mas"/Blue Note

Barry Harris, "Live in Tokyo"/Xanadu

Tommy Flanagan, "Thlonica"/Enja

## 1970S-1980S BOP REVIVAL

Richie Cole, "New York Afternoon-Alto Madness"/Muse  
Chris Hollyday, "Ho, Brother"/Jazzbeat

### BLUES IN BOP:

Thelonious Monk, "The Thelonious Monk Trio"/Prestige  
Miles Davis & Milt Jackson, "Bag's Groove"/Prestige  
Miles Davis, "Walkin'"/Prestige  
Horace Silver, "Senor Blues"/Blue Note

### HARD BOP

Hard bop was a reaction to the somewhat brittle and intellectual nature of straight bop. Hard bop distinguished itself from bop by its simple melodies, slower tempos, and avoidance of the (by then) clichéd bop chord changes. The constant up-tempo frenetic quality of bop pieces is absent. Tunes are often in the minor mode, much slower paced, and often moody -- more feeling and thoughtful. Hard bop reaches into the blues and gospel tradition for substance to slow the up-tempo bop music down, stretch the time out, and imbue the music with more feeling. It was as if jazz had once again found its roots and was nourished. The public thought so too, because it was more approachable than bop. Hard bop is one big step toward establishing a groove, but it lacks what has come to be known as a groove, as in "groove" music. Blues lovers will appreciate the more bluesy nature of hard bop, but probably still yearn for more blues yet.

## Hard Bop Pioneers:

Horace Silver, "Pieces of Silver"/Blue Note  
Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, "Moanin"/Blue Note  
Cannonball Adderley Quintet, "Quintet at the Lighthouse"/Landmark  
Nat Adderley, "Work Song"/Riverside  
Art Farmer, "Meet the Jazztet"/Chess  
Crusaders, "Freedom Sounds"/Atlantic  
Lou Donaldson, "Blues Walk"/Blue Note  
Kenny Dorham, "Trumpet Toccata"/Blue Note  
Donald Byrd, "House of Byrd"/Prestige

## COLTRANE-INFLUENCED HARD BOP

Wayne Shorter, "Native Dancer"/Columbia  
Freddie Hubbard, "Hub-Tones"/Blue Note  
McCoy Tyner, "Sahara"/Milestone  
Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note  
Joe Henderson, "Page One"/Blue Note  
Weather Report (Joe Zawinul), "Mysterious Traveler"/Columbia

## MAINSTREAM HARD BOP:

Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus and More/OJC  
John Coltrane, "Blue Trane"/Blue Note  
Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside  
Clifford Jordan, "Glass Bead Game"/Strata-East  
Booker Ervin, "The Book Cooks"/Affinity  
George Coleman, "Amsterdam After Dark"/Timeless  
Charlie Rouse, "Two Is One"/Strata-East



Harold Land, "The Fox"/Contemporary  
Blue Mitchell, "The Thing to Do"/Blue Note  
Kenny Dorham, "Afro- Cuban"/Blue Note  
Oliver Nelson, "Soul Battle"/Prestige  
Hank Mobley, "Soul Station"/Blue Note  
Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes  
Montgomery"/Riverside

## FUNKY JAZZ

Some hard-bop players like pianist Horace Silver began to include even more feeling in their playing by adding blues riffs and various elements from gospel music to their playing. Silver, considered by many to be the father of funk, describes funk:

"Funky means earthy, blues-based. It may not be blues itself, but it has that down-home feel to it. Playing funky has nothing to do with style; it's an approach to playing... "Soul" is the same basically, but there's an added dimension of feeling and spirit to soul -- an in-depth- ness. A soulful player might be funky or he might not be."

The hard-bop jazz that they were playing became in Silver's hands still more earthy, bluesy or, as it was called, "funky". This was jazz, but with a funky flavor. It is quite easy to distinguish this funky jazz from the all-out jazz funk described below. I really like funky jazz because it sometimes has a groove, but I love jazz funk better because in that music there is a total groove.

Horace Silver, "Song for My Father"/Blue Note  
Cannonball Adderley "Somethin' Else"/Blue Note  
Nat Adderley "Work Song"/Riverside  
Bobby Timmons, "Moanin'"/Milestone

## THE BLUES GROOVE – GROOVE MUSIC

The whole thing about groove music is that everything exists to establish and maintain the groove. Solos, egos, instruments -- what have you, only exist to lay down the groove and to get in it. There is a steady constant beat that can become drone-like or trance-like. You get in a groove and you stay in the groove and that feels good. There are no absolute rules about what makes groove music. Anything can happen as long as the effect is to put you in and keep you in the groove. It often has a Hammond organ in the sound, but not always. It can have any number of instruments doing all kinds of solos and what-not as long as these things don't break the groove.

Everything exists to create and maintain the groove. Blues lovers tend to like groove music because the blues is nothing but a groove.

Groove music can be up-tempo or slow, bright or dark, but the net effect of getting in a groove is always to satisfy and relax. There is always a constant rhythm section driving the groove, invariably danceable. Grooves always have a funky, earthy flavor and blues and gospel elements are essential.

All grooves are bluesy, by definition. It can be as funky and nasty as you want to be, but groove is not stir-it-up music. It is always cool-you-down music. If it is not relaxing, then it is not groove. Which is not to say that groove is not energetic or fast paced. It may sound wild, but the final effect is a 'groove'. Although I hesitate to characterize it this way, groove music is always a little trance-like. The result of the funkier, 'baddest' piece of groove music is a bit of clear sailing -- relaxation. Get in the groove! That's the place to 'BE'.

#### ORIGINAL FUNK (SOUL JAZZ)

The transformation of bop did not always stop with hard bop or even funkified jazz. Some players dove rather than dipped into the 'roots music' and an even more bluesy music was born that came to be called funk or soul jazz. For the first time, we are talking real groove music.

Funkified Jazz, also called soul jazz, jazz funk, original funk, or just plain funk is a form of jazz that originated in the mid-1950s -- a type of hard bop. It is often played by small groups -- trios led by a tenor or alto sax, pianist, guitar and often the Hammond B3 organ.

Funk music is very physical, usually 'down and dirty'. Funk or 'Soul Jazz' emerged as a reaction to the bop/cool jazz (cool, intellectualized) prevalent at the time. Funky music is everything that bop/cool jazz is not. It is hot, sweaty and never strays far from its blues roots. The term "soul" is a link to gospel roots; "funk" links to

blues roots. This fusion of jazz with blues and gospel elements became known as "Soul Jazz" during the 1950s, partly through the promotion of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet as a "soul-jazz" group.

Fast-paced funk pieces have a bright melodic phrasing set against a hard, percussive dance rhythm. Funk ballads are never more than a few steps from the blues. Above all, this is dynamic relaxin' music that is easy to listen to -- the groove. Those of you who like blues and R&B (and gospel), but find some jazz just a touch remote, may well like original funk. There is no better music to kick back to than this.

Jazz funk is sometimes called "original funk" to distinguish it from the contemporary funk sound of the James Brown/George Clinton variety. Along with blues and gospel, original funk or soul jazz had some R&B (soul music) elements thrown into the mix and the resulting fusion was even more to the public's taste.

Soul jazz has remained one of the most popular and successful forms of jazz to this very day. Bop is stir-it-up music while funk or soul jazz (no matter how up tempo or percussive) is at heart calm-you-down or groove music. Here are some classic funk albums:

Eddie Lockjaw Davis, "Cookbook" vol. 1-3/OJC

Gene Ammons, "Gene Ammons Story: Organ Combos"/Prestige

Arnett Cobb, "Smooth Sailing"/OJC

Red Holloway, "Cookin' Together"/OJC  
Willis Jackson, "Bar Wars"/Muse  
Ike Quebec, "Blue and Sentimental"/Blue Note  
Jimmy Forest, "All the Gin is Gone"/Delmark  
Bobby Timmons, "Soul Man"/Prestige  
Johnny Hammond Smith, "Breakout"/Kudu  
Harold Vick, "Steppin' Out"/Blue Note  
Harold Mabern, "Rakin' & Scrapin'"/Prestige  
Stanley Turrentine, "Comin' Your Way"/Blue Note  
Houston Person, "Soul Dance"/Prestige  
Grover Washington, "Mister Magic"/Motown  
Harold Maybern, "Rakin' and Scrapin'", OJC-330  
Cornell Dupree, "Coast to Coast"/Antilles  
Les McCann, "Swiss Movement"/Atlantic (soul jazz)

## ORGAN COMBOS

At the heart of original funk and soul jazz sits the Hammond Organ, 400 pounds of musical joy. I have had two Hammond B3 and still have a digital Hammond today. This unwieldy piece of equipment can do it all -- work by itself, as a duo, trio, quartet, or with a full band. It is a full band. More important is the fact that the Hammond-organ sound pretty much defines real funk. There is something about the percussive sound and the adjustable attack/decay effects that, coupled with the famed (rotating horns) Leslie speakers, epitomizes that music called funk.

Whatever the reason, you will find a Hammond organ at the center (or as backup) of the majority of soul jazz recordings, not to mention contemporary funk and R&B

recordings. Jimmy Smith is the man who tamed the great beast and turned the Hammond from a roller-rink calliope into a serious jazz instrument.

The story is that Smith locked himself in a warehouse with a Hammond for almost a year and came out playing that sound we all love.

And Jimmy Smith is just the tip of the top. There are many great Hammond players that are every bit as great in their own way, names like Richard Groove Holmes, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Charles Earland, John Patton, Larry Young, and others. Put a Hammond organ and some drums together with a tenor sax or guitar and you have all you need for some real funky music. This is groove music par excellence. And this is my personal favorite music.

Jimmy Smith, "Back at the Chicken Shack"/Blue Note

Jimmy McGriff, "At the Appollo"/Collectables

Jack McDuff, "Live!"/Prestige

Richard Groove Holmes, "After Hours /Pacific Jazz

Don Patterson, "Genius of the B-3"/Music

John Patton, "Let em' Roll"/Blue Note

Shirley Scott, "Blue Flames"/OJC

Charles Earland, "Black Talk"/Prestige

Charles Kynard, "Reelin' with the Feeling"/Prestige

Larry Young, "The Complete Blue Note Larry

Young"/Mosaic

Joey DeFrancisco, "All of Me"/Columbia

## THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF SOUL JAZZ

Soul jazz sometime gets a not-so-great rap. Anything so potent and popular lends itself to misuse and a great many so-called soul jazz albums were recorded that had no "soul" -- bad commercial funk. On the theory that you never know what is enough until you have more than enough, artists sought to increase their popularity by making their music more and more commercial until, in the end, they lost touch with the roots of the music -- the soul.

To make matters worse, the advent of bop and the various forms of progressive jazz that grew out of bop, gave birth to a somewhat elitist, conservative, and overly intellectualized attitude -- the jazz purist. This purist looks down on jazz that partakes too much of its blues and gospel roots, and any R&B influences are really frowned upon.

These mainstream jazz purists used the overt commercialism aspect of soul jazz as grounds to dismiss the entire music off-hand. Funk and soul jazz was somehow (in their opinion) not as worthy of respect as the bop or progressive jazz they admired. The fact that soul jazz is the most successful and popular form of jazz was cited as further proof of its commonness. This elitist attitude is now on the decline and soul jazz is beginning to take its place in the history of jazz as a legitimate form of the jazz. Soul jazz reissues are a hot item. It is a fact that most great jazz performers also have a funky or soul side and albums to prove it. Often very little is written about the soul jazz side of these artists.

Well, there you have a quick tour of the funkier side of jazz -- groove music. It is important to point out that soul jazz, although always popular with the people, has received short shrift from the jazz elite. The attitude is that groove music is something, like the blues, which should be kept in the closet -- keep back. That time has passed.

### GROOVE MASTERS

We are coming out of a time when jazz has been measured by how outstanding the soloist is -- how high can they fly? Critics only seem to know how to rate what stands out. This won't work for groove music. In 'groove', the idea is to lay down a groove, get in it, and deepen it. Groove masters always take us deeper into the groove. These artists are our windows into the groove, and their hearts become the highway over which the groove can run. They reinvest. And we ride the groove.

This is why jazz critics have either passed (never got it) over groove masters like Grant Green and Stanley Turrentine or heard something but did not know what to make of what they heard (and felt). If music is not viewed as such an intellectual thing (something to see) but more of a feeling kind of thing, then groove masters can be appreciated. You may not see the groove masters, but you sure can feel them. In groove, the solo (and all else) only exists if it adds to the groove. Witness Grant Green's incredible single- note repetitions. Who



would ever think to do that?

You wouldn't dare think of that. It is done by pure feeling. It feels good and you keep doing it. Nothing to think about.

Stanley Turrentine has been laying down grooves for many a year for all to hear. I am surprised at how many books don't even mention him. Grant Green has received even shorter shrift. There have been a few voices crying in the wilderness of soul jazz criticism.

Producer Bob Porter of Atlantic Records and Bob Rusch of Cadence Magazine have always known and told us about the groove. Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder is another pre-eminent groove expert. More than half of all great soul jazz sessions were recorded by Van Gelder. The next time you hear some real groove music, in particular if there is a Hammond organ on it, just check the album for this engineer's name.

#### GRANT GREEN: THE GROOVE MEISTER

All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered.

To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. Early on, a lot of people said the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that we can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvet-toned singer. Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now, that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too. Someday everyone will be able to hear it because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is – a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now.

Billy Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there. We try to absorb it and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!) she entrances us in a delightful dream-like groove and we are lost to criticism. Instead, we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us.

Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest -- to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves. He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master.

I hope that some of what I have written here will help blues lovers push off from the island of blues out into the sea of jazz. You can always head back to the solid ground of blues if you can't get into the jazz.

Blues and jazz are not mutually exclusive. Blues in jazz has been a thrilling ride (groove) for me and I have found a whole new music that satisfies much like the blues satisfy. I listen to groove music all the time. If you find some great groove tunes that I have not mentioned here, drop me a line. I want to hear them.

## BLUES IN JAZZ AND R&B

There are forms of blues in jazz other than the groove music presented above. Here are a few notes on some of the major styles:

## BLUES SINGERS AND SHOUTERS

There are blues singers who tend toward jazz and almost all jazz singers sing some blues. This is not the place to point these out since they are more-or-less straight-ahead blues singers when they sing blues. The one exception, of course, is Billie Holiday. Holiday is probably the most seminal singer ever recorded. But is her music the blues? Everything she sings is way beyond blues and blues is supposed to be the root music. Holiday is the equivalent of Delta blues singer Robert Johnson in that she is seminal -- pure source. Period.

If you have not listened to Billie Holiday and gotten into her music to the point of real distraction (being moved!), then you have missed one of the premiere music experiences of a lifetime. Enough said.

## BLUESY JAZZ

There is also a style of blues-laden jazz that is not so much funky as downright bluesy. Kenny Burrell is perhaps the chief exponent of this style of jazz.

Bluesy jazz has a slow or mid tempo and is easy to listen to -- relaxing. It makes great background or dinner music and yet is integral and stands on its own merits as a music. A lot of artists play bluesy jazz; some play it often. Much bluesy jazz can establish a groove.

Kenny Burrell, "Midnight Blue"/Blue Note  
The Three Sounds (Gene Harris), "Introducing the Three

Sounds"/Blue Note  
Ron Carter, "Jazz: My Romance"/Blue Note  
Grant Green, "Born to be Blue"/Blue Note  
Ray Bryant, "All Blues"/Pablo  
Red Garland, "Soul Junction"/Prestige  
Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside

## BLUES/FUND SAX

### HONKERS, SCREAMERS, AND BAR WALKERS

Although the emergence of blues sax can be traced all the way back to the great Ben Webster, the honkin', screaming tenor sax of the bar-walking variety originated with Illinois Jacquet and was carried to its logical conclusion with the R&B sax of King Curtis.

The term "bar walkin'" came from the habit of emotionally driven sax players walking on the top of a bar among the customers playing at a frenzied pitch -- often in contests with another sax player walking from the other end of the bar. This honkin' blues-drenched sax style was as much performance bravado as sheer music. As Cannonball Adderley said about the funky big-toned sax, "It's the moan inside the tone."

Since many of the main players in this style hailed from the Southwest, players in this style are often referred to as "Texas tenors." Some of the main artists in this style include Al Sears, Big Jay McNeely, Willis Jackson, Sill Austin, Lee Allen, Rusty Bryant, Hal Singer, and Sam "The Man" Taylor. Most of these players came out of the large

swing bands and either formed their own groups or found work in various R&B settings. This raunchy honkin' music scratches that blues itch and satisfies. This is often groove material.

Since many of these sax players can (and often had to) play it all -- blues, R&B, honkin' sax, soul jazz, straight jazz, etc., they are listed here together. I have made some notes to guide you as to their main directions. If you can find the 3-CD called "Giants of the Blues and Funk Tenor Sax"/Prestige (3PCD-2302- 2), you will get a superb 23 cut collection with many extended solos and liner notes by Bob Porter. Worth ordering or searching for.

#### SAX: BLUES, R&B, FUNK: HONKERS AND BAR WALKERS

Lee Allen (R&B) "Walkin' with Mr. Lee"/Collectables (R&B)

Gene Ammons (R&B, bop, soul jazz)

"Boss Tenors -- Straight Ahead from Chicago 1961"/Verve

Sil Austin (blues) "Slow Rock Rock"/Wing

Earl Bostic (R&B) "Best of Earl Bostic"/Deluxe

Rusty Bryant (R&B, soul jazz) "Rusty Bryant returns", OJC

Arnett Cobb (blues, soul jazz) "Smooth Sailing", OJC-323

King Curtis (R&B, soul jazz) "Soul Meeting"/Prestige

Hank Crawford (soul jazz) "Soul Survivors"/Milestone

Eddie Lockjaw Davis (blues, soul jazz) "Cookbook, Vol. 1-3"/OJC

Jimmy Forrest (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Out of the Forrest"/Prestige

Frank Foster (blues) "Soul Outing"/Prestige  
 Johnny Griffin (bop, hard bop, blues) "Big Soul  
 Band"/OJC Eddie Harris (soul jazz) "Best of"/Atlantic  
 Coleman Hawkins (blues, hard bop)  
 Red Holloway (soul jazz) "Cookin' Together"/Prestige  
 Joe Houston R&B Honker (Honker, blues)  
 Willis Jackson (R&B, funk) "Bar Wars"/Muse  
 Illinois Jacquet (Honker, blues, R&B) "Blues: That's  
 Me!"/OJC  
 Big Jay McNeely R&B (Honker, blues)  
 Wild Bill Moore (blues) (Look for him as a sideman)  
 Oliver Nelson (blues, out) "Soul Battle"/OJC  
 David Fathead Newman (R&B, soul jazz) "Lonely  
 Avenue"/Atlantic  
 Harold Ousley (blues, soul jazz) Sweet Double  
 Hipness"/Muse  
 Houston Person (soul jazz) "Goodness"/OJC-332  
 Ike Quebec (blues, soul jazz) "Blue and  
 Sentimental"/Blue Note  
 Al Sears (blues) "The Swingville All-Stars"/Swingville  
 Hal Singer (blues) "Blue Stompin'/Prestige  
 Sonny Stitt (bop, soul jazz) "Soul Summit"/Prestige  
 Buddy Tate (blues) "Tate's Date"/Swingville  
 Sam "The Man" Taylor (blues, R&B)  
 Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (blues) "Kidney Stew"/Black &  
 Blue  
 Ernie Watts (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Ernie Watts  
 Quartet"/JVC

## BLUES IN FREE JAZZ

Blues in free jazz are present; the notes are there. The

problem is that the constant beat is missing and thus the groove never gets laid down. More important, most free jazz is stir-it-up music rather than cool out. While this is great music, it is not groove music. Here are some outstanding examples of some blues in free jazz.

Archie Shepp, "Attica Blues"/Impulse  
Oliver Nelson, "Screamin' the Blues"/New Jazz  
Charles Mingus, "Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus"/Candid  
John Coltrane, "Love Supreme"/Impulse  
Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra"/ESP  
Ornette Coleman, "Tomorrow is the Question"/Contemporary

#### BLUES IN JAZZ-ROCK AND FUSION

The Same is true for most jazz rock as for free jazz. The notes occur but the energy is more agitating than not and the groove is seldom established.

Crusaders, "Crusaders 1"/Blue Thumb  
David Sanborn, "Backstreet"/Warner Brothers  
Mahavishnu Orchestra, "The Inner Mounting Flame"/Columbia  
Miles Davis, "Star People"/Columbia

#### THE GROOVE GUIDE TO BLUES IN JAZZ

Here is something that I wished I had when I first started to get into groove and blues jazz -- a quick guide to the best recordings. It can save you both time and money.



These are some of the main jazz (and R&B) artists with a strong blues content. You will want to hear them out. In each case I have tried to point out key albums that are worth a listen from a blues or groove perspective.

The albums are rated and reviewed, (where possible) to give insight into why these might or might not interest you. A short biography is also included and sometimes additional notes on how to approach the artist from a blues perspective. We would need a whole book to do this right, and the All-Music Guide to Jazz (2nd edition) is available when you are. I am sorry to say that many of the albums listed below are not available on CD. Some probably never will be. Although I love CDs, I have had to get back into vinyl to hear a lot of this music. Many of you will also -- back to the old record bins. It's worth it if the music is there. And it is. I hope you enjoy this short guide to groove music.

## LANDMARK JAZZ ALBUMS

Putting aside the 'blues in jazz' aspect, here is a list of landmark jazz albums that every jazz lover should hear. And this does not just represent my personal opinion.

Any serious jazz listener would agree that these are classic albums that should be heard at least once. Whether you like them or not does not matter. It will show you the wide world of jazz and help you figure out what you do like, which directions to take, etc. One thing is certain: if you don't like these albums, it is not because

they are lousy performances, but because it is not your kind of music. This list is admittedly weak in traditional, swing, big-band jazz, and fusion.

Air, "Air Lore"/Arista  
Mose Allison, "I Don't worry About a Thing"/Rhino/Atlantic  
Louis Armstrong, "Hot Fives and Sevens Vol 1-3"/JSP  
Art Ensemble of Chicago, "Jackson in Your House"/Affinity 9  
Count Basie, "The Original American Decca Recordings"/MCA  
Sidney Bechet, "The Bluebird Sessions"/Bluebird  
Art Blakey, ""Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk"/Atlantic  
Anthony Braxton, "For Alto Saxophone"/Delmark  
Clifford Brown, "Jazz Immortal"/Pacific Jazz  
Dave Brubeck, "Take Five"/Columbia  
Ornette Coleman, "The Shape of Jazz To Come"/Atlantic  
John Coltrane, "A Love Supreme"/MCA  
Chick Corea, "My Spanish Heart"/Polydor  
Charlie Christian, "Solo Flight"/Columbia  
Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue"/Columbia  
Eric Dolphy, "Out to Lunch!"/Blue Note  
Duke Ellington, "Blanton-Webster Band"/Bluebird  
Bill Evans, "Sunday at the Village Vanguard"/OJC  
Keith Jarrett, "The Koln Concert"/ECM  
Erroll Garner, "Concert by the Sea"/Columbia  
Stan Getz, "Getz/Gilberto"/Verve  
Dizzy Gillespie, "In the Beginning"/Prestige  
Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note  
Billie Holiday, "The Quintessential Billie Holiday Vol. 1-

9"/Columbia  
Milt Jackson "Bag's Groove"/Prestige  
Roland Kirk, "Rahsaan"/Mercury  
Shelly Manne, "At the Blackhawk"/OJ  
Charles Mingus, "Mingus at Antibes"/Atlantic  
Thelonious Monk, "Genius of Modern Music Vol. 1-  
2"/Blue Note  
Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes  
Montgomery"/Riverside  
Fats Navarro, "The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1- 2"/Blue  
Note  
Oliver Nelson, "Blues and the Abstract Truth"/Impulse  
Herbie Nichols, "The Art of Herbie Nichols"/Blue Note  
Oregon, "Out of the Woods"/Electra  
Charlie Parker, "The Charlie Parker Story"/Savoy  
Bud Powell, "The Amazing Bud Powell Vol. 1-2"/Blue  
Note  
Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus"/OJC  
Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric World of Sun Ra Vol 1"/ESP  
Cecil Taylor, "Unit Structures"/Blue Note  
McCoy Tyner, "The Real McCoy"/Blue Note

Apr 26, 2022 9:20:18pm







Copyright © Michael Erdwin 2014

## STALKED BY SANDHILL CRANES

April 27, 2022

Here is a fun story from 2014, when I was on my way to the tip of the top of Michigan's upper-peninsula as part of my interest and study of bogs.

I had been invited to join a very select group of naturalists who were given permission to enter a rare bog preserve at the very top of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in order to take a survey of wildlife there. Bogs are very fragile environments and even walking on them is destructive. But this conservation society allowed special teams to enter these closed reserves once or twice a year and I was to be the team's herpetologist. I had been trained in reptiles and amphibians, specializing in amphibians, in particular salamanders (Ambistomids), and so I knew all about them and every other Michigan amphibian and reptile. I was geeked to go.

I could not wait to get to Michigan's wild Upper Peninsula and out on those endangered bogs with my camera. The trip was to last a number of days, and I was up before dawn of that first day and in my car heading north. It must have been around 4:30AM when I hit the road, which is like me.

The only hiccup was the fact that I had just had some fairly protracted oral surgery (several days of root canal work), and the tooth in question had developed a really nasty abscess beneath it. I was already on my second dose of antibiotics, this time really heavy antibiotics, the

first round having not even touched the problem, but I was not about to be stopped by a wayward tooth.

Although I was in some pain and my lower jaw was swollen, I assumed that as time passed and the new antibiotics kicked in, the swelling would just naturally go down. Anyway, hell or high water would not have kept me off those bogs, so on I went. I had been studying bogs for quite some time, and these were massive.

My first stop was at a small bog at the top of the Lower Peninsula, just before you get to the great Mackinac Bridge over to the Upper Peninsula. I was out on the bog in the full morning sun by 8 A.M., already hours from my home. It was a magnificent crisp morning. Yet I was still having trouble with that dumb tooth, a certain amount of throbbing punctuated by needle-like shots of pain in my jaw. I did my best to ignore it and again told myself that it would die down.

