

BLOGS 2022 WINTER



by Michael Erlewine

2022
Essays
WINTER

by Michael Erlewine

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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.

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DHARMA SKETCHES: DHARMA IS AS DHARMA DOES

January 1, 2022

Dharma, dharma, dharma. What does dharma mean for me at this point in my life?

It means more to me than just sitting on the cushion and practicing dharma. It's dharma all the time by now. I was intellectually talking dharma in the late 1950s and personally introduced to actual dharma practice by the Ven. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1974, so I have been learning basic Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) for at least 50 years. That ought to teach me something.

One thing that I have learned is that, as the old saying goes, 'the apple does not fall far from the tree,' which here means that whatever dharma I have learned, it is in line (aligned) with my natural love of nature, which predates my introduction to formal dharma, and that manifested when I was about six-years old. To me, nature is one of the greatest dharma teachers. By that I mean that my dharma training in these last many decades reflects or mirrors my natural history training.

They complement one another. Moreover, it seems the two are recursive, one reinforcing the other. It also makes me somewhat of a maverick, at least to my own mind, something I question, yet cannot seem to avoid.

As for me, I found that making 'dharma' special or a separate part of my life was not helpful. The dharma is everywhere we are. Yes, the dharma is 'special' in its own right or important, but that is all the more reason why we don't need to 'gild the lily' or in any way reify the dharma. Doing so, only obscures the dharma. Putting dharma on a pedestal is an oxymoron or should be.

For one, I am (and have been) very active in my life, which perhaps contrasts with my sitting on the meditation cushion, unless we consider doing that 'active' meditation. Of course, I did sit and can still sit, yet in truth, my form of sitting seems more to be 'sitting while in motion', so to speak. It seems to me that I am most at rest when I am moving around, if that makes sense.

Of course, there is at least somewhat of a dilemma with that approach, the idea of resting in motion. I sat for some fifty years while learning basic Shamata (Tranquility Meditation), but once learned, I don't need to learn it again. It is second nature now. I should have stopped practicing Shamata years before I did, yet I was too busy salting the salt and couldn't see that I already knew basic 'mindfulness'. My problem was: how do I learn something I already know. It took the advent of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) to prove this to me.

Once Insight Meditation (Vipassana) arose in my practice, Shamata (Tranquility Mediation) instantly

completed or revealed itself (so to speak) as complete, and the pair (Vipassana and Shamata) were independent enough (and yet conjoined) to be instantly useable. Of course, I can further tweak my Shamata practice, but it, along with Insight Meditation, are by now a functioning entity or whole. And together they are very portable.

I don't have to physically try to hold or be still because the mind already can be or is still. It comes to rest and remains there, at least enough for what I need it to do at this point. I'm sure there is more, but until I know I need it, I don't.

And what I do know is to continue the process of what is called Mahamudra Meditation, which in my case involves expanding and extending Insight Meditation in the stillness of Shamata, which has become much like breathing. It seems I want (or have to) do it all the time to live and to feel 'normal' on any given day.

And I do find that I am gravitating (somewhat at least) away from 'busyness' and all my entertainments to the refreshing and bracing clarity of sometimes doing just nothing at all but immerse (or open) myself in the present moment.

This I am still learning to do, yet it seems natural, unavoidable, and an integral part of the path opening before me. I have no idea how someone as active and busy as I have been will fare when that flame of activity

is plunged or 'quenched' in the stillness (perceived boredom) of the mind. Perhaps that will strengthen or temper me like a sword or a piece of iron.

At any rate, plunging myself into the realm of what I used to call boredom is about as extreme or opposite an action as I can find. Yet, all of the road signs of dharma practice seem to point in that direction, resting in the nature of the mind. Yet, how does that relate to stillness, to being still?

At heart, perhaps they are unrelated. Stillness may have nothing to do with activity, meaning that we can be absolutely still even while moving at high speed. That seems to be in my case.



TIME AND THE TIMELESS

January 2, 2022

[A little exercise in dharma logic.]

Time has many faces and I seem to distinguish two basic types of activity that I tend to do in a day. One I call full immersion or 'timeless', the other I call 'Timed', made up

of biding my time and trying to find some kind of entertainment. I'm either immersed and absorbed in what essentially is timeless activity or I'm clocking time and doing my best to entertain myself.

Of course, I feel it is timeless when we have no awareness of time passing and it is 'time-filled' when we do. And it seems that the only time when we know we have been timeless is after we come out of it and start just marking time to the degree that we need to seek out some entertainment. After all, time is more or less a convention agreed on by the majority of us. Skip a beat or so and we find ourselves on our own sense of time or the lack of it.

If we are absorbed in something, deeply immersed in it, time can pass in minutes or even hours before we look up at the clock and are surprised at how many minutes or hours have passed. What would you call that? It happens to me all the time, so to speak.

If we had no awareness at all of the passing of time, where would we be? As it is, that's not a problem most of us have. It seems that we go in and out of this sense of time (time-minding) and the timelessness of full immersion. And so, I can't help but ask the question.

Is our goal to immerse ourselves in the present so that we have no sense of time passing? Is that what meditation is? Do we not want to be there in the sense

of clock-watching seconds, or do we just like being lost in timelessness? Or do we want to be immersed in the moment, yet also be fully aware of that immersion, if that makes sense?

Is that what meditators mean by clarity and lucidity? I'm asking a lot of questions here, yet I do have some experience and perhaps even some little realization as to the nature of that experience. Why not just mention that as best I can.

My favorite way of living... perhaps I don't want to say my favorite way of spending time, because full immersion in the moment is timeless, is it not? I want to be present and accounted for, but not present and also fidgeting and counting the seconds. Something like that.

We go in and out of the body, take full possession of it, much like we get into a car in order to drive and to live life to the full, and not to have this sense that we are hanging outside of life, wishing we were more involved in the moment than we are.

What is there beyond full immersion with awareness, clarity, and lucidity? Perhaps nothing I know of, and by that I mean nothing I am aware of except for that awareness itself.

I don't like rollercoaster rides (anymore), yet I do like the full immersion that Vipassana (Insight Meditation)

brings. I would prefer to be in that process of immersion fulltime, if possible. And I don't feel like it is an escape, yet it IS (or seems to be) an alternative to what we call Samsara, the normal rat race of dualistic dilemmas.

I like being one minded and not two and for the world of the mind to be revealing itself to me incrementally at a constant pace, a continual revelation. That's what Insight Meditation is in my experience. What's not to like?

How is Insight Meditation not some kind of escape from, at the very least, this samsaric world we live in? Good question and not easy to answer. And for me, the answer is that in Insight Meditation, there is no doubt, not a question, and no sense of duality because Insight Meditation itself is non-dual. It has no subject and object. That is key here.

My point is that, when in that process of Insight Meditation, there is, as mentioned, no duality, so there is no sense of either escape or that something is missing or could be better or worse. It just is what it is, and with no annotator. And this by definition. It's all right there, in full.

To repeat, in Insight Meditation there is no sense of escape from anything or anywhere, but only the sense of fullness or completion, and this because in Insight Meditation there is no duality, no one out there

watching, no second guessing, critic, or witnessing, because the process itself is non-dual. There is no other one or part of us jabbering at us. We are fully extended in the senses, going all out, so to speak.

There is no self or sense of doubt that is watching our experience and making comments, but rather just the experiencing itself experiencing. Perhaps, when we exit that immersive state and once again find ourselves dualistic, back in samsara, we can evaluate that experience, be critical, have thoughts about it, witness it, and use-your-own-words.

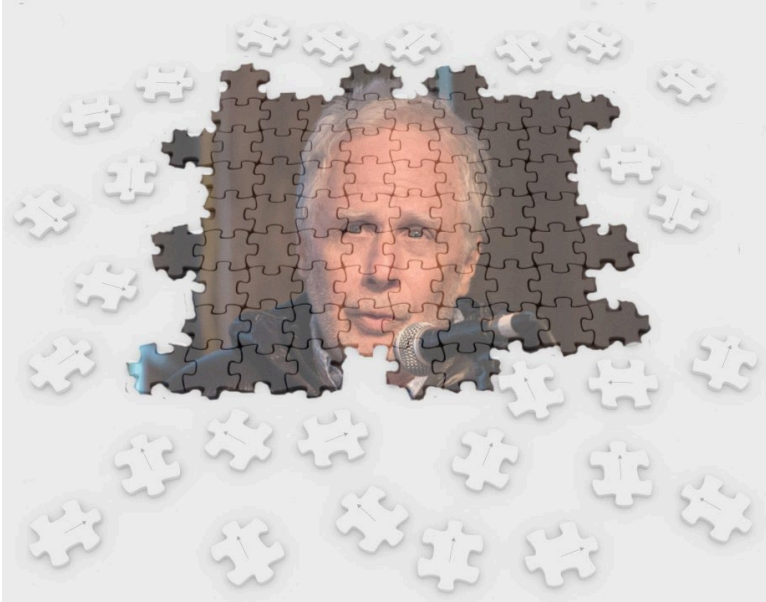
In that case, we are “back again,” meaning we are once more dualistic in having a subject with life (or whatever) as the object. For me, I find the process of complete absorption in Insight Meditation (with clarity) preferable. I prefer it, which statement itself may be an attachment.

It probably is possible, for great meditators, to remain in full immersion at all times. There being no need for second thoughts or to criticize or even witness (dualistically) life involvement. Being and ‘living it’ is enough and the clarity and lucidity of Insight Meditation is a better solution than dualistic commenting, if only because Insight Meditation itself is a solution, a full immersion.

The takeaway for me from all this is that the tip of the top is just that. There is no further and also not less, like

the fully unrolled (and inverted) fingertip of a glove. This is something I intellectually realized was possible back in 1963 when I spent a year studying the dialectic of the German philosopher Hegel, yet actually experiencing and realizing this conceptual viewpoint in the flesh took another 45 years of practice to even touch into the reality of Insight Meditation.

Of course, I am a slow learner at all of this.



INDIVIDUATION: THE SAME AND NOT THE SAME

January 3, 2022

[Be sure to read the legend (below) for the enclosed illustration I put together.]

It amazes me how much each of us is separate and alone no matter how large a crowd we are in. I know that you know this because we all are in the same boat when it comes to being distinct.

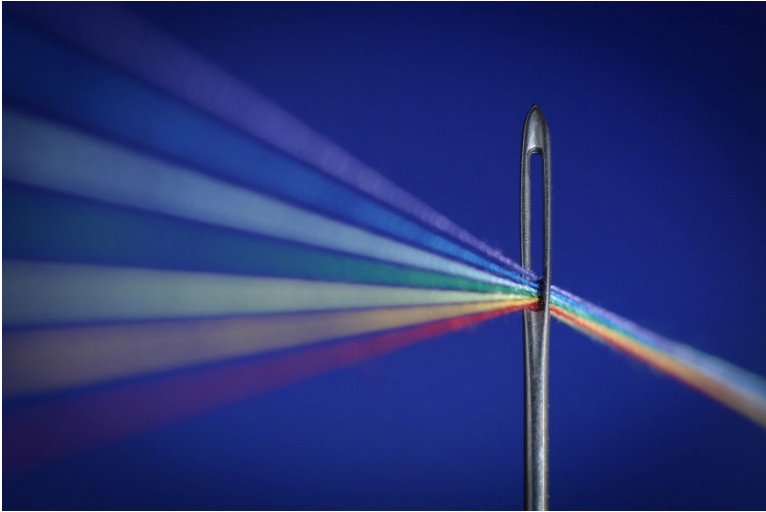
We individuate. Nothing else could work. Yet, by individuating, aside from the fact that there is a refreshing quality to that, we each are continually thrust out into walking point, ready or not, and like it or not. The result is that we each are alone together with all other beings.

There is no real 'other' if truth be known. There is just one being, not many. One 'being', but many beings. We each share in that being, such as it is. I say 'such as it is' because, if I understand it right, the dharma teachings say something like 'our being is becoming', yet not that 'our being has become' or ever is. Our being is not permanent, meaning we don't have a permanent 'soul' or we are not a permanent soul.

Instead, it seems that we are a temporary soul, a 'queen or king for a day' or a 'soul' for a lifetime, after which what we call our person and our 'soul' disincorporate or break-up and what drives us on to rebirth are the desires and karma we have set in motion but never satisfied. They alone continue on and are reborn, whereupon they proceed to draw around themselves a new birth, a new persona or 'Self' – a new face on the same extended karma.

And so, in rebirth we are the same karmically yet not the same personally. What are your thoughts on this?

[Forever probably didactic, this graphic that I put together illustrates as best I can the forces, desires, and karma that I brought with me into my current birth, as they work together to create my persona and 'self' in this life. Here in this graphic, I show how they are coming together to make me the person I am today, piece by piece, and not arriving from a previous life as a complete 'soul'. When I pass on from this life, those continuing forces and karma (not my person), piecemeal (one by one, each piece of karma) will eventuate a rebirth where these same forces and karma will collect and gradually draw around one another to create a new composite person from my ongoing bits of karma. This is how I understand the rebirth process works from my study of the dharma texts. We are the same and not the same. I feel this is important to understand.]



BANG THE DRUM SLOWLY

January 4, 2022

[When I got up in the middle of Sunday night, it was 7 degrees out. That's getting cold; I could feel it as I made my way along the icy path to our dharma center next door to do some work. Just mentioning this advancing of winter.]

I'm encouraged, every day, by my own continual discovering of the actual nature as to how the mind works, if only incrementally. This is an enlightening process that apparently has no end, the incremental conversion of this world of Samsara in which we find ourselves into Nirvana (awareness), bit by bit, and moment by moment, the recognition of the mind's nature through the effective practice of what is called in

dharma terms Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

And for me, much of this is driven by 'Bodhicitta', in particular what is called Absolute Bodhicitta, which amounts to an overwhelming desire on our part to share dharma that liberates with other sentient beings like ourselves. There's just no end to that impulse.

In the midst of this Samsaric life it seems that we build a timeless spaceship right here in the middle of time. We learn to go between the clock-ticking seconds to rest beyond time's reach thanks to the full immersion of Insight Meditation. IMO, we don't R.I.P. (rest in peace) at the end of life; we rest in peace all through the day in micro-increments, yet this is a process that we either are unaware of or that we have to become more aware of.

It's not enough to simply immerse ourselves in non-duality that is forgetfulness; we have to remain aware that we are doing this, what the dharma textbooks describe as "clarity and lucidity." It's not ignorance or avoidance that works, but rather the pristine clarity of our awareness while in the immersion. We immerse with eyes wide open, so to speak.

And that's not so easy to do; it requires the development of what is called Vipassana, 'Insight Meditation', which is part of the practice of Mahamudra meditation, and this requires, as mentioned, that we are fully immersed and also at the same time we remain

fully aware within that immersion. To use the vernacular, we are 'all out' or 'all-in', fully extended (non-dualistically) into the senses and life itself.

It is with Insight Meditation (or something similar) that we stand or step outside or beyond time. The closest most of us come to experiencing the Kagyu style of Insight Meditation is when we are totally absorbed in something we are doing to the point we lose all track of time. That too is timelessness.