There I was in my hip boots, far out on the surface of the bog, surrounded by sphagnum moss and small bushes, and carefully stepping my way along in the deep ooze. Each step made a suction sound as I lifted a leg and then placed it back in the thick matrix of the bog. Moving was very slow. I was maybe halfway around the periphery of the small lake-bog when I first saw them, a pair of large Sandhill Cranes picking their way through the bog on the opposite side. I was thrilled to see them, of course; these huge birds are incredible.



As I threaded my way along, I must have somehow begun to encroach on the area where they perhaps had their nest, for they became increasingly animated. Now these are large birds. They can stand five feet high and have wingspans of six to seven feet across. And their piercing red eyes were on me, and they were not just casual looks. Then slowly I realized these birds were moving in circles around me.

Many of the bushes on the bog were several feet high, so I could not always see the cranes, but I could hear their frightening calls. I didn't say 'frightened' calls; I said frightening calls, which they were – eerie. And then the cranes began running through the bushes, circling me closer, working together, and they moved fast. Much of the time all I could see through gaps in the bushes was a sideways profile of one of their heads as they circled me. I could see one bird as it ran through the bushes on my right, and then suddenly on my left, there was another bird circling in the opposite direction. I was constantly off balance, and I had to watch my every step lest I step into muck so deep that I would begin to sink down in it, which happens. Bogs are mostly a mat that you can fall through, so there was that. I was carrying over \$12,000 worth of camera equipment, not to mention my life. Bogs, like quicksand, can be treacherous places.

One of the birds would rise in the air and cut directly across my path (only a few feet in front of me) only to

disappear into the bushes and take up running around me again. And the cries were now getting really scary. At some point I began to feel like I was being stalked, and visions of the movie Jurassic Park and velociraptors came to mind. These were very large birds, and they didn't like ME. It is easy for me to see how birds were once reptile-like creatures.

Well, that is as far as it went. I finally managed to plot a course through the bog that apparently took me on a route away from their nesting area, while all the time I was moving one gooey step at a time very slowly through the muck, carrying a large tripod, geared head, camera, and accessory bag. Every step was a balancing act. I finally got out of there, found my way back to the car, and drove to the nearest town.

By this time, it was beginning to be clear that my tooth was not going to just calm down, but instead was only getting worse. I had super strength-Ibuprofen and even some Vicodin that the dentist had given me, so I had to dip into those a bit. And this was just the first morning of the first day of a five day journey. I had to decide what I would do.

I went to visit some friends who lived in a nearby city to where I was. I was now safe in a nice home in a town only a few hours from my home. But I had the strange experience of feeling that I was somehow embedded in a scene at which I was no longer fully present. Part of me

was elsewhere. It was probably the Vicodin, and it was like a dream or a movie set in which I was only an actor. In other words, I was beside myself. It must be the medicine.

At the same time, I was kind of leaning out of it, like you might lean out the back door to get a breath of fresh air. Something had stirred or moved inside of me that day and I was damned if I could figure out what it was. Somewhere back in there I had lost my incentive or my direction.

Perhaps these combined events with the birds, my tooth, etc., schooling (like fish school), now appeared as signs that pointed that something within me had changed (or was changing) at the core.

Yet by tomorrow I was supposed to be across the Mackinac Bridge and way at the tip of the top of the Upper Peninsula, hours from where I was now, and out on those remote bogs, miles from any town (much less a hospital), and the temperatures up there were predicted to be very cold, even for a spring day. After all, way up there it was still hardly spring. Hmmmm. What's the message here?

In the end, the throbbing of my tooth and those little sharp spasms of shooting pain told me that slogging through a bog for a few days, miles from anywhere, might not be the time to try and push this 67-year-old physical envelope. As it turned out, that was the right

decision because the second round of antibiotics with its very large dose also failed to do the trick. My abscess overcame all attempts to control it and spread much farther into the bone of my lower jaw. In the end, the tooth had to be extracted and the jaw treated. And I only tell this longish story because this became a real turning point for me. I will try to explain.

Like so many times in my past, I had once again managed to confuse the inside with the outside, the important with the unessential. What had been going on over the last year was that I was now using the outside (nature photography) to look at the inside (my mind) AND I had fallen into the mistake of confusing the two, which was easy to do.

Since it was through photographing nature up-close very exactly that I was realizing something about the nature of the mind, through 'Insight Meditation', I began to elevate photographing nature as the goal or object of my passion, when it was only the means through which I was experiencing a glimpse at my mind's nature, which is my real passion. I hope that makes sense.

Yet here I was, trying to upscale my nature trips when all they were to me in the end were the lens or means through which I was viewing the mind itself. It was the seeing the nature of the mind that was illuminating. And here I was, buying more equipment, planning longer and more extensive trips, and ordering every kind of field

guide I did not already have, and I have a whole room full of them. Well, this all changed, and that early morning faceoff with the Sandhill Cranes was perhaps the turning or pivot point. That experience was thrilling and not really that scary, so I was not scared off by what happened there. But something else did snap around that time and I woke up from that particular dream. It seems that in this life, I wake up from dream within dream from within dream.

Here are a few snapshots I took of the cranes while I mucked through the blog, one step at a time. It will give you some idea of how it was with me.

After that day I began to realize I was unnecessarily further complicating my life with all these lenses and nature trips, when what I wanted (and needed to do) was simplify it. I was extruding the naturalist in me at the expense of the simple clarity of resting my mind when out in nature, and it was the clarity of the mind that I was in love with, albeit, as seen through the lens of nature. It is the old baby and the bathwater thing. I had once again confused the two, but I am getting a little ahead of myself. Let me summarize.

Quite early on in the spring of that year I began to notice that the very special lucidity that came when I patiently peered through the camera lens, waiting for the wind to die down (or whatever), was now present without any camera at all. What before was made

possible only by my intense concentration and a really tack-sharp lens had now overflowed and begun to mix into the rest of my life. Then one day I realized that I did not even have to bring a camera along with me out into nature at all. What a thought!

This clarity that I had very carefully nourished the entire preceding year through my photography had become the rule rather than the exception. It was not about cameras; it was not about lenses, but about clarity of mind. That was it, and I began to realize this. I finally understood what was troubling me way back in there and I am so glad I did.

I could as easily have been lost in an endless Odyssey of cameras and nature. And now I found that just walking along a road, looking at the vegetation or whatever, produced the same result as hours of painstakingly peering through a camera lens.

My mind was already somewhat lucid and I could more and more just rest in the beauty of the nature around me just as it is, and it would just present and reveal itself to me without the need of a camera. It became clear that I really didn't need a camera at all anymore, and this at first really puzzled me.

Whoa, I thought. Now I have these great cameras and all these fine lenses, and whatever technique I had managed to acquire... and I don't need them?

That's right. That's just what happened. It took time, but I increasingly became aware that what I had loved all this time through the photography is what was happening within my own mind.

All that gear was just a scaffold to build a stable Insight-meditation practice and, once built, the camera equipment (as wonderful as it is) was just an empty cocoon as far as I was concerned, for I had now already gone beyond. I guess the moral of the story, for me anyway, is that it is easy to mistake the joy of meditation clarity with any of the objects through which that joyful clarity first appears, again, the baby and the bathwater. It is a question of priorities.

[Photos by me while carrying heavy equipment in hip boot, struggling to cross a bog.]



## JUKE JOINTS AND SATURDAY NIGHTS

April 28, 2022

By Michael Erlewine

This is a short article about juke joints and their role in African American music, in particular the foundation of 'The Blues'. And it also sheds some insight on the proverbial innate musicality of Americans of African descent. What seems forgotten (conveniently once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what that dictated. Blues fans may find this interesting. Let me know.



## Juke Joints

The term Juke (or Jook) Joints is probably derived from the Creole "juk" meaning to be disorderly and rowdy.

Juke joints are said to have arisen after the emancipation, when Jim Crow laws forbade Blacks from entering White establishments. However, the facts show that they existed long before that, probably as early as there were plantations and slaves. In other words, even after the emancipation when slaves were free to leave the plantation, they were not allowed in any establishment in town. Proscribed from White society and White establishments of any kind, juke joints arose wherever Blacks could gather, socialize, eat, drink, and dance; many also sold grocery items, moonshine, and some even had rooms to rent and other conveniences.

Jook joints were shacks, originally built by the plantation owners themselves on their own property to give slaves a place to socialize and blow off steam. Most were open only on Saturday nights and were not much maintained. And juke joints always had music, which meant at least one musician and often two or three. Historically tagged as 'blues' joints, the music originally played in these places was not blues but dance music -- ragtime, slow-drag, etc. What we know as blues today did not actually appear until the early 1900s. In fact musicians were not the focus early on but rather were there just to enable the dancing. It was all about dancing. It could be one

happy drunk person dancing and clapping their hands with maybe someone hitting a table along with them or perhaps a harmonica – anything with a beat.

And juke joints could be held anywhere, in someone's home, an abandoned sharecropper's house, any old shack of a building - wherever. In slavery days (and even after) Blacks had no transportation, so juke joints had to be within walking distance or reachable by tractor, bicycle, or mule. And there was no law at juke joints.

On plantations the authorities never came unless the owner himself called them in to break something up. It was private land. Later, during prohibition and the sharecropping days, the sheriff was actually paid to stay away so that the illegal whisky would get sold and everyone in power got a piece of that. As mentioned, the law only came when they were called in on purpose. They never just "showed up."

Most early juke joints were one-room shacks, seemingly always too small for those who filled them. And they were not open the rest of the week, just Saturday nights, so they didn't get but minimum upkeep and they weren't much at all, just some kind of roof, four walls, and a dirt floor.

I did not grow up down south and I am not African American, but as a musician I have played in plenty of bars both Black and White. In fact, I have played more

often in Black bars than White ones. And so, what I write here is with great respect for the African American culture here in America that essentially gave Americans our favorite music -- blues, jazz, R&B, and so on.

Older Blacks liked the kind of blues our band played – Chicago-style blues. I never knew the Deep South juke joints, but I am sure that most any small bar on a hot summer night after a long week will hit the same pitch, if only for an hour or two. As for the rough quality of juke joints, I have seen knives, guns, clubs, whatever, and actually witnessed one fight (hiding behind our amplifiers) that it took nine police cars to break up.

A juke joint was often an open shack in the back yard with a tin roof. It didn't take much of a place to draw a crowd. People were looking for somewhere to go and any excuse for a place would do. If you have ever found it hard to wait until Friday night when you got off work to visit 'the scene' at some local bar, imagine if that one Saturday night a week was your only chance to let it rip and socialize AND that there were no other opportunities for you than hard work the rest of your entire life aside from singing in church Sundays. That was the case for African Americans before emancipation. Consider that.

I am reminded of the poem "Black on a Saturday Night" by Rita Dove of which this is an excerpt:

"... and an attitude will get you nowhere fast so might as well keep dancing, dancing till tomorrow gives up with a shout, 'cause there is only Saturday night, and we are in it - Black as Black can, Black as Black does, not a concept nor a percentage but a natural law."

To repeat, we all can identify with a wish to socialize, especially after a difficult work week. Just imagine if that Saturday night once a week was your only chance to do anything other than what you were told to do AND for your entire life this would be the case. That Saturday night and the following Sunday church service would take on a whole different meaning. And history records that Blacks that could sing or play music were more valued on plantations than ones that could not.

### African-American Music

I find it interesting to read comments about the innate musicality of African Americans. I don't question that musicality. What I question is the myopic view that manages to ignore two-hundred years of slavery when Blacks were basically restricted to one night of social gathering (and Sunday church service) and what that might actually mean in their history.

What seems forgotten here (once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what it infers, so I am asking readers to please think about this for a moment. And I am going to repeat some of what I presented earlier.

You are twenty-five years old, young, bright, full of promise, and a slave to some owner of 'you'. While you have your whole life before you, in the slave's case, that life is already mapped out in terms of the possible. You work at what you are told from morning until night and what is left?

Perhaps you have Sundays off and maybe something like a Saturday night. That's it. You don't have college, schooling, or even trade school. You have no hope of seeing the world or even this country because you are not free to travel anywhere. You are not free. You are somebody's slave. And depending on how far back we go, you can't even read and write, and your owner likes it that way.

I spent a good part of my young adult life studying Black music, so I know full well Blacks are great musicians. Wouldn't you be too if your parents and their parents before them had nothing to look forward to but Saturday night music and Sunday-morning services? Instead of a myriad of possibilities and choices you had no choice and two possibilities. The only social outlet you had each week was perhaps getting together with your own kind on Saturday nights and singing the Gospel in church Sunday mornings. Music and dance were one of the few outlets open to Black Americans and to their forbearers. Everything else was scripted. No wonder Blacks know music and dance! It didn't all come

from Africa my friends.

## Song and Dance

My point is that aside from any traditional culture carried over from Africa centuries ago, plantation life (slavery life) left only a few opportunities for free time; music and dance were often the only social outlets open to slaves and then only at certain times. Life as a slave in America gave African Americans generations of training in music and dance in addition to whatever culture they actually brought with them from Africa. Think about it as I will reiterate.

You are young, hopeful, energetic, and you have zero plans that involve freedom on your part. Your whole life is already entirely scripted, leaving only Sunday church service and perhaps a Saturday night at a juke joint open to you. No wonder Black Gospel music is so powerful. And no wonder blues music is so powerful. These were the only outlets open to many Black Americans for generations – Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. The rest of the time they were slaves! And the transition from slavery to tenant farming did not change things much for most Blacks. In fact, as often as not the Black tenant farmer ended up owing the plantation owner money at the end of the year – another form of slavery.

There was one break each week. Work stopped for most

Blacks in the slavery (and tenant) years sometime Saturday afternoon and that is when barbecues and social getting-together began. By Saturday night workers were headed for the juke joints on foot, by tractor, and by mule. Early on the juke joints were right on the plantation itself and Black workers would even drive the plantation tractor right to the juke joint with the understanding that as long it was on the plantation, they could use the tractor.

I am not going to go into extreme detail on juke joints and what happened there. That has been covered elsewhere but suffice it to say that these places were where the work-week steam was let off, and the later the night got, the more out of control these joints could become. It is said that after 11 PM, anything could happen and usually did, everything from bar fights to shootings and knife fights.

My main point is that these Saturday night juke joints were the focus of music, dancing, and celebrating. This is where the blues were born and grew up. This is where dancing was permitted, and drinking took place. This was your one night out. And (as mentioned) the law never went to juke joints unless it was called in. That was understood by all. So, there was the juke joints music and dancing Saturday night and the gospel singing in church Sunday morning. That was it.

I have pointed out that juke joints or Barrelhouses as

they were also called originally were set up on plantations as a place for Blacks to socialize on their one night off, which was Saturday. Later on, after the emancipation, when tenant farming had replaced slavery, Blacks were not allowed at bars and saloons in town, so juke joints sprang up just outside of town at crossroads or wherever it was convenient. These joints were often hardly anything at all except a place to meet, drink, gamble, and dance. They were essentially shacks hastily thrown together and often with not enough room for but a few to dance - jammed.

It is true that juke joints were later moved into town, urbanized by Whites in the south, and called "Honky Tonks." But the original juke joints were hardly any kind of building at all, with no running water, and so on – just a roof and some side walls. That's it. But juke joints were where everything exciting happened socially for Black Americans way back then.

So, when we say that blues music and blues musicians were popular with Blacks, understand that it means a lot more than just 'popular'. The juke joint scene was all the freedom there was to let off steam and have a good time. Period. That and Sunday morning church service and gospel singing.

The main point here is not to just describe the juke joint scene but to highlight that the skill of Black Americans in music, blues and jazz, in dancing and having a good



time, did not only come from Africa. It had generations of extreme focus right here in this country to hone those skills into a veritable lineage. And those who believe that the emancipation changed all that had better get out their history books because tenant farming changed things very little at first and often made things even worse. In slavery, African Americans had nothing to lose because they had nothing. As mentioned, with tenant farming they most often went into debt to the plantation owners on top of struggling to make a living.

If your whole life was work unending until you died and that one Saturday night a week of celebration followed by Sunday church were your only social outlets, what would that mean to you? How important would that music be and the musicians that played it? That is my question and also my point.

If Blacks are master singers, musicians, dancers, and entertainers it is not just because they brought these skills from Africa. African Americans have had 200 years to refine these skills. It's no wonder that some say that White Americans can't dance and Blacks can. And it is no wonder that popular music (especially jazz and rock 'n roll) in America finds its roots in the blues.

And it is not only about dancing and playing music; it is about having a good time in the midst of whatever your situation is, about letting go and grabbing time to celebrate in the moment – being here now. There is

wisdom here.

And it's all right there, embedded in the music. You can hear it. Growing up I could hear the wisdom in the blues music, and it pulled me to it. The music of Pat Boone didn't grab me that way but Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf did. There was something in the music that spoke to me beyond the sounds. These blues musicians knew something that I knew little of and I hungered for that kind of knowledge, and it was not just the sound of poverty or deprivation.

Later, when I had an opportunity to interview scores of the greatest blues musicians, I got to know these players often on an eyeball-to-eyeball basis. What I heard in the music was backed up by the persons they were. Blues greats like Big Momma Thornton, Arthur Big-Boy Crudup, and Howlin' Wolf were incredible beings that made others feel accepted and welcome.

They had wisdom and the life experience I did not have and that my teachers in school did not have. They had what I wanted to learn, and I yearned for it. I more or less studied rural folk music, blues, and jazz, from the late 1950s until around 1971. And it was an inspiration.

In the early 1970s, I found the Tibetan Buddhists, who had the same joy and insight that I found in the great blues artists. And they were also devoted to knowing the true nature of the mind and life. While I never

abandoned my blues teachers, I did begin to study and practice with the Tibetans and am still doing that today.

It was never the down-and-out nature of the blues that caught my attention. It was the wisdom of life and the ability to seize the day and find joy in any situation, the ability to master extreme circumstances and still have a life. We all owe a great cultural debt to African Americans.



## THE DARK OF THE MOON

April 29, 2022

Tomorrow is the New Moon, so traditionally the three days before the New Moon have been called (in

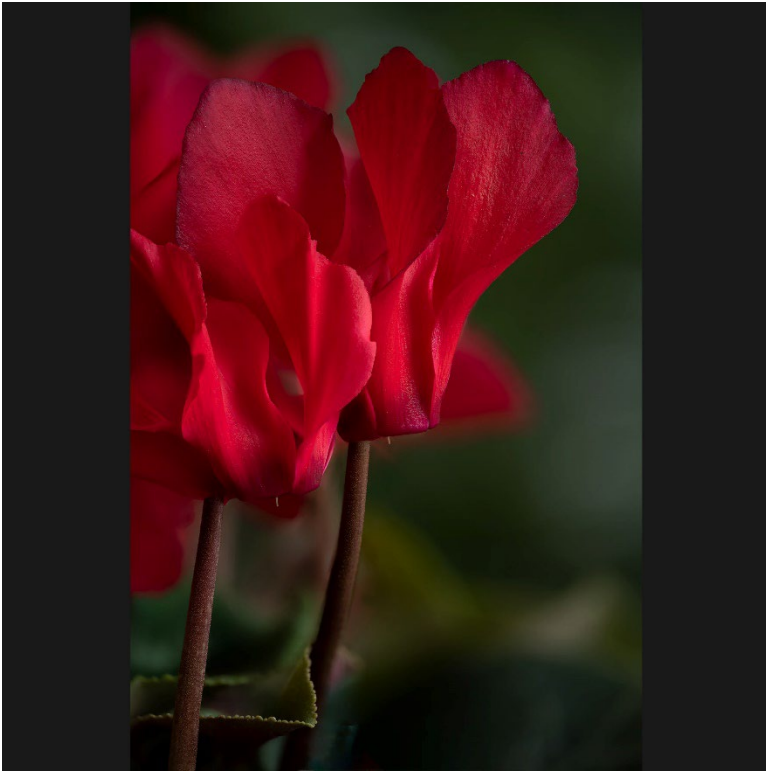
Medieval times) the 'Devil's Days' and in Tibet the 'Dharma Protector Days'. These days have been set aside to kind of wait them out, or to finish up things that need to be completed, things that we have left undone, while we wait for the coming New Moon at 4:28 p.m. on Saturday April 30, 2022.

Traditionally, we don't start things or plan things until after the moment of the New Moon. For many, these can be difficult or times fraught with worry. Best to ignore all that and just hunker down, mind our own business, and not take anything too seriously just now.

One way to say all this is that everything is changing all the time, like a big clock. The big gears tend to move slowly, while a myriad of lesser gears whirl and flash all the time. Another way of putting this is: life goes on, yet there are stations or points in the monthly lunar cycle which it pays to be aware of. The New Moon is one of those. Relax and wait it out. It can march a bunch of scenarios past us in the mind, none of which we should bother with. Instead, wait for the New Moon.

And often just before the New Moon time is like a waking dream and a surrealistic one at that. It's not foggy, but clear, yet it can seem like an empty hologram, and ourselves kind of a hollow man or woman, or just hollow everything. And here we are, seeing through it all like walking in a transparent dream.

It happens every month, and sneaks up on me so often, until I realize that, of course, these are the three days before the New Moon, so pay them no never mind.



## ENJOYMENT BODIES

April 30, 2022

Consider our indwelling consciousness that, after death, driven by karma and desires, searches for a rebirth, a body and situation to live in. The Buddhists point out that the consciousness in all creatures, all sentient beings, from a fly to a human, etc., is identical in nature.

This concept took me a long while to understand, for its implications to sink in, so take your time.

The difference between sentient beings is that only the body-mechanics of a fly differ from those of a human. In other words, there is a consciousness in the housefly that is the same nature as the consciousness we have as a human, but that consciousness is restricted by the body and movements possible for a fly to express itself, as compared to the flexibility and possibilities of a human body. This is a terrific notion.

That similarity is one concept to consider, yet not the actual subject of this article. Here I would like to talk about alternate bodies that we use every day other than our physical body.

That same consciousness that indwells in and uses our body also wants to indwell not only in our physical body, but also in Samsara itself. Samsara, this cyclic world of ups and downs, itself is like a body, a sheath or vehicle in its own right, one that we take refuge in and always have.

We make our life and the body of our surroundings in Samsara as comfortable as possible. In other words, we make our bed and then sleep in it too, even though it smacks of that old chestnut, "it's like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic" – futility, because whatever comfort we can manage to arrange in Samsara is



impermanent. The comfort will end at death, yet it's all we know.

Getting comfortable in impermanence is not a slam dunk for any of us, although we are told that we have had innumerable previous lifetimes to experience this. As comfortable as we can get, sooner later, particularly as we age, that comfort will wear out as our bodies do. Then, being asked, what was the point of it all, of all this concern for our comfort, we may be hard-pressed to answer. How much better if we could realize the nature of Samsara as actually Nirvana and adjust our life accordingly? However, that's not easy to do.

What I'm concerned about here is how we use our Samsaric habits as almost a vehicle in itself, call it a body of knowledge or a comfort body, but nevertheless a body of some kind, a body in which we also live or spend much of our life in. In fact, we have all kinds of bodies that we have created aside from our physical body of the flesh, bodies of knowledge, psychological bodies, interests, hobbies, etc. that we live with, in, and get enjoyment from. My opinion is that very few of us realize that our attachments, fixations, desires, etc. are for us places of refuge, where we spend an inordinate amount of our time. These enjoyment bodies are obviously very dear to us. We also live in them.

All of this are what I term attachment or "entertainment" bodies and by that, I mean something more than just

casual entertainment like reading a book or watching a movie. We invest in the body of our hobbies and interests that we build, in an intellectual or psychological body, and then very much use and live in it.

Instead of continuing to cast our lot and life with Samsara and taking refuge there, we can raise our heads from our Samsaric feast (so to speak) and look beyond just trying to make ourselves comfortable in our attachments and begin to undertake the voyage of recognizing the true nature of the mind itself.

If we consider it, we have many different bodies in which we live and enjoy. It is true that our physical body is the one that allows us to enjoy most of the various other bodies, yet even our physical body gives way (and is eventually lost) to the body of our consciousness (and karma) that travels from rebirth to rebirth.

I have many 'enjoyment bodies' that I have created to enjoy and live in. We all do, and they are our hobbies and interests. I have many of these hobbies or enjoyment bodies, but here let's just look at one as an example, my interest in photography.

I have invested years and countless hours creating a body of knowledge of photography, not just knowledge, but an actual body of experience in which I actually live in and use. We can say, well, that's not a real body, and you would be right in a corporeal sense. Yet, in actual

experience, I have spent (and continue to spend) a great amount of time there. I live in and through (by means of) photography in a very real sense. It has been more than a casual hobby, but an actual refuge in a more profound sense.

In fact, my life is filled with various bodies of knowledge and experience in which I live, as well as many interests and hobbies that I have tried to live and take refuge in that did not work out so well. I had to abandon some hobbies and remain a dilettante, my own personal shipwrecks of hobbies. I have left a trail of them behind me in time, yet have been successful with some others and use and depend on them regularly, like every day.

Here is a photo I took yesterday, that I created from my body of experience as a photographer. As I do this, I don't even think "I am a photographer" or "now I am doing photography," but rather I immerse myself in photography to the exclusion of everything else and later immerse with a photograph or two. Here is one example I took yesterday.

I take pleasure in and to a real degree actually live in and through photography. Photography has become a real vehicle for me. I also have bodies of experience in astrology, music, art, archiving, etc., and of course in 'writing', which I am using here.

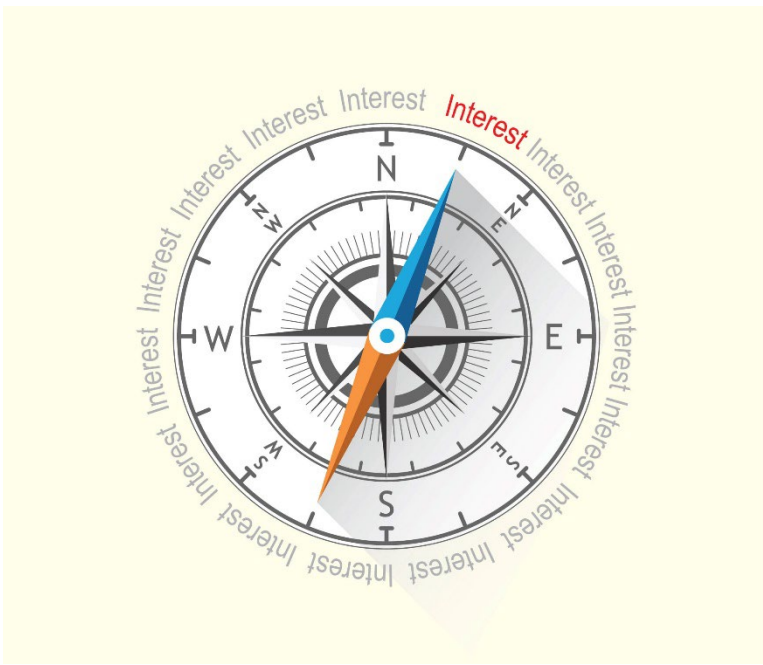
I suggest that while these 'enjoyment bodies' are not

flesh and blood, yet they allow us to accumulate experience and any realization we can garner from that experience. Any 'realization' we manage is ours and is projected beyond death into the bardo for use in any rebirth we have.

For me, a photograph like this may not interest others, but for me it captures an impression of how life is for me and I live in and through that. I can hold it up and through it see what to me is important in the life I am living. I do the same with music, astrology, natural history, and whatever I use to see life through and by way of.

These all are the crystals or eyeglasses I peer into and through which I paint what to me is precious in life.

[Photo by me.]



## ONE TASTE

May 4, 2022

In the beginning, our interest in dharma is localized to whatever dharma practices we have undertaken. That's our focus, a sort of ante-in, all that we know of dharma. Yet, just as in the old song, 'the leg bone is connected to the ankle bone is connected to the...', dharma spreads out to eventually include everything in this samsaric world because they all are interdependent. Actually, the dharma does not itself spread because it has been there

all the time. Instead, our awareness spreads, embracing more and more within its reach. In the end, it's all dharma, the entire world we live in.

This is a process of normalization, much like the circular ripples in the middle of a pond expand when a pebble is dropped, each ring embracing the succeeding ring, until it all is taken in and enclosed.

When essentially all of samsara is similarly embraced, and what is called 'relative truth' (samsaric subject and object) is merged and unified, something like equal or 'One' taste arises. Everything is consciously experienced as interdependent.

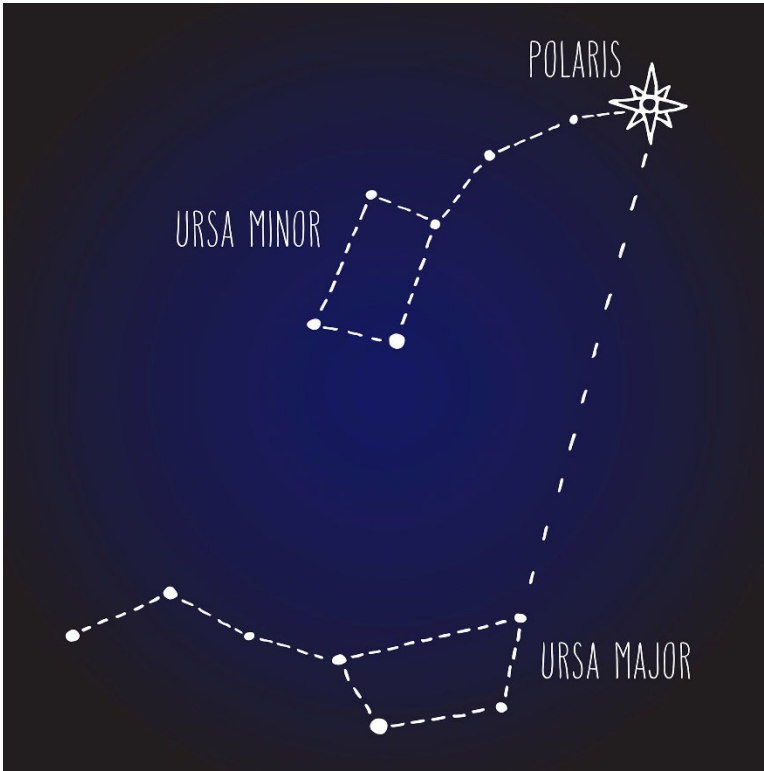
At the point of 'equal taste', what we call 'dharma' is no longer localized but is equally everywhere and in everything, a vast sea of awareness. There is no 'point' to get and no meditation to do. It's all meditation, which means we don't consciously meditate. Everything is taken to the path, and nothing is rejected. Whatever arises in our consciousness is the path.

The Drukpa Kagyu have three short phrases used in training the mind:

"Whatever happens, let it happen!  
However things go, let them go!  
There is no need of anything!"

Whatever arises is taken as the path because there is, as the Chuck Berry song put it, "No Particular Place to Go," and also no way to get there. When we manage 'equal taste', then we are already there, 'There' being we are finally in the here and the now.

One Taste.



## DHARMA: THE POLE STAR

May 5, 2022

[In the last day, the sunspot AR3004 has produced more than 18 solar flares (15 C-class flares and 3 M-class flares). And so, we are being inundated with solar 'change' in larger packets than we are used to. How you handle this influx depends on how change affects you.



Some will use it to forge ahead, while others will go lie down and ride it out. Many more flares are in the works and a CME may hit Earth on Saturday May, 7th.]

DHARMA:

From the Sanskrit root word 'dhri,' meaning to hold firmly, the supporting reality or truth, essentially the natural law or cosmic order, that which upholds or supports.

Dharma is often described as the teachings of the Buddha, but that IMO is just passing the buck. The natural law of the dharma has always existed, and the historical Buddha became aware of it and shared it with humanity. Dharma also has been said to be that which holds us back from falling into the various states of suffering, as is clearly stated in the Common Preliminaries, "The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma."

Dharma is also defined as the teachings and words of the Buddha that can be studied as well as what can be realized consciously from those same teachings, something that is self-supporting or persistent. So, we get the idea that the term dharma can have several meanings.

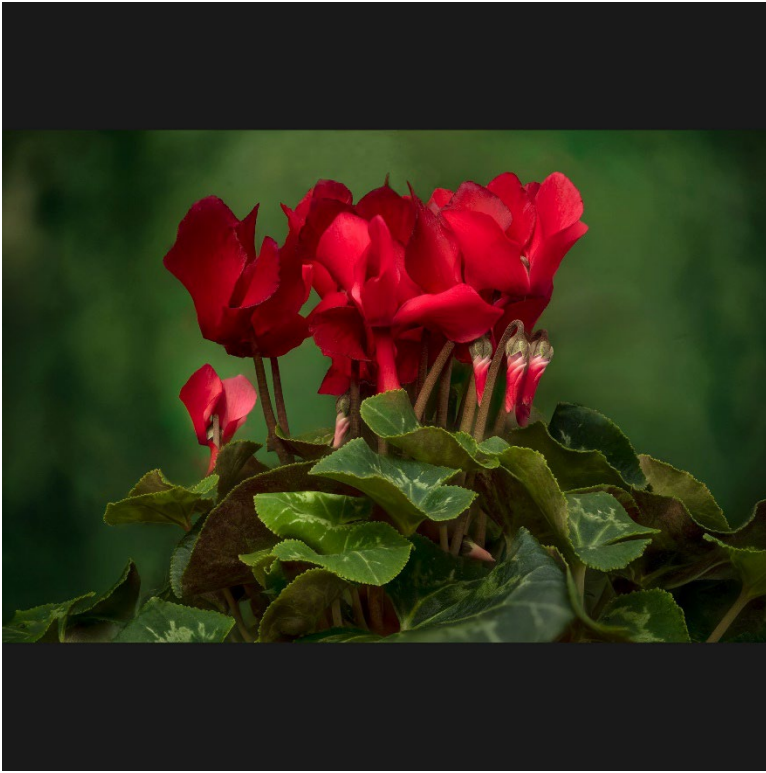
Yet, for me the meaning is that the dharma is what persists best or most, as in that what is dharmic 'lasts'.

When everything else fades out, the dharma still persists. I say to myself that the truth of dharma is the future because it will last until then. When all else fails and falls away, the dharma will still be there, so it is for us a guide and guru.

And I believe that what may be the particular dharma for me, part of my own direct path, may be something else for you, although there seems to be general agreement that the dharma is the natural unvarnished law. Mother Nature and the Dharma are pretty much the same thing.

That being said, what is not so well understood is that our awareness of the dharma is what needs work. What good does it do if the dharma is sitting there in the wide open for all to see and we somehow manage to ignore it and not be aware of this most crucial view of life.

When all of the stars in the sky fade to black, the dharma is still the one bright pole star shining in the night of time.



## HELD TO OTHER'S EXPECTATIONS

May 10, 2022

[An X1.5 Class solar flare exploded today (May 10, 2022), followed by a series of lesser explosions at almost the same time. Scientists are trying to decide when the CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) will reach Earth, of even if it will.]

This blog is a bit exploratory and may not suit everyone. In general, we can usually depend on ourselves, and as

for depending on others, perhaps not so much. It's not those others don't care, rather that rivers do not flow backward, or climb uphill. Perhaps everything circles around and returns to the starting point, yet if true, not yet to my knowledge. Of course, "What goes around, comes around," but when?

We cannot be needy. We each have to walk our own path. Only then, will other's join in, when they are not required to join in. Seems like an odd truth, but true.

The problem here is that it makes it harder to reform, even if we have the strength to do that, reform ourselves. People expect us to be, like a rock, just what we have always been. In that way, we are a bit like furniture in everyone else's life. If we attempt to change, it seems those around us attempt to put us back into our old orbit, the orbit they have always known as us and feel comfortable with.

If we have been the wage earner or the one walking point, or whatever the case may be, those around us, especially our family, want to hold us to that, even if (and especially if) we want to modify our role with them. The fact that others depend on our closeness, each of us is like a Pole Star in everyone else's life. Others direct and find their own direction by our remaining just as we have always been, good, bad, or indifferent.

It can be hard for us to get out of a groove, when once

one has been established. In other words, it's not just up to us, when we want to change, but also up to the nexus, the context of people, especially family, we are embedded in.

And so, it is at least interesting to note that the path of least resistance may not be where we want to be headed in our life, but rather we may be stuck with the traditional role and direction we have already established with those around us. Any attempt by us to change course, can be met with resistance from all those around us, those who expect us to be just as we have always been, and I repeat, like the North Star in their lives, whether we want to be or not. As mentioned, we are part of the furniture of their lives.

As an example, I can well remember coming back home to visit my parents, after having made some real progress in how I handled myself (and how I was now living my life), only to be triggered into some behavior that I had tried to move away from for some time, and then to be told by my mom, who might say something like: "There you go; you have not changed at all."

Anyway, I hope you get the idea of what I am pointing out here, that our efforts to change and reorient ourselves can be met by outside forces that work to keep us in our old groove, despite any efforts to modify our trajectory and life course. Many like us to remain just as we have always been for them, and not to alter our

trajectory.

And so, if we are a Lewis & Clark type, cutting a path through the wilderness, we may be held to that whether we like it or not. Else, folks will think that we are not being ourselves, and assume something is wrong with us.

In other words, after all, there is often no room in the inn, so to speak.



## STAY IN YOUR OWN LANE?

May 11, 2022

By this I mean, keep to the path that your own interests drive and it's best not to stray too far from that. And 'keeping on keeping on' is not rocket science, either. Feel out and determine what actually interests you. Of course, if you are interested in staying in bed all day and have no ambition, that too can be a path and you will get somewhere, but perhaps not where you intended to be. At least for me, hiding in bed is not so much following your 'interest' but rather the avoidance of everything.

Mother Nature is a harsh mistress as we all should know by now, and in a way, we are led by the nose by our own interests and it is best not to stray from those, especially if that's how we know our path, through what interests us. I also feel better and more natural if I follow the breadcrumbs of my own interests.

Sometimes, by following my interests it reminds me of one of my trips to Tibet, in particular when I stood on the top of one ridge high up in the clouds, a ridge separated from another ridge by a deep ravine, but not so far away physically, and I waved at a yak herder on the other side and he at me. So close, but yet also so far.



I sometimes feel that same way even with my own family, and it can be painful. For example, my wife and I often get on the same phone call with one of our kids, each on a different extension. We share news and stuff, and this can go on for quite a long time. As for me, I soon tire from chit-chat, yet chatting is a lot of what my wife and the kids are enjoying. So, it is well known that I will just say I love you, but goodbye, get off the phone, and go back to whatever I am doing. In fact, I may walk through the room an hour later (or whatever) and they are still talking. What's my point here?

Well, the point is that my own interests or lack thereof are separative, and by following them it takes me away from the sharing I could be having with my kids. I really want to share, of course, but it seems that I need something of common but emerging interest to go there, and not so much just idle conversation. As humorous as this may seem, it has real effects.

I miss the bond that comes from just chatting with one another, because I am not so interested in the chatting part. If there is a problem, a question, or concern, and so on, I am Johnny-on-the-spot, but with chit-chat, not so interested. I would rather get on with whatever current project I am interested in.

However, I don't like this image of myself as all seriousness and 'no fun', yet I am pretty much that way. I do have a sense of humor, yet I'm afraid most don't get

it, but indeed, it is in there and active much of the time, perhaps just a little subtle. So, why am I being defensive here?

Well, I guess I am defending this path of interest I have followed most of my life. It's been like being on the expressway, with few to no local exits. I usually am on about my business, the interest that drives me, and I am not stopping to smell the flowers so much, although my interests are to me like flowers.

Anyway, I have been taking a look at all this of late, and I come up wanting to be closer to my family but have no idea just how to do that. As I wrote in yesterday's blog, it seems that in order to be closer, I have to continue to be "a man on a mission," since that's the kind of father and husband my family is used to. When I stop to pander to the idle chit chat, it's not natural for me and they know it.

And so, if I am doing a bit of a turnaround, breaking stride, and wondering how to get closer, I don't know how to do that. And it's a bit of a sad truth, that when I cease 'trying' to be close, I feel much better and I believe, so do they. Thus, the image of me waving at the yak herder across the valley.

I'm on my own and that's not quite the same as being 'lonely', yet its close. As the oldest child of five boys, I always have been on my own and don't know any other

way to be. And when I try to step out of that role, I am pretty clumsy and can't hide the fact that I am 'trying' to be close, rather than just being close. In other words, I am closest when I am far gone on my journey, which includes them, yet as a father, rather than a mother.

With a wife and three daughters, my son and I are outnumbered, which has never bothered me, because I love women and am all about woman's rights and so on. However, it seems that this is not the "Age of Man", but rather the "Age of Women" we live in, and I not only get that, but have always supported it.

At the same time, I have fathered on as best I can, which I guess to me means I have protected, provided, and looked out for my family. Yet, I don't have the closeness of a mother, because I am a father and not a mother. Nothing can get between a mother and her child.

And so, I am just noting all this. As mentioned yesterday, it seems I have to stay in my role of the father-provider whether I like it or not, and can't seem to bridge the gap, any more than I was about to cross the valley in Tibet between myself and the yak herder. What's happening here is that I am waking up to the fact of my role in the family, as a father, although in some ways it is kind of bitter/sweet, IMO.

I'm a father, not a mother.

Indeed, we each are also our own worst enemy. LOL.

[Photo by me taken today.]



## USE IT OR LOSE IT

May 13, 2022

I am talking about the very large packets of solar change that are being hurled at Earth these last days. The quiet Sun brings change through sunlight that leaves the Sun, arriving Earth every nine minutes. Our life depends on it.

However, enormous packets of change, such as the recent CMEs (Corona Mass Ejections), bombard Earth with more change than most of us know what to do

with. Lately I find myself being inundated by these CMEs, not only when they reach Earth, but from the moment they are first hurled out from the Sun.

I'm afraid that my first impulse was to hunker down and wait this bombardment out, but gradually, since they seem to keep on coming, I am raising my head and looking around, thinking that there must be something I can do with this energy other than stick my head in the sand.

And I'm not talking about small change here, like that from the quiet Sun, but rather some pretty major change that is now available and at hand.

And so, as for using this change, what follows is a good example of what we can do with this powerful energy, if we dare seize the day.

What I have done is go through some realization about my own local, in this case, family situation. I love my family, but in recent years have tried to keep up with these youngsters by playing their game, so to speak, which for me means trying to fit in.

I have to confess that I have had trouble fitting in since I was a child, try as I might, and I have tried. Yet, the "go along to get along" philosophy is foreign to my very nature, or so it seems. I'm afraid that the sight of me "trying" to go along is not a pretty one.

Well, in this current climate of solar change, for lack of anything better to do, I have found myself rising to the occasion and grabbing the third rail, so to speak, and then I put my pedal to the metal on top of that. I took all that spare change that the Sun is laying on us and, in my own way, grabbed it like a vajra, a thunderbolt.

Of course, the shock of it kind of blew me out of the water, but as I gathered my senses, I realized that all of my trying to get along with my own kin, was just that, 'trying', not only for me, but very trying for my family as well.

I am reminded of the image (I can't remember where I saw the image) of a line of farmyard cats parading across the lawn in the coming twilight. And at the end of the line, a little way back, was one skunk walking right with them and as happy as can be.

Well, in this analogy, I'm the skunk and thanks to the energy of this now active sun, I realized my mistake, and have been feeling around for ways to remedy this situation for myself and for them. "Them," being my family.

And what came to mind is that from at least 1972, when Margaret and I realized that we were going to have a child, I have concentrated on trying to provide for a family, and at the same time not work at something that

I was not interested in, for me not a small task.

I can't say what the roles of men and woman are today, but back then, the woman actually had the baby and was in charge (or was at least more expert) in caring for them, while the men (that would be me) interfaced with the outside world as a provider of food, home, and general protection. Anyway, that's how I was raised and what we did. It was not anything we really talked about; we just naturally did that.

Now, fast forward to 2022. My kids are raised and have their own pups. I'm retired and we live on a modest retirement income. I'm no longer bringing home the bacon or much of anything. My kids, mostly my three daughters and their mom, are very close, which is wonderful, while my one son Michael (who does better than I do) are somewhat outriders to all this, at least I am.

I no longer have a staff to tend to, projects to complete, or anything that has to be done other than housework, some repair and maintenance kind of stuff.

So, of course, I try to join the ladies and fit in. Good luck! The problem is that, as usual, I have trouble fitting in. I am a lead dog and have been all my life and there is nothing to be "lead" about, and the kids are more up on what is happening than I am.



And so, as mentioned in a recent blog here, I am mostly relegated to my traditional role of father and provider, whether I have anything to do in that regard or not. One could say I am at a crossroads. It seems everyone is used to (and content) with me in my traditional role as the father provider, even if I just stand there with my thumb out. I'm not really going anywhere just now.

And that in-close and 'chatty' work apparently is not my style, meaning I can't quite get with the program. So, thanks to this recent boost of spare change, this bolt of solar energy, I'm trying to resurrect and fit back into my classic role as lead dog and provider, even though I have nowhere to go, and we don't need provisions. At least I belong there in the family's eyes, if not my own.

It's true, I am very used to following my own interests and have for decades. I'm like the gunslinger after the West was won; I'm no longer needed. Perhaps all I'm good for is the 'Wild-West Show,' where I can appear as a performer. Those are my two-cents. Your suggestions are welcome.

I feel this is an excellent example of how to act on the solar energy at hand and use it, rather than be used by it or just ignore it.



## I'LL TAKE MINE NEAT, PLEASE

May 15, 2022

There has to be some point to 'walking point', even as we get old and retire, and I'm on it. My kids are raised and because of covid, I don't see my grandkids much anymore. I've been a leader all my adult life, and I don't know how to do much else.

Perhaps these days all I can do is lead in a direction that

no one cares much about, since I am so used to carving my way through life, come hell or high water. I'm not good for much else.

As of late, perhaps my form of 'leading' is sharing in forums like this, sharing whatever I can, which more or less keeps me sharp and busy enough. God knows I don't see anyone in person these covid-days because of this virus, and no one comes in our house without covid testing, and even then, it is just our kids and inner family.

So, what's a retired walking-pointer to do? I'm almost 81 and all I know in this pandemic is sharing posts like these. I'm no longer building companies or carving our future from the ether. And I'm not ready to be put out to pasture either, at least in my own mind. So, what's an old guy to do?

And the whole "guy" thing and guys in general are not so popular in these times. This is the "Age of Women" as far as I am concerned, and I have three daughters and a wife to prove it.

When I meet someone my age, just like it has always been said, we agree that the younger generation does not have the same work ethic we did and many don't like to work at all.

Another way to say this is that I'm not sure where I

stand. Everything seems a bit chaotic, yet my internal clarity tells me that this is a good thing. I just don't know how it will play out yet. I feel clean inside and in the process of waking up from a kind of bending over backward to fit into my retirement situation, which I cannot quite seem to do.

I just am me, the way I am, and nothing more. It is no one's fault but my own that I try to do something I can't by nature do. All my life, my choice has been to walk on, and this because for me there is no 'room in the inn', so to speak. The roil of life, like surf rushing up a beach, pushes me before it, like an innertube by a wave. As mentioned, my first choice has always been to find a place to be. Instead, I keep paying that forward.

One of the advantages of learning to use the more intense solar energy of these times is to achieve what amounts to a reset to my system, a reduction to a more natural baseline, and a chance to build on that. At my age, it is difficult to get any kind of reset, because too much water has gone over the dam. Seizing solar change and mastering it can do that, turn things around.

This makes particular sense because the solar sunspot cycle is now on the increase, so we can expect more and more quantities of intense solar change to be coming our way. Of course, we can hunker down and wait it out, which most folks do or remain oblivious to it by ignoring these changes. I find it is worthwhile to not ignore

change, but to at least attempt to use it directly, as the old saying "Carpe Diem" expresses: Seize the Day.

Yes, it's like trying to exercise a very stiff body, this initial fumbling to get a handle on solar quanta, these packets of solar energy, and learn to use them in our behalf. This is something we have to learn to do. And the first step is to verify for ourselves that this energy, these solar changes, are real and that we can be aware of them and not just continue to ignore them.

And then, as mentioned, we learn to use this solar energy as best we can. Better late than never, as the old saying goes. These large packets of solar change are there for the taking, and to ignore them is to be buffeted around by them. Better to become aware of them, their effect on us, and get started with actually putting them to use. This is what I'm learning to do.

I look forward to the day when daily solar events are part of the news cycle and we refer to them as we do to a weather report, and we are learning to use these packets of change as a form of renewable energy, renewing our own energy. Right now, all this solar change is chaotic in its effect and not something many folks are aware of. In time, that will change.

And it will change by each one of us ceasing to ignore this solar flux and beginning to learn how to effectively handle it in our daily lives. Some are doing this already,

but it seems few.

The increased solar flux, with the immense packets of change (CMEs), are enough to clear out all the stops in our system, which can either put us down on a bed (trying to hide our head for some days) or blow out our mind, leaving us lean and clean, essentially purified to a more significant degree. It's kind of our choice how we take it, either laying down or on our feet and straight-up.

I have done it both ways, of course, and I prefer the second, if I can get my arms around all that change and channel it somewhere helpful to me. It's as close to a free lunch as we will ever get, IMO.

Incoming solar change, as propelled by a solar flare or CME, is profound in its effect on us, both psychologically and physically. It can cause chaos and confusion (and does), yet it also can be directed, if we can manage it. It's like a firehose, strong enough to upset our apple cart, yet also powerful enough to carry us into a new dimension or turn over a new leaf. And it's not like we have any choice. Everyone on Earth experiences the Sun, both quiet and angry, and at the same time.

I am trying to sort this out, so that I can perhaps give folks here a more coherent account. Please bear with me.

[Photo by me today, as the grape leaves on our arbor begin to unfold, here is the nymph mode of the Assassin bug.]



## "I'M TIRED AS A RETIREE"

May 15, 2022

[Full Moon Eclipse tonight, should be visible if there are clear skies tonight. The moment of the Full Moon is 12:14 AM Monday. Take a look, a 'Blood Moon'.]

The above is a line from a song by my good friend, singer/songwriter, Luke Winslow-King. And I should



know because I'm retired, and just now I'm tired of my idea of retirement. The other shoe has fallen. Actually, for me, retirement has brought with it some confusion that has taken me a few years to sort out. It came in the form of distractions that sapped my insight.

I have not been able to give my 100% to anything, because I have been distracted trying to figure out just where do I fit into my life, now that I don't have much that I have to do. With the loss of all that I had formerly to do in the workaday world, I found myself trying to fit in 'somewhere', where (apparently) I don't belong, and that has hamstrung me and left me wanting, like I need to fill some hole. My attention, instead of being fixed on the task at hand, has been distracted by all kinds of other things, or so it seems. And just lately, I can see that's what I've done.

I am reminded of the Tennyson poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and the line:

'Theirs, not to reason why; theirs but to do or die'

I'm not in that class, yet I am in the same predicament, that of lacking full-throttle because I am not giving all that I have. And this was due to me trying to arrange what really can't be arranged anyway. It just happens, and it happens when we are concentrating on what is important, whatever that may be for each of us. And that's what I have been missing of late, undivided

attention.

In other words, if I lost my old one/two punch, it is because I was not able to give it all that I've got. I didn't know how or what to address in this new world of retirement. That makes sense. No use looking around for someone to blame when I'm standing right here. Now, how to turn that around?

From where I stand, it looks as simple as that I'm like a leaky sieve, losing my way and effect by being pulled in too many directions, instead of having any one clear direction and focus. Stop the leaks, so to speak, which simply means to pay attention single mindedly, i.e., gather my wits.

To repeat, my leaks were my trying to advance ten things at once, in a vain attempt to 'fit in' to my changing life situation upon retirement, something my first dharma teacher clearly told me, using a circus analogy, "Michael, if you spend all your time in the sideshow, the main tent will be gone." I've been to that sideshow.