Insight Meditation is like that, only with Insight Meditation we are totally immersed and at the same time totally clear and lucid. And Insight Meditation is not a static 'state' of mind, but a continual process to the degree that we can maintain it, which is why steadiness of mind through Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) is required. In fact, Insight Meditation and Tranquility Meditation are connate, two sides of the same coin. They work together.

And Insight Meditation and Tranquility Meditation are recursive; they depend on and reenforce one another. The analogy of these two that I like is that of trying to thread a very fine needle when we have shaky hands. Tranquility Meditation steadies the hands, so that Insight Meditation can thread the needle. Together they comprise the two main elements of Mahamudra Meditation.

In general, most dharma students first learn Tranquility Meditation (Shamata) so that their mindfulness can be steady. Then, based on that steadiness, we are introduced to Insight Meditation (Vipassana), usually by an authentic teacher. And, when Insight Meditation naturally arises within us, then Insight Meditation and Tranquility Meditation, working together, make up what is called Mahamudra Meditation, which goes exponential. We awaken.



MY KEY TO TAKING GOOD PHOTOS

January 4, 2022

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins came up with a concept that struck me as true. He even made up his own word to describe it, "inscape." Inscape was to Hopkins an insight or path from the Samsaric into the eternal or beautiful, literally the way or sign of the beautiful. Let me try to explain.

I look forward to my trips out into the fields and woods. They offer me a chance to get my head together, time out from the day-to-day grind of chores, and generally to relax a bit. This is not to say that just going outside and walking in nature means that I am instantly relaxed. For me, that usually takes time.

It is the same with taking photos. In the first ten minutes of a walk, I often don't see all that much to photograph. This too takes time, time for me to slow down, open up, and 'see' again, and to let in the natural beauty all around me. It could be that I am still filled with all the workaday-world thoughts, the things I have to do, problems, and what-have-you. It takes time for my mind to relax and let go of its constant chatter. This day-to-day endless worry and thinking affects my photography. And here is where the word 'inscape' comes in.

As I get out there and wander through the fields or wherever, I gradually start to slow down and once again

begin to see things that are beautiful, scenes that I might actually want to photograph. Slowly, like a flower, my view of the natural world around me starts to open up again, and I begin to experience things differently. I begin to 'see'. It takes time and usually does not happen all at once.

This little pattern of leaves over here or the way the light comes through the forest canopy grabs me just a little bit, and the chatter of my mind pauses, gets distracted, and begins to slow down. As I walk along, some little thing or scene strikes me and appears beautiful; I am touched by it, however lightly at first. And I gradually get distracted from my daily distractions and begin to center.

These little moments of opening are 'inscapes', ways out of my mundane world and into the natural beauty of nature or, more accurately, back into the state of my own mind or being. As I slow down and take my time, I am able to see the beauty in things once again, and what I am seeing suddenly seems worth photographing. Like most of us, I photograph what catches my interest, what I find beautiful or worthy in the world around me.

These inscapes (and insights) are signals or signs that manage to catch my attention, and they flag me down on my busy way forward to nowhere-in-particular. These moments and signs are how I stop going nowhere and manage to almost miraculously arrive somewhere once

again, perhaps only at my own peace of mind. This is one of the functions of the beautiful, to catch us in the turmoil of life, flag us down, and induce us to pull over and take a moment of actual rest, some time out.

Of course, these moments of inscape are different on different days, and different for different people. They represent the clues or signs that catch our attention and show us the way, guide us into the beauty of the natural world, actually the beauty of our own mind. Another way of saying this might be: what is beauty actually? What happens when we see something beautiful? What does it take for us to open to the beautiful? That's what inscapes are all about.

Beauty is not simply somewhere out there in nature waiting to be found, but always already here within us, locked up within us, we who are suddenly seeing this nature, we who can see the beautiful. Beauty breaks down the rush and struggle of the everyday world and opens our heart a wee bit, making us vulnerable again, more open to experience and input.

Through opening to the natural beauty outside, we go inside and experience the inner beauty of things, which is none other than our own inner beauty. That is what beauty is for, to be touched on, seen, so that we find once again the beauty within our own hearts that we may have lost through the constant distractions of our daily life. We forgot. We look outside in nature to see in

here, to see into our own heart once again.

We can be sensitive to beauty in our photography. I would hate to tell you how many photographs I have of this or that butterfly or critter that are perfectly good photographs, yet are empty of magic or meaning. They are well lit, well composed, and have everything that makes a good photograph except that 'magic' that keys or excites me. Instead, they are 'pictures' of a butterfly, but they have not captured any essence of anything. They might as well be in a field guide – snapshots in time with no real meaning.

The reason for this, so I tell myself, is because they just happened to be there, photographic opportunities. I saw them and I took a photograph, but at the time they did not instill or strike any particular beauty in me. This, to me, is "gotcha" photography, taking a photo because I can, not because I saw beauty in it or was moved to do so. There was no inscape moment, no moment of vision – snapshots only.

I have found that it is really worth paying attention to what strikes me as beautiful or meaningful (the inscapes) and photographing that, rather than just photographing the Grand Canyon because it is there or I am there. A lasting photograph, in my opinion, requires more of me than that, by definition. It has to mean something to me and for that to happen I need to actually be moved or inspired. Photographs that have special meaning for me

usually have some form of inscape, insight into a special moment that inspires me to capture the scene in a photo. That inspiration can thereafter be seen in the resulting photo.

We can wander for miles looking for something to photograph, chasing down this or that butterfly or animal... searching. Or we can slow down and let nature herself show us the signs, reveal the inscapes through which we can relax and begin to 'see' photographically once again. We can listen to our own intuition. This process of inscape, of insight into the sublime in nature (the sublime within ourselves) I find to be the key to good photographs and to creating photographs that are real keepers, at least in my mind. If we don't touch our own inner self in our work, we touch no one at all, but when we are touched by a moment, I find that others also feel this. Touch one, touch all.

This same advice works in the studio as well, waiting for our mind to show us the beauty in front of us.

[Photo by me.]



January 5, 2022

THE GIFT NEVER GIVEN

Not everything is immediately forthcoming in life. For some things we must wait, try as we might to eventuate them. More mysterious, IMO, are those topics that I try to explain to myself, ones that I even write out in great detail, only to find that what I wrote is only an introduction and that for some reason I never managed to touch upon the actual heart of the topic. Some of these elusive topics I have been trying to pin down for decades.

It seems that as I introduce the topic and try to state the context or frame in which to view what I am about to say, I end up only describing the context and never the subject itself, which remains elusive and somehow always just out of reach, no matter how much or long I write. I can't explain that. It's not the gift that keeps on giving, but just the reverse, the gift that is never given. All I manage to do is to kick the can down the road and there it sits.

These quite elusive topics seem to have, at least for me, great depth, because as mentioned I never reach the end with them. I never define them, no matter how hard I try. I'm just left holding the skin, the molt and not the heart of it, which 'heart' has once again slipped ahead and segues on, leaving me holding the bag, so to speak. And the worst part about it for me is that I never do get to the bottom of it and am satisfied. The itch to explain by trying to define it to myself still remains.

Do I learn anything from all this? I would have to say yes, that I do. I learn how slippery this topic is for me to get my arms around. I explain it, only to find I have not explained it, but at best have only set the stage to explain it, and this remains true (as mentioned) no matter how much I write. It's like one of those all-day suckers (lollipops) that we had as kids, layer within layer within layer. It seems these puzzlers accompany me through my life laughing and never manage to appear in the rear-view mirror of my mind. Indeed, for me, this is a karma yet to come, a gift always giving yet never given.

[Photo by me.]



THE SLEEP OF ENTERTAINMENT

January 6, 2022

I often find myself just treading water in this Samsaric sea that all share called life, there being no direction that is obvious to me as the way for me to go in the moment. And so, sometimes I am sort of marching in place, bidding my time, or perhaps floating on the surface. In those quite uncomfortable times I often am just too tired to make further effort, yet I'm seldom ready for sleep. I'm just right here present in this moment.

As I look around me, the past or the future seem empty, lifeless, and not animated, leaving me, as mentioned, here in the now, where I always am (and have been) if I bother to look. Mostly when these times come, I believe we all turn away; we turn inward to the entertainment that shadows us.

What can I do with this present moment more than I already am doing? It seems that I must either actively do something or retreat (go lie down) among my entertainments. This staying awake and aware in the current moment has a mechanics all its own, a process. This process is, well, a process. Like a circle, it has no beginning and no end, but seems to go on forever. It's just there. And I'm with it when I can be and oblivious to it when I can't, when I fall back into the sleep of

entertaining myself to get some rest, a common refuge.

Ultimately, I'm with this moment because there it is and here I am, either a part of it or by withdrawal, apart from it. I'm trying to reorient and adjust myself aerodynamically so that I can fit into the slipstream of this moment and be pulled along alert, rather than to continually make efforts to be aware. Even the most subtle effort eventually becomes too much. We tire.

Again, I must emphasize that this is a process, including how to work along with the process, how to learn to become stronger. It's like pulling taffy or kneading dough, this process of how to expand and extend our recognition (mindfulness) as to the actual nature of the mind and just how the mind works, which is not like a one-time event, but as mentioned, an ongoing process.

And the fact is that this process, like breathing, has to be continued much as with the old film projectors, the celluloid had to be kept moving across the light source for there to be any motion to be seen. This endless need for motion or contrast is key.

With the particular dharma practice called Insight Meditation (Vipassana), it seems to me that we learn how to practice Insight Meditation until we are skillful enough (aerodynamically speaking) to effortlessly maintain the process without tiring. I find that the only way to achieve this is through purification, to gradually

remove any attachments that slow down and hinder me from the effortless articulation and clarity of Insight Meditation.

The truth is that I can't seem to NOT practice Insight Meditation each day if I want to have a clear mind, yet at this point in my dharma practice, even when absolutely fueled by intense interest, I eventually physically tire from the practice and tend to revert (fall back) into entertaining myself if only in order to rest-up. The sleep of ignorance, ignoring. We revert and seek out the shadows, so to speak.

Perhaps I need the distractions of life to allow me to relax. I imagine that continued diligence and further articulation will help to streamline this practice until one day it becomes automatic to the extent that it takes no effort whatsoever to remain aware on my part. Until then, I am on the path, betwixt and between, busy struggling for the light to see the necessity of the night.

[Photo by me.]



ASTROLOGY TERMA (HIDDEN DHARMA TREASURES)

January 8, 2022

The concept of hidden dharma treasures (terma) as discovered by 'Tertons' (dharma practitioners enabled by birth or practice to receive them) are one of the many seeming miraculous gifts offered by Tibetan dharma to the world.

With terma, which traditionally are dharma treasures hidden in rocks, trees, the ocean, or in the mind itself, the texts from which come out or are found are written in what is called 'dakini' language, which is not a language that you and I can read. In fact, the writing hidden in rocks, underground, etc. when they are broken open may be as simple as two or three letters or a single

symbol or sign whose purpose is not to be read like a letter, but rather (when seen) they trigger within ourselves what could only be described as a burst of words (volumes in some cases) that enter our mind and then are written down.

So, no matter how these various terma were hidden, when found, they trigger the mind to produce within us their intrinsic meaning. They are placed or hidden there only to remind us to discover from deep inside ourselves their meaning and nature. Ultimately, all hidden terma originate in the mind, come from the mind, and are decoded by the mind.

In other words, all terma are triggers or pointers. Perhaps a better word would be reminders. Terma remind us (or trigger) something deep within the mind that reconstitutes itself or arises upon being discovered or seen. Think of it as freeze-dried pith-dharma that is activated by immersing us in their content by seeing this dakini language, awakened by these signs, which dharma then springs to life, comes fully to mind, and become sensible or visible to us.

And once arisen or discovered, it is up to us (our ability to receive this treasure) for these terma to be understood, to make or allow this dakini language to be understood and work through us. And terma have to first be understood conceptually or intellectually. They then have also to be experienced or made to come alive

through experiencing them in the flesh, in our experience, and be felt and known. And that's not the end of it. Not only does it have to be understood and then experienced, but we also have to realize in full exactly what we are experiencing. And this process of unpacking discovered terma can take many years in many cases.

Only then, can the tertön (the one who finds the terma) share or express the meaning of the particular terma that has been found to others, and to the world of dharma practitioners. A little personal story may be helpful here.

In 2004 Margaret and I travelled on pilgrimage to Tibet and China with our Tibetan dharma teacher of 36 years, along with some of his lamas and students. One of the sacred dharma places we visited in China was Mt. Wu-Tai Shan, five mountains in the form of a 5-die, four mountains in the shape of a square, with the 5th mountain in the middle. We spent several days there and something we made a point to accomplish was to climb to the top of all five mountains and offer puja, prayers and offerings. We did this.

And while we were there, Khenpo Rinpoche told us something of the history of Mt. Wu-Tai Shan. It is part of the legend of the place, or so he said, that these five mountains were where the Bodhisattva Manjushri first appeared in youthful form, and from the top of his head

emerged the 84,000 astrological dharma, which were then given to humanity.

As the story goes, the astrological dharma were so loved by those who received them that people began to ignore their dharma practice, which displeased Manjushri, who then took back all these astrological teachings and removed them. This made the people of Earth very sad.

Then, so it is said, that Guru Rinpoche (often called the second Buddha) came to Manjushri and pleaded for humankind that these precious teachings be given back. Manjushri finally acceded to Guru Rinpoche's wish and he returned the 84,000 teachings, yet there was a caveat. Manjushri hid these astrological teachings as 'terma' throughout the world and also internally as 'mind treasures'. They then will eventually gradually be found and become available to the world. As an astrologer for much of my life, of course, I took all this in.

I don't know about the story, but I do know that when I came back from that trip, many astrological teachings and techniques seem to pour out of my own mind, and I have done my best all these years to share them with other astrologers, as I was able to make sense out of these teaching and ones that I had previously found earlier in my life.



WAITING ON KARMA

January 9 ,2022

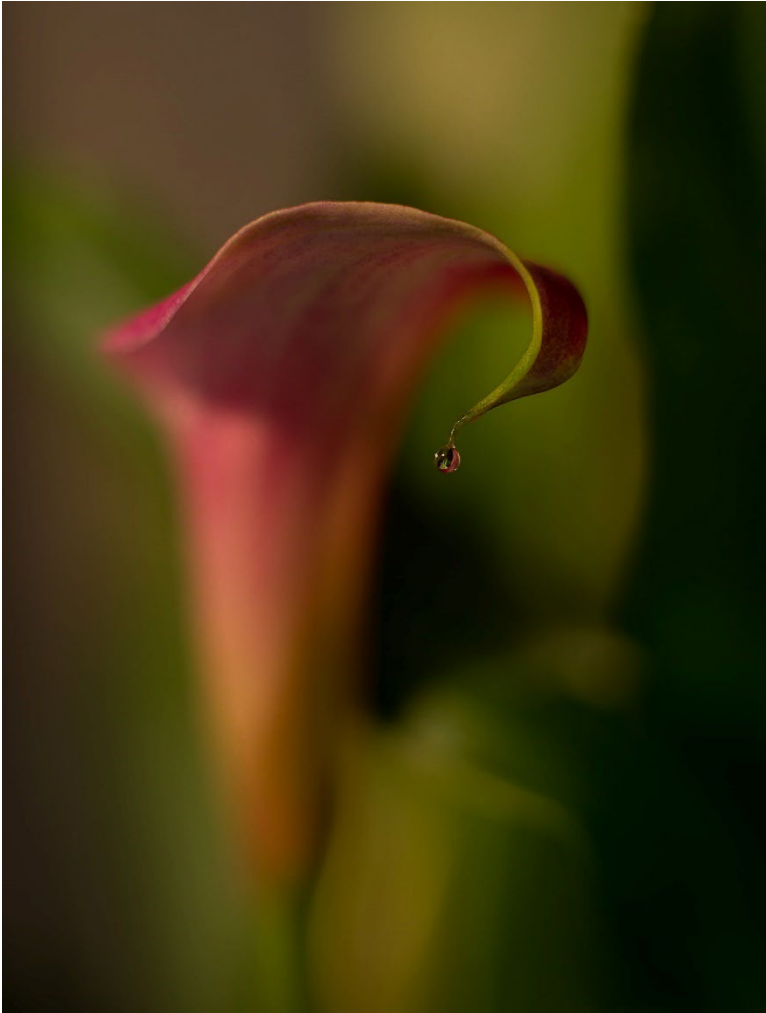
Karma is coming, if only because we create it as we go along, not to mention what we bring with us at birth. A principal theme that I have found in the dharma literature is that it is much easier to stop creating karma than it is to remove what karma we have already accumulated. This is one point that each of us has to carefully think through, IMO.