So, if I felt empty and that something was missing, it was just that: I was not following my own inner direction along the lines that I formally had done, which used to be something like: "Damn the torpedoes, full-speed ahead! I have done that all my life, only somehow, I lost touch with this approach since I retired.

And I understand how that may have happened, having no businesses to run, and trying to repurpose myself, yet not wanting to throw the baby out with the bathwater, yet I did. However, thanks to this recent huge influx of solar change and the fact that I finally got off my duff enough to seize some of that change, I find myself back on track or on my way to getting there.

Let's blame it on the residue of retirement, the turning off of what had been always on for many decades, and letting all that work-attention wind down, without at the same time keeping my internal compass alive and always pointing north. That's about it, but it was much more of a climactic event than I was prepared for. I thought retirement would just be an easy relax and life would just go on, however, it was a little bit more than that, at least for me.

I was not prepared for the disorientation and loss of direction that followed retirement. I get it now and am happy to have realized this. What a waste, this 'not-being-more-vigilant' that mired me. It's OK to let all the business stuff go fallow, yet not OK to fracture my internal-compass, train of thought, and sense of direction, which had been cultivated my entire life.

I've had nothing much to say about retirement up until now, but no more. There is a whole mystery and adjustment to retirement, as well as to any other main

life-juncture, one which now I begin to better understand.

[Photo by me of a grape leaf leafing.]



## A SPIRITUAL GROUNDHOG'S DAY

May 16, 2022

For many decades, I was too busy following my own interests passionately than to stop and smell the roses. When I did stop working and retired, I found that retirement was not all roses, so to speak. And I also found, which I should have figured out by then on my own, that I had not developed any of the skills for passing time, making small talk, and just treading water. Instead, my tunnel vision for work that interested me had shielded me from being pestered by a lot of the trivia of life. And all that time, as mentioned, I assumed that all was roses, if only I had the time to smell them.

Meanwhile, all those many years, my tunnel vision had

encapsulated me like a time capsule, an express train that made few local stops, although I always assumed I was missing something by my dedication to whatever I was working on. And because so much of my work was ultra-tedious, like documenting all recorded music, all recorded film, and on and on, I knew I was sacrificing a lot of 'fun' by working so hard and assumed that if I had (or took the time) to have some general fun like I saw others apparently having, I would have fun too.

Well, like the game of 'musical chairs', when the music stopped, and I retired, as it turned out I didn't have a chair to sit on. Little did I realize that all those years of perhaps working too much, not only got the job done, but protected me from wasting my time, and all the fun out there that I assumed those others were having, was perhaps not all that it is cracked up to be, especially for my temperament.

That express train that I was on all those years actually acutely trained my attention and kept me in a kind of a suspended-animation groove while life outside of that groove passed me by relatively uneventfully. As they say, 'who would have thunk it', so to speak. Certainly not me.

I postponed for me a lot of the fun I assumed others were having, in favor of trying to complete just a little more of what I was working on, on the assumption that I was contributing to the archiving of something I felt was important not only to me, but to everyone if I could do

it, that being our popular culture of music, film, astrology, rock posters, and the like. And so it went, much of my life.

And the life I lost, the life that was forfeited by my work, I assumed was rich in meaning, while much of the tedium I put up with was an offering I made for the general good. When at last I retired and turned my attention to all the fun I had missed, that fun was hard for me to find or come by. It was not so much fun, and not as meaningful as the quite tedious work I had done all those many years.

And so, I can't but think of Julius Caesar's "Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, I conquered), and as far as retirement is concerned, for me it was "I came, I saw, I walked away." And so, at this crossroads of life, where I have looked both ways, I have seen what is, for lack of a better phrase, "outside," and choose to enfold myself back into what I was doing all those years. I came up for air and discovered that air was where I came from.

Like the groundhog, I have seen my shadow.

[Photo by me taken yesterday.]



## THE ZEN OF ZEN

May 16, 2022

I guess I can't say enough about the benefits of concentrating on whatever task we have set for ourselves. It's very Zen-like at the outset. In addition, attentive absorption in a task is very protective, because since we have all our feelers tucked into any non-duality we can manage, we can't be harmed by what would



otherwise distract us.

It's so easy to be nickel & dimed by endless distractions, especially if we are not attentive to whatever we are concentrated in doing. One of the great dharma lessons for each to learn is that it is much easier to not create 'bad' karma than it is to remove karma we have already recorded. No comparison.

Our undivided attention to what we are doing at the moment, naturally repels countless distractions that otherwise would play havoc with our mind. Undivided attention is a natural prophylactic that protects us from accumulating karma that would only weigh us down and have to be worked off.

[Photo by me of the ferns which are coming alive in the back yard of the center. They will become overwhelming soon.]



## SOLAR OVERLOAD

May 17, 2022

The sunspot 11-year cycle is on the rise. Right now, there are eight sunspot groups on the solar disk, which scientists tell us is the most in years. And two extremely powerful hotspots are just coming to the sun's eastern limb and will come into view of Earth by midweek.

We know as a fact that Earth (and all its inhabitants) depend on the sun's light and heat for our very existence. And we also know that our sun is a variable star, meaning our energy and light from the sun does not flow at a constant rate, but varies, going up and down. Right now, it is going up and will for some years yet.

And even while it goes up, it will also suddenly vary greatly by increasing exploding flares with their CMEs (Corona Mass Ejections) of plasma that are hurled at Earth, and which we will all experience more or less at the same time. I am talking about energy that is ejected at Earth in large packets, energy that changes our status quo in various ways. And that change is something we have not only to endure, but it also can be useful to us (or not), depending on our physical constitution and willingness to work with change.

Extreme solar influx reaching Earth (and our minds and bodies) is like putting electric power through an

extension cord that in many cases is too thin to hold the load. The power of this extreme solar change affects us depending on our state of mind and the ability of our body to absorb the load. If we can't sustain that much change, we either blow a fuse, so to speak, or hunker down and ride it out.

Thus, our handling of high intensity solar flux is challenging as well. As mentioned, we can either act as a conduit and use solar change or blow a fuse ourselves. However, if we can manage to handle the load, the extra change or power can be used to forge ahead in whatever direction we are headed or where it is most needed.

When these incoming CMEs pile up and what is called 'cannibalization' takes place, one CME overtakes an earlier one and they pile on, the best we may be able to do is to hang on for dear life or let go of the change entirely and just hunker down until it passes.

However, if we can't handle the load, yet are holding the charge, we can offload it from us in any number of ways, most which are not so good for us or for those upon which it is discharged toward. How many times have we struggled to contain a charge, when it attempts to offload on someone or something else? We can walk a fine line, trying our best not to lose balance and still accidentally discharge it against our best interests.

When such an overload sweeps Earth, it affects millions of people all at once, many of whom will be unable to contain themselves and perhaps a lesser group who can contain themselves and put the change to work in their behalf. In my experience, there are times when I can rise to the occasion and other times when it just blows right by. And there are early warning systems available, yet the public as a whole are unaware of them and/or how to best use them.

Most folks think of change as a product of fate, when most often it is very much up to our ability to sustain and use change, guide it, or suffer an overload, with all of its possible consequences, most not welcome by us or those who come to know us.

As they say, "Change is the only constant," which should tell us something. And we can add that the degree of change very much affects us, and high-intensity change like that of solar flares (and their CMEs) can affect us very much. Many people don't handle change well. In fact, there are whole groups who are conservative, and try to limit change to as little as possible. Of course, we can't limit change one way or the other, yet we can learn to use change rather than fight against it.

First, it helps to be aware of solar change, to know when it is taking place. And that is as simple as going to [SpaceWeather.com](http://SpaceWeather.com) and see if any high-intensity solar flux is taking place now or has recently occurred and

may be affecting us. That's a beginning, to actually monitor the solar influx and to see for ourselves whether we dance in response to it or not.

I read somewhere that the movement of ants on a heated surface, as the temperature is turned up and down, is a more accurate thermometer than any scientists can devise. I don't know anything about whether that is true or not, yet I'm curious.

My question here is that we know that the influx of solar variation reaching Earth goes up and down. What each of us can determine is how do we react psychologically and emotionally to very high solar energy reaching Earth. How does this change in solar energy influx affect us? We have huge wind turbines to channel air. Perhaps we eventually will have methods to channel the solar wind and the change that solar influx thrusts upon us.

[Photo by me of the lilacs which are in bloom.]



## HAIR-TRIGGER EMOTIONS

May 18, 2022

What to do with all that excess energy that comes with solar flares and their CMEs? If we can't contain and absorb that degree of energy, we have to shed it one way or another, and that is fraught with all kinds of problems for most of us. Once in a while we can surf that change, ride the crest of the wave, and come out

smiling. Yet just as often, in fact more often, not being able to hang on to all that change finds us dumping it in whatever way is most convenient, and this may not be so convenient for us or those nearest us.

When we are filled up to overflow with change or the urge to change, what to do with all that extra energy? We try to shake it off. That's when we find that we are filled to the brim, with perhaps a hair-trigger release, and it seems that the least little thing sets us off. And when we can't absorb solar change, we dump on whatever, wherever, or whomever is most convenient. At these times, it takes very little to upset us, simply because we can't contain it.

If we investigate what causes us to erupt like this, and wonder why we can't contain ourselves, we find all kinds of reasons for setting us off. Of course, I am not discounting those, but only adding one more possible cause and it's up to you to see if this makes sense in your life.

Science is just getting around to seriously studying the effect of solar-energy packets affecting us emotionally and psychologically. Science has spent decades unpacking the physical effects on Earth from solar activity and CMEs, yet they have been rather shy in getting personal about all these effects. How does solar change also affect us internally? That's what I am interested in.



This is and has been going on for as long as time and our sun have existed with us, so our reactions to sudden solar change is not new. Perhaps our awareness of it is. Astronomers initially go for the hard science, the outer physical effect on radio transmission, electrical grids, and so on. Yet, there is an inner, psychological, and emotional counterpart that we struggle with and apparently, as far as social awareness goes, are not generally aware of.

Where do you think change comes from? Mostly, since forever, we have assumed that 'change' just comes as it does, arbitrarily or something. We have not put our inner changes and the solar flux together as a single process that affects us. I find that if you will study these solar effects for a while, look at what the Sun is doing each day, you will find that it is, among other things, 'doing us'. We are in synch with solar activity. When the Sun says "Froggy," we jump.

In other words, we dance to the flow and variation of solar activity.

[Photo of our Redbud tree in bloom, by me.]



## THE WELL-TEMPERED BLOG

May 19, 2022

I'm workin' on it. Of course, years ago I liked quotes from various dharma teachings, in particular in-depth teachings from my own dharma teacher. I posted them right here on my blog. Why don't I do so much of this now?

Well, my reason is that although these quotes made sense to me and were appreciated by others who were somewhat advanced in practicing dharma, they seemed to repel others who seemed embarrassed by them because they faced them with their ignorance. Another

way of saying this is that some folks were put off by what they did not understand, and because these quotes seemed a little too 'Greek' for them, their eyes glossed over, and they avoided these more formal teachings. Perhaps they felt threatened by being faced with something they knew so little about. I can understand that and first learned this approach of not confronting people with their ignorance from the remarkable and direct astrologer John McCormick (born August 29, 1922). McCormick told it like it is, IMO.

And so, I gradually phased out this approach, although some do ask me where are my dharma posts these days? Well, they are still right here, where they always have been, yet I have shifted my style somewhat. I kind of figured out that making the dharma posts 'too dharma', too serious or technical, etc., was like blocking a lot of folks from learning anything dharmic at all. They seemed to feel these more technical dharma posts were too heavy and long for them and skipped over them. As for long, I wonder if I will ever learn to write short pieces. LOL.

I realize that while formal dharma teachings are important at some point in our learning, stories that have dharmic elements in them are more generally helpful to beginning dharma readers. A number of FB Friends have told me that their only contact with the dharma has been these blogs, which was kind of sobering for me. I'm not a rinpoche and serious dharma

students probably don't need to hear from me, but those who are just starting out learning dharma, those folks I may be of use to.

I know a little bit about what to do starting out with dharma, yet I feel I know a lot about what not to do. Folks need that too, to understand what not to waste their time on.

In addition, over time I came to see why I was posting some details that pleased me by their complexity and the fact that they were difficult to understand, and they might interest other folks who had done a lot of dharma practice, yet the last thing these more advanced practitioners need is to hear from someone in the same boat that they are in.

My response to this realization has been to tell more stories about my own experience, tell it like it is for me, as best I can, and hopefully that will have some dharma content. And the further I got into this approach, the more I saw that my previous dharma-heavy approach was a kind of repellant to those that perhaps most needed to be introduced to dharma.

If any of you remember (years ago now) the short section that followed the CBS News program "60 Minutes," "A Few Minutes with Andy Rooney," Aside from a few comments I didn't agree with, I thought Andy Rooney was a great combination of humor, wisdom, and

friendliness. That's what I would like my Facebook blog to be like if I can manage it.

[Photo by me of part of the back yard at our dharma center, where the violets meet the ferns.]



WHEN THE MND IS AT REST

May 20, 2022

Because Michigan was scraped flat by a glacier many ages ago, the wind here is unimpeded, always on the go. Those rare times when there is no wind are special for photography.

In the same way, when the mind is not moving and naturally is at rest, it's like a holiday. I find I have nothing to say. Here is a poem about poems that will have to do.

#### MY POEMS

Poems,  
A home for my thoughts,  
Dear thoughts,  
The very best of me,  
All that's precious and kind,  
Now sealed in words,  
Like insects in amber:

Prayer flags endlessly waving,  
In the gentle chalice of the mind.

[Photo by me, one of the Trilliums in our back yard.]



## RELAX, AS IT IS

May 21, 2022

[I'll try to tear myself away from the fireworks currently going on in the surface of the sun. It's been so rich and furious there that we have been more or less inundated for some time now, so whether we can feel it or not, it's taking place all around us. Remember, this intense solar influx suddenly injects pure 'change' into our lives, when we are used to the steady stream of change through sunlight from a quiet sun. It's up to each one of us to determine whether we can feel this urge for change and act on it or ignore it and resist change and try to weather it out as best we can.]



As to our mind, feelings, and emotions and their exposure to all of this solar stuff, the politics, and the Uranian war, etc., how can we protect ourselves from compiling these disturbances and being disturbed by them?

As the great Mahasiddha Tilopa pointed out ages ago, we have (and are stuck with) the well of this present moment.

And even with that, this present moment, Tilopa suggests that we are not to do anything but rest in it, being careful not to attempt to alter or change it. Take it straight. How can we forget Tilopa's primary words of advice? They are more than worth considering.

Don't Prolong the Past  
Don't Invite the Future  
Don't Alter the Present  
Relax, As It Is!

Who can contemplate these thoughts and not be moved to consider them? They are the essence of Tilopa's teaching, passed down from mouth to ear, and contemplated by every Tibetan dharma practitioner. Once grasped and taken to heart, who can forget them?

They all boil down to the fact that we cannot avoid this fathomless well of the present moment. It all happens in

the here and now. Every thought, word, and deed has come up and out of the here and now.

We don't have to make excursions to the future because we can't see that far ahead anyway. With the past, that's another matter. There we can see as far as we can see, but keep in mind that the foundation of the past is always deteriorating, morphing, and becoming less stable.

Our memory very much is and soon becomes nothing more than our projection, and an unstable one at that, more like a shimmering mirage in a desert than anything else.

Which leaves us with the present moment, yet with the Tilopa's admonition not to alter that moment in any way. Just let it be. The sage advice is to rest in this present moment. That's the entirety of it all.

It might be helpful to note that even if we tried to implement these four admonitions of Tilopa, it would take great skill and practice to do so. Resting in the nature of the mind is considered a very advanced practice, as simple as it ultimately is. Try it out, relax 'as it is', and see for yourself, and by doing so also make a start at becoming familiar with the nature of the mind.

[Photo today by me.]



## 'FILLER UP PLEASE'

May 21, 2022

How much dharma can we hold? Well, if we are trying to remember written or spoken dharma texts, the answer would be "not so much." However, the point of dharma, at least as I understand it, is not to remember it, but to be aware and realize the truth of it, the truth of our own mind. And truth will always be right there with us because it is the truth. No need to remember anything; just allow our realization, once we have it, to inform us.

Trying to keep in mind something we read or heard spoken is at best of temporary usefulness, and usually

relatively empty at that. At best we become a bookworm, parroting what we have read, instead of a realized being. It seems to me that the gift of an authentic dharma master is not to let us wander on with our head filled with empty concepts but, as Shakyamuni Buddha did with his mudra, the earth-touching gesture, make sure that the lightning reaches ground for us, i.e., that the rubber meets the road.

That's the difference between an airhead and some actual realization on our part. One would think this would be easy, for us to tell the difference between these three: understanding a concept, a living experience, and an actual realization of the concept. Yet apparently, it's not.

I have been interested in Buddhism since the late 1950s, dabbled with actually sitting Zazen in the 1960s, and was seriously committed to the dharma in the early 1970s. From the 1970s until now, I have been increasingly involved in dharma practice and study. I never thought of myself as a 'religious person' and I still don't, because for me the dharma is not a religion, but a method of becoming aware as to the nature of the mind and gaining familiarization with that nature.

I was new to the dharma and the dharma was new to this country, so there was a bit of the blind leading the blind for quite a while. And the dharma is not a case of our learning a set of rules, but rather one of our

becoming aware of our own nature, which we may be unaware of, but that nature has never been unfamiliar to us, because it's our very nature.

My point is that realization of the dharma (whether it is brought to us in Tibetan, Japanese, Indian, or Chinese format) is not in any way foreign because, by definition, the dharma is becoming aware of our own intrinsic nature, what has always been there

This may be one of the most difficult concepts to realize, that what we are looking for is not something that is out there and which we will finally someday 'get'. On the contrary, the dharma is the realization of what has always been right here within us and which we have experienced intimately forever, but we have just not realized all of this time until now. One of the pith teachings is the line:

"In the midst of experience, realization can arise."

And it means just what it says, that in the midst of this unending flow of experience we call life, realization of the actual nature of that experience may arise.

How long that will take, who knows? It could be this next minute or many lifetimes from now, or so the teachings say. I have found that despite all the wrong turns I have taken in life, that the dharma turns out to be the only right turn available.

And I know this may sound trite, yet the longer I live, it seems that everything is a dharma path, no matter which way we may twist and turn. If we choose the path of greater awareness at every turn, we can't go wrong.

[Photo today by me.]



## SOMETIMES A FEELING

May 22, 2022

Surfing or riding the wave of expressing a feeling is what drives my writing, and the written words are just the result or byproduct of expressing that feeling. In other words, my writing starts with a feeling, like feeling like writing, and the writing is just a process of expressing that feeling, which itself (the feeling) is the working off of a deeper impression that is somehow surfacing. The process amounts to the feeling surfacing, and the words are just a byproduct.

Perhaps I don't know what an 'idea' is, because when I write, as mentioned, I start with a feeling rather than an idea. And that feeling is simply wanting to express

something. I feel like writing but have nothing in mind to say. And I work through that feeling or work off that feeling by using words. Or, at least, words come from the process of expressing that feeling. Words are the byproduct of the feeling.

Somewhere along the process of expressing the feeling, the outpouring and sequence of words, gather around and create a theme. And from that theme, an idea may emerge. That's when I could say I have an idea, yet most of the time the idea comes after the feeling and its expression and not before. No lightbulb for me.

This process seems like a backward way of coming up with an idea as the textbooks describe that concept. The books say, you have an idea and then you write about it. While this does happen, that I first get an idea, most often the need for expression of some kind comes first, and then, as words assemble themselves, their gathering turns into an idea or at least a theme.

Is this automatic writing? I don't think so. This is just the way I write. I might be the only one, yet that would be the first time I have been the only one of anything. My 'only one' is just the tip of the iceberg. Many others must 'feel' the same.

And I'm telling you all this because of the feeling I had to express something that I felt, which then morphed into the urge to write, which then started with one



sentence, that led to the next, and so on. Before I knew it, I had a theme, and eventually as blog, which is the expression of a feeling.

[Photo by me.]



## BEAUTY IS A WAY TO THE HEART

May 23, 2022

I had a further confirmation yesterday that what moves me is the beauty in this world, when I can see it. Beauty inspires me. It's why I like photography and why I use it to, sort of, capture the beauty that I see, again, those times when I can see it.

I'm not always in that space where beauty registers with me. I can be in a funk or something, where nothing seems very beautiful. And then, I give in, and something beautiful pops up or perhaps I elide and slide into a head space where I can see beauty once again. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins called this 'inscape', where we

slip the bonds of thought and irritation (or whatever is bothering us) and suddenly can see beauty all around us. What a difference a moment can make.

It often happens when I go out for a walk and have a camera with me. Those first minutes I might look through nature for the beauty that I know is there, but trying to see beauty is not seeing beauty, is not beautiful.

Yet, after some time, when I relax and leave behind the rat's nest of whatever has been worrying me, as mentioned earlier, I slip or slide into another space, and suddenly all around me I can see beauty and want to photograph it.

There is a huge difference between photographing 'beauty' as it reveals itself, as opposed to photographing when I don't see beauty or just think I should photograph this or that because it's there. And so, that 'inscape' into beauty is the key to my photography, IMO.

And so, to recap, I have some Calla Lilies sitting around my studio. They are OK, and worth a photograph or two. And there is a larger form of Calla Lilly that only blooms once a year in one of our guest bedrooms. These are the yellow lilies I have been posting here lately. These large blooms were not just OK, but rather lovely flowers, in a world all their own.

Just seeing these flowers and their beauty, I had to photograph them. And I did, as you can see. And the takeaway for me, and proven once again, is that the more beautiful an object is, in this case a couple of Calla Lilies, the more I'm inspired photographically. And, related to that, how much a waste of time it is shooting any other kind of photo than those inspired by beauty, rather than by design.

[Photo by me.]



## THE GRAVITY OF DHARMA

May 24, 2022

I seem to have one foot in each of two worlds, so to speak. Like all of us, I have one foot in this samsaric world we live in. No choice. And, to the degree I have realized anything, I may have the other foot somewhere in the world of dharma. I'm gradually becoming multi-dexterous in this respect.

The dharma has come to represent like a window in time for me, something other and beyond the rule of time, the same time that has held me so tight ever since I can remember. As for an analogy, there is the expanding universe of time and embedded in samsara is the equivalent of a gigantic black hole into which everything is being gradually drawn and transformed through its wormhole. In this analogy, that hole would be the dharma.

We might quibble and say why picture the dharma as a black hole, something we are eventually being drawn into rather than something we go after and 'get'?

The reason, IMO, for gravitating toward the dharma rather than hunting to find it is that, if we read the pith dharma instructions, we discover that the dharma instructions state that we have to relax and allow the mind to remain just as it is, rather than alter the mind by any of our effort, which effort only further obscures.

And so, by relaxing and not resisting, we naturally gravitate toward, are drawn into, and come to rest in the nature of the mind and samsara is transformed into nirvana

[Photo by me.]





## WELTSCHMERZ (WORLD SORROW)

May 25, 2022

Yes, I am having some world sorrow in these times. Just too much of 'enough of this'. And around our dharma center, it's time for some new Tibetan Prayer Flags, as this last winter's wind pretty much whipped the ones we have to shreds. Here's a photo of a string of prayer-flags framing some of the ferns in the back yard of our dharma center.

It's pretty sober out there in these weeks as the world and politic news compounds one problem after another. And of course, aside from that, each of us (no doubt) have our own problems to work out. What makes me most sad is that young people growing up now, like my kids (and probably some of you as well), in this world



situation, may have no idea and no memories of life in America as it was like 50 or 60 years ago when I grew up. IMO, life these days is a grotesque caricature of what it used to be, with little to no memory by younger people of there being any other way to live. It was not always as it is now folks.

As for me, I can't just hang out on the edge of life witnessing all this and do little else. I must turn away some, back to what I know and do, and live life, not because I don't care, but because I care too much. And of course, I have no way to inject my memories into those of you just coming up now. At best I do what I can to share what I know of how it used to be.

One good thing is that Mother Nature has not changed or at least not so much, and certainly the rules of nature and of dharma remain the same. And so, while I can't share with you what it was like growing up back then, any visit into nature, by path or trail, to forest, meadows, streams, and lakes has not changed so much from when I was young. The truth of nature is still being told.

We can go out into nature and feel what there is to be felt today as we did in the yesteryear. We can't share what there was only one of, our particular time and its memories, yet we each have our own time and can at the very least empathize with one another.

Just as the music we grew up in and through our youth,

what we danced to, and heard on the car radio on a warm summer night when we were young has a special meaning for each of us that others who were not there perhaps cannot feel or hear as we heard it, yet they too (each of you) have your own time, your own music, and your own youth and summer nights. We can share what we all have in common, even if you cannot hear tunes like "Earth Angel," "Sally, Go Round the Roses," or "A Whiter Shade of Pale" as we heard them. I grew up at the start, through decades, and beyond the birth of rock & roll, and we heard these great tunes the first time they came on the scene. IMO, that was something.

It's almost as if history is the extension of, the stretching out or the attenuation of a certain subtle something (our very being) that grows less (thinner) in each successive generation, and the process of time has a way of making us (each generation) forget what we find too hard (or have no way) to remember, leaving us with the impression (and a false impression) that no less than the same for each generation is certain. It is not the same, but less than it was.

I wrote this poem which I have shared here a couple of times that points this out.

#### TIME TO MIND

Lost again in the swing of time,  
I agree to forget,

What I find so hard to remember:  
This moment.