Another way to say this is that it is much easier to not spill that bucket of red paint on the new carpet than it is to clean the carpet once it has spilled. Immensely easier.

And the way to do that is as easy (or difficult) as being aware enough of what we are about to do that will cause karma and not doing it. And so, like almost all dharma teachings, 'awareness' is the key. If we can only work on one thing, then improving our awareness is it. That's the whole ballgame.

I can speak from experience that performing the extensive dharma purification practices can be difficult and take years for most people. I did them twice. Many great dharma teachers go so far as to say that it is practically impossible to remove our karmic stains by the various purification practices. Period. In most cases, karma will be removed only by ripening and taking its toll on us. That fact seems to take a long time to sink in.

As they say, karma burns twice, once as we create it (and take it on) and secondly when it ripens and results.



THE VIEW

January 10, 2022

For years, I have been the champion of the view, and by 'view' I mean as many different viewpoints of the same

moment as we can manage. Having but a single view is one-dimensional, flat. Having two views, like our eyes, gives us stereo, and having multiple views offers us more like a 3D representation of things.

I have shown this to be true in astrology, by accenting the various astronomical coordinate systems and their inclinations to one another. When seen together they offer a multidimensional view of the birth chart, the same planets, the same moment in time, but from various perspectives. Like algebras in mathematics, different coordinate systems each bring out certain perspectives and suppress others yet taken together we get a multidimensional overview.

This is also true of photography and its images. Most photo images have a single viewpoint, one point in the midst of the entire image toward which everything is looking or oriented. Our eyes are led to find relief when we synch in with that original view, that single point. It all lines up and becomes a habit. Breaking that habit in various ways can be liberating, IMO.

And this is why in focus stacking photographic images, where everything can be equally in focus, the eye has nowhere to go except where we want it to. We are not led to a view; there are no hints unless we place them there. In a stacked image, we are free to just look around at will, and we do. Perhaps this is why stacked images have a bit of a strange or unreal feel about them,

a certain liberated feeling we have to get used to. So much more is just up to us, like where we want to focus. We are not led, unless the photography chooses to.

Or, using stacked images we can (if we will) have two primary viewpoints or for that matter as many points of view as we care to stack. In my case, I like to highlight the view (by stacking in focus) just the part of the image I want to emphasize and allow the rest of the image to go to bokeh (slight blur) of one depth or another.

I like to tell myself that the part that is in extreme focus is the clarity life offers us, while the part that is blurred or gone to bokeh, is the sense or impression we have, the impression that life is also like a dream we are having.

In other words, our grip on reality is tenuous enough that we can be swept along in time, yet cling to that point of focus like a life raft in a flowing river. The dream is what we are having, but the extreme focus is how and where we hang on and orient ourselves.

Of course, there are dozens if not innumerable viewpoints to be had with focus stacking, and comparing approaches is where photographers can differ and find their differences.

As for me, I like the dreamy bokeh and the sense that this world we live in is impermanent and not always in

focus. And where I color in focus is like an innertube I
throw to myself that anchors me in the image.

[Photo by me.]





“ETERNITY IS IN LOVE WITH THE
PRODUCTIONS OF TIME”

January 11, 2022

The above quote is from the poet William Blake's poem "Songs of Innocence and Experience." Given time, I have been increasingly able to gather the pieces of the puzzle and fit them together, as regards Insight Meditation and my practice of it. Of course, I have to compare the descriptions in the classic dharma texts against my own actual experience. They do go together somewhat, but I've had to adjust my view along the way in order to take in all the information and align it properly with my personal experience. They are relatives.

A key fact is that Insight Meditation is non-dualistic, meaning it is all of one piece, and devoid of the subject and object we are used to in our day-today relative dualistic consciousness. Once engaged and immersed in Insight Meditation, not only is everything of one piece, but there is no self-consciousness, annotators, commenters, doubts, or second thoughts. It is like there is no reflection whatsoever, good, bad, or indifferent. It just is.

And without all the added noise of our own reactions, I find that with Insight Meditation there is pristine silence and great clarity. This is also a great relief, one that is outside of time, IMO. This is the 'eternity' within the productions of time that William Blake writes of.

Perhaps more difficult to describe is what is called in the

dharma 'Bodhicitta', and in the case of Insight Meditation we are talking about 'Absolute Bodhicitta', not the average kind. And what is meant by this word "Absolute" is an undeniable, even compulsive, desire to benefit other sentient beings by sharing with them the dharma as we have come to know it.

If there is an engine that drives Insight Meditation, it is this arousal and the sheer impetus of Absolute Bodhicitta. At least that's been my experience. And the sacred texts also point this out.

As for Insight Meditation itself, what's not to like? It's a time-out from the wear and tear of thoughts, reactions, confusion, and, as mentioned, from any kind of reflection whatsoever. It is a 'singleton.' Perhaps I manage to embroider along the edges of full immersion in Insight Meditation, but immersed I am, more or less, and for increasing longer times, as needed. Yet, it's not that short incursion into Insight Meditation are not welcome and useful. They are. In fact, my precious dharma teacher said that a session of resting the mind in Mahamudra, could be as short as raising a teacup to our lips and taking a sip.

It seems that we can only measure Insight Meditation by coming out of it, so brief visits are fine too. It's like skipping a flat stone on a quiet pond, where the stone is touching into the water surface again and again and again. If there is anything healthy that addictive, for me

this has to be Insight Meditation of the Mahamudra variety. It's like that quote above from the poet William Blake, "Eternity is in love with the productions of time."

Those bits of eternity, those little 'sips' of immersion, are, IMO, what makes life livable, in that they provide the pristine clarity, lucidity and timeouts in the nature of the mind that, like an open sky, allow us to rest in their eternity.

[Photo of "The Heart Center," our dharma center here in Big Rapids, Michigan. The hummingbird logo is both high up on the side of the building and also next to the side door.]



JACK BE NIMBLE

January 12, 2022

'Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick.' And Samsara is the Swiss cheese in which all this happens. We inhabit it; we live here. What is 'in there' comes 'out here'.

"Relax as it is," said the great Mahasiddha Tilopa.

Or the Bible in Psalms 91:11-12:

"For He will give His angels charge concerning you. To guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their

hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone.”

Or simply rest in the nature of the mind. Trust yourself to it like crowd-surfing a mosh pit at a rock concert. I’m talking about Vipassana, ‘Insight Meditation.’

Insight Meditation is about losing yourself in the present moment to the exclusion of time, second thoughts, comments, criticism, annotation, and the like, at the same time having perfect clarity with lucidity and no fear of getting lost in there. If nothing else, with Insight Meditation, it seems that time will always see us out. The first hurdle is invoking or getting immersed into Insight Meditation to begin with.

How do we learn Insight Meditation, to trust such a moment of immersion? Well, first by being projected into it, coming back out of it, and liking the experience enough to do it again. We like it because it is crystal clear, lucid, and contains no doubt or interruptions until we come out of it. It is liberating.

Or when Paul McCartney, upon seeing two monkeys having sex in the middle of a road in India, and realizing the liberation in it, wrote the song “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road.”

‘Liberate’, from the Old French Liberare ‘to set free’ or the Scottish word Libber, meaning to lib a farm animal is to castrate it. And the Tibetan word Rangdröl, meaning

'self-liberating' or 'innate liberation.'

Holding on to what no longer exists, 'the past', or what does not yet exist, 'the future', miss the point. And actual meditation is not a chore, but a delight. If it is not, you are not doing it right or doing it at all. Learning to meditate and practicing meditation can be a chore, yet actual meditation (at least Insight Meditation) is anything but a hardship. Insight Meditation is liberating.

Who can predict the particular method of meditation that best suits us? Of course, the sacred texts outline the end results and try to point out the path that leads to those results, yet the actual path we will take, much like our choice of a yidam (if it is a choice), is whatever works for us, said the old lady as she kissed the cow.

So, my best thought on this is try what the sacred books say. Try what your teacher points out. Try, try, try, but in the end, trying and 'trial' does not do it, doing does it. And we do whatever works for us and that because it works. Nothing else works like what works.

IMO, learning meditation takes flexibility on our part. We have to become more nimble, pliable, in order to pass through the straight gate of what in dharma is called 'Recognition', recognizing for ourselves the true nature of the mind.

It took me years to allow myself to understand that the

embrace of dharma is wide and vast, not just narrow and close. In a sense, there is nothing but dharma everywhere we look, whether thick or thin. Buddhists love lists. Yet dharma practice is not as simple as a series of rules or instructions we learn. Yes, the rules exist, yet they are not intended as a straight-jacket. Rules exist to be used, flexed, manipulated, and above all they have to be pliable, flexible in order to work.

If you find yourself up a blind alley with learning meditation and banging your head against a wall, stop doing that. It hurts. The dharma path or way-to-go for each of us must be flexible and pliant. It will fit 'us' individually. Yes, I know. You can say that beating your head with a hammer is good for some people, yet I have not found that is helpful. We don't bang our heads against an obstacle over and over, but rather learn to work with or go around our obstacles. Remove them.

And speaking to myself: Michael, don't imagine you know what's good for you because if you did you would already be past it and enlightened by now. The simple fact that we are not should be enough to for us to know we missed an instruction or two somewhere along the way. Slow down and take the time we need to get enlightened.



WELLSPRING OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

January 12, 2022

Thinking ahead to the future, it is hollow because there is as yet no reality to it. It's also true of dwelling on the past, an ever-dwindling memory of things gone by. At some point, we begin to realize the ineffectualness (and waste) of putting all our eggs in those two baskets, and cease doing so.

The fallback from thoughts of the future or those of the past, is centering on this precious present moment, from which everything does arise. We realize that our worry, worry, worry about the past or future is an enormous

obstacle and waste of time. Until we realize this, we just keep feeding it and tying ourselves up with non-existing attachments like the past and the future. They are no longer or not yet real.

In time perhaps we can learn to conserve this energy and by that remove these distractions (past and future) and center on what is important, the present moment. And this, because it is from the here and the now that everything came that has already passed, and everything that will ever come will arise. Permanence is at a premium in this samsaric world and the present moment is about as close as we come to that. And even with the present, our 'being' is a best becoming and not itself ever permanent.

And so, it seems like the 'smart money', so to speak, the great meditators, concentrate their awareness on the endless and eternal wellspring of this present moment. And so, it behooves us to note that, and do what we can to lessen our attachments to the past and the future. That would enable purification to take place, with the resultant centering on the present and learning to not encourage attachment to the past and future.

As mentioned, experienced (and certainly realized) meditators are not noodling on the past or the future. If I read the texts right, these meditators are resting in the nature of the mind, whatever we can agree that is.

Here is a little poem I wrote some years ago about the well of the present moment:

WATER AND THE WELL

The rare times,
When nothing moves me,
And I don't feel,
Like doing anything.

Perhaps this is some kind of,
Natural meditation,
An effortless detachment,
From my day-to-day world.

All that is missing,
From just being lazy,
Is this awareness,
Of my own condition.

I don't waste time,
Pretending to be busy,
But just sit there,
And for a long time.

Nothing is missing.

Watch a movie,
Read a book,
Sit, or not,

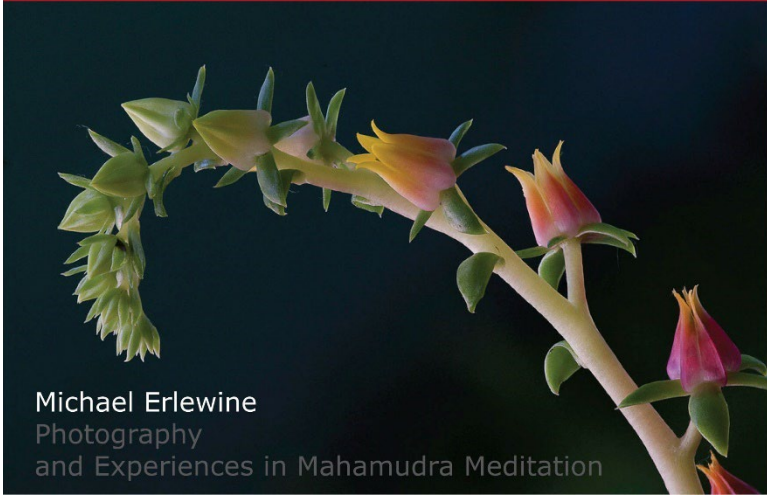
It makes no difference.

I am right here.

The mind is at rest,
The water back in the well.

The Lama of Appearances

Learning Dharma through Nature



Michael Erlewine
Photography
and Experiences in Mahamudra Meditation

THE LAMA OF APPEARANCES

January 13, 2022

I'm not worried about those of you practicing dharma who find that the various texts and dharma roadmaps are working for you. This blog is for those of us who find our dharma path a little different than average or not cookie-cutter enough for us to feel comfortable and fit it. And some of us find the standard protocol not fitting our dharma history. Personally, I have found that one size does not fit all. This is about those who end up wondering where they are in their dharma practice. It might help.

To start out with, what is your deepest 'you'? In other words, where did you come from that you may even have forgotten about? Another way to put this is: where in your past do you remember being naturally most safe and secure?

The 'dharma' within us is like a magnet, and that's exactly where it's going to point for you, to your deepest background story. In my case, it just skipped over decades of my history and went straight for my childhood love of nature. It paid no attention to my carefully arranged cushion and dharma shrine and went right for the jugular of my natural history upbringing. That's where it stopped, and where I found myself once again. That's where I discovered Insight Meditation.

It's not that I had forgotten my past love of natural history, but more like I had forgotten to go there because for me, although very beautiful, Mother Nature is painful to behold, at least for me. Mother Nature never blinks and tells it like it is when it comes to matters of impermanence. When all this went down, it took me a while to pick up on the pieces and figure it all out, but perhaps the dharma is way more organic and natural than we imagine. Instead of top-down as I had imagined it, what if the dharma is more bottom-up, rooted in the land and our history?

The dharma may not be as tidy as we would like it, but instead raw and unforgiving of our gradual

gentrification. Nature does not mince words, IMO.

As I like to describe it, for me my breakthrough from this event started with something like the 'perfect storm' that we hear about these days, at first tearing me down to the ground, with little fanfare, and plunging me beyond politeness back into where I came from as a child, which was the incredible beauty and also the brute force of the natural environment of nature, this land we live in.

I passed right on by my little Buddhist shrine, my meditation pillow, and was out the door, almost clawing my way back to Mother Nature with her forests, meadows, streams, and especially her perfect micro-worlds of plants and critters.

And it was not a conscious decision on my part, but rather a reaction to everything untoward I was facing in my life, a somewhat blind attempt to go home, back to where I came from as a child. I immersed myself in nature, from head to toe, in an effort to get away from what was hurting me.

Each morning found me out in nature before the sun came up, crawling around on my stomach in the cold wet grass taking photos of tiny micro-worlds and critters. And I did this for pretty much six months straight until the cold weather forced me (and my camera) inside.

When was the last time that you saw the sun rise even a few times, much less for six months of sun-ups at a time? That should tell you something was going on with me, because it was, way beyond my expectations. There was no forethought here, only my visceral reaction to the events that put me into this state. It was thoughtless on my part.

With my back against the wall of fate, I was responding to something much deeper inside me than I thought. It was like another form of 'me' took over, someone I had not seen for decades, shades of myself that came from a very much simpler time, back when I was a kid and it was just me and Mother Nature, so to speak. That was like home to me, and I went straight for it and stayed there.

Or, another way to phrase it is that dharma is not so tidy and polite as we might believe, but very much raw and organic, a homing pigeon that heads for home when the chips are down. I was being taken directly to a state of mind I had long forgotten, my love of this natural world, and at the same time introduced to a process that had entirely eluded me up to that point, what is called in dharma terms Vipassana (Insight Meditation). And I didn't even know to name it, my experience during that time.

I had read about, imagined, even dreamed of such a

process, but in the decades of dharma practice I had done, never managed to get beyond perhaps understanding it conceptually, yet I had never experienced it, much less become aware or realized that process.

And suddenly here I was, fully immersed in it, no longer seeing just the object of my photography, this plant or that critter, but for the first time, seeing the 'Seeing' itself, and becoming one with the whole process and not my usual dualistic duo of subject and object. Suddenly there was no commenter, annotator, critic, or even any self consciousness. There was just this vivid awareness, my total immersion in it, and a great clarity and lucidity.

And, as mentioned, I had not even labeled it as Insight Meditation. I only knew I had found something like a home where I could quench the pain of my personal worries, and if this is what it took for me to realize this, it was worth whatever pain to get there it cost me. It is no wonder that I could not wait to get out in nature in the dark just before dawn, day after day, month after month, and plunge myself into this realization. And it went on till late in the fall.

The funny thing is that I never put two and two together. I did not realize this was the dharma inside me speaking, and that I was finally breaking through. I was just content, and happy to just be in that state, the process of Vipassana (Insight Meditation). It was months later

that I understood that this was dharma talking to me in my own language. That's the difference between what I conceptually had thought any realization might be like and an actual taste of the reality.

In fact, it was not until a close friend mine (and our family), a Tibetan monk (Lama Karma) that we had helped to bring over to America, came and visited. And as we walked together out in nature early one morning, Lama Karma (who had done two closed 3-year meditation retreats) explained to me what was happening, which was:

Just as we both shared our teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Lama Karma pointed out that he was our lama and teacher. However, there also were other 'lamas'. All the Buddhist scriptures that we studied, are what is called 'The Lama of the Scriptures', another path or way to learn the dharma. And a third path was the 'Lama of Dharmata', meaning learning from the true nature of the mind itself, which was more advanced yet. And finally, he said, there was 'The Lama of Appearances', which was the fact that natural appearances (like Mother Nature) were also a perfect lama from which we could learn the dharma.

And it was this, so Lama Karma explained, that I was plugged into at the moment. I was main-lining directly to the nature environment as the 'Lama of Appearances' and deeply learning. And it was with this instruction that

I realized that all that I had been going through was the dharma of nature directly instructing me. And I was responding, perhaps because I had been brought down from my high-horse by my situation, and had perhaps become more open to learning.

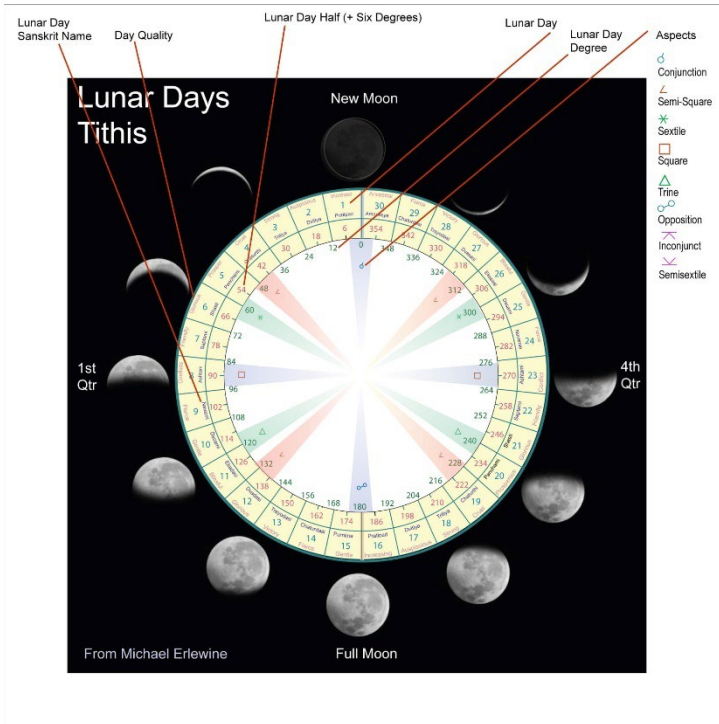
It didn't happen on the cushion or even in our shrine room, but rather this took place as I have described it here, out in nature (my truest background) and directly from appearances themselves. And suddenly, I could see that all of this was dharma, dharma, dharma and that I was, in my own way, breaking through to another dimension of my dharma practice, one more individually attuned to my particular nature.

And with that realization, I not only pulled out from my personal nose dive, but also began the systematic process of extending and expanding my practice of Insight Meditation, which is another whole story.

For those who want to look through an earlier version in more detail, here is a book on the "Lama of Appearances," for those who want to deep dive.

http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/LA_ebook.pdf

[Cover by me]



ASTROLOGY AND THE DHARMA

January 15, 2022

Astrology is of this world, meaning that astrology is an integral part of what in dharma is called "Samsara," this cyclic world of ups, downs, and arounds that we live in. Astrology is ideal for Samsara because it is all about working with cycles, in this case the cycles of the heavenly bodies.

When I first began to have access to the great diaspora

of Tibetan rinpoches, as they fled Tibet, there was a period of maybe ten years or so in 1980s where these rinpoches had nowhere special to go. Because of that, many in our lineage (Karma Kagyu) were available to visit dharma centers like our own, "Heart Center KTC" (Karma Thegsum Chöling). All of a sudden great lamas like the heart sons of the Karmapa were showing up at our door and staying for days or even up to a week in some cases, teaching and sometimes giving empowerments.

As you can imagine, with my interest in astrology already knee-deep, I (kind of) pestered these great beings about Tibetan astrology. What I found is that although all the rinpoches I met support astrology, carried an astrology calendar, and used it, few to none (how about none) seemed to know how these calendars were made. Some special monks did that kind of work. Astrologers in Tibet are called 'Tsipas'. What I did eventually was to find out that there are different Tibetan-year astrological calendars. One version does not fit all. And I made a Tibetan lunar calendar for our lineage here in America for many years.

More confusing is the fact that the three main calendars, one from the Dalai Lama's lineage (Gelug), one the Karmapa's lineage (Kagyu), and the Chinese yearly astrological calendar could vary or differ from one another by up to a month and did!

Furthermore, I eventually found that the Kagyu lineage (the one I belong to) had a yearly calendar called the Tsurphu Calendar, which was based on the ancestral home of the Karmapa, which is Tsurphu Monastery high in Tibet. Anyway, it seemed that in the diaspora, when Tibetan lamas fled Tibet, some of the Tsipas, the astrology lamas, either were imprisoned, died, or otherwise were unable to continue extending the astrological calculations into the future as they had always done.

Well, this troubled me. I was able to find one young Tsipa living in Rumtek, Sikkim (a part of India) who was working on this problem and he had studied with some of the older lamas. Thanks to some help, I was able to invite this monk to come and live at our dharma center here in Big Rapids, Michigan. And so, we brought this monk to our center and began to look into this calculation problem.

Then in 1997, my dharma teacher of many years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, told Margaret and I to go to Tibet on pilgrimage and see His Holiness the 17th Karmapa. He didn't just ask us, but as mentioned he actually told us to go. And when I said to him that of course I aspired to meet the Karmapa one day, he said, no, that we should go now, this summer, within a month. For someone that thinks twice before I leave the house, going to Tibet seemed out of this world, or at least not in my world to date.

Yet, we did, within a month (vaccinations and all) and I took my wife and three of my kids with me, and that's a whole other story, which can be found here for those interested:

"OUR PILGRIMAGE TO TIBET"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Our-Pilgrimage-to-Tibet.pdf>

And I brought with me the calculations that this young monk and I had put together to offer to the young Karmapa, which I did. I had been studying astrology by that time for decades, and I was one a very few astrologers who had apparently discovered the value of the heliocentric natal chart and managed to become empowered in that coordinate system.

Of course, because the Karmapa spoke no English at the time, this required us to speak through a translator, who turned out to be our Tibetan guide through these mountains of Tibet. I tell this story because during our interview, the Karmapa gave me a name, speaking to me directly and saying "You are Tenzin Nyima," which of course I did not understand, until our translator told me this that this meant "Holder and Keeper of the Sun." As you can imagine, that got my attention, because who would know I was a heliocentric astrologer out here in the far reaches of Tibet. Well, perhaps the Karmapa would.

As for speaking to me directly of astrological things, my main dharma teacher, Khenpo Rinpoche, came to our center and gave an entire teaching on astrology, probably because he knew how much I was into it, making it clear to me that while astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, it is not the root. And what he indicated by this was the following.

Astrology is authentic, legitimate, with but one caveat, and that is that astrology was one of our means to handle Samsara, this cyclic world we live in. However, astrology should not be confused with the dharma which functions not only in Samsara, but in Nirvana (Enlightenment) just as well. What he was pointing out to me, I feel I can best explain in the following metaphor.

Imagine a sphere, like this earth, but covered with water, complete with calm seas, towering waters, and wind blowing all over and around.

On the surface of that watery globe is one sailboat. This represents astrology as a means or vehicle. Using the techniques of astrology, we can set the sails of that sailboat to go anywhere we wish on the surface waters on this globe. So, if we are in a bad patch of wind and water, using astrology we can set our astrological sails and move right out of there to some calmer seas and live there. Astrology, as this boat, can do that for us and

for our clients, which is very powerful. Yet, no matter how far and accurately we can sail, we can never reach the center or inner part of the globe. We can only reach its surface water, which again, is Samsara.

Only the dharma can cut through the outer surface (Samsara) and take us within, beyond all the waters and globe. So, the point or bottom line here is that astrology is a creature of Samsara, helping mankind to improve their position through its techniques, and a very valuable one at this, because astrology can help us to find the time and the place to learn to be more aware, which is dharma's province. Beyond that, astrology has no powers. In fact, astrology is very much like the old phrase "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," meaning that astrology can bring about temporary relief and peace, but temporarily only. Our personal ship, so to speak, is going to sink at death, no matter what. We need dharma for true liberation from Samsara.

Again, to repeat my dharma teacher's point: "Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root.'

And so, astrology is what is called a relative truth, one perfect for negotiating this Samsaric life in which we find ourselves, helping us to find peace and contentment for the moment. Yet, to take us beyond dualism, into non-dual awareness, that requires the dharma and the development of nondual awareness.

That view I have found very worthwhile to contemplate and consider. It helps to explain a lot to me about what astrology can and cannot do.

[Diagram by me of the Tibetan and Indian approach to the lunar cycle.]



PRACTICING MEDITATION IS NOT THE SAME
AS MEDITATING

January 16, 2022

Insight meditation (Vipassana) is difficult enough that usually it has to be pointed out to us by an authentic dharma teacher and is not something we just pick up on our own. And, who's to say when and where actual Insight Meditation for each of us will arise beyond what we are already doing in the way of dharma practice.

We may be already working to that end, practicing, but our particular personal realization path may be more circuitous and not follow the path of our conceptual (or textbook) choosing. It's not just up to us and we don't dictate where the rains of life flow, cutting rivulets in our history as they go. Life is not nearly so cut and dried as we might like to think or imagine when it comes to these things.

I do believe that we can look to our heart to remember where we came from and perhaps find our way back to there, because that's where we may find our original path. At least, that was true in my life, despite all of my intellectual assumptions. The actual process of life finds a way to bring us to the dharma that is beyond thought or any conceptions we may have imagined or contrived. After all, beyond all our intellection we are indeed organic. We have senses and roots that should be paid attention to.

The various dharma texts, our teachers, even friend

practitioners can sketch out a dharma map for us to follow, and they sometimes do. That does not mean we can follow it, try as we might. It just may not work for us. We each can be so different. That was true in my case. I studied many of the traditional dharma-practice routes in detail and, of course, I assumed that's just how things would go for me.

I was wrong! That's not how things went. Those traditional maps of dharma perhaps are fine for many folks, but in my case these rivers ran dry. I put in the time, decades, but nothing much happened. I am thankful to my dharma teacher for unpacking me enough, carefully freeing me up from my obscurations so that I had at least some freedom to look around. And like magnets, when I finally was free enough to move, it turns out that I didn't follow the rules, the books, or the maps, but instead found myself going straight for the heart of my own upbringing deep in my childhood past.

In other words, when I finally realized Insight Meditation as actual meditation (and not just practice), it wasn't a neat and pretty affair that brought it about, either. Before it started to work, I was pretty much tore down to the level of the ground. It was quite viscous, what I had to work through, and it was a quite rough as well. That's what it took to get my attention.

And to my surprise, it didn't even happen on the meditation cushion as I had always assumed it would.