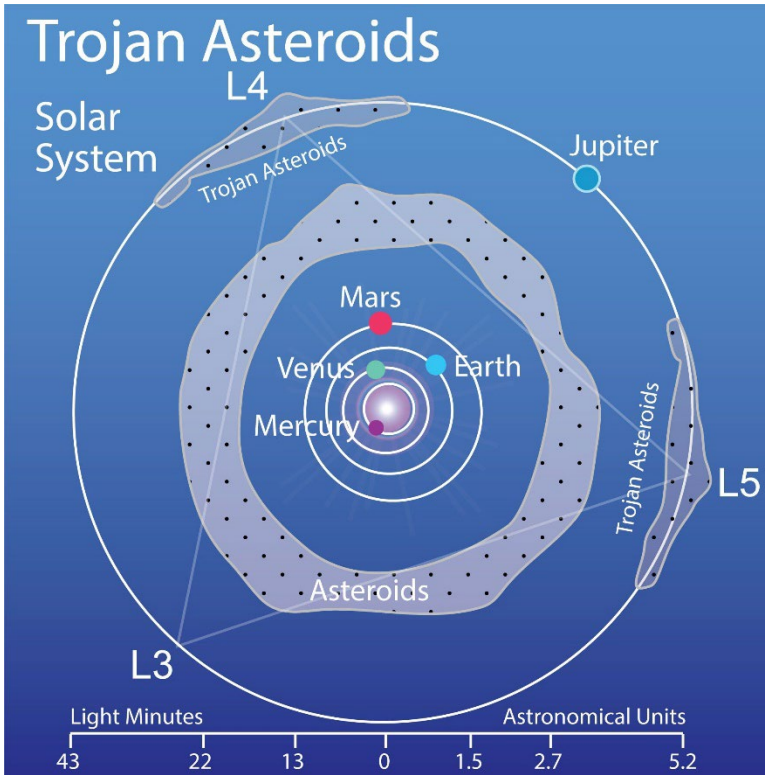
Always later,  
Urged awake by impermanence,  
I am back again,  
But farther down the road.

Time takes my mind,  
In small and larger bites.

The little ones,  
I reconnect and can remember,  
But the larger gaps,  
I can only leap across,  
Guess at,  
And hopefully learn:

To say more in silence,  
Than in words.

[Photo by me.]



NOT FADE AWAY

May 26, 2022

[Update: Astrophysicists tell us that a large sunspot has erupted producing a M1-class solar flare, which hurled a CME (Corona Mass Ejection) into space that won't directly hit Earth, but has an Earth-directed component

that will hit our planet on May 28th or 29th. Against this CME, we should be aware.]

Certainly, these troubled times have put us to the test and can easily soak up a lot of our goodwill, forcing us to trim our sails more than a little. A question I have is how do these times affect our dharma practice and, if so, just how?

Looking back over these last two years or so of the pandemic, I find that more than I would like of the edges (the fringe and frills) of my dharma practice are absorbed by the angst of these times, leaving me with just what? Good question and that's what we find out at these times, like it or not.

For one, the pool of my patience begins to dry up, and I look around to see what part of my 'dharma lake' remains and what has been sacrificed or diminished one way or another.

One place where the landslide of my confidence sticks (hangs on) is what we could call the 'truth'. I notice that when everything else seems to be fading away (at least somewhat), clarity itself remains crystal clear and through that we can see forever. I find no loss there.

And like the old phrase "The Buck Stops Here," as mentioned, times like these are good for separating the wheat from the chaff of dharma practice. Yet, what

remains, call it our attempts at recognition of the mind's nature, to the degree we have any recognition, is inviolate. And around those fixed points, like the fixed stars in the heavens, we gather and from that we can continue to build from there. Here is an astronomical sidebar that may just be helpful.

## THE TROJAN ASTEROIDS

Astronomically, the Lagrangian points come to mind, and for this example, let's use the planet Jupiter and its orbit. There are two points on Jupiter's orbit, one 60-degrees ahead of Jupiter in its orbit (leading group of Trojan Asteroids, L4) and the other 60-degrees behind Jupiter in its orbit (trailing group of Trojan Asteroids, L5). In other words, we are talking about a bisected Trine aspect of 120-degrees (see diagram). It is at these two points, L4 and L5, that there is a balanced point that allow asteroids and other space objects to be captured and congregate, so to speak, caused by the 'groove' or lacuna that is naturally created there, points of equilibrium.

A point L3 completes the Grand Trine (three 120-degree points equidistant from each other in a circle). Two of these points are where objects in space, like the odd asteroid', naturally gather and group. These are like 'pockets', points of least resistance, where stellar objects just naturally congregate. Obviously, scientists would like to place satellites or space stations eventually,

because they would tend to stay there.

If you find this interesting, then consider this analogy, using the dharma. There are natural grooves or equilibrium points, 'pockets', where the essence or 'truth' of the mind and dharma naturally gather, and these points are not easily jarred or popped out of their mind-orbit. These dharma truths are about as true or lasting as anything in this impermanent world system offer.

When all things fade, these equilibrium points become our Pole Stars or pointers, and they are the last to fade or go. I don't know whether these dharma points or nexi (plural of nexus) are fixed for all practitioners or do we each gravitate individually to the dharma truths that work for us? Probably both, meaning we have our individual yidams, but also all agree on pole stars like "The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma," and related principles. To return to my original question for myself: how have these troubled times affected my dharma?

And the answer seems to be, those dharma principles that I somehow have realized as the sum of my dharma experiences seem to shine in the mind's sky, unaltered by these current tough times. That being said, my ambitions when it comes to dharma have perhaps been somewhat blunted, which simply means that I'm not so arrogant, self-sure, and adventurous as I may have been

a few years ago, not so cocky.

In these times, I find myself occupied with putting one foot in front of the other, minding my own business, not so interested in the various entertainments and distractions as I used to be. I seem to be pulling in my horns, so to speak, content in a more simple life of shelter-in-place, little socialization, and turning to my main interests, like photography, writing, fixing up our center, and the like.

The pandemic, the lies of politicians, war of Ukraine, and other worries like climate change, global warming, etc. nickel and dime my energy and do their best to blunt my vision, yet I do my best to soldier on through this. If anything, right now dharma is more of a refuge for me than ever. That said, some of my reified dharma attachments, which are just attachments that I don't need, are being pruned back to a realistic flow.

[Diagram by me.]





## DHARMA SCAFFOLDING

May 27, 2022

When we build a house or a building, often a series of scaffoldings are used while the building is under construction. When the building is finished and before it is open and livable, the scaffolding is taken down as it is no longer needed. The same is true for dharma practice.

When we are introduced to the nature of the mind and

the non-dual dharma practices, a lot of what is essentially dharma scaffolding has to be removed and is no longer necessary. Without removal, the scaffolding itself becomes an obscuration to any advanced practice.

Chief among what must be removed are the stains of 'effort', the effort it took to learn the dharma in the first place. And these stains do not just evaporate and go away. The effects of the effort it took to practice dharma are no longer needed, yet they leave their mark on our dharma progress, much like the glaciers did to the state of Michigan when they scraped the Lower Peninsula flat.

Equally, another type of obscuration is all the anticipation, expectation, assumptions, perhaps what we imagined about dharma progress, and our misperceptions and mistaken notions. All of these leave their ring around the tub, so to speak, and need to be accounted for and worked away.

And the removal of what has to be removed reminds me of the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, where stick after stick is carefully removed from the stick pile, until nothing is left, just as when we peel an onion, there is nothing in the center. In this case, it is the 'nothing' we are looking for, so that there is nothing by the way of residue or damage left over from our previous dharma practices and their effort to impede us.

[Photo by me.]



LET BEAUTY IN

May 29, 2022

Obviously, that's a question the human race has been trying to define since who knows when. What is it? We know beauty when we see it and beauty probably varies from individual to individual. "Everybody to their own taste," said the old lady as she kissed the cow.

Whatever we can agree beauty is for each of us, it appears to be the ticket to going inside, to touching our hearts. It does something to us like nothing else does.

And some of us strive for beauty in everything we do; perhaps we all do. For me, beauty (despite how beautiful it is) very much depends on my state of mind. If I am off my contacts and in a funk or a grump, beauty may be invisible to me until it isn't once again.

Of course, beauty begets beauty or something like that, meaning if anything can open my eyes to the beauty around us, it is beauty. I know. That's a circular argument, so I challenge you to find the words, because I know you know what I am talking about.

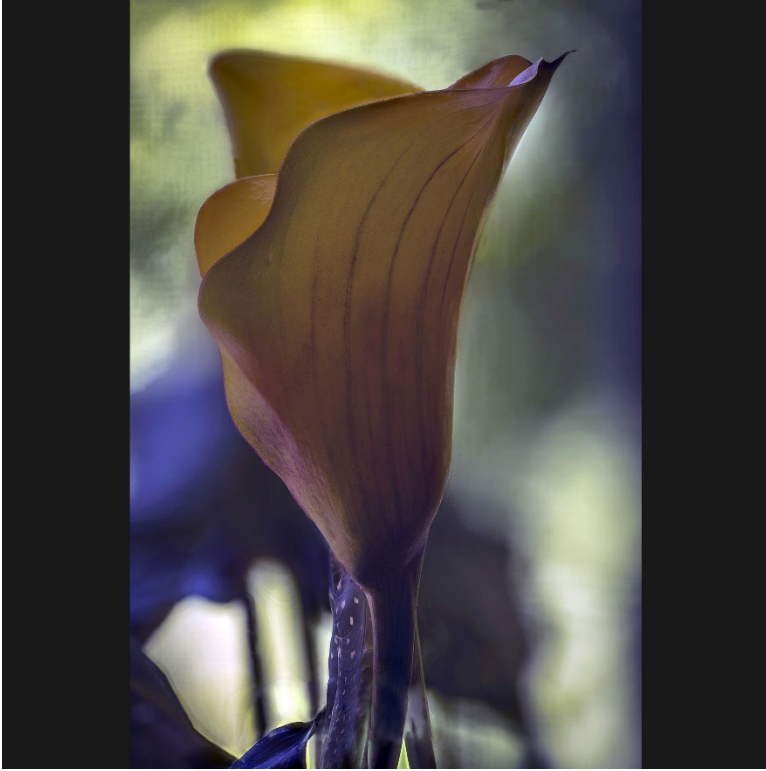
In my case, apparently, I have to relax enough and let go enough of my normal tunnel vision for my eyes to open and let beauty in. I don't know exactly how it happens, but it happens none the less. Something catches my eye just enough for me to see beauty in it and, whoosh, the doors to beauty are open and I am back again to where I like to be, able to see the beauty in life.

As a photographer, this transition that brings the ability see beauty again is graphically illustrated. My eyes have to be open enough to beauty to know I want to capture this or that impression in a photograph.

Once I can see beauty around me again, this usually happens for a period of time and then, somehow, my mind gets tired, and I slip back into a more regular mode.

I'm afraid I have not defined beauty but have only nibbled at the edge of it. As they say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

[Photo by me.]



## THE DARK OF THE NEW MOON

May 29, 2022

We are headed down-traffic toward the New Moon on Monday May 30, 2022 at 7:30 AM. And so we are, as traditional texts indicate, wrapping things up, riding out these three days before the New Moon, which used to be called the "Devil Days" in Medieval times in Europe and the Dharma Protector Days in Tibet. Either way, the

message is the same: hold on to your hats and hunker down a bit, meaning traditionally this is NOT the time to start new ventures or turn over a new leaf. Wait until after the New Moon for such things.

And the advice I have found most helpful while waiting out these three days before the New Moon:

Don't take anything too seriously or final during this time, but just consider the source, and the source is this more troubled time we are passing through or that is passing through us – particularly these three days. Much of what goes on is not the sign of anything other than turbulence, at least emotionally and psychologically.

What I continually realize around this time of the month just prior to the New Moon is, "Oh, that's what's wrong. We are in the dark-of-the-Moon days." And that's all that is wrong. Just hunker down, watch a movie, read a book, or if you are industrious, finish up unfinished business. Clean the basement.

The Moon, Earth, and Sun have a monthly cycle. That's why we call it a 'month', a rhythm that is as old as time itself. We can either dance to that rhythm or fight against it. The smart money works with the rhythm of the lunar cycle and not against it. And we can learn to get in step with the lunation cycle.

I have written at least three complete books about the

lunation cycle that contain just about all you could need in order to understand and learn to use the phases of the Moon. They are free as downloads here.

"Vision of the Eclipse: The Astrology of Lunations"

[http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/vision\\_eclipse.pdf](http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/vision_eclipse.pdf)

"Mother Moon: Astrology of the Lights"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/MotherMoon.pdf>

"Astrology's Mirror: Full-Phase Aspects"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/FullPhase%20Aspects.pdf>

With a little study of the lunar cycle, you can, as the old Kenny Rogers song "The Gambler" put it:

"You've got to know when to hold 'em,  
Know when to fold 'em,  
Know when to walk away,  
And know when to run."

That's what learning about the Four Quarters of the Moon is all about. And when you grasp that, you can learn what I call "The Sweet Sixteen," the sixteen aspects (activities) that make up the monthly lunar cycle. And if that doesn't do it for you, try dividing the lunar cycle into 30 parts as the Tibetans and Indians do, thirty lunar days, and learn that. The lunar cycle has something for everyone.



"Knock, knock, and the door shall be opened."

[Photo by me.]



## BRIDGING A DREAM

May 29, 2022

OK, here is some holiday-weekend musing on my part. It's finally warm enough out to feel hot and so I am feeling some heat, turning on the fan, and letting my mind out for a walk. Anyway, here's my thought. Let me know if you can make sense of it. This is hard for me to put into words.

It has to do with my daily dharma practice, which is not so much a 'practice' but actual meditation. I do it every day, because without it I don't feel like myself until I do. And I do it as much as I can. It's a particular form of meditation that is part of the Kagyu Mahamudra tradition called Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

In this particular form of Insight Meditation, it seems that I have to remain active, keep it moving, and this is done by way of a process that I articulate every day, keeping that process up. It's not so important what the means is by which I do this, the particular vehicle, as that the process itself keeps articulating. My particular vehicle usually is either doing close-up photography or writings such as this.

I have always liked the analogy of the shark that has to keep moving in order to breathe, because otherwise it has no way of getting oxygen, other than to move forward so that oxygenated water passes over his gills.

Something similar is happening to me as well with the dharma and meditation, which I will attempt to recount.

As mentioned, I have my favorite means of processing meditation in this current moment by resting in it (the moment) of course, yet the accent here is on the process and the processing itself, and not so much on what is being processed (photos or writing). As long as the process continues, I am OK. If it does not continue, meaning if I don't do it each day, I'm not as good.

Well, what I am describing is not a perpetual motion machine either, because it is not quite recursive enough to be automatic. I wish it were. And I'm not at the point where I could just process life itself in its entirety (hook, line, and sinker), and thus not need any oxygen (outside input) at all. I am somewhere in between, as they say, the devil and the deep-blue sea. "Give us this day our daily bread" is kind of where I'm at. In other words, I need to consciously meditate in this way each day, rather than just live life with no particular mindfulness as to meditation.

At this point I seem to need some oxygen, some extra help, a crutch of some kind, something within samsara to focus on, to digest, absorb, and from that to process in order to realize and tag onto, enough that I can recognize the true nature of some part of samsara. I know, this may be hard to understand.

In my experience, samsara (this cyclic world we live in) and nirvana (resolution of that samsaric world), seem not only to be connate (two sides of the same coin), but the link or connection between the two is more like a bridge, an artery or a vein, through which flows whatever realization that connects the two.

And just like the shark needs to keep moving to breathe, the process of the expansion and extension of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) is an ongoing and everlasting recognition of samsaric experience as nirvana, even though each day it may be a small part of samsara perhaps connected by a single thread. It seems that the continual process, not the speed, is what is important.

And so, it's not like with any bit of recognition gained, I'm suddenly out of the box and free of samsara. Not at all. It's more like a balloon on a string or a kite on a string; I'm attached to samsara by some means until the last goodbye is gone, however that works. And, as they say "Every goodbye ain't gone" ... yet. This may take lifetimes.

And so, that being said, I'm looking for information about just how our samsaric world and nirvana (freedom from that) are connected, and the process of incrementally realizing the actual and true nature of samsara. It's not like the process of transmigration between these two realms is not already in process. It is. I just lack knowing more about how that process works,

so that I can become better skilled in the processing. I am convinced that the twain (samsara and nirvana) shall meet, as they say, and with no need of oxygen. I just have not reached that point... yet.

The last words my teacher said to me before he passed on were that I should keep extending and expanding my recognition as to the true nature of the mind. I'm working on that!

[Photo by me.]



## TRANSFORMING SAMBARA

May 30, 2022

I've checked around, mostly within my own family, and we all seem to be somewhat distracted by all the world events and the goings-on. I know I have been. My question is how do we move forward and not continue to just stand still like a deer in the headlights? I don't want to continue being eaten up by all this bad news.

My provisional answer for what to do as this pandemic continues to surge in this state (Michigan) is to stop stopping to note event after event and just get busy doing stuff, which is what I am doing and, if not able, at least that's what I intend to do. It can get discouraging.

I can't go much of anywhere, as far as travel, so that limits me to our home and the center next door. Yet I can get busy and fix it up, make repairs, and do something useful. I am starting with painting some of the wood trim. I first have to dust and clean the trim, using some kind of degreaser. Then I can mask and paint the trim. This could take a while because we have a huge amount of woodwork and trim. I find it purifying to concentrate on something useful.

And I am taking photos outdoors again, weather permitting. And by 'weather permitting' I don't just mean the warming temperatures (86-degrees today), but mostly the lack of wind. This has been a very cold



and windy spring, IMO, and almost the only time the wind dies down to zero is for perhaps an hour just after dawn. Of course, that's when I'm out with my camera. Why? Because much of the photo work I do involves the intricate process of stacking a lot of photos, each photo taken a tiny increment of distance from one another, and then compiled to create a single photo with everything more or less in focus. You have all seen my work here.

This is called "focus stacking" and I have done it for many years, have written books about it, and even produced 24 videos on it for [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com). Yet, 200 layers of photos, each taken separately, combined to form a single photo is not only time consuming, but also very delicate work, because if there is any movement, then the stack is messed up. And the wind is never still for very long here in Michigan.

Yet, the idea for this blog is not my photography, but rather how do we work with constant distraction of current events, so we are not just brought to a standstill and feel enervated. It seems when I am busy, with my mind on the task at hand, that this is a kind of shield against events on the outside that keep rumbling on from distracting me.

I don't like the idea that I am ignoring these outside events or hiding from them, because I am not. At the same time, I don't want to be taken up and belong to

these events either. I need to pay attention to what I am doing, and I don't want to have one eye on my work and the other distracted by the news channel or by the upset emotions much of the news these days bring.

From a dharma perspective, non-distraction is crucial, if only to keep our mind on what we are doing. When we are fully engaged (and absorbed) in what we are doing, with our full attention, and resting in that, we are not recording karma or, if any, very little.

All the anguish experienced over this pandemic, not to mention the political waking-nightmare, and now the Ukrainian war, there is no rest for the distracted. Better that the sphere of our attention is focused on what we are doing and by that fact, is not dwelling on the news events or allowing them to feast on us.

Perhaps it's a bit like walking a tightrope, to keep putting one foot in front of the other and just mind our own business. Yet, having taken several excursions with my family members on the phone examining (and sometimes commiserating) about our common plight, I learn that nothing good seems to come from just waiting or even talking about it.

Our own focused awareness as to what we are doing seems to be the best protection I have found so far. It's hard to just go about life as if nothing is happening around us, but after a while of doing nothing about it,

distraction by these outer events seems to be even worse.

It's not that you or I are the Lone Ranger, here. There are multitudes of folks being traumatized by all of these adverse events we are commonly experiencing. Who knows how long it will take to sort all of this out and to reach some kind of feeling normal?

This is why I feel that some of us must tear ourselves away from being mesmerized and distracted by these current situations and start now to carve out a normal life, as best we can. And it's not as simple as just walk on and ignore it all.

No doubt, we will know what's happening around us, without dwelling on it to the exclusion of action on our part. We probably can't do much directly, other than the best we can. Yet, we can begin to set a line or form a direction, not against the status quo (the pandemic, for instance), but in the direction of sanity and good sense. Paying it forward is what I mean.

There have to be some 'Pole Stars' out there, something like a North Star to guide us, other than our fixation on all that has gone astray and that which is not what we expected or want. We can point out through careful attention a more positive direction and activity that, at the very least, will not do further harm.

And so, that's my take on how to cope with current events and our absorption and distraction by them. Don't be morbid, exclusively focusing on what we have lost or are losing, but rather carve a line toward a future that makes sense to you. Someone has to lead on. It might as well be us.

And we can start off by guiding ourselves, breaking our dependence on outside distractions, and focusing once again with both eyes front on whatever we are doing and have traditionally done. The whole world can be at standstill, mesmerized by current events. Some of us have to look and move forward, creating by our own action a sense of continued direction, a way on that points beyond these times.

[Photo by me.]



## TIMELESS

May 31, 2022

“Timeless” means without time, beyond time. Where is that? Certainly not right here and now, unless we somehow go between the clock-ticking seconds, and find eternity, so to speak, just in time.

And we don’t exactly escape time just by growing older. We may run out of time, sooner or later, yet that’s not what is meant here by ‘timeless’.

‘Timeless’ in my own experience is brought to us by what are called the non-dual dharma practices, practices like Vipassana, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen, yet those forms of meditation are not something that we can just slide into or that we can just enter at will.

We have first to prepare ourselves through mastering what are called the preliminary dharma practices, which all are primarily purification practices, meaning we have to work off whatever obscurations we may currently have until we achieve some degree of transparency such that we can see beyond our own Self.

And so, what’s holding us up or holding us back is usually our own Self with its opaque attachments which act like white noise to cloud the inner airways so that we can’t see beyond that self. These obscurations have first to be removed, which means we have to work with and

through them until we can see clearly. Only then may we be ready for the non-linear dharma practices mentioned above, those of the 'timeless' variety. Apparently, we can't just step outside of time without preparation.

If we are not ready now, it's up to us to get ready, because any realization of timelessness will wait forever until we actually ready ourselves. It's called 'turning the wheel of the dharma' And only we can turn the wheel for ourselves. Even the Buddha himself could not do it for us because dharma is by definition a do-it-yourself project. As mentioned, we each have to turn the wheel of the dharma ourselves.

So, what then do we mean by 'timeless' or 'The Timeless'? For one, timelessness is a product or byproduct of nonduality, when the subject and object elide and become one, like the phrase "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

This is why the non-dual dharmic meditations are timeless because we immerse ourselves in them to the exclusion of duality, duality being me here and you are over there. Those distinctions are lost in the full immersion of the non-dual forms of meditation like Insight Meditation (Vipassana), Mahamudra, and Dzogchen. And when we are all in, there is no sense of time and no karma recorded.

'Here' and 'Now'.

Resting in the well of the present moment is the only place where full immersion is possible for those of us in Samsara, not in the past or in the future, but just right here and now. Allowing ourselves to come to rest in the present moment is the key to timelessness in meditation, yet it is not that easy to do, at least in my experience.

If that seems to be worthwhile, I'm glad to work with anyone here in moving in that direction.

[Photo by me.]





GETTING THE POINT OUT OF LIFE

June 1, 2022

It must be the summer heat and my middle-of-the night excursions from sleep. After all, life essentially is like a dream we are having, and that midsummer night's dream (summer solstice) is soon approaching.

Or, like skipping flat stones on a calm lake, I seem to bounce off of what I'd most like to be absorbed in. Like a Moon lander, I'm stuck with sampling the surface of the mind, and am still learner to go deeper.

However, for me it's not enough to just be some kind of 'filter', catching the odds and ends of meaning. I'd rather mainline my interests if I could and be present and aware all the time. Yet, everything has to start somewhere.

In other words, panning for gold flakes is not my idea of success, although, speaking begrudgingly, finding gold flakes does seem to work, and I have no choice but to be grateful for that. I'm certainly not looking for a workaround, but am still looking for the main course, so to speak. How's that for being oblique. However, inherent in all this is a problem.

And this is because there is no way of going direct at what does not exist in any real sense. It's more like that the best we can do is reflect the truth, as in a mirror, and thus see what we can by way of those reflections.

Effectively, what we have is a hologram, a product of light rays and reflections, like a hall of mirrors. Yet within that, there is a clear 3-dimensional image (our life) because we can see it, although we are told that it's not really there, and certainly has no personal permanency.

But who's counting? Certainly not us, because we have never known anything else and have always taken all this phantasmagoria around us for real, as our reality. So, it's a little late to now be trying to squeeze the 'Charmin', so to speak.

And here's the point. There is none. Instead, it's the whole idea of grasping to 'get' the 'point of life' that's the problem. This life is a process that is beginningless and endless and never has gotten or will gets to the point. No way. This blog is about getting the point 'out' of life, doing away with it.

We've never noticed the difference, because there is no difference to be found, no difference at all. This moment, right here and now, my dear friends, this is it, as real as it gets!

As they say, you can't lose what you never had, so where do all the long faces come from? I wrote a poem long ago:

SEMANTICS

"It's not just that being,  
Is empty;  
It's that there is,  
An emptiness,  
Of being.

"It's never been there."

And what goes around comes around, as they say. Even longer ago, back in the mid-1960s, like a time capsule, I left myself the following note for the future, and that future is now. I wrote:

"No matter what you think about me, about my person, I know in time you will learn to recognize me as yourself, and you will love me, as I have learned to love myself, as I have learned to love you, like it or not. My person has not changed. How could it, truly? For person is the product of time, and my person — like a freight train — rushes on at the future. It always has. Only I, stepping off my person, am with you now."

"I am myself. I turned off time's endless matter at thirty. I dropped my body or sense of gravity. It proceeds on without me or rather: with my perpetual care and love. But I am not only my person. I am, as well, one with the creator of my body, of any body."

"My faith informs me. Each day's passage frees and reveals my past, 'presents' my past, and clears

it open. Where before was but an endless accumulation, layer on layer, is now removed with every passing day. And as the layers lift, it is clear to me that there is nothing there worth worrying. All the past lives I have are presently living, are become clear."

"Nothing to go back to, no place to hide, no cover."

"I am born free, held awake by all that lives. Where before I could not keep my eyes open, so now I cannot shut or close them. No closure. From my subconscious pours my past. Cloudiness clearing, it is my present. My placenta is being born, turning out all of that which nourished me."

"I can clearly see all that clouds this stream of consciousness is but a searching, is itself but a frowning, a looking to see, a pause, a hesitation that, caught and unfurled in the eddies of time, finding nothing, becomes clear and, laughing, I leave it go clear and turn from a darkening or dimming of my mind to light.

"And it came to pass, and I let it pass."