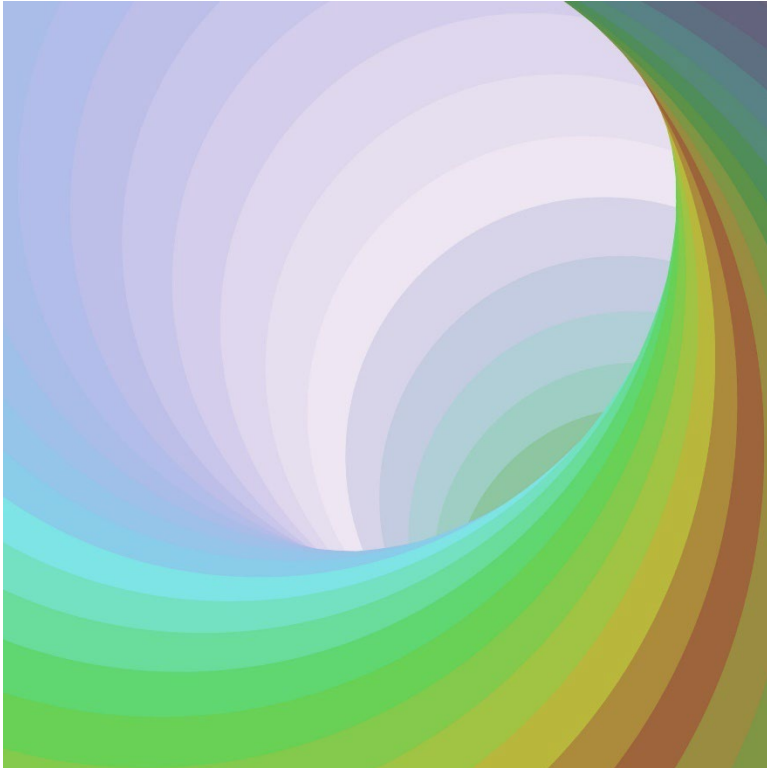
Instead, Insight Meditation happened out in the meadows and woods, not on a fine sunny day, so to speak, but rather in the midst of what was for me quite a terrible time.

I had been laid off and had no income to support my family, and had reached a point of no-return. And it took some pretty serious events to pop me out of the well-worn groove I was stuck in and all this left me at what seemed like a crossroads in life and especially in dharma practice. In other words, it took that much pressure to bring me down to where the rubber meets the road, beyond conceptualizing.

I only mention this because we tend to imagine the future and plan for that, which I found not to be helpful. When they say to take it a day a time, that is good advice. We don't know what way we are going to have to twist and turn in this life. It's better to just drive the car than to assume that following a road map will get us some where we need to go. Be flexible and bend with the wind is my advice. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. Today is all we know for sure.

Rinpoche has been so right in what he has taught me, and not just in dharma instructions, but in life instructions as well. It is something to encounter someone who cares more for us than we know how to care for ourselves. Such a reflection is a mirror in which we can correctly see ourselves and adjust accordingly.

[Photo by me.]



THE WONDER OF INSIGHT MEDITATION

January 18, 2022

What's precious? This precious human life I have. Ever since I was a child, I knew I did not want my life to be wasted. And my family is precious, of course. However, on a day-to-day basis what is most precious to me these years is the practice of Vipassana, Insight Meditation.

And the preciousness is in the doing of it, not just in the learning or the practice of doing it, which took me many years to develop before the actual daily doing of it. Like breathing, it seems I can't imagine living without it. It's a one-way trip, IMO. Once found, there is no going back, and this by choice. I wrote this poem about practicing meditation and actually meditating.

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.

Poetry aside, the point is the we practice until we can actually meditate and there is no point in making practice itself a habit.

I'm grateful for the introduction to Insight Meditation as

pointed out by my teacher of 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. And after having this pointed out, I am also grateful for the opportunity to spend several years of intense practice preparing for what followed. And what followed was the perfect storm of events that brought me down to where the rubber meets the road long enough for me to actually experience Insight Meditation firsthand, although the road to get there was, for me, very painful indeed.

And finally, I am grateful for the time, any more years I have to actually learn to expand and extend Insight Meditation as part of the Kagyu style of Mahamudra practice.

Was it worth all those decades of dharma practice? It was, because learning and practicing toward the arising of Insight Meditation can be long and grueling, yet once awakened, Insight Meditation, which as a form of recognizing the actual nature of the mind, remains present, because all realizations are 'realizations', not just conceptual understandings. In other words, recognition (a realization) does not go away but remains permanently with us. Yes, these realizations can go fallow if we do not work with them, but they are still there, liberated and free. Like starter dough, Insight Meditation is up to us to extend and expand them.

And as I like to point out, with the discovery or arising of Insight Meditation, cojoined with that same exact

moment, I realized the coming together with Insight Meditation of my many years of Shamata practice, Tranquility Meditation. These two forms of meditation are connate, different sides of the same coin, and they are equally recursive, meaning they feed on each other to the extent that the output of one is the input of the other, and vice versa, back and forth, producing an exponential curve of increasing awareness.

The result is that Insight Meditation becomes natural or automatic, something I enter or engage, am immersed in, and then extend that immersion for an indefinite period of time, non-dualistically, and eventually come out of it quite naturally. And then again and again and again.

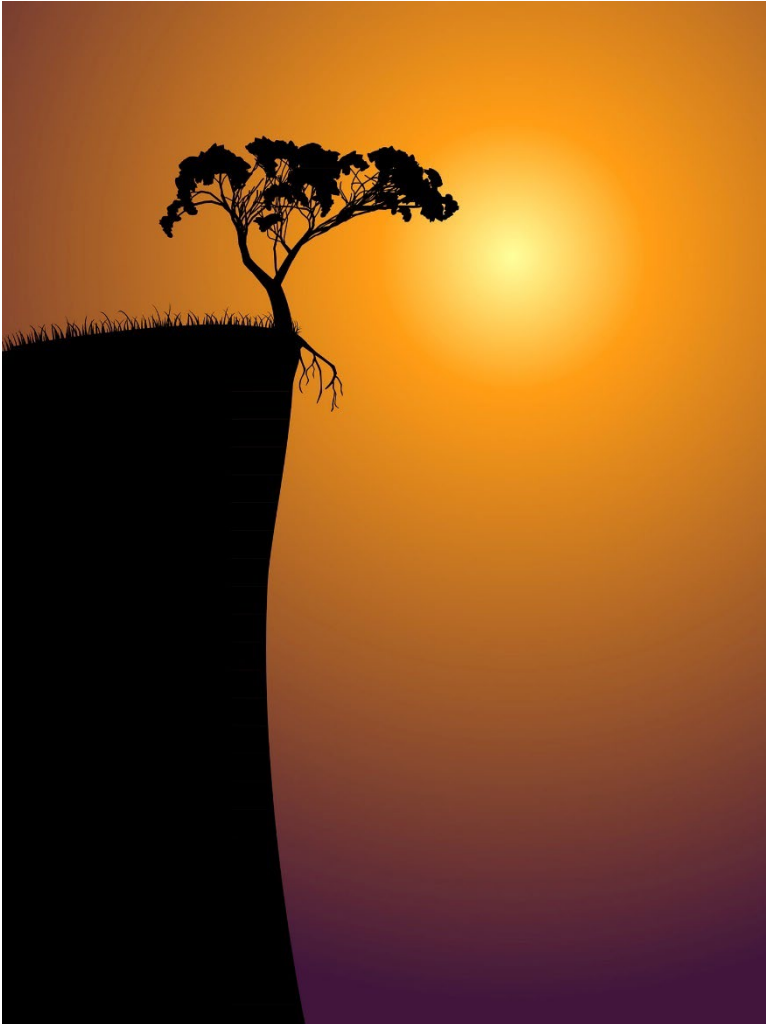
That's all there is to it because that's all there is that interests me.

-- Chönyi Rangdröl

After being given the bodhisattva vow with a large number of folks, when I later asked my dharma teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, for a Bodhisattva name, I had to wait for this to happen. Eventually, sometime later, Rinpoche told me that my Bodhisattva name was Sempé Chönyi Rangdröl.

'Sempé' means warrior (bodhisattva). The Tibetan word Rangdröl, means 'self-liberation' or 'innate liberation'

and the word Chönyi means 'Dhamata' or true nature of the mind. Thus, the self-liberation of the true nature of the mind, or something like that. Why Rinpoche chose that name, I imagine I will be in the process of figuring out for the rest of my life.



LESS IS MORE

January 19, 2022

Each year that I live, to remain even somewhat the same,

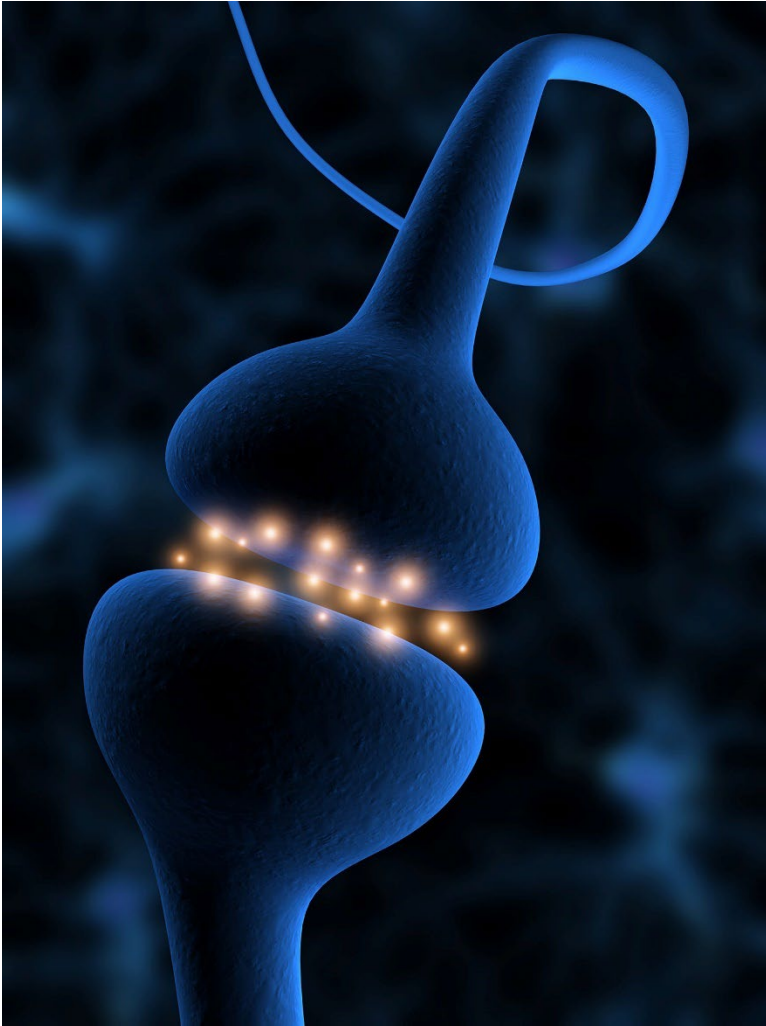
requires a greater sacrifice than the year before, meaning I have to work harder to remain as healthy, thin, and alive as the previous year. There are less foods I can eat without an effect on my health, more exercise I have to do to not go downhill physically, and more demand on me to remain positive and on point. These are not new ideas.

And of course, this is by definition a losing battle because it is impossible in this life for each of us not to eventually reach a point of diminishing returns, try as we might. Ultimately, we are all headed in the same direction.

At the same time, it is hard not to continue to project our trajectory in a straight line toward the future, as if we are going to live forever, while at the same time struggling to remain as we once were.

I don't need to lecture any of you who are older because you know this only too well. You live it every day. About the best we can do as we age is, as University of Michigan Economist Kenneth Boulding once told me, "Michael, we learn to fail successfully." It's either that or as the poet Dylan Thomas put it "Rage, Rage against the dying of the light." I see no point in the raging.

I will do my best to fail successfully.



LEARNING TRANQUILITY MEDITATION BY
INTEREST NOT ROTE

January 20, 2022

Contrast or compare the traditional method of learning Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) by rote practice to finding our path of natural interest and following that, so that our interest holds our feet to the fire, so to speak, as opposed to 'trying' to be mindful, which is the earmark of traditional Shamata Meditation instruction. What if we are mindful because we are interested and not by rote practice? Is that such an unusual notion and how would that work?

Another way to say this is what does it take to fire your synapses and get your interest alive and living?

IMO, this seems like two sides of the same coin. On the one hand we try to teach ourselves 'mindfulness', to be mindful using rote practice like watching our breath. And, on the other hand, we are mindful because we are naturally interested in what we are doing. I favor the second approach, following my natural interests, rather than methodically training my mind to be mindful by rote iterative practice.

Of course, both approaches work, but less is said about learning Shamata by following what naturally interests us. In the first approach, the traditional following of the breath, etc., the goal seems to be to develop muscle memory by training the mind to stay on task. However, some (like me) found this method to be boring and thus

somewhat ineffective.

In the second method (the one I ended up using), we stay on task by following our interests, what interests us, not only as regards formally designated dharma tasks, but anything in life that interests us. And this because the point in this second approach is to stay with our interests rather than develop (somewhat artificially) muscle memory by rote training.

All of my life, from when I was quite young, I have followed the path of least resistance, meaning my natural interests, which in my case, as a young boy, was mostly about nature and natural history. Being raised far out in the country with no neighbors my age and thus no one to play with other than my younger brothers, nature became my closest friend.

What's the worry with pursuing our interests? That we will run out of interests and somehow stall out? That has never happened in my life, because one interest leads to another, and that to another, and so on. If nothing else, it seems that following our natural or native interest amounts to a perpetual-motion machine driving us forward.

And by that natural interest, my ability to stay on task has blossomed organically, without the need for muscle memory training. Sure, following our natural interest also creates habits and muscle memory, yet perhaps

(IMO) in a more comfortable and organic fashion.

I find that I balk at forced or rote training, preferring instead to follow my natural path of interest as it unfolds. I have always done this, and it works well for me. The only point in bringing this up, IMO, is that I spent some 32 years trying to learn Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) by rote practice and never learned it. I slavishly persisted in trying rote practice, against my results and good sense.

As to why that is, as mentioned, perhaps this is because from an early age (six-years old) I was used to the other approach, following my natural interest and I fail to understand why rote training is superior. Perhaps it is not superior, but just easier to teach someone than trying to figure out what interests them. Of course, that's the whole point: we have to do that ourselves, find what interests us.

If the point of Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) is to be mindful, meaning to stay on point, what better way to do that is there than following our organic or natural sense of interest? With our organic interest, we can't help but stay on point because this is what we are interested in. We are held to point by our own interest.

My interest in bugs and butterflies as a young boy seems to me now no different than my interest in dharma today. However, I distinguish my interest in

dharma from my interest in dharma 'practice' using rote methods. These rote practices never captivated or interested me. Of course, I did the practices because I was told that is what one does who practices dharma. My mistake.

At the same time, I never took to rote practice. It reminds me too much of Catholic grade school, the strictness of the nuns, and the meaningless drills we were forced to do. I experience such meaningless exercises as invasive of my natural sense of interest and even destructive as a learning device. It's not that I just avoided them. Far from it. I did them, but just couldn't learn from them. As mentioned, I practiced sitting Shamata Meditation for some 32 years and never learned it. Now, that's an embarrassing admission.

As it turned out, the reason for this is because I already knew exactly how to be mindful from all my years of being mindful about whatever I was interested in. As far as I can tell, there is no difference between mindfulness in dharma and mindfulness in any other area of our life. Mindfulness is mindfulness, my being mindful.

To be mindful is to be aware and to be aware that we are aware and being mindful. Dharma is nothing other than the awareness itself and the goal of Shamata Meditation is to be aware of the awareness itself.

And so, nothing we are interested in, as far as the

interest itself goes, is more or less sacred, meaning: everything is sacred. Interest is awareness, awareness of what interests us.

If you have trouble learning by rote, as Tranquility Meditation (Shamata) is often taught, consider going freelance and following your own interests and build the muscle memory of mindfulness that way.

[Graphic shows synapses.]



THE STORY OF DIFFICULT DHARMA

January 21, 2022

With dharma progress, how slow is slow? The short answer is 'slow!' There can be a great difference between what we want or even what we 'will' for ourselves and what we can actually do. How's that?

I found this out for myself the hard way, meaning incredibly slowly. This might as well be in story format, so here goes. First, a little introduction.

Like many dharma practitioners before me, I kind of worked up the ladder of the various purification

practices to try to get my attachments and cloudiness down to what we might call my fighting weight. I had read the sacred texts, attended the in-person teachings from authentic lamas, and generally did my best to get my dharma ducks all in a row. And this included, laying out my own scenarios as to just how it could happen.

Of course, that and a ticket would get me a ride on the bus. I had no idea and certainly no accurate fix or map as to where I was going or how it would go. That's a joke or a dream I had, as It turned out, quite unrelated to the actuality.

It seems, at least in my experience, that dharma is much more organic and free than it is scripted and planned. That I found out. In other words, the dharma is part of natural reality and not subject to conventions and civil rules. I should have know that, but I was following the bread crumbs in the sacred texts.

Or perhaps we can better plan in the so-called relative dharma practices (dualistic) like the Common Preliminaries, Lojong, or the Extraordinary Preliminaries (Ngondro), and so on. Yet, when it comes to the more advanced dharma practice, which are non-dualistic, like Insight Meditation, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and so on, anything goes.

Apparently, we don't set a date for the advent of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) to arise in our lives. I am not

talking here about studying, listening to teachings, or practicing Insight Meditation. Those we can more or less plan out. Instead, I'm talking about actually meditating Insight Meditation. That's not exactly the last chapter in the Insight Meditation book or course. We don't plan that. We wait until it arises and that can be a long time. All this up until now has been the introduction. Now to get to the point, that which I think is more interesting.

Once Insight Meditation arises and takes hold, and there is no guarantee where or when that may be. Of course, in my own case, I had my shrine room all ready. The water bowls were filled, a candle burning, my meditation cushion plumped out, and all of that. I was ready for Insight Meditation (whatever that was) to take place.

Little did I know that Insight Meditation was, as mentioned, much more organic than that. It has a mind of its own and, aside from my personal shrine as a birthplace, Insight Meditation has the entire rest of the world to arise in. Insight Meditation is no respecter of persons, as far as I can tell, including me.

And while I had earmarked my personal shrine as the landing field of Insight Meditation, and was out on the landing strip to flag it down, that never happened. Not even close.

Insight Meditation is in love with the heart, with Bodhicitta, and it always goes for the most sacred part

of our history, not what we may have groomed for it. In my case, Insight Meditation, skipped right over my idea of dharma, shrine, cushion, and so on... and it went immediately way back into my distant childhood and arose in my love and devotion to nature and natural history. I had no idea and never saw it coming, but there it was, along with me, nevertheless.

Right in the middle of the fields, streams, meadows, and forests, Insight Meditation arose and commanded my attention for the first time. I was crawling around in the wet grass with camera in hand taking close-up photos of small critters and micro-worlds. Then, instead of my continuing seeing nature, suddenly I was seeing the 'Seeing" that was seeing nature. I was one with the moment and all of nature, and I spent a good six months dipping in and out of Insight Meditation while I watched the sun come up each morning all summer until the cold and frost drove me inside. That's how Insight Meditation arose. Now I am getting to the hard part: what to do next?

After being driven inside by the cold, I still had my little inside photo studio (a small room with good light) to continue with my photograph, sort of, as I had been doing outside. I continued on with my process of photographing, but felt the limitations of no plants to photograph, the winter light, and confined space. Something had to give, and it turned out it was me that gave.

In the beginning, it was only through the process of photography that I could do Insight Meditation. And as wonderful as that was, I yearned to expand and extend my process of Insight Meditation to something other than photography. What I had in mind was my writing. I wanted to do Insight Meditation through the process of writing blogs like these.

Well, why not, thought I? I would just articulate the writing process and, voila, be doing Insight Meditation. I would just will it so and it would be. Yet, no, nothing happened. "Will as I would, by force of will, nothing at all took place. My writing process was as ordinary as it ever was. I was powerless to make it be other. I tried and tried and tried. It seemed that I was frozen in place, unable to lift a finger toward that goal.

And yet, even the textbooks and the teachings made it clear that after Insight Meditation was possible, it has to be extended and expanded. What the books did not tell me is that this process of expansion and extension could be very difficult. And it was, at least for me.

It was like having a charley horse in my leg or as if my leg went to sleep, and I willed it to move and nothing happened. My leg didn't move. You can be sure I worked at this, like all the time, every day, and month after month. And this because I wanted to use writing as the process of Insight Meditation. Yet, it seemed that

will had little to do with it, at least initially.

Yet, or so it seems, in this whole world of life, the one opening or window through which Insight Meditation appeared was through photography. That window was remained open and I could see through it. Everything else was as opaque as it had always been, including the process of writing and the writing itself.

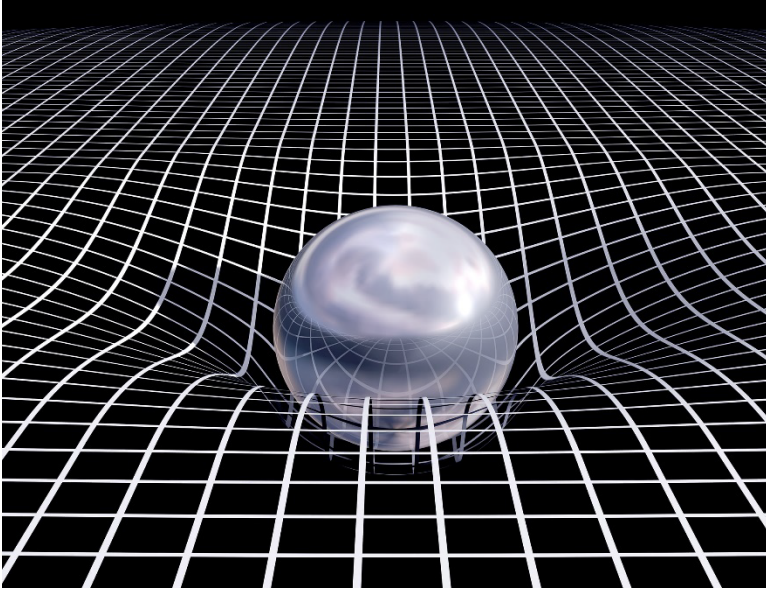
I would have taken 'no' for an answer had it not been for this constant urge within me to expand and extend Insight Meditation beyond just using it through the process of taking nature photos. Well, that and my wish to move or expand Insight Meditation from photography also into writing. Yet, there I remained frozen in time and space.

I can say this. It took me from a year to a year and a half of constant effort and trial (trying) to extend Insight Meditation into writing things like these blogs. Yet, it was possible and it did eventually happen. I write this here to encourage anyone interested, NOT to give up and to inform you that (at least in my case) progress in this respect was very, very, very slow, almost imperceptible. I wish something swifter for you, but for me apparently that was not possible. It took all that time, every minute of it. Yet, I never gave up because I could not accept not being able to write through the process of Insight Meditation. Transferring the process of Insight Meditation to another form was excruciatingly

slow, but yet possible. And that is what we need to know. It is possible.

So, there you have the gist of my message here. Was it worth the effort? Absolutely, beyond all measure it was worth it. Yet, until it was accomplished, I did not know that I could do it, so that also is important to keep in mind, that I had to try and at the same time I had no guarantee that I would succeed, only that I felt it was very important that I do.

[Illustration of difficulty.]



FINDING THE GROOVE

January 22, 2022

Staying on point does not just mean pinpoint focus of some kind, but rather our remaining aware of our awareness most or all of the time, and we first have to choose to do this, and then actually do it without tiring. It's like switching from being out of the groove to being in the groove, where once in the groove, our own inertia keeps us there. Yet, getting there can be an issue.

It's quite an aerodynamical feat for us to remain aware without tiring, with no effort. And its not so much

finding the energy within ourselves to make the effort as it is finding an interest (Bodhicitta) that will keep us awake and aware, which is better than effort. In my experience, this degree of interest or oxygen can be found only in Insight Meditation or one of other nondual meditation practice.

It can't be found in the struggle of what are called the 'relative' methods of dharma practice, most of which have too much friction. I'm talking about the dualistic practices, like the Common Preliminaries (Four Thoughts), Lojong, the Extraordinary Preliminaries (Ngondro), etc. As mentioned, instead what is required here are the nondual meditation practices, Insight Meditation in particular, where we can be fully immersed beyond any sense of time and its drag.

Even with Insight Meditation, and our learning to refine it, some residual sense of effort remains. In fact, it has been my experience that refining the more advanced dharma practices takes persistence. Removing the effort required is, well, also required and this can take years or perhaps lifetimes.

Yet, everything points toward and heads in that direction, one of no effort. It is a matter of incremental advance, an advance that is so slow that being able to measure or be aware of any forward movement takes months. It's almost as if only in hindsight we can see any movement.

At the same time, apparently, there is no choice. It's the only game in town, so to speak, developing full awareness all of the time. And, as pointed out, this cannot be maintained unless the effort is removed. So, this becomes IMO the 'sine qua non' of realization requirements.

And the journey to effortless meditation is slow and deliberate, a succession of minute incremental advancements that are almost unmeasurable. Yet, they happen and add up.

This reminds me of our climb in the high mountains of Tibet to visit Shel-Drak, the 'Crystal Cave', Guru Rinpoche's first cave, where he bound the demons under oath. The air was so thin and we so tired that we could only walk maybe twenty feet before we had to stop, take off our backpack, and throw ourselves down on the ground for a spell to catch our breath. It was only after a long while that we could look back and see that we had climbed a great distance. The effort to have no effort in dharma practice is like that. In my experience, it is not easy.

And it is always a process of diminishing returns, of ever finer refinements, until we have no impediments or effort. Much ado about almost nothing.



THE COOKIE CUTTER ANALOGY

January 23, 2022

With me, all this dharma practice, at least the results of practice, is gradual, gradual, gradual. Results come gradually. What used to be just a little touch or taste, a hole or window in the opaqueness of Samsara, becomes familiar until what was once a single portal becomes an everyday rarity, and that portal is now common. When I

look back on my growing familiarity with the mind, it all comes into focus. What was a struggle becomes gradually easier, increasingly more natural, until I can do Insight Meditation almost at will. What was a once in a blue-moon-sort-of-thing becomes available to me on call.

I work on myself until my mind is such that everything I do carries the imprint of my familiarity and recognition of mind. I marvel at the truth, that instead of working to perfect a particular talent or skill, I work on the mind itself, making it more pliant, and then anything I do, write, or say carries that imprint or signature.

So, the takeaway is not for me to concentrate on the particular object of practice, but rather to concentrate on the 'objectifier', the awareness that recognizes the nature of the mind itself.

Work not on the cookies we cut, but rather on the cookie cutter that cuts the cookies. And this because the cut cookies are only as good as the cookie cutter is well formed. Make sense?

This same is true of our mind and what we do with it. Develop or refine the mind and then anything we do with the mind will imprint and carry that stamp. It's like the Tibetan story of the king who wanted to cover his kingdom with leather so that everywhere he walked his feet would feel comfortable. Of course, more sense

would be to make a pair of leather shoes.

The same is true of this cookie-cutter analogy, that instead of working on this subject, that subject, or some other subject, trying to perfect it, how much more sense it makes to work on becoming more familiar with the nature of our mind itself so that our view would be improved no matter what subject we take up.

Of course, this is just what Tibetan dharma and mind training is all about. The Tibetans do not assume that our mind, just as it comes out of the box, so to speak, is good to go and that the minds of all infants are perfect.

The Tibetan approach is that the mind, all minds, require preparation and exercise, before being turned loose on the world. Much of the more advanced dharma teachings are about introducing us to the true nature of our own mind, so that at last we are familiar with it.

And, I have told this anecdote before, but it fits exactly here. I did not first learn about mind training from the Tibetans. That realization came as a young man, early on in my life through a reading of the diaries of the author Franz Kafka. In those diaries was a single sentence that caught my interest, one I spent many years attempting to make sense of. And that line was:

“Each line I write, it already has perfection.”

After much contemplation, I realized what I have tried to point out above, that any work on becoming familiar with the nature of our own mind will change our view and impress itself on anything we do in life.

[Photo of a more serious cookie cutter.]



COMPLETE IMMERSION IN TIME

January 24, 2022

IMO, the following is a good definition of Insight Meditation. This is from "The Thirty Verses" by Vasubandu, as translated by Khenpo David Choephel.

(#27)

"When you place before yourself

The thought that 'All of these indeed
Are mere awareness!' as your focus,
You are not resting in just that."

(#28)

"When consciousness no longer observes
A focus, it dwells in mere awareness.
Since there is nothing to apprehend,
There's nothing apprehending it."

For me, this perfectly says what Insight Meditation is all about, provided it is understood that this goes on while doing whatever else we are doing. In other words, this sense of objectless nonduality (timelessness) takes place while we are engaged in everyday life, meaning the dharma practice of fully resting in this moment. In the midst of samsara, Insight Meditation arises.



A STORY OF SEEING THE 'SEEING' ITSELF

January 25, 2022

When Insight Meditation first arose in my life, I was not sitting silently on my cushion in front of my little shrine. Not at all. In fact, I was soaking wet, busy crawling around on my belly in the wet morning grass just as the sun rose, taking closeup photos of small critters and tiny

perfect micro-worlds.

The point is that I'm used to immersing myself in Insight Meditation (Vipassana) in the middle of action and not while sitting on the cushion. It could have been the other way around, but for me that was not permitted.

And over the course of time, I have learned to, in addition to doing Insight Meditation through close-up photography, also do Insight Meditation through the activity of writing these blogs or various kinds of essays. At this point this is perfectly natural for me and is a complete form of meditation because through it I find that I am becoming familiar with the actual nature of the mind through expanding and extending my recognition of its nature .

Personally, I identify with the Karma Buddha Family and the activity that goes along with that family. It turns out that I just happen to prefer meditation on-the-go, so to speak, call it meditation in action. It does not matter. One style does not suit all. Just as we have individual yidams (dharma paths), we each must find our own particular form that nondual meditation takes.

However, what all forms of meditation have in common is that they are about awareness. Natively, we all have awareness, otherwise we could not get through the day. For example, we have to be aware of what we are doing to do our jobs. What is missing for many, and what is

required for dharma meditation, is not only to be aware outside us, but to also be aware of awareness itself , and maintain the awareness that we are aware.

In my case, by doing whatever I do to be aware, be it photography or writing, I find that I can completely rest in the awareness of this present moment while I either compose photos or put together words for sentences like these. The point is that something is going on, something happening that I am involved in, and now here comes what is hard to define, because the essence of this kind of meditation is nondual and thus ineffable.

I am plunged and immersed in the moment, much like when we bob for apples in a tub. In the nondual meditation process, I let go to the exclusion of monitoring or annotating what I am doing. I'm all in, so to speak.