If you want a point, the point is that grasping at life is an endless disappointment. Why? Because life has no point, nothing to finally 'grasp' or 'get'. None whatsoever. We already have everything we need close at hand. We just lack awareness of that. Life is a continuing process, one without a beginning or end. And as for the dharma, the

dharma, IMO, is all about relaxing and accepting this fact. If you want an old-fashioned point, then here it is:

Relax, as it is!







## NOT FADE AWAY

June 2, 2022

Certainly, these troubled times have put us to the test and can easily soak up a lot of our goodwill, forcing us to trim our sails more than a little. A question I have is how do these turbulent times affect our dharma practice and, if so, just how?

Looking back over these last two years or so of the pandemic, I find that more than I would like of the edges (the fringe and frills) of my dharma practice are absorbed by the angst of these times, leaving me with just what? Good question and that's what we find out at these times, like it or not.

For one, the pool of my patience begins to dry up, and I look around to see what part of my 'dharma lake' remains and what has been sacrificed or diminished one way or another.

One place where the landslide of my confidence sticks (still hangs on) is what we could call the 'truth'. I notice that when everything else seems to be fading away (at least somewhat), clarity itself remains crystal clear and through that clear window we can see forever. I find no loss there.

And like the old phrase "The Buck Stops Here," as mentioned, times like these are good for separating the

wheat from the chaff of dharma practice. Yet, what remains, call it our attempts at recognition of the mind's nature, to the degree we have any recognition at all, is inviolate. And around those stable points, like the fixed stars in the heavens, we gather and using that stability we can continue to build from there. As for outward appearances:

The figurative robes and sometimes attitude when I sit down on my cushion to practice meditation don't become me. I don't like myself with any kind of dharma attitude on my part as much as I used to. Of course, there was a time, early on, when any kind of dharma attitude was much better than none, which is where I came from, having no dharma attitude.

And over time, I did my best to gather around me all the implements, statues, brocades, and dharma decorations as I could muster. I wanted to be 'dharma man', for sure. What happened to that approach?

Well, a lot of it is still there, as far as the physical statues and implements are concerned, yet I no longer depend on them to boost me up. Today, it's more like all of this dharma paraphernalia is just scaffolding, window dressing for practicing dharma. It would be wrong to remove it, because in itself it is not offensive, of course. So, there it sits, gathering dust unless I dust it. And where have I gone?

Well, I'm still right here where I always am, of course, in the here and now. If anything has changed, it is that I see little to less difference today between official dharma items and just whatever items I find myself surrounded by. If anything, I have a slight embarrassment about brandishing a dharma appearance than I used to.

Obviously, attachment to dharma 'stuff' and any reification that ensues from that is no different than any other attachment that I have. There is nothing wrong with the dharma item itself, just my attachment to it. However, a lot of that worry has just sort of died down. We move on because, sooner or later, attachment just doesn't work or do anything for us. In itself, a dharma item is inert. Our grasping for attachment to that item is the problem.

And so, removing our attachment, bit by bit, is ultimately unavoidable, IMO. We have to go free.

[Photo taken today by me.]



## THE DEFECTS OF REIFICATION

June 3, 2022

One of the defects of reification, trying to make things more real than they in fact are (attachments or grasping in general), is that whatever overage we accumulate will at some point in our future, at least at death, be reduced to the actual reality of what is. And we will not be used to being that naked or direct. It can be blinding! I suggest that it may be very essential that we start early, like now, trimming down our attachments until they are not obscurations but clear.

I can intuit from some of the reactions from yesterday's post that perhaps I am not being clear enough. I did not manage to enunciate it well enough, and I would like to rephrase and try again. And of course, you can't help but refer to your own experience and use your own words. Yet, there may be situations that you have yet to experience and therefore are unaware of.

I would be negligent if I did not at least attempt to set the record straight and not let my intent be turned over like one would till the soil, although I very much understand what some were doing and why you did it. So, I will put it this way.

Much of what I wrote yesterday was based, at least in part, on my actual experience in having had a major stroke and the misunderstanding about what is involved

in a stroke as it affects our spirituality.

And by "spirituality," I mean our basic or intrinsic awareness itself. For example, when having a stroke, what we call our basic "Awareness" is not itself affected by the stroke. As an example, consider this present moment, the here and now. With a stroke, that present moment is still present right here now and time continues and is exactly as it always has been.

That 'Awareness' we each have remains just what it has always been because it is beyond the physical. In other words, a physical stroke is just that "physical." A physical stroke is not only not-spiritual, it does not directly affect our spirituality. I will try to explain using a simple analogy.

The onslaught of a stroke directly affects the physical brain, but is NOT connected (or hard-wired) to our native intrinsic Awareness such that if we turned up the volume on a radio, both the brain AND our awareness would get turned up. Only the brain would get turned up, so to speak.

Our intrinsic awareness would remain unaffected except, of course, perhaps quite indirectly. A stroke happens in our brain and not in our awareness. That's why we can be aware of even having a stroke. That Awareness does not itself have a stroke.

That turns out to be a crucial fact to understand. Yes, there I was after the stroke hit, unable to speak or mumbling words that had no meaning to others. However, aside from the shock of it all, my mind inside was still crystal clear. The awareness of the mind is inviolable; it does not alter.

While gibberish was coming out of my voice, inside I thought I was clearly saying something. What appeared as a non-sequitur was not. In other words, nothing had changed in my intrinsic awareness. This fact might be of interest to those who have never had a stroke and certainly it should be understandable to those who have.

Stroke victims know their mental 'Awareness' is still functioning as it always has, subject to brain or bodily impairment. That, IMO, is a key point. There is another important effect from the stroke that also was not so clear to me at first. In fact, this effect was a total surprise, one I believe that, as a dharma practitioner, I was completely unprepared for.

This effect never occurred to me, yet it dominated the aftermath of the stroke. And this was the fact that when the stroke shattered my Self and its composure, causing my assemblage of personal attachments and fixations (i.e. essentially my Self) to vacate or be voided, this included ALL of my attachments, the good as well as the bad. And so, a lot of bad personal habits of attachment went right out the window in a flash, leaving me alone in

a kind of no man's land, a land without a past and attachments.

As scary (and new) as that was, there was also a certain sense of refreshment as well that was undeniable. However, what was totally shocking to me was that along with the loss of my personal Self's attachments, also went ALL of my attachment and fixation on the Dharma. That was not refreshing, but rather terrifying.

Aside from the physical aftermath of the stroke, with the endless tests, scans, and blood samples, I found myself without any of my attachment to the dharma as well. Just imagine! That was the real shock. If you think I had my finger on the scale of my likes, dislikes, prejudices, and judgements, imagine what I had ginned up over 45 years of attachment to the dharma.

My attachment to the dharma was immense, beyond measure, and it too was instantly stripped from me at the stroke like all of my other attachments. Voila! This I was totally unprepared for. And it was devastating.

In fact, it had been so devastating that I did not even write about it until long after the stroke itself because I was still plumbing the depths of what it meant and desperately trying to put that puzzle back together, piece by piece, as best I could.

So, there I was, stripped naked of every attachment I had



accumulated since I-don't-know-when and then, at the same time, I was thrust back into the center of my life with no clue of how I felt or was used to feeling by habit; I was unattached.

And yes, in a way it was refreshing to suddenly have much of my personal excesses removed in favor of what I can only call 'reality'. And what remained was who I am without so much of the "me, myself, and I" that I had always known, that was kind of everything I had known or was attached to.

In other words, I experienced myself as pretty much purely naked yet authentic. "Authentic" is the only word I can come up with that characterizes how I felt or was. 'Authentic' because there was no embellishment or elaboration. Yet, there was the caveat that this authenticity, this loss of attachment, also included my attachment to the dharma and dharma was a mainstay of my life.

Of course, none of this affected the dharma itself, only my attachment to and reification of the dharma. In other words, just as my life's fixations and attachments, anything that went beyond reality were removed in a single stroke, so was whatever undue, imagined, or ginned-up attachments to the dharma that had accrued. All that remained was, as I explained, authentic. Yet I was not used to that. Everything else, every embellishment and elaboration was politely removed.

And I experienced (at heart) as soon as I was able, for example, to sit down on the cushion and do my daily meditation practice, which was not possible for some time after the original stroke. Sure, I had said prayers and mantra all along, but something as formal as a sit-down daily practice with texts and all that was not possible until the winds of change from the stroke had blown themselves out a bit.

And then, when I did manage to sit down on the cushion in front of my little shrine, fill the offering bowls, and all of that, I had a rude and shocking awakening. It was devastating for me. I sat and cried.

Everything and anything that had been put together, trumped-up, or in any way artificial about the process of my dharma practice was also gone. You might think that this is good, to be totally natural and unelaborate with my daily dharma practice, yet what was removed was much of what I had made or reified the dharma to be. I had personally created all this over decades. It was my little dharma realm, yet it was flawed.

And I soon found out that much of what I had put together through all those years as a formal practice was, in fact, just one kind of elaboration or another. And in that first attempt to formally practice after the stroke, I had no attachment to it at all. It fell on deaf ears. The practice left me cold and just sitting there, a stranger to

the whole process. What was missing was all the padding from my own imagination that I assumed was part of the dharma, but which (at least in my case) turned out to be an elaboration only, something that I liked to 'think' or that comforted me. There was no room in that inn. It had fled.

Just as my Self's personal attachments and fixations had been stripped out, so had any and all attachments that I had to the dharma as well. Attachment is attachment, plain and simple. And that was another whole kind of shock, in a way worse than the stroke itself. LOL. What a tangled web we weave, and yet it can vanish in an instant. Poof.

The patina of practice that I had built up from 45 years of dharma-practice was completely gone and there I sat, practicing dharma in what, to some real degree, seemed like an artificial manner. I had lost the support of my own reification and imagination, the accumulation of decades of dharma practice.

My finger was no longer on the scale and much of the practice seemed so unnatural, unnecessary, and, well, meaningless. It's like the decades of trying to practice, including all the scaffolding I had built to make that happen were politely removed, leaving me stark naked of attachment, and unable to entertain myself in my usual manner. Until then, I never conceived of dharma practice as entertainment!

And what remained was my mind with no elaboration and no attachment, one way or the other, for or against. My respect for the dharma was still there, in fact it was so much there that I could not accept or tolerate any artificial or exaggerated attempts on my part to support my practice through good-will gestures and rote recitation, on my part. I saw through it at each sentence, each word until I just stopped.

The dharma does not need our good will; perhaps we think it does. I am reminded of a line my first true dharma teacher drilled into my head back in the 1960s.

“My god is no beggar! He does not need me to make the ends meet. The ends already meet.”

In a similar way, the dharma did not need me as its pimp, to additionally pull for or promote it. It is already everything, just as it naturally is. As mentioned, all of the devices or aids to get into my practice that I had accumulated for decades were not only unnecessary, but they were stripped from me and completely absent in that they no longer had an effect on me. Nada. It was like starting over in dharma, or at least at the time that was what I feared.

Worse, some of the practices or at least the way I did them were even somewhat repulsive to me or at least of no use and totally redundant. And so, that is how my

formal practice went, my dear dharma friends, which should make for you an interesting read.

And the hardest part for me is that, essentially, I had to start over, to go to the back of the line (and not collect \$200), so to speak, as to having a history. My slate was wiped clear, and I could no longer recite texts, either in Tibetan or English by just rote. I could try, but they seemed (at least the way I was used to doing them) to obscure more than clarify.

There was no meaning there. Instead, my dharma practice on the spot involved, instead of simple recitation, actually pulling the ideas from the ether of the mind, one by one, and assembling them as if for the first time. Humbling, yet full of meaning, because I was creating the meaning on the spot and not drawing it from some memory bank, habit, or drone because I had none.

In fact, it took weeks for me to find a new approach to my daily practice, one that still included the bare bones of it, like filling the offering bowls, etc., but I came at it in a deeper, more natural manner. I am still working on that today, years later.

In summary, the point here is that along with losing my Self's fond attachments and fixations came my Self's attachments and fixations on the dharma, which themselves no longer got special treatment and were

not grandfathered into my life after the stroke just because they were "dharma." Everything stood on its own merit and nothing more.

Attachment is attachment, good, bad, or indifferent. They are all part of the bathwater and not the baby. This has got to be part of some cosmic humor pageant or other. So, there you have what I came across in life that was entirely unexpected and somewhat terrifying. My dharma teacher of 36 years, when I explained my stroke experience, just laughed and said it was good for me and could stand me in good stead when I reached the bardo after death..

I am still working through it and am better off for it, but I can't say it has been a walk in the park. And I apologize if I go against what you might like to hear me explain that I experienced through the stroke.

And why I do this is because some of you may, eventually, have to do the same, either in this life or just after death. At that time, there will be no memory bank or patina based on your elaboration or any reification you have tried to incorporate. You may, as I found out, have to be able to actually put together your thoughts and their meaning right on the spot, drawing them from within you. To me, that's worth understanding.

[Photo taken today by me. the Poppies are up.]



## FIRE & BRIMSTONE

June 4, 2022

Some folks object to fire & brimstone in any kind of instruction or teachings, especially dharma. Certainly, I understand that as I was raised Roman Catholic, with Sunday mass and catechism, catholic school under the control of Dominican nuns (armed with wooden rulers), not to mention being an altar boy and learning church Latin. I have had my share of liturgical fire & brimstone. Yet, there has to be a place for it and I can explain why I feel this is so.

The laws of dharma and the laws of Mother Nature have

been said to be very similar, if not actually almost the same. There even is a special kind of dharma-learning called the 'Lama of Appearances', which teachings are claimed to be just as authentic as the physical Lama we work with, the 'Lama of the Scriptures' (teachings) that we study, and also what is called the 'Lama of Dharmata' (the way things are), and as mentioned above 'The Lama of Appearances'.

'Mother Nature' is a good example of the Lama of Appearance, so I should not have to say much more than that if you look carefully at Mother Nature, she says it all, including a motherload of Nature's fire & brimstone. For example, almost all living creatures hunt and eat other creatures, while at the same time trying not to be eaten. "impermanence" is front and center in nature, as anyone with eyes can see.

And if dharma law is said to be so similar to natural law, you can be certain that somewhere in the dharma teachings, there is bound to be a liberal dose of fire & brimstone. Need I say more?

With most spiritual teachings, the beginners are not usually introduced to the fire & brimstone, but rather welcomed with smiles and kindness. It's only farther down the road, after the hook, line, and sinker phase, that, and this perhaps is for advanced students only, we all get a taste of the harsh parts of the truth or reality, dharma or otherwise. There's no free lunch.



These hard lines are ultimately unavoidable because they too are part of the truth, especially in the samsaric world we find ourselves living in. I'm not saying that we should go to our spiritual mentors and ask them to give it to us straight, and that they not pull any punches, although if you can take it, that might be a good idea.

However, most of us are not yet ready for the nitty-gritty hard truths, yet you can be sure that they are out there, as mentioned before. Mother Nature has the truth on full display. Just as we harden off tender plants with more sun, because they may be growing too 'leggy', so too must many of us need to harden-off a bit before being exposed to the whole enchilada, dharma or otherwise.

[Photo by me.]



## ME AGAINST THE WORLD

June 5, 2022

Back in the early 1960s, the rumor was that this new kind of psychedelic drug, LSD, could permanently alter your mind, which was to all of us a scary thought. What we did not understand back then, was not that LSD could alter your physical brain and neural pathways, but rather that acid could alter your attitude and psychological approach to life. It could change how we saw things. Let me give an example.

I first learned that this world, the world outside myself, was very much my own projection on May 6, 1964, in Berkeley, California, when I first dropped a cube of Sandoz acid. Just like they said, it changed my life forever, yet not my brain, etc. And what was most important was that from that night onward I discovered (and confirmed for myself) that the outside (and often threatening) world was to an enormous degree my own psychological projection. I was watching a movie I had created with my own projections and was being terrorized by it. And with that insight, my mind, meaning my mind and the outside world, as I now knew it, was actually workable and, even better, that I could (just as I was, warts and all) work it. That was a point of no return for me.

Previous to that day, it never (not even ever) occurred to me that I had a say in the matters of my own life as

relates to the outside world. Instead, I assumed that it was me against the world, which outside world was totally independent from me, and that, essentially speaking, I was a victim and at its mercy.

This, for me, was the dualism of all dualisms, me set against the world. And then, on that most auspicious evening, time slowed down to the point where, as mentioned, I independently actually witnessed my own inner projections as animating much of the outside world. I was projecting a world that then terrorized me with my own imagined fears. As they say, we are our own worst enemy.

The key discovery here is the word 'workable'. There was a way out or onward on my own. There was a differential, a calculus through which I could resolve and integrate the huge difference (that I had imagined) between me inside here and the world outside there, if only incrementally and slowly.

To repeat, from the moment I first confirmed to my satisfaction that the 'me' in here, the subject, and the outside world out there, the object, were not only indissolubly linked together, but were in fact already in cahoots, one and the same, was when I began to breathe, like a baby does the first moment they are born. Life was a two-way street, but also a unity!

LSD, acid, was able to pierce and dissolve the dualism

that separated me from the outside world itself and at that point, as the poet Sir Edwin Arnold wrote "The dewdrop slipped into the shining sea." The toothpaste never went back in the tube after that.

Please, don't get me wrong. It took decades of hard work on my part to dissolve my initial duality, yet each day was incrementally better than the last. And it was only when I more formally recognized the actual nature of the mind (many years later) that I understood that the seed and beginning of that process took place in Berkeley that night in May of 1964. And everything since had been a step along the way of what in dharma is called "Recognition," the recognition on our part of the true nature of the mind.

Of course, what I struggled to understand and implement on my own from then on, was much better accomplished through what are called the pointing out instructions as given by an authentic dharma teacher. Yet back then I had no teacher.

There has to be that first drop of water that ripples the pond and breaks up the reflection, that initial insight that breaks the seal of the duality that separates each of us from recognizing the nature of our own mind as one and indivisible with the world itself.

That initial insight in May of 1964 helped me to breakthrough and understand that the mind (and my

situation) was workable and that I, just as I am, could work it, something I never ever forgot from that moment onward. Yet, it took decades of working with my situation until I actually fully experienced what I initially understood mentally and then even more time to begin to realize the nature of that experience.

[Photo by me.]



## YOU DRANK THE KOOL-AID, WHAT NEXT?

June 6, 2022

No, I'm not talking about Kool-aid, the drink, but rather the various psychedelic drugs that many of us took in the 1960s with little idea what effect they would have on us. And to our surprise, unlike pot, speed, and whatever else we tried, psychedelics like LSD, Mescaline, Psilocybin, 'Heavenly Blue' Morning Glory seeds, and so on were

another whole story, and this is because many of us were actually changed by the psychedelic experience. What then?

I would like to at least try to talk about those internal changes from LSD and how we dealt with them back then and perhaps for decades afterward. In fact, many acid-heads are still dealing with them today. I can of course speak from my own experience, but I also did almost ten years of counseling other folks, many who tripped on acid and were at a loss as to what to do with what they saw on LSD, so I have some direct knowledge of what a great many others went through. I was the guy to go to about acid.

I spoke some in yesterday's blog about the main effects from, for instance, LSD. I don't want to repeat that all again, but in general I can sum those effects up by just saying that the chief effect or takeaway from an LSD trip back then (for most folks) was to become aware that we live in a world, not solipsistic (as we might imagine), but within an outer world of our own projections, and through LSD the wall between our close inner-self and the hard-edged outside world became transparent enough to be essentially nonexistent. Our separateness vanished and we were everywhere.

In other words, on acid I could clearly see (and for the first time) that what I believe here in my own private mind is something I have (unknowingly) projected on



the screen of the outside world and, like a deer in the headlights, have become mesmerized watching my own attachments and prejudices acted out in real time on the virtual screen of the world around me. In other words, our mind is not an isolate, just here in our skull, but rather projected everywhere outside ourselves as well, because we project what is in-here, out there, and then take it for reality. For someone raised in the straight, crew-cut world of the 1950s, this amounted to a complete revelation.

Indeed, LSD was the harbinger of the 1960s alternative culture, which took hold around 1965, but whose inception was the introduction of acid in the early years of the 1960s. Acid opened the eyes of an entire generation and, IMO, affected everyone and everything in the ensuing alternate culture called the 'hippies' or whatever.

Such an LSD vision or trip brought good news and bad news to its recipients. The good news, at least to me, was that I finally experienced (and certified to my own complete satisfaction) what up until then had been two entirely separate worlds, the often cold and threatening outside world in which I lived and my own familiar inner senses and self. With the help of LSD, it was immediately crystal clear that not only were the two worlds related, but my inner personal world was also very much reflected in the outside world, where I watched (sometimes in horror) my most innermost fears and

worries acted out before my very eyes on the big-screen of the world surrounding me.

Actually, although at first terrifying to realize, ultimately my experience on LSD was all good news, because from the moment I realized my inside and the outside world were indissolubly linked, and by that I myself became an actor in this world drama I lived in and not just its victim. What we might call the 'bad news' part of all this is that, since I now was complicit in all of this, it was up to me to sort it out. And that would take me decades to do. Actually, there was no bad news.

Personally, I was thrilled at last to be a part of my own life story, both inside and out, and I was more than game because it meant I could actually change not only the part I played in my own life, but I could effect change each day and reflect that change in my outside world, and as I learned to sort it out, everything became clearer and clearer. My life was coming into focus for the first time.

On the downside, it was a little challenging to suddenly feel like the Lone Ranger, all alone and so much on my own, like standing on the precipice of a great mountain and gazing at the vast inner sea of the mind. And, the two unified and became one, in-here, out-there; it was all the same. The dewdrop had slipped into the shining sea. I just had to adjust and sort it out.

In fact, as a counselor, someone who specialized in counseling those who had a bad acid trip or who were having great difficulty making sense of their LSD trip, I was encountering the effects of acid on folks every week for many years.

Of course, having been raised Roman Catholic (although a lapsed Catholic), I did my best to seek out the brightest Catholic priests I could find, in my case these were the Jesuits, long famous for their brilliant minds. Yet, sad to say, they had not a clue about acid trips and could be of no help. It was all I could do to thank them and quietly tiptoe away without disrupting them more than I had by talking LSD trip-language.

And I found that a great number of clients who came to talk with me about their LSD trips were in a similar boat. They had experienced realms of the mind that (at least at the time when LSD was new) few folks (not to mention society) had ever known, and because of this, they had often painted themselves into a corner where they felt they were either a bit crazy or a one-in-a-million genius on their local block, yet were still not clear about their own fate. And the problem most had, as I saw it, was this:

LSD is not a religion or a substitute for some spiritual training. God knows, so to speak, that I tried to make the best sense out of my acid trip that I could, and this went on for decades. Yet, when all was said and done, what I

ended up with was more like a patchwork quilt, where I had figured out some of the panels in the quilt, but many others were still blank. I tried to organize what I could, yet always felt incomplete because I was. I had brought order to some of my experience on acid, but there were a lot of holes that were still not plugged, and this was frustrating, and most of all: incomplete.

Heaven knows that I looked everywhere for the answers I was missing, and Ann Arbor, where I lived, was a perfect crossroads for spiritual 'gurus', all of which had perhaps a piece of the puzzle for me, but little more. I did Zen, yoga, meditation, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Theosophy, Macrobiotics, Christianity, Buddhism, and on and on, yet still came up with this empty sense of 'wanting'.

What was missing was some form of actually training the mind beyond just hearing or reading words. I had to take control of my own mind, but could not quite get my arms around it, so to speak, because I didn't know how the mind worked. To repeat, I had pieces of the puzzle from my LSD experience, but never enough, and I did not know how to generate what was missing. I didn't quite get the whole picture, yet I needed to.

Long story, short, I eventually got the mental training I needed from the Tibetan Buddhists and Vajrayana Buddhism, very detailed and vigorous training of both mind and body, yet it took years of very dedicated work.

I'm not saying I have it all figured out, yet I no longer feel I have a patchwork quilt, but rather one made of whole cloth, with no missing pieces that I am not in the process of working out.

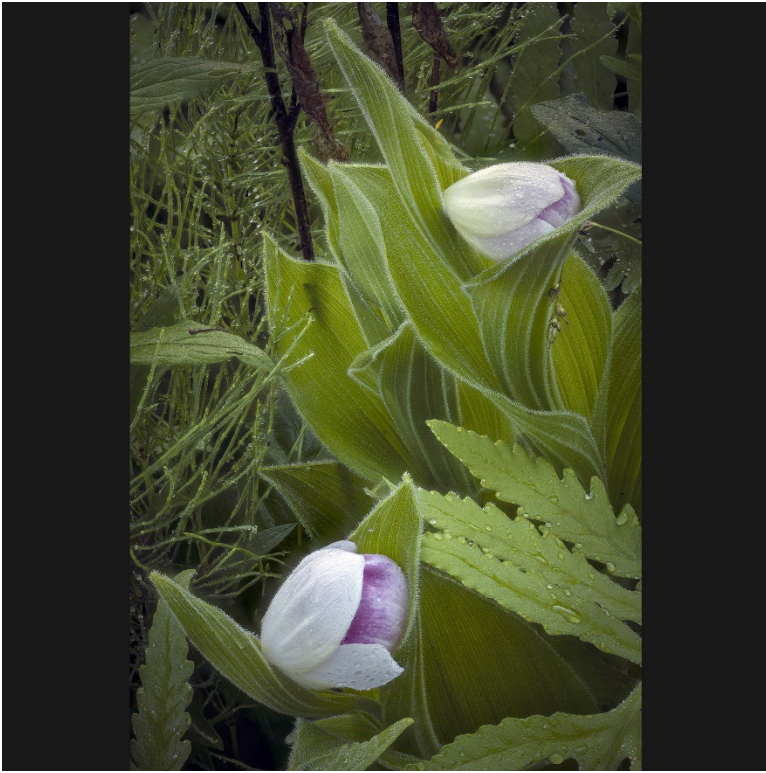
And all those years I was sharing what I learned (as I try to do here) as I went along. As mentioned, I ended up counseling others less able to sort their experiences out than I was. I was someone folks could talk to about their drug experiences, yet there was one caveat.

Meeting someone like me, who was perhaps more experienced in these acid changes was helpful. Yet for some LSD 'isolates', I was the last person in the world many of these acid clients wanted to encounter because I knew exactly where they were and very little that they showed me was unknown to me. Some of them hated company, because many had become used to being themselves seen as unique, with uniquely held experiences, so a mirror image of themselves (someone like me) was a shock and repugnant to them. I destroyed the illusion that they had of being a lone genius. I brought them company, which although they desperately needed it, was also threatening their 'uniqueness'.

However, in the long run, meeting someone like me, ultimately was comforting to them because, whether they liked it or not, in me they had company and were no longer all alone. And I popped the bubble of their

uniqueness, and with that their loneliness also vanished. As I mentioned, I was company whether they liked it or not. And so, the net result is they no longer felt as unique and thus separate, and with their bubble popped by having my company, they seemed more willing to pick up the pieces and get on with their lives.

“Alone or All-One” is the question posed and the answer always will be that we are all-one with one another, although it may take a while for some to come around to this. We are all alone together.



## 'REGINA' -- THE ORCHID QUEEN

June 9, 2022

Margaret and I headed out before 7 AM this morning to a tiny micro-climate some miles outside of town, where once each year one of Michigan's rarest orchids the 'Showy Orchid' Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium regina*) bloom, the "Orchid Queen."

It's a bit of a hike from where we park the car, a little over half a mile I would guess. And this tiny micro-climate is inset into a hill, where various small streams, actually little more than riverlets of water wander horizontally across a hill of ferns and low brush. And the path to the hillside used to be a small bridge, perhaps ten feet long, over a steep-sided culvert-like stream.

Beyond that are a series of very slippery wooden pallets laid end to end but punctuated by large boulders or little streams. Yet the spring rains, which were very strong this year have washed that bridge away. Either that or the landowner took the bridge down to keep the odd naturalist from crossing over it.

So, there I stood looking at the space where the bridge used to be. And all that I could see were the steep sides of the culvert, something like 6-7 feet down (on either side), and it was muddy and slippery. I started down it, trying to brace my feet sideways and inch downward, all the time carrying a large tripod and camera, but the danger of slipping was too great, so I carefully backed off.

Instead I walked down the path from where the bridge used to be until I found a way to cross the small creek with less-steep sides. I was still dealing with an incline, but not a sure-slip. As it was, I had to inch down and then holding of equipment, leap over the stream (about



3 feet) and land on the other side and also not slip. I managed that.

Then all I had to do is, carrying my equipment, make my way through thick 2-3 foot ferns and find my way back to the pallet path. This turned out to be trickier than I imagined because beneath those ferns were all kinds of thick branches, logs, and what-not. As it was, I slipped a couple of times but did not fall down. It took a while to reach the pallet path, which was even more slippery.

And then I carefully found my way along that path to where the orchids have bloomed for many years, only to find that while all the orchid greenery was there, only about three orchids were in the budding stage. And then I did manage to slip and get one of my feet wet in a stream hidden beneath the overgrowth. I was wearing ankle-high Goretex boots, but one went deeper and I had to not move my foot until I could brace the camera equipment. Got wet.

So, I then did take some few photos and make my way back along the path, and then back through the underbrush to where I could cross the creek by leaping with my equipment in hand.

So, there you have it, my little morning trip. Margaret was there too but elected not to try leaping the stream, and instead investigated other areas, equally lovely. We were soon back home, where I cooked up some pan-

fired potatoes just for a treat.

[Photo by me today.]



## DRIFTING TOO FAR FROM THE SHORE...

June 10, 2022

This little poem I wrote says a lot for me, especially now when we are trying to pull this family gathering together. Here's the poem,

### SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

Expect nothing,  
Except nothing.  
Accept something.

Well, that's the way I feel these days. As it turns out, my

kids, of course, are moving with the times, doing their best not to be exposed to Covid, but yet living a more regular life than Margaret and I are, with kids in school, work to go to, trusted friends, and so on.

As it turns out, some of my kids (and their families) have had exposure or perhaps situations in which they have to test, and test repeatedly to be free from worry about Covid. While it is not too difficult to arrange to meet with one family-group or another here at our home, trying to get a bunch of families together is practically impossible because of perhaps Covid exposure. It's almost a mathematical certainty that not everyone in the family will be free and clear of covid situations.

So, because of testing and waiting for PCR tests, the more definitive test, as we come down to our family gathering, some of the family we can meet with, and some not quite ready yet, not 10 days into it or whatever, so many (most of my family) are staying next door at our dharma center which has five (or seven) bedrooms, and we will all meet outside during the day... and sit around in the open air. Otherwise Margaret and I will be sitting over here in our house while a family party is going on next door. Bummer.

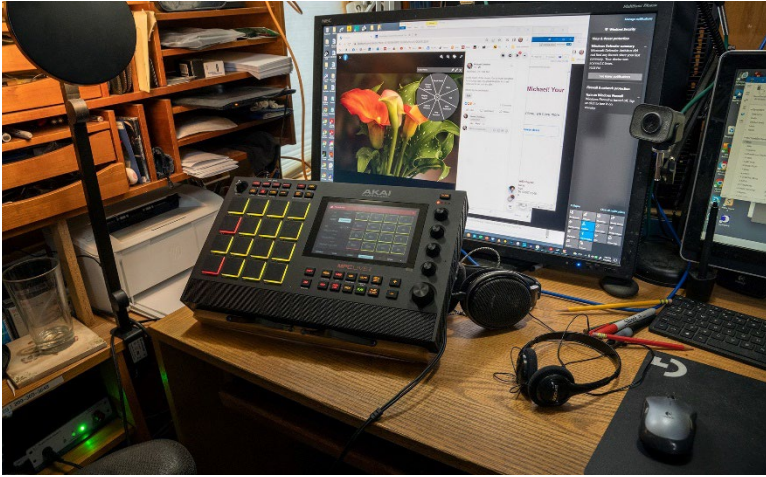
Or perhaps I can put on a mask and do brief visits at the dharma center next door. A total pain, and it does not speak well for future gatherings, especially if Covid gathers steam for another surge as we approach winter,

which is predicted.

Anyway, what can you do? For me, it's a strange sense of isolation and especially in these critical years of my getting older and the pandemic keeping pace with my aging. It feels like I can only wave from the other house, across a canyon in between, and wish well to my family. This pandemic situation may go on for quite some time, even years more for all we know.

And so, these days life is more virtual than I would like. Here is a photo I took today of the open space between the houses, where we can gather... when it's not raining. Our house is on the right, the center on the left, our shrine room at the top left, and our stupa top right. In between, various tables and chairs getting ready for visitors.

[Photo by me.]



## CAN YOU HEAR THE MUSIC?

June 12, 2022

I grew up in and through the birth of rock n' roll, R&B, and much of jazz. No problem. It all made sense. However, somewhere along with the birth of rap, I lost my way or interest. Hip-hop was gentler on my mind, but I believe there too I made a simple mistake.

I was focused on the words of rap (and much of hip-hop) rather than the beat itself. As a 'word person', rap and hip-hop words were not all that interesting to me, and so I didn't listen to rap and hop-hop when I thought to put on some music around the house. Yet all this changed in an unexpected way and I can explain why.

My point here is that, as for hip-hop, I got turned around the moment I stopped focusing on the words of hip-hop and instead just listened to the beat, and suddenly for me there was 'no problem'. Also I came across a book by Dan Charnas called "Dilla Time," which is about one of the legendary and most brilliant hip-hop producers, James Dewitt Yancy, better known as J Dilla, and thus the book title "Dilla Time."

This book is kind of a musical history of hip-hop, meaning the reader gets walked through that history, producer by producer, and almost song by song, so it requires me to go on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com), look up and play song after song (which thankfully are all there), where for each song the various beat styles and transitions are called out to the timed-second, just where to listen. The book gives the name of the song and often just the where in the tune (exact time to the second) to give a listen

Anyway, I'm not finished with the book, but still working through it. And what I hear is, of course, music, yet instead of music as read from the words down, this book focusses on music from the beat itself up. And I can hear the beat much easier than I can by focusing on the words, top down, so to speak.

Well, long story short, it was not long before I was also understanding the equipment these hip-hop musicians

(like Kanye West, etc.) were using, basically one form or another of what is called a 'beatbox.'

And basically, instead of trying to learn the quite difficult music notation systems like ProTools or Cubase, it seems to me that something like a beatbox is perfect for someone that does not read music but has no trouble hearing it. And this beatbox-idea spread like wildfire among the hip-hop musicians, and many built their careers with it and around it.

And so, before I quite knew it, I was studying beatboxes and it was only a hop, skip, and a jump until I bought one to try out, in my case an Akai MPC Live 2, a really lovely thing physically as well as musically.

And I'm busy learning how to use it. And it is a steep learning curve because it essentially is a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation), a sequencer, drum machine, with built-in high quality stereo monitors, velocity sensitive RGB pads, including AC and an internal battery. You can take it anywhere.

It works as a standalone but comes with computer software (laptop or desktop) that connects to the MPC2 and they work together. There are stereo outs, line levels in, TRS CV/Gate jacks, full MIDI in and out, USB 3.0, and network connectivity. My copy also has a 128 GB SD card and a 1TB SATA internal SSD drive.



The 'MPC Live 2' It also has 16 velocity sensitive pads that allow the user to work with any digital sound samples, songs, MIDI files, or what-have-you, and tweak and build a finished tune using mostly just your ears and fingertips. I showed it to some of my family this weekend and my young granddaughter was overdubbing samples within a few minutes. Everyone loved it.

### Grooves for the Rest of Us

The way I see it is that the MPC Live 2 is kind of a sound studio 'for the rest of us,' especially those who don't read music. And for those of us who were never that interested in rap words, yet can still feel the beat of that music, IMO, here, is a back-door into hip-hop.

[Photo of my office with the MPC LIVE 2.]



## PULLING THE PLUG ON THE JUKEBOX OF LIFE

June 14, 2022

[I'm still in-between the afterglow of the family gathering and picking up my life again. Sorry to always gravitate to the following subject, yet in this kind of Limbo-land I am in at the moment, it left such an indelible impression on me that I have not stopped sampling it to see if it is still virile. It is.]

I've been around the dharma for a bunch of decades. Our center here in Big Rapids, the Heart Center KKSG is dedicated to Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the setting sun, death, and dying. I've read and studied a lot of teachings and books on death and the after-death bardos. Of course, along the way I felt I picked up a lot of understanding about the process of death and the bardos that follow.

Having no way to experience death, other than dying, much less grasp what happens to each of us in the bardos after death, I felt I had some actual knowledge of the whole process. I couldn't have been more wrong about this, because when a major stroke came along, I then had some actual life experience walking near the edge of death, and realized that abstract my 'understanding' from reading and listening to dharma teachings is no substitute for the starkness of reality in the present moment.

In that stroke, I can remember marveling... while at the hospital undergoing what seemed like unending scans and tests, in those hours just after my major stroke. I saw that aside from my personal medical condition, the mind itself was crystal clear, as if nothing happened at all, other than, of course, I had lost my sense of Self, my attachments and self-worth, plus all of my reification (and its patina) and could not find where or how to take refuge or get back into my old samsaric haunts. They

had all gone void. One thing that was crystal clear is that the mind itself had no stroke nor any sign of being disturbed whatsoever. It's pure awareness of what is.

My problem was that in that state of stroke and all the turmoil while at the hospital, on another level I was feeling naked as a jaybird, as if I were lifted up and thrust out somewhere on the high plains of time, with endless sand in every direction as far as I could see, and there was this one light, although I dared not look directly at it, much like not looking directly into the Sun. The white light was high above me, and I kept turned away from it due to its brightness. I was naked of all attachments. It was terrifying.

Aside from that, I had nothing else whatsoever, and, as mentioned, was unable to find my way back to any of my habitual haunts and cover, some place to secret myself away from the brilliant light. However, all of my past Self, memories, history, etc. were at that moment very distant from where I stood. I vaguely sensed that somewhere out there was the past, the 'me' that I knew, but I had no way to reach there, no entrance door. And I could not invoke it, try as I might, and I desperately tried.

Yet, I knew that where I stood out on this vast plain (although sheer pain) was real, authentic, and my shock and panic was just because I had no cover, nothing to protect me, like the old folk song:

"I ran to the rock, to hide my face.  
The rock cried out, 'No hiding place',  
The rock cried out 'I'm burning too,  
And want to go to heaven the same as you."

And now I come to what is the hard to grasp point. Standing in that naked plain, in what I called the white-bright Sun in the sky, which was not a sun at all. That's just an analogy, a placeholder. That so-called Sun was nothing more than my nakedness itself and the inability for me to seek refuge in my normal habitual entertainments. I had popped out and could not get back into samsara. There was no shadow world to hide or shelter in. This was full exposure, and thus the pain of that.

In other words, I was stuck with my nakedness and inability to cover myself with attachments, busyness, and the constant entertainments of my shadow world of samsara I had been used to all my life. They say that attachment is the glue that holds the Self together, After the stroke, I was remarkably free of any direct attachments, other than my attachment and longing for my old attachments in general. In other words, I wanted to plunge my consciousness into the habitual entertainment of myself, yet that entertainment was nowhere to be found. It had vanished.

I couldn't find my way into escaping or forgetting this

harsh present moment in all its nakedness. There was no reverie, no recalling memories or, for that matter, any dreaming about the future. If you can imagine pure boredom, being completely bored out of your mind, that would be vaguely similar to what I'm pointing at here. I had no idea, zero, as to what to do with myself. I felt like a sore thumb. It was like someone had just pulled the plug on the jukebox of my life.

Only, it was much worse than that, beyond my comprehension, and unheard of all my life up to that very moment -- never before even imagined.

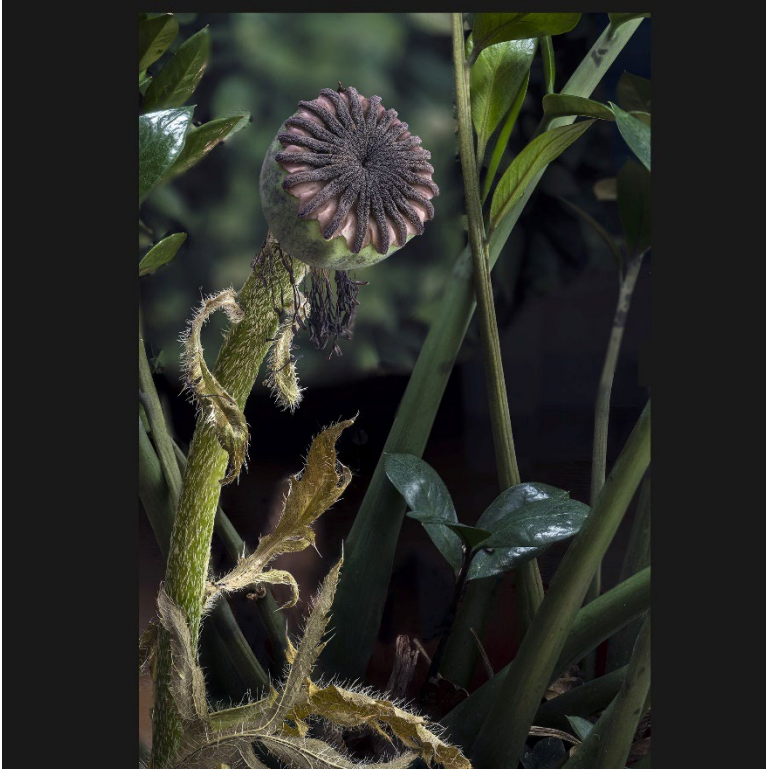
We think we can imagine the future and can't help but be influenced by all that we read or are taught. We 'think' we know how it will be for us when we pass on and enter the after-death bardos, yet this is ridiculous, because we have virtually no idea what will happen, other than some odd abstract thoughts we may have read somewhere or heard in a teaching. Talk about whistling in the dark!

What I experienced through my stroke which, when I later related it to my dharma teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, he just laughed and said my stroke experience would stand me in good stead when I entered the after-death bardos. My point here is that I found out in a flash that all of my imagination about the bardos after death, all my study and the concepts was nothing substantial, nothing at all. That and a ticket would get me a ride on

the bus.

It was clear to me that I in no way was ready for what will eventually come to all of us at death. I had no idea! Of course, we can just throw up our arms and do the best we can. There is always that, which we have probably done for innumerable lifetimes.

Or we can sober up enough from our daily entertainments and attachments and get down to where the rubber meets the road and attempt to 'get real'. As I like to joke to myself, we can go to meet our maker, meaning we can be pro-active and do what we can begin to engage what we can't avoid.



## ESCAPE VELOCITY AND SAMBARA

June 15, 2022

[There was more interest in yesterday's blog than I imagined, so this is a follow on. The Buddhist idea of Samsara is this world of attachments, the desires and grasping that each have is what keeps us incarnating, rebirth after rebirth, according to the dharma texts.



And such fierce attachment and their distractions is not a passing phase but are said to be habits each of us have had for innumerable lifetimes until this one. The point is that by now samsara is very ingrained and habitual for us, and even the idea of breaking free of samsara is almost unheard of. We are creatures of samara and, pardon me, but even our ideas of the dharma are pretty much brought to us courtesy of samsara. We never get beyond the fringe of actual freedom because we are in a bound orbit, and have never managed the escape velocity to escape those bounds.

Given a choice in life, we tend to follow our interest, creating in our wake, a path based on that interest. We tend to keep to what interests us because going in the opposite direction to interest is what does NOT interest us, which amounts to what bores us and is boring.

There is a fine line between interest and entertainment. Of course, entertainment is interesting to us, yet to reverse interest, to stand dharma on its head, so to speak, requires not only what normally interests us, but also to be interested in the interest itself, and interested to the point that our interest is also in what does not interest us. That degree of recursiveness is required for our dharma practice to become incendiary and result in actual meditation.

It is a classic maneuver (or turn-around) to reorient ourselves so that we purposely go in the direction of what does not interest us as a way of balancing ourselves out. It is in the direction of non-interest or boredom that the 'white light' of the after-death bardos can be found. It's there all the time, only we are not interested. We ignore the white light.

Yet, we don't go toward what bores us because it runs against what interests us. Not only do we do this, but essentially everyone does the same thing, so that we humans habitually as a group ignore what does not interest us, and thus have no experience with the white-light that is spoken about in the after-death bardos. In fact, we religiously shun it and always have. This behavior is a hallmark of Samsara, this world of attachments and entertaining ourselves. We are in a bound orbit.

And the only time we flip the scale, and then only briefly, is when some untoward event comes whistling out of the blue, confronting us (like the death of a loved one or other similar stunning events) and almost magically shatters what we call our Self, and by that shattering voids out our normal attachments.

Such an untoward (and unwelcome) event can be shattering, leaving us without our normal degree of attachments, and by that very voidness, offers us a glimpse, usually short-lived, into a world of less-to-no

attachments. This does happen often and, even though such events are often deeply troubling or 'sad', it is at such times that we most clearly see and have the opportunity to deeply learn something about the nature of our own mind. At those times of voidness, our normal distractions are themselves distracted, leaving us with clear insight. It does happen, but rarely.

As mentioned, most (or all) of us would not volunteer for such a devastating event to happen in our life. In fact, we avoid such events as best we can. Yet, they do happen to most (if not all) of us from time to time. And as troubling as such events are, with them comes a clarity of great value, if we can be aware of it, one that we can put to use.

Such untoward events can offer us a window beyond time through which we may gaze, if only fleetingly, at a bit of eternity. As I like to joke with myself, 'eternity' can be found, yet always just in time. Like the great Mahasiddhas write in their pith teachings, that in the midst of our experience, 'realization' can arise. Otherwise, experience itself is endless and goes on and on. And by 'realization' as used here, we mean recognition (on our part) as to the true nature of the mind, how to work it, and most important that we (just as we are) can work it.

We can look for these moments or glimpses beyond the strictures of time at any sudden event. It could be as

simple as a loud noise or sudden surprise, whatever it takes to sever, however momentarily, our deer-in-the-headlights mentality, giving us some (however brief) respite from our normal attachments to everything we are attracted and attached to. I mentioned earlier that an untoward event that deeply shocks us also almost certainly offers us some relief from our constant distractions.

And for dharma practitioners out there, those who want to make a move toward hardening ourselves off from just life as 'usual to the very end', my advice is not to run out and have a stroke. The only value in that and I am very clear and convinced about this, is that an intellectual understanding of all this is not worth the paper its printed on, or very close.

We all get wakeup calls as life progresses, so one takeaway from an article like this, is to treasure the times when fate strikes and brings us to our knees. Along with the sorrow of those crucial times, comes an opportunity to look beyond our usual attachments, and at least get a glimpse beyond the strictures of our Self, as to what is ahead and needs to be taken into consideration.

And if such a glimpse has value, then along with that insight, we may also get the conviction and strength to find ways to begin hardening off our attachment to our attachments and better learn to stand on our own two feet and take to what is real.

For one, this is one reason that the great meditators masters recommend that we find a place of solitude and learn to be there without wanting to cut and run. We need to train to not have to be entertained all the time. My fear is that this is almost impossible in this day and age and requires a fierce determination by any individual to achieve an escape velocity that would break free of the bound orbit that samsara guarantees.

[Photo by me.]



## THE CHEESE STANDS ALONE

June 16, 2022

Let's speak for a moment about the absolute clarity of the mind in its awareness.

The clarity of the mind, meaning our internal awareness itself (which is beyond our graspingness) stands alone, and is independent of whatever we personally do. It is

that which apprehends the present moment in its fullness. And it's not actually 'ours'. Is this natural awareness part of us or is it independent of us?

For my two cents, I say it is independent, in that, while it is available to us, it is not controllable by us. Our natural or intrinsic awareness is that through which we are aware of anything and everything. We can't turn it up or turn it down, but just accept or receive it, although we can become increasingly sensitive to and aware of this intrinsic and natural awareness. That's the extent of our power. It seems that being 'aware of this awareness', itself, is a requirement for any spiritual work and experiences.

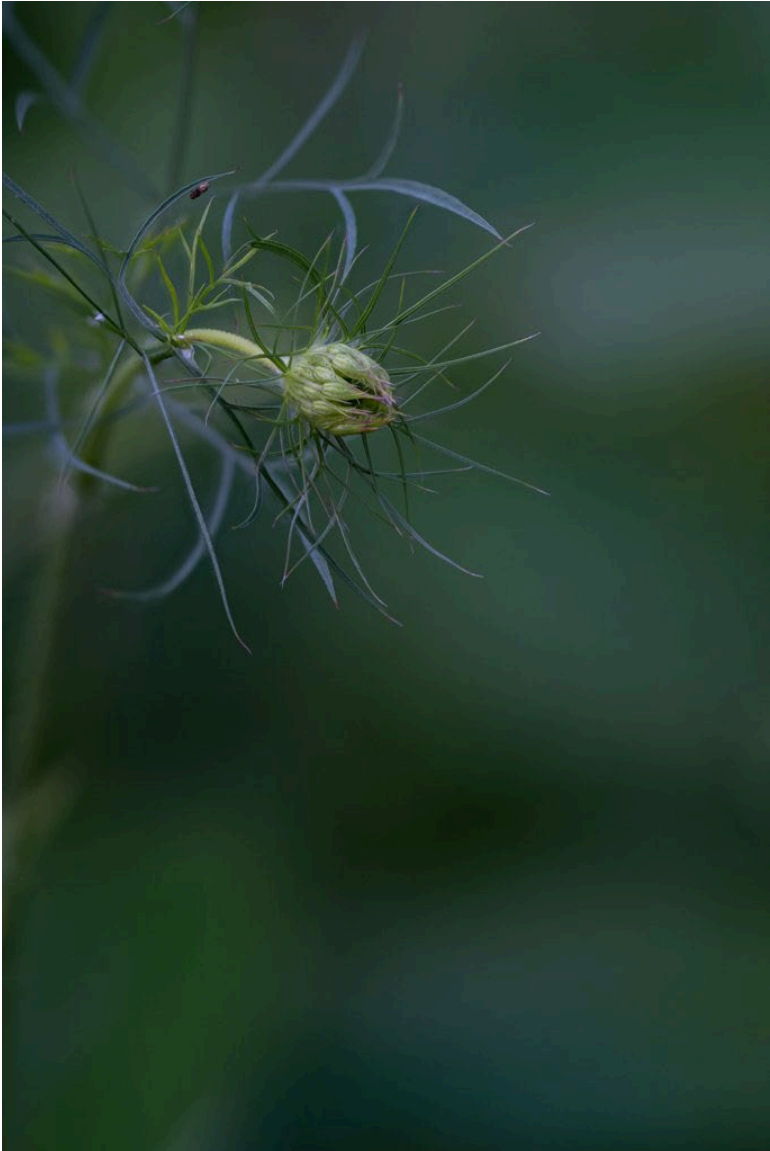
About all that we can do is learn to rest in this natural awareness effortlessly. It doesn't need our effort. In fact, any effort on our part becomes an obscuration and eventually has to be abandoned.

All I can say for certain is that when I had my major stroke and was going through all of the hospital tests, and freaking out as well, the clarity of the mind's awareness never blinked, but was like a vast blue sky, always there quite independently of my theatrics, sort of like this samsaric world is overseen by this pure awareness.

Without it, we would see nothing at all. It lights up our life, so to speak.

[Photo by me.]