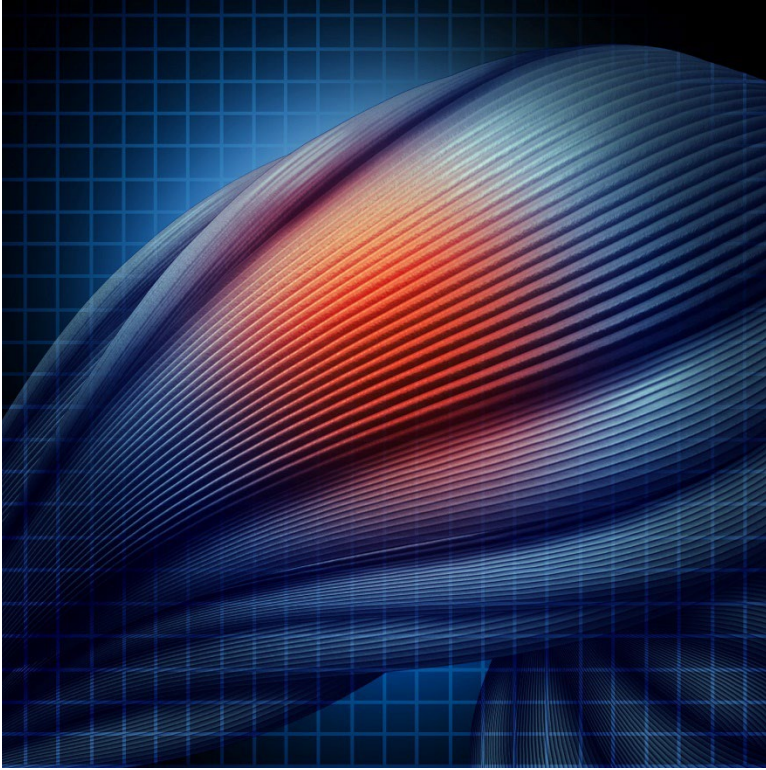
Yet, in that immersive process, clarity and lucidity is so bright that I intuitively create photo images or put words together without thought or having to think. I would say it is like 'automatic writing', but that would not be fair to the incredible process and legacy of Vipassana (Insight Meditation), which combines clarity and lucidity with the purity of the insight of direct seeing.

And the byproduct (or what rubs off) from this particular Insight Meditation tends to appear as a kind of signature on the photo images or written works. They

somehow contain the imprint or impression of the actual process of Insight Meditation.

Now this may sound like just some fancy words here, my trying to express the experience, but the actual process is simply pure and direct, the product of vivid awareness and nonduality.

I can't say or tell you what your introduction to Insight Awareness will be like or what mental or physical medium will work perfectly for you. From my own experience, the only advice I have is to follow your interests deep down, wherever the oxygen that moves you lives. Give yourself to that with all your heart and don't be afraid of being lost in the meditation process. You can be sure that time will see you out.



MENTAL CHARLEY HORSE

January 27, 2022

Every day has its 'ins' and 'outs', especially these days. I can never count on tomorrow being as navigable as today. I don't want to say that it is a 'crap shoot' because most days it's not. Then it is. It's my responsibility, meaning my inability to respond to what is permitted on a given day that is the problem.

As mentioned, most days I'm good to go, so to speak. And then things attenuate or get a little thin, and whatever I was monitoring or interested in runs out and I'm left holding an empty bag, so to speak. Again, my problem and I am aware of it.

What I need is to just relax with whatever rolls in, and I'm working on that every day, which does not mean that I am up to the task some days. I end up zigging when I should have zagged and suddenly, I'm feeling exposed and vulnerable. And usually, I use that exposure and vulnerability by bringing it to the path, as the dharma teachings say. Yet I still have an obstinate streak in me that rears up every once in a while. It's a kink I have to work out.

Instead of rolling with the waves, I mistakenly or obstinately go against myself, only to find me as the odd man out, self-isolated, and roiling against the tides. Not ever helpful and I know better. As mentioned, I am aware of it.

Of course, I write about stalling out and being left in the lurch, quite often, and usually I dive right in and bring it to the path unless I don't. When the good times run out, my interest wanes, and I uncover a knot of belligerence in myself I have to work through, well, I have to work through it, which I am now doing.

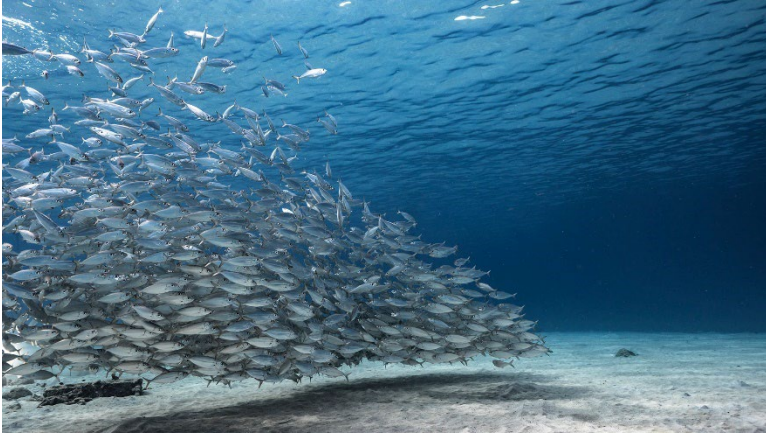
I do believe that we each owe ourselves the same kindness that we say we owe to others. I often speak of putting my 'Self' out to pasture as we would an old cow, give it enough sunshine and fresh hay to not upset it, and certainly not persecute the 'self' and its bad habits. I say that, and I also do that most of the time, until I don't. And when I don't, I then find myself where I have been these last few days. I'm a bit of a slow learner.

I do have a sense of humor about all this, and I'm busy wearing down my resistance to the common-sense idea of working with myself (just as I am) rather than opposing or damning anything. It's like a charley horse that seizes up until we can massage and work it out. I'm now working it out, pain and all. It's coming along and getting better.

Since I like to stay current with my readers, I feel I should tell it like it is if I can. And I can. Pardon me while I have a little 'Come to Jesus' talk with myself.

These harder times are just a course correction, a sign of purification taking place, pointing me in the right direction.

[Abstract illustration of a muscle.]



A SCHOOL OF POINTERS

January 28, 2022

[This blog is a bit involuted, for which I apologize. I am still sorting out the changes from my recent visit to the hospital, the parts that were not immediately apparent. I appreciate your patience.]

Well, now that I am working on a bit of a course correction in my life, my many problems have come back into focus as mainly a single one, and that's me, myself, and I. And once I accept this as my main problem, it's always a relief and it feels like I'm back to moving forward again, thanks to the saying "We can't change what we refuse to accept," the bellwether of any counselor and their client. So, I'm back more to the old

Peter Pan quote 'Second star to the right and straight on till morning'. However, we can't ever sneak up on a mirror or outrun ourselves.

And it's tough to have a 'reset' on a Full Moon because two trains are running in opposite directions, one up and the other down, And the wear and tear of that can get to me. Anyway, as of today, the 'flutter in my dovecot' is calming down and I can't wait to see just how (if any) I've changed through this time. No, I won't have changed very much and any change will probably not be visible to anyone but me, yet an adventure this is and it's not without a certain freshness.

I can remember once again that the dharma is all about awareness, and I don't mean just awareness of myself in the mirror, but awareness of 'Awareness' itself, something that dwarfs anything personal. If I forget that, I'm soon marching off-track again.

Awareness of awareness (awareness of being aware) folds back on itself, bringing with it the recursion I need in order to stay centered. Without it, without Insight Meditation, everything is just too busy, too contradictory, too much in doubt, with pointers pointing in every direction. I need the meaningful pointers in life to be like when a school of fish all point in the same direction. I can go along with that. It makes sense. So, how hard is that to do?

Well, it's not hard to be aware in life of whatever we are doing right at the moment, like being aware of the current object of our attention (like this sentence you are reading). That is our innate awareness busy objectifying. And then, it's only a skip and a jump from there to be aware of that innate awareness itself that is doing the objectifying, which amounts to just being aware that we are aware. And, if we can relax enough, we can be aware of that awareness to the point that we are fully immersed in the awareness of being aware, and with nothing hanging out. And this, so to speak, without a doubt, comment, or quip.

That is what Vipassana (Insight Meditation) is all about and why we practice realizing it. In other words, we are occupied making Awareness itself the object of our awareness.

[Photo of a murmuration or school of fish.]



“THE MUSIC GOES ROUND AND ROUND AND IT COMES OUT HERE”

January 28, 2022

Like most of us, I have spent many decades (if not lifetimes) going around and around in Samsara, this cyclic world we find ourselves in. As to where is the 'bright' spot in all this, that would be found, IMO, in

what is called Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

Insight Meditation is the way through or beyond Samsara, call it our portal into Nirvana, or perhaps a wormhole into Nirvana, a process opening that can be extended and expanded.

I can look around my mind as much as I like, take as long as I want, and feel free to be 'me', whatever that is. And when all is said and done, when it's time to go home or back inside Samsara for the night, so to speak, I'm going to end up talking about Insight Meditation every time. In fact, this is the first thing I do each day when I get up, engage Insight Meditation. It's like my mandatory cup of coffee. Now, why is that?

It's easy. In fact, it's Pavlovian, how addicted I am to Insight Meditation and why I seek it out. There's nothing like it in my experience, nothing I would rather do. I don't feel comfortable doing anything else and it's been this way for many years. Yet, don't think of it as a static state. Instead, it is an ongoing process of expanding and extending recognition through Insight Meditation.

And this because Insight Meditation sees through or beyond Samsara to the non-dual process of recognizing Samsara as Nirvana, if only a bit at a time. Insight Meditation is like a portal or keyhole beyond Samsara. Through it, we can resolve Samsara into Nirvana.

Because the dharma textbooks state that Insight Meditation is ineffable, beyond description and words, and they are right, we can only kind of point out Insight Meditation to others as best we can. In itself, it is inexpressible. I've found that out. The Tibetan analogy most often encountered is that of a mute, one who cannot speak, tasting sugar. He or she knows what sugar tastes like, but cannot express it in words.

However, it does not stop me from trying my best to describe it, to find the words, and to somehow communicate to anyone interested just why it is in our interest to learn Insight Meditation.

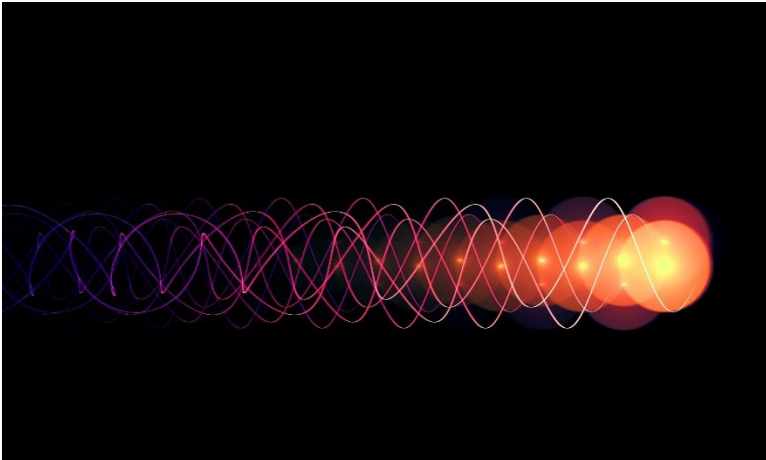
One of the centering of problems that come from getting closer to where the rubber meets the road, the nitty-gritty, as they say, is discarding what has distracted us all along. We cull out those distractions and end up just being more direct. At the same time, because of the "culling" process, we have less to point at or point out. The advice or remedy becomes increasingly simple, so it's hard to ask for your patience when I keep saying the same thing over and over again from different views, trying to be more concise. In the dharma, repetition seem to be required.

I tell myself every day or so that it's time for me to call it a day about talking about Insight Meditation, and not belabor the point any further, that point being that it is invaluable that we learn Insight Meditation. I'm like a

stuck record, even to my own mind, although I can't seem to let go of this feeling that I want to tell others about this particular form of meditating called 'Insight Meditation'.

I can tell you about Insight Meditation and do, how one might go about learning it, and the difficulty of practicing it at first, and on and on and on. Yet, I can't experience it for you, or directly give that experience to you. Each of us has to do that ourselves, yet the caveat is that probably someone has to show us how to do that, yet, as mentioned, it cannot be put into words. That's a dilemma.

I could take my marbles and go home, so to speak, except on this issue (apparently) I am shameless. I won't give up writing and describing the value (at least as it exists in my life) of Insight Meditation.



RESPONSIBILITY: THE ABILITY TO RESPOND

January 29, 2022

I don't have the inclination or knowledge to teach dharma. That is not how I see myself, as a teacher. I do have an interest in the process of dharma training and an intense interest in sharing what little I know from actual experience. I'm a dharma 'sharer', so to speak, if that is allowed. I have been what is called a 'phenomenologist' almost all my life, meaning while I don't study the mind academically, I do study my everchanging consciousness in real time and always have. It's really where and how I learn about the mind, by actual interaction and observation.

I am intrigued by formal dharma training and have followed the standard textbook instructions for many

decades. However, I find it hard to learn dharma if it is too much by rote instruction. I am somewhat of a maverick in fact, although that has never been my intention and I don't like being excluded even if it is by myself – self-exclusion.

I find I have to take myself away from techniques that depend too much on rote instruction and not enough on intuition and my natural interest in a subject. I am more about finding where I am interested and following that, hoping that it will lead me to the same general goal of dharma as the more by-rote practices.

I have been struck, and this through actual experience, by how individual the dharma path for each of us can (or has to) be. I believe this concept is wrapped up in that of the 'yidam', which I understand is a particular (or personal) dharma sequence of practices that result in our personal liberation. These practices can be uniquely individual, as least as I understand and have experienced them.

The bottom line in what I am writing here is that there are alternate paths to enlightenment and that this requires that each of us get familiar or comfortable enough with the mind and its nature to find the path that works for us. And that perhaps particular dharma instructions will not come our way, ones precisely suited for us, because they don't or cannot exist, and this by definition. I will try to explain.

And the reason for that is that each of us have to, at some point, quicken to the dharma life as we awaken to greater awareness. What this means is that dharma is a do-it-yourself project, and not a case of one size fits all via various dharma instructions. The goal of dharma instruction is not for us to be endlessly taught, but rather for us to be startled (or gradually) awaken and take over our own dharma practice. That's the whole point.

The purpose of dharma is to receive instruction only until we can instruct ourselves and it was never the intent of a dharma teacher to bind us with instructions, but rather to, like the doctor delivering a newborn, to make sure that we can breathe for ourselves, even if they have to slap our butt. I hope you see the beauty in this.

Which is that we have to come alive in our ability to know and become familiar with the nature of the mind on our own, by ourselves, and not just accept hand-me-down instructions ad infinitum. The goal is independence from not depending on a teacher or set of instructions. And this because all of the instructions and dharma practice is nothing other that what it takes to become familiar with the nature of the mind until we can respond enough to awaken ourselves and be responsible for our own enlightenment from that point forward.

In other words, the whole point of what is called "Recognition" as to the nature of the mind is that we become familiar with the mind's nature on our own and take over the responsibility for our own eventual enlightenment. We have to eventually stop looking outside ourselves for further instruction (for more, more, more) and begin responding to our own particular situation. This is the whole reason for the teachings, independence from them.