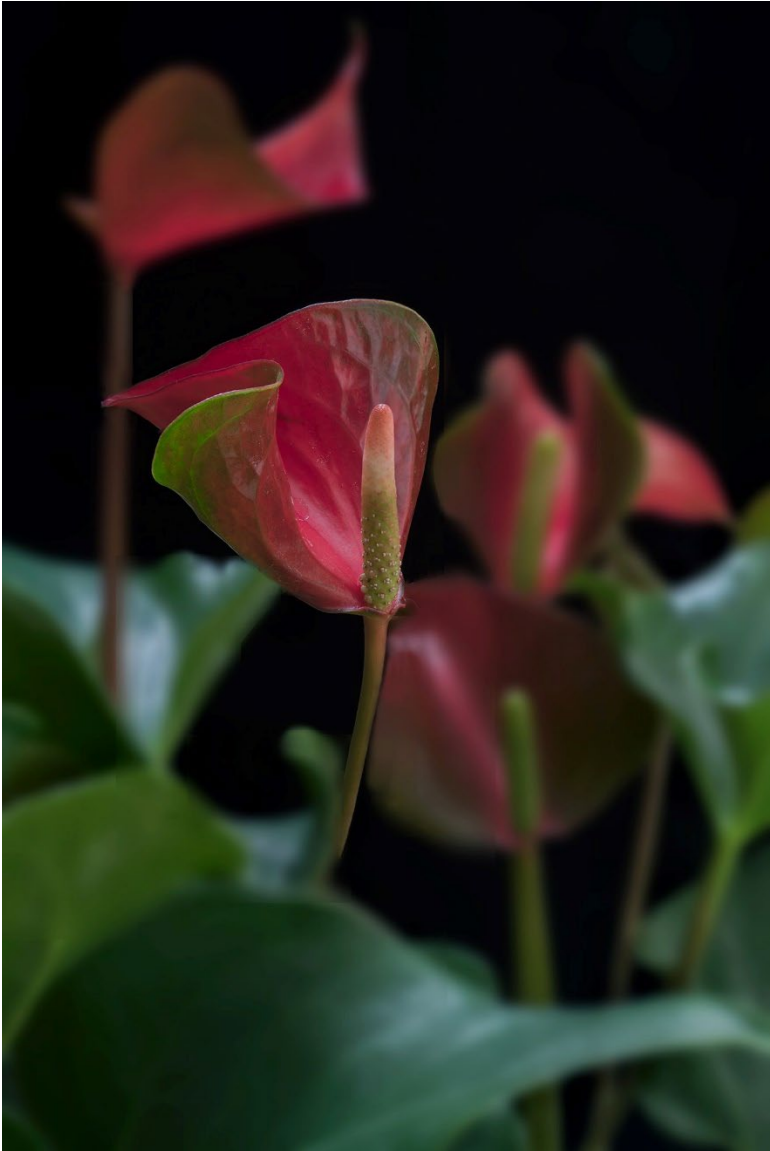
## DHARMA AS WIDE AS THE SKY

June 17, 2022

Clarity increases with practice, experience, and allowing the mind to just rest. And by 'clarity' I mean clarity like a vast expanse of open sky. And that clarity is found in this present moment, a heightened lucidity, and a sense of authenticity, with no elaboration.

And don't confuse this with just an instant frozen in time, something momentary, but rather here we have a contiguous extension, facilitated only by our ability to continually remain resting in the present moment. This is not something we 'do', but rather something enabled by our continuous alignment with the nature of the mind, thus the vast expanse of open sky. The two are one. Non-duality.

[Photo by me.]



## THE TERRIBLE CRYSTAL

June 18, 2022

Our personality is the product of a myriad choices we make, often not just the choice 'to do' something, as much as the choice NOT to do something as well. If we have an 'interesting' personality, it's the sum total of decisions made over time, often hard choices, the value of which only accumulate (and interest others) because they did not make them.

Actually, personality more reminds me of the old game of 'Pick-Up-Sticks', where instead of endlessly adding on, the point is to remove sticks from the pile until none are left but the emptiness itself. Learning dharma correctly reminds me of that.

The dangers of 'reification', of constantly accumulating attachments as we age (instead of decrementing them) is clearly stated in this somewhat dark poem I wrote years ago.

### PHOENIX

Personality,  
Bright beauty of the night,  
That terrible crystal,  
Burning in the darkness,  
At the very edge of time.

Watching,  
In rapt fascination,  
Fires,  
Impossible to ignore,  
Forever frozen,  
On the face of age.

It is a dark light,  
Indeed,  
Funeral pyres,  
Signifying nothing,  
But impermanence.

This is a fire,  
That does not warm.

[Photo by me.]



THE PUPPETMASTER

June 18, 2022

It's a common phrase that many people act like they are going to live forever. Death is not a popular subject and how many people put off considering the end game until, well, it's the end?

If those of us who study death and what happens afterward feel some obligation to point out what's involved in death, dying and the afterlife, our concern perhaps too often casts a somber tone on what otherwise is a 'nice' day. I'm sure I'm to blame for this habit. Why?

For me, my concern is based on my own lack of concern and, moreover, my previous belief that "I've got this!" and am doing enough to be ready to work the afterlife when my time comes. I'll get through somehow. As Shakespeare wrote:

"For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause—there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life."

Of course, the Buddhists texts say we each will get through this life and then the texts go on to detail our alternatives when we escape life's mortal binds and become some kind of free agent. Yet, a careful look at the Tibetan teachings shows that the degree of freedom we have after death with no preparation or even

consideration for death, is very small, even infinitesimal in size. Rebirth by direct karma, with no room to influence our next life is the norm.

One of the most powerful punches to the gut that Tibetan dharma study has delivered me is their statement that all sentient beings, meaning ALL sentient beings, from a crawling worm up to the monarch of a kingdom have the same identical consciousness, a consciousness limited only by the kind and condition of the body we inhabit.

It took me quite a long time for this thought to make an impact with me. What these sacred texts are saying is that a common house fly has the same consciousness as an Albert Einstein, limited only by the functioning physical form and body that is being inhabited. Every sentient being is a consciousness just like we have now, a consciousness trying to manipulate the kind of body they have been reborn in as best they can.

And to this statement the Buddhists emphasize an additional thought that says, while most of us are bound to take rebirth automatically, we may take not rebirth as a human being. In fact, the Buddhist specify six realms into which we can be reborn, and one of them is as an animal such as a gnat or a microbe. As mentioned, it's the same consciousness (not personality) we have now but hampered by the functioning body of say a gnat, instead of a human body. We are all puppet-masters



animating one kind of body or another.

To me, this was a bold and startling idea, one Buddhists don't sugarcoat or break to us gently. To most dharma practitioners, this is a simple fact. And to the average westerner, this is unheard of, and even when the idea is floated it tends to go in one ear and right out the other.

As poet William Blake put it, "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"

On my trips to Tibet, it was not unusual to see Tibetans gently brushing mosquitoes from their arms, and not smacking them down as most here in America do. Kindness to animals, we understand. That the mosquito we brush off with our hand is a complete and equal consciousness equal to our own is not so easily understood, and it differs only by the kind of body we take rebirth in.

When we die and enter the after-death bardo, our lack of attachments (which fall away from us at death) makes us so sensitive that the brilliant white light created by our freedom from samsara (this cyclic earthly life) is so powerful that we shun that white light and turn away trying to find a lessor, darker light as a place to hide. And driven by our karma, we end up taking rebirth in the first womb we come across, perhaps not even a human birth.

The Buddhists say that every sentient being has been our mother and our child innumerable times. Such statements are either crazy or we have another thought coming.

[Photo by me.]



## CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

June 19, 2022

I'm not a contrarian, yet if I see the reification-pendulum swinging too far in one direction, I can't help but balance it by pushing the other way. And so, I have mixed feelings about the growing popularity of dharma in America. Of course, I'm thrilled that the dharma is catching on. Yet, at the same time I don't want it popularized or reified so that it becomes faddish and meaningless.

Therefore, I find myself on the outside of the dharmas-fashionable group, those that want to reify the

dharma, and to quote the title of one of my favorite shows, because of that I tend to “Curb Your Enthusiasm.”

I can't help but curb those who find the dharma as entertainment or as something to 'get' or appropriate and I tend to point this out to anyone interested. And then there is the worse problem, those who mistake intellection and conceptual understanding for dharma experience, much less assume realization. That's a real problem, to help them down to where the rubber meets the road without their feeling defeated.

And I realize that this paints me outside the inner circle of popular dharma, yet I realize how and why I got here. I don't want to see the dharma neutered or conventionalized, glossed over with artificial kindness, and yet somehow ignore the depth and value for which the dharma stands. I'd like us to keep it real.

And keeping it real, reminds me of the song “I Never Promised You a Rose Garden,” and the lines “... Along with the sunshine, there's gotta' be a little rain sometime...”

Well, I guess I'm the rainmaker more than I would like to be. Yet, I'm not just going to roll over and let the dharma be reified publicly. As my first dharma teacher would frequently say to me, we must choose between being a diamond and a pearl. A diamond is produced over time and under great pressure, while a pearl is a

piece of foreign matter that is veneered over to protect the organism. The Dharma is a diamond, a vajra thunderbolt, and I don't want to see it 'pearlized', neutered, and glossed over for the public's convenience.

That's why, in my role as a rainmaker, I do my best to bring folks down from their conceptual ivory tower to where they feel and experience dharma at the gut level.

[Photo by me.]



## WE BECOME WHAT WE WANT

June 20, 2022

What's that? Well, in my life, that would be a lot of things these days. My first dharma teacher used to say to me, repeatedly, "Given the opportunity, people will do what they want." I agree; so true. And I used to teach in astrology of the Four Element Balance Fire, Water, Air, and Earth. using this statement: "We do what we have to

do, and we become what we want or lack.”

And in that line, I was leaning on the archaic use of the word “become,” as used in the sentence “What a becoming dress she has on.” Here the word “become” means to turn toward, in this case what we want or lack. What we don’t have fascinates us and we do our best to emulate it, even though we have none of a particular element.

Of course, I can play with what my teacher said and examine the word ‘want’ in its meaning that ‘want’ means ‘lack’ or not having, thus we become what we want or lack, trying to fill in those emptiness holes in our Self. Something like that.

Certainly, as I age, it appears more and more ridiculous for me to try to outlast those younger than I am who are dead set on doing what they want, whether it’s good for them or not. They are going to do just what they want and it’s a colossal waste of time my wanting to direct or guide them otherwise.

Raising four kids is lesson enough in that regard. Any life wisdom I may have is not wisdom they have, and there is simply no such thing as knowledge by association as a final denominator. We each must generate our own wisdom or make the classic wisdoms our own. And who am I to know what others need. Mistakes are often the best way to learn in life. For many the correct way to go

comes out of going the wrong way for a while.

So, I try to stay out of the storm of 'wants' I see going on all around me. I'm busy enough exploring my own wants and they are exhausting as well. I always say to myself that I'm not a good teacher. I don't have the patience. If I'm good for anything in that regard, it is instructional to watch me work and see how focused I am. I can't say, but that's what I have been told.

My first dharma teacher also said (again, repeatedly) that "Better your own job poorly, than someone else's well." Which, I translate as mind your own business or something like that. It's all too much like that line from my favorite gospel, that of John, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

I feel we are all trapped between the devil and the deep-blue sea, Samsara. If I read back to my old journals from 1967 (and before), I find a couple times where perhaps my interest in dharma all started and this quote I wrote then:

"All I remember is haze — red shifting to orange — as I strained under the infinite pressure of my past, like a baby being born, and then, through the strain of this labor (so intense that time slowed) in which somehow I was involved, and through that slowness like the head of a child in birth, I crowned, and for the first time came I, me, a glimpse of my eternal self — real awareness. I saw



myself. I found myself.

"Emerging right up through the top of my head, I was born as through a veil and vale of tears, surrounded on all sides by people living in eternal slowness. Tears stood in all our eyes, for I was them — huge catlike creatures, winking and blinking in the slowness of expanded time. We moved together in this, the rhythm of our birth, rising and falling like the cry of some great beast. Living was so slow that it took forever. We were all, together, one, born out of suffering, born out of and beyond time itself, born through a veil of tears, itself an endless rain."

No, I can't go back there. Have already been. Yet, I'm optimistic because I can clearly see a progression through time that trends upward toward opening wider, like a flower opens. I am a reflection now of what I was then. Nothing has changed from that essentiality.

I believe that we, each of us, through whatever struggles we have, are progressively more open, year by year. Indeed, it is an expanding universe. I can see, through my journals, my own opening. Here is another and later journal entry.

"The morning's brightness lights the day. And when that day is gone, the quietness of evening here approaching settles to sleep this restless world. Hard can I hear the frantic rush, as I turn away from the edge out into floating rest am I. It is not my conscious direction doing this, but as a head downturned all life now turns up a

blossom to the night. The night of time urges me open,  
at last a flower too, open to life. Already the dawn.

"Still, around me, urging caution, a retinue of persons  
set my spirit, like a jewel is set, in time. But where before  
my worry, now my rest. The tide rolls on beyond me.  
Ever changing, it rocks me now asleep. And in my sleep,  
awake am I, so clear a bell is ringing.

"The smart of person's lash and crack to drive me at  
time's edge. My personal ties are slipped, as floating out,  
I'm gently tugged. Too long have fought to force my  
thought, and not, at ease, arising like some cloud to  
pass. My work undone, yet done, I rise. Drifting through  
strains, I sieve, and pass myself, open out to nothing  
thoughts to touch back not once more. A clear sleep is  
soft, it's ever blooming sound is silence. Now to find my  
way among the slips of time. And slip I will, now lost to  
striving, and lounge in this room of emptiness. To lie  
back in time, behind its edge, and ever look eternally.

"No way to pass this on. This is: passing on. Slamming  
against the walls of time, I shove off into eternity. Spread  
open a flower, so wide."

[Photo by me.]



'SPECIAL' THAT'S NOT SPECIAL

June 26, 2022

Discovering "The Dharma" is one of the best things that ever happened to me. The 'Dharma' is simply the truth, the way things naturally are. In a very general way, the Dharma and Mother Nature's laws agree, yet the Dharma differs from most civil law.

The danger in such a discovery (dharma) is that we tend to put the dharma (or anything we like that much) up on a pedestal and refer to it rather than keep that discovery fresh. We treasure the memory of the freshness of the original discovery, i.e., rather than continue discovering. That freshness fails if we refer to memory rather than to the present moment. Our memory does this for us. We remember the freshness rather than refreshing the moment.

There is a cure for this mistake, yet it is not that easy to do, especially while we are stuck with all our pedestal-revering. It is called Insight Meditation (Vipassana), and a special kind of Vipassana at that. Making insight recursive and continuously self-revealing is no mean task.

This form of reification (treasuring the memory and losing track of the actuality) is rampant, practically endemic in this world of cyclic experience in which we live, called in dharma terms 'Samsara'.

We are literally stuck in the past, in our own memory of

an event, rather than able to focus on the present moment. This seems to be par for the course, our preference for the past memory of an event rather than our ability to refresh the original event itself and live in the present.

As the poet William Butler Yeats put it, "... the grass cannot but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain."

Keeping our eye on the hare and not the empty form in the grass is a challenge we cannot avoid. It's this or rust, worshiping the past, IMO. It's like trying to snatch at a gnat, a flying bug, and opening our hand to find nothing there.

Like almost all things, if we are not aware of this as a problem, we can't do anything about it. First, we have to see the problem. Then perhaps we can change it.

I say 'perhaps' because, as mentioned earlier, this is very difficult to do, staying fresh and in the present moment, even though that is where we always are. We get distracted. Most of us just find our hand is empty.

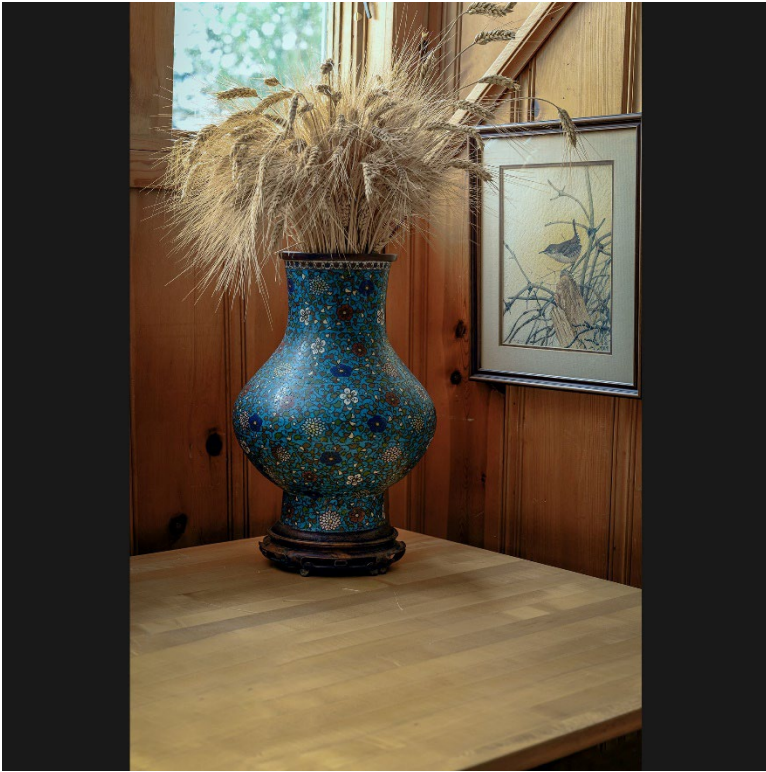
And the why of this is because of our 'graspingness', our attachment and failure to avoid reification, again and again. No sooner than something fresh or striking occur to us than we fixate on it and life passes us by, while we sit fixated on the event.

We are left holding the bag, so to speak, and not what was in the bag. I keep restating the premise because unless we have that clear in our mind, we can do nothing about it. We can't change what we are not aware of, what we are unable to see and accept. Only by acceptance of the status quo can we go about changing it.

This is what makes dharma practice so very difficult. As an analogy, it's like when a baby is born, and it takes its first breath and tries to hold it. That's when the midwife has to slap its butt, to start the cycle of breathing. We can't seem to get past our grasping at whatever good thing happens, thus shutting down the cycle of inspiration in one fell swoop. We cling.

It would be better to transmigrate, to shift our focus on the present-that-just-passed to the present that is right now present. It's a bad habit and very difficult to change or remove. We fall for it again and again, with each fresh inspiration. We fall in love with it and immediately begin reifying it, making it special. And with that, it ceases to be special.

[Photo by me.]



## FREEDOM FROM BEING 'SPECIAL'

June 27, 2022

I've been so busy that I've had little time to contemplate and allow insights to surface.

Nevertheless, some changes are obvious and show themselves, while others are more like the sun coming up, a more gradual change.

Something I have noticed over the last couple of years is that what I used to call 'dharma' has been expanding, much like when you drop a pebble in a still pond, it produces a series of concentric rings that expand outward until they hit the shore, and then rebound and start back the other way.

As to how I adapt that analogy to my current situation in recent years is that what I consider dharma is expanding and extending until almost anything I do has more clarity and meaning. After all, is it all dharma?

I first noticed this in the doing of housework. We used to have a helper who came in each week and did some of the housework chores. However, with the advent of Covid, that ended. These last years we no longer have anyone but ourselves in the house since Covid. Instead, we have to do the housework, all of it ourselves.

And although doing housework can take a lot of time, I increasingly found that I didn't mind doing it. In fact, my philosophy was that if I have to do it, might as well get into it, put my heart into it. I can't say this was immediately the case, yet over time I found that engaging in the housework wholeheartedly was the best way to enjoy it, pass the time, and of course, get it done.

And later yet, as I begin to be Mr. Fixit around the house (and the center), this tendency spread outward to include more and more tasks as a form of dharma



practice.

My point here is that to my mind the difference between practicing dharma on the cushion and doing just about anything else began to dissolve and it became harder for me to see where the dharma ended and housework began. It was all dharma or dharmic.

Moreover, I began to see that much of my dharma practice was a little forced or artificial in itself, while housework was (as most of us know) very much authentic and quite of the moment.

And so, it does not seem to matter so much what I do anymore. It all has the same sense and taste. In a very real way, this is freeing, especially not making the dharma special (by reifying it), meaning not making dharma any different than anything else. It's like I have been disrespecting everyday events all this time and at the same time reifying dharma, making it somehow 'special'. Now those roles are flipping or at least equalizing one another.

The freedom from anything 'special' is very much a freedom indeed. Having to make special allowances for dharma is tiring, especially if this reifying becomes a habit rather than the spontaneous discovery of dharma. Every day, everything is special enough and does not need my approval or deifying, and it all is interdependent.

[Photo by me.]



## A MANDALA OF WORDS

June 29, 2022

Now that this basement project is finishing up, I'd like to get back to writing blogs, only more carefully and detailed. It's hard for me to explain, even to myself, how I feel about the whole blog process. Blogging is about as sacred as I get with 'process', and I articulate them using the juxtaposition of words as best I can to flag down the attention of my readers and take them toward whatever my vision is showing me. I want to share it.

Do I expect a lot of response? Not if history has anything to say about it. I try to make words speak in my writing,

articulating by their arrangement something like a sieve to catch what I can of the reader's awareness and offer at least a sense of what I am speaking of. And I know, what I write is not for everybody.

At the same time (perhaps even primarily), the whole writing process itself is why I write, about the stream of experience to find for myself (and hold in mind) the authentic dharma as I understand it. And it's not like there is anything to be found or to 'get' from the writing itself. Instead, the voicing and articulation of words creates a mandala of words, the process itself, which is the point if you feel you need to have a point. In reality, there is no point or end to get to, no beginning and no end. That's the point.

Like the process of breathing that keeps us alive, this articulation of words, a mandala, can keep us more in the present moment than we otherwise are. The meaning of the words gesture and point us forward, lead us on, and yet that meaning itself is finally not going anywhere in particular, except onward, a continuing continuum.

When we realize this, that the end result is the means we use to get there, then we are finally getting 'somewhere', so to speak, which is not anywhere at all other than the continuing process itself. It is then that we may see the light shining within the process. If we can rest in that process, we have arrived in this present moment.

Here is a darkish poem I wrote back in the early 1960s,  
when I was oh so serious.

### LOOK AT YOURSELF

Look at yourself, first yet first,  
No better, and yet not worse.  
Now get yourself together in a bunch,  
And call what carriage as ye may your hearse.

[Photo by me.]



“TALK LOW, TALK SLOW, AND DON’T SAY TOO MUCH”

June 30, 2022

That’s a quote from actor John Wayne. Something that has been popping up in my mind of late is how to older men and women become wise. And the way I mean ‘wise’ in this context is more the sort of wisdom that is kind yet clear about the truth. I’m thinking of a John Wayne type, realistic but also compassionate as needed.

As I actually get older myself, I am having some second

thoughts about this tough truth that some older folks seem to acquire. I know that my first dharma teacher, Andrew Gunn McIver was kindly and compassionate, yet at the same time a fierce protector of the vulnerable and the young. Yet, he would not take any baloney either.

I don't know where wisdom came from all these years. Mostly, I never thought about it. I guess I imagined that it just arose like patina does on a piece of wood with age or something. However, I am starting to see it differently.

There is no point in shining yourself (or anyone else) on down the road. For older folks, there is not that much road left and no real advantage to pretending otherwise. Simple trial and error instruct. For me, it often comes down to sharing the truth, the way things actually are and not just what we would like them to be or that society tries to demand of us. To explain what I am sharing, consider this:

Mother Nature, what is called natural law, is often compared to the laws according to the dharma teachings. This is not just me making this up. There is a little-known area of dharma instruction that pertains to this, which cites a short series as to what can be considered the 'Guru' in dharma. I will list them, just as they were taught to me.

(1) The Guru – This is our Root Guru or teacher.

(2) The Guru of the Teachings – all the dharma scriptures.

(3) The Guru of Dharmata – This is more advanced, learning from the dharmata, the way things are, itself.

(4) The Guru of Appearances. This is an even lesser-known way of learning the dharma, by studying the appearance of Natural Law, primarily Mother Nature.

I know you know about The Guru, and The Guru of the Scriptures. The Guru of Dharmata is lesser known, and I had never heard of the Guru of Appearances until I was introduced to it by a Lama.

What ‘The Guru of Appearances’ essentially points to is at Mother Nature herself. Natural law is also a perfect teacher of the dharma. Nature buffs know this.

And whether we learn the dharma from the first three Gurus, or pick up our knowledge of ‘how things are’ from Mother Nature herself, is not important. We can learn from all of them.

To return to the theme of this post, as we get older, these various kinds of dharma instruction can actually merge, and here is an important sidebar:

Mother Nature does not blink. If you study her laws,



which feature 'impermanence', we learn that just as there is life, there is also death. Moreover, in nature most animals are struggling to find something to eat and at the same time struggling not to be eaten themselves.

As I was trained as a naturalist from a very young age, I am quite aware of nature's laws. And compared to human or civil law, they don't compare. Human law is filled with reification, wishful thinking, ignorance of reality, and shall I name more?

And to wrap this up, as we get older, those who have studied natural law or dharma, kindness seems to be tempered with reality more than when we are young. It could be because we are nudging closer to our use-by-date and perhaps the seriousness of that fact can affect our view.

We can't just kick the can down the road forever and by that avoid a come-to-Jesus moment. The way things actually are, no matter what civil authority wants them to be, shines through the growing transparency that age brings. We can't help but see the light or at least the outlines of it. We can't just ignore it and pretend the harder truths are not there.

And so, as for my original question as to the wisdom of the aging, there is less and less reason to dull the knife blades of death. And although Grandpa and Grandma

hopefully are kind, along with the sunshine, also comes a little rain sometimes.

The buck must stop somewhere, and at the end of aging has to be one of them. Wisdom has to include reality, the way things actually are, so I believe that a product of age is a stop sign as to shining younger folks on. Wise men and woman often are willing and able to do this, thus my point.

If you go out in nature, and study nature, kindness is not one of her virtues. Just witness all the earthworms trying to cross a tarmac road just as the sun comes up to dry them to a crisp. Most of them never make it and some worms are crawling in the direction of the road itself. Or the robin shell on the sidewalk, dead baby bird and all. I won't go on, yet nature is replete with impermanence. How is that communicated?

If the Buddha Dharma is a mirror image (or close) of the laws of Mother Nature, then the same laws we so easily see in nature are also present in the dharma teachings, even if they are not emphasized.

And if it all, the whole enchilada, good and bad news, is what we have to realize, just when and how do you want to be introduced to such laws as the nitty-gritty of impermanence? If the dharma is effectively a mirror image of nature's laws, how is that reflected and taught in the dharma. And if not, just why is that? I'm talking

about the hard truths of impermanence and its implications.

[Photo by me.]