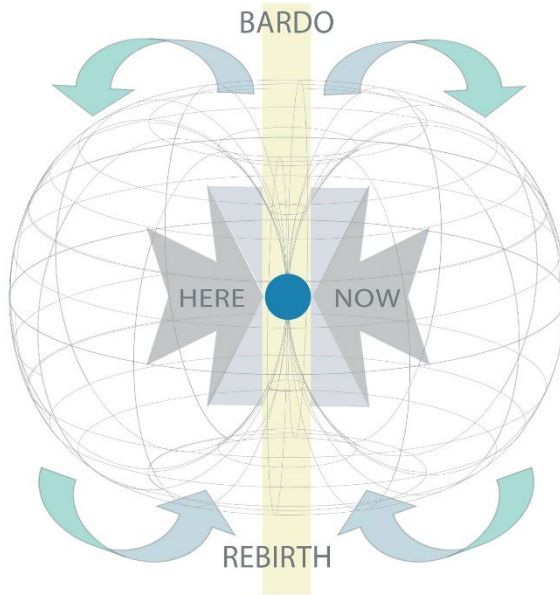
And yet, this reorientation depends on our innate sense of responsibility, literally our ability to respond to our life situation on our own. That is the most important task of a dharma teacher, after which their involvement with us is essentially done, to make us independent and able to learn on our own from that point onward.

That 'independence' is 'The' major event in dharma training, at least as I understand it, to become independent of the guru or teacher, not because they have nothing more to teach us, but because we have to develop the ability to respond to our own situation -- responsibility. That is the turning point, the event in dharma training called "Recognition" as to what the true nature of the mind is all about, our coming of age to respond on our own and to be responsible from that time forward for our own enlightenment. It is a huge shift or change for us, perhaps which is why it is called "Recognition."

If you follow my reasoning here, you should now understand why we have to be weaned from dharma instructions and dependence on a guru or teacher, because the whole idea of dharma training depends on our eventual independence from it, and our ability take over 'breathing' the dharma on our own, so to speak, much like a newborn. The event that triggers or signifies this is called 'Recognition' as to the true nature of the mind.

That being said, there is no hurry in becoming responsible for our own dharma. In fact, until 'Recognition' arises, we are dependent on an authentic teaching to prepare us.

CYCLIC VORTEX OF SAMSARA



SEARCHING FOR COMPANY IN A CROWD

January 30, 2022

I sometimes wonder if my struggle to find like-minds in relation to dharma practice and the lack of finding many is just reality letting me know that what I need is not 'like minds' but rather to finally get it through my thick skull that there is nothing (and no one) out there to find and stop looking for what does not exist. I should just get on with being responsible for my own dharma life,

as in it's time to grow up.

After all, that is exactly what the dharma event 'Recognition" and the recognizing of the true nature of the mind is all about, recognizing the nature of the mind and becoming familiar with it. And by that familiarization, being able to work with and be responsible for the dharma on our own and not having to be dependent on a guru for eternity.

A guru has a purpose, but it is not to spoon feed us forever. IMO, the job of a guru is to help us become independent (and as needed, interdependent) from anything and anyone on the outside. Maybe that's the whole point and I'm missing it, while I continue the rather futile pursuit of searching for company in a crowd.

The whole rite of passage, which in dharma lingo is often called 'Recognition" is a profound change for us, to go from relative truth (the duality of Samsara) to a non-duality that has no handles, no perch to sit on, and no choice but to become responsible and soldier on toward enlightenment, which journey after Recognition in itself is enormously refreshing and empowering. Yet there seems to be an equally huge mess from our past to sort, clean up, and move on from, and that takes real time.

In my opinion, one of the hardest realizations to come

by is that there is no one out there to meet up with, much less anyone here on our part going to that meeting. This is bound to be at least somewhat confusing. It's all or nothing, and that in a nutshell.

We are not going to find anyone to dharma-partner with, other than perhaps in a superficial way, and that's because there is no one out there or, as I mentioned above, is there anyone actually in here who is looking for someone out there, who also is not there. I mean, that is basic dharma understanding about the nature of the Self, correct? It's a construct of mostly our attachments, likes and dislikes.

If so, then what's our excuse for an excuse? As this 'rebirth vortex' diagram (included) demonstrates, it's like a fountain that rushes straight upward from a central stream and reaching its maximum height, branches out equally in all directions like an umbrella, and falls back around itself, encapsulating the stream from which it emerged from. Until rebirth, it never comes back together again into a stream or is more coherent in an existential way than it is when we are in the prime of life. Study the top and bottom of the vortex carefully. Against that fact, we best prepare. There is no permanent 'suchness' or existence in the past or in the future, nothing that we can 'feel for' or touch as there is right here and now.

In other words, there is nothing and no one out there to

reach for and find. There is no object for our subject, and no subject for the object. The whole idea of subject and object is part of the dualistic Samsara that we are working to unpack. It is not practical and makes no sense to cling to duality. The 'clinging' is the duality itself.

And that's what I mean when I say that we may have some things to sort out, while we reorient ourselves to a nondual form of meditation. The whole idea of the Self becomes an oxymoron when we try to project it into our future by expecting to find 'someone' out there to look after us or help us when the whole point is that we have finally begun to look after our ourselves.



WAKE UP OR COOL OUT

January 31, 2022

[NOTE: We have a New Moon tomorrow, the harbinger for the Tibetan New Year, the Year of the Male Water

Tiger. And this New Moon comes in like a whirlwind, with much ado about nothing, with the accent on the "much ado." New Moon on February 1st at 12:46 AM EST. It's five in the morning here and the Internet says its 8-degrees out, but my own outdoor thermometer says its zero degrees. Either way, its cold enough and there is no wind. Yesterday we took a walk through the snow during the day and there was little wind. The bigger news is a huge sunspot spewed out a CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) from a flare that lasted a long four hours and is heading toward Earth now, arriving around February 2nd. Can you hear the music?]

Here's an old chestnut that we must not forget, the problem of mistaking traditional Asian Tranquility Meditation (Indian, Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese, etc.), all of which are very similar, with the more popular (today) idea of meditation as some form of relaxation therapy. Both have their value, but relaxing is not traditional awareness meditation. In other words, 'taking a rest' is not the same as 'allowing the mind to come to rest'. These are two very different things. It has long worried me that some readers are doing practices designed to relax us and imagining this is what the historical Buddha taught. These are two very different practices, yet the word 'meditation' today is used to describe both.

And this basic Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), which is the heart of the Asian approach, is usually also surrounded by all the cultural paraphernalia from

various countries like Tibet, Japan, India, and so on. Back in the 1960s and thereabouts, few of us knew what we were doing when it came to meditating, and back then our meditation practice seemed to be as private as our sex life. We were quick to say publicly that, "of course I meditate," but we never shared any details about what we actually were privately doing or how our meditation was coming along. We would give the equivalent to a 'thumbs up', yet if truth be known, most of us probably didn't know what we were doing (if anything) as regards our meditation practice. Many were perhaps practicing in some way, but few were actually able to meditate. That's just the way it was early-on. We called our dharma meditation our 'practice' because that's just what it was, our practicing, doing a 'sounds like', with what we imagined meditation was all about.

You have to understand that, before Tibetan dharma swept through this country like a warm breeze, what had been there for decades before was Japanese dharma, in particular the coolness of Zen Buddhism, with its tailored gardens, paper Soji screens, and teak floors. And the Tibetan dharma culture was anything but Zen-like, and a step farther, the various Indian religious cultures often appeared downright garish to the eyes of many Americans. After all, we had just come out of the prudish 1950s mentality.

And suddenly all of these Eastern disciplines were overlapping like a Venn diagram. That was the 1970s,

and the then still smallish town of Ann Arbor Michigan, where I grew up, had some kind of New Age guru speaking almost on every street corner. After all, the 1970s was the American response to the 1960s, and at that point the New Age was in full bloom.

Meanwhile, here in the year 2022, the bloom is no longer on that New Age rose, and spiritual disciplines in America have by this point settled down to a gentle roar or just died out. And there are so many practices today that are called 'meditation', that the original Asian versions as taught by the Buddha are dwarfed by what are essentially relaxation therapies.

And while the traditional Asian forms of meditation are uppers, ways to become aware and wake up, most relaxation therapies are more like downers, ways to cool out, let down our hair, and relax. That's the main difference between traditional meditation as taught by the Buddha and the many modern relaxation therapies that call themselves some form of meditation. And I am not disparaging relaxation therapies. I look forward to them every day, although in my case, it is usually relaxing by watching a movie, while in the back of my mind, I'm busy sorting out the day's events.

That being said, perhaps it is easy to see why it is important to thread our way through all the types of meditation that exist today and call out those that actually are what was taught by the Buddha, if only for

clarity's sake.

So, when some person tells me they meditate, I have to ask them what kind of mediation they do. And more often than not, it is some form of relaxation therapy or other. Nothing wrong with relaxing, but it's not what the Buddha called meditation. I suggest that some of us might want to learn what it is that the Buddha taught and why. And, as mentioned earlier, it worries me if some of us are practicing relaxation practices and imagine this is what the historical Buddha suggested.



RECOGNITION

February 1, 2022

The old song by Tennessee Ernie Ford "Sixteen Tons and the lyrics:

"You load 16 tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
St. Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store."

That's how I feel about Samsara, the only 'company store' in my life, and I have known little else up to now. Blindly looking around for a back door to Samsara never turned up anything I could find. No escape hatch, so to

speak. Here we all sit.

However, what IS available to each of us, but which most have yet to experience (until we do), is what are called the non-dual dharma practices, like Insight Meditation, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and so on. Since we are now ensconced (and have always been) in this dualistic Samsara, talking about a non-dual realm or more advanced practice amounts to just more dualistic words for us, until we actually experience non-duality for ourselves, at which time there is clearly a profound shift in consciousness and identification.

Yet, how do we communicate something to others which they have never experienced for themselves? These are just words until the actual experience arises in them, at which point their interest becomes personal and profound, IMO.

It's not that we don't each have moments or times when we are in a non-dual state. We do, yet we are not aware that we are in that state, so that's not too helpful. Introducing someone who has always been dualistically oriented, addicted to the process of non-duality is something entire dharma practices are dedicated to, making that switch from dualistic to non-dual dharma practices. And what makes it difficult is that we have no idea as to the difference that switch will make in our lives until it happens. There is no way of knowing without knowing. We can only imagine, and

expectations cannot define such a reality, as this little poem I wrote points out.

BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS

Looking at the mind,
It's not what I'd expect.

Expectations can't define,
And you can't expect to find.

That's the nature of the mind.

Once that switch is made, turned on, and we actually experience non-dual insight, with its clarity and lucidity, it can't be turned off. We can't un-ring that bell or walk it back. The sacred texts state that we can, however, allow our insight to go fallow (to not progress), yet we cannot regress to not having experienced non-dual insight. As the pith dharma teachings endlessly state, after the initial arising of Insight Meditation, our ongoing practice is continuing to expand and extend our awareness first obtained in Insight Meditation. In fact, those were the last personal words from my perfect teacher I ever heard, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, my root teacher who introduced me to the nature of the mind, that I was to continue expanding and extending my recognition, and gain increasing familiarity as to how the mind works.

All of this turns, as you might imagine, on how we as dharma students transfer our attention and identification from our habitual dualistic (relative) forms of meditation to the non-dual forms of meditation like Vipassana, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen. According to many teachings, this transfer is not something we can do alone, not all by ourselves.

To achieve Recognition as to the mind's nature requires the help and guidance of an authentic master or trained teacher through what are called the 'Pointing-Out Instructions' as to the actual nature of the mind. This whole process is often called 'introducing' the student to the nature of the mind, so that we can begin to become familiar with how the mind works.

As for me, I had the pointing-out instructions a number of times and still did not manage to get it. Quite embarrassing. In one case, one of the four Heart Sons of the 16th Karmapa himself took me into a room, sat me down on a wooden chair in front of him, his face just inches from my own. His Eminence then proceeded to do things around my head with his hands, almost touching my eyes. Even with all that, I did not recognize the nature of my mind. Eventually, I had to give up and leave that room with my head hanging down. LOL.

Eventually, years later I did manage to receive the pointing out of the mind's nature, and this was immediately followed by a number of years of intense

practice on my part after I understood what (at least for me) was required, and this before the actual Insight Meditation kicked in. And when it did kick in, my life changed forever and in a big way. So, what's being said here?

The art and subtlety of all this is how do we pop a dharma practitioner out of their dualistic (subject and object) mode of meditation and suddenly immerse them into the non-dual practices like Insight Meditation and Mahamudra. That is the question.

And the answer amounts to an essay in misdirection, how to distract us from our habitual distractions and dualistic view of things long enough for us to transfer our attention to and identify with the non-dualism of Insight Meditation. It seems this is something we individually have to be shown how to do. I have experienced it but have spent years trying to figure out how to easily point this out to others seeking to have this happen. I'm not saying it is brain surgery, yet IMO it is at least that difficult. No simple solution.

The non-dual dharma practices are not just one more choice on a list or menu of meditation selections. These nondual dharma practices mark a turning point in our dharma practice, as I understand it. Of course, we can choose to begin practicing these non-dual forms of meditation (Insight Meditation, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, etc.), yet practice is all we can do without a formal

introduction by an authentic teacher to the non-dual dharma practices. That alone should tip us off that something different is happening here other than just learning another dharma technique.

And by 'formal introduction' I don't mean a letter from our dharma teacher or something like a verbal permission. What is required, as mentioned, is what are called the 'Pointing-Out Instructions' as to the true nature of the mind, something we have never experienced or even come close to realizing, and this is usually given verbally as part of a teaching or similar instruction. We have to be shown how to break our ingrained dualist habit of subject and object and freely slide into the non-dual meditations. Trust me, it's not easy, until it is.

What's implicit with those pointing-out instructions is that the authentic teacher tries to point out to us the actual nature of the mind in real time, right on the spot. Or, at least to implant a seed in us that loosens our veil of obscurations so that there is enough light generated for us to see what kind of finishing practices we need to do to facilitate this 'Recognition'.

If anything, this is a cosmic dance between guru and disciple, IMO. In the purification practices (The Preliminaries), which can take many years, everything is dualistic (subject and object) and there is no nondualist practice whatsoever, aside from perhaps being asked to

rest the mind in awareness at the end of a practice session, but no introduction to that.



ZENO'S PARADOX

February 2, 2022

[Note: Today, a break in the very-cold here in Big Rapids. Margaret and I garbed up and headed out across the local football field and into the woods. We followed Mitchell Creek for a way until we branched off and headed up to the hill with a large sand patch, where we began to climb through the snow until we reached the meadows. There is much more light today than there was a month ago and the sun is shining. The snow around us was sparkling like diamonds and it is above freezing, at least for the day. We follow the deer tracks and cross-country ski marks as we move across the meadows, finally winding our way back into town. And that's the highlight of the day.]

And now we return to our regular programming.

Water off a duck's back is an apt description for my trying to complete the finer purification dharma practices. 'The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.' That's how it is, or the closer we actually get to finishing the course, the longer each stride takes, or some such variant of Zeno's Paradox.

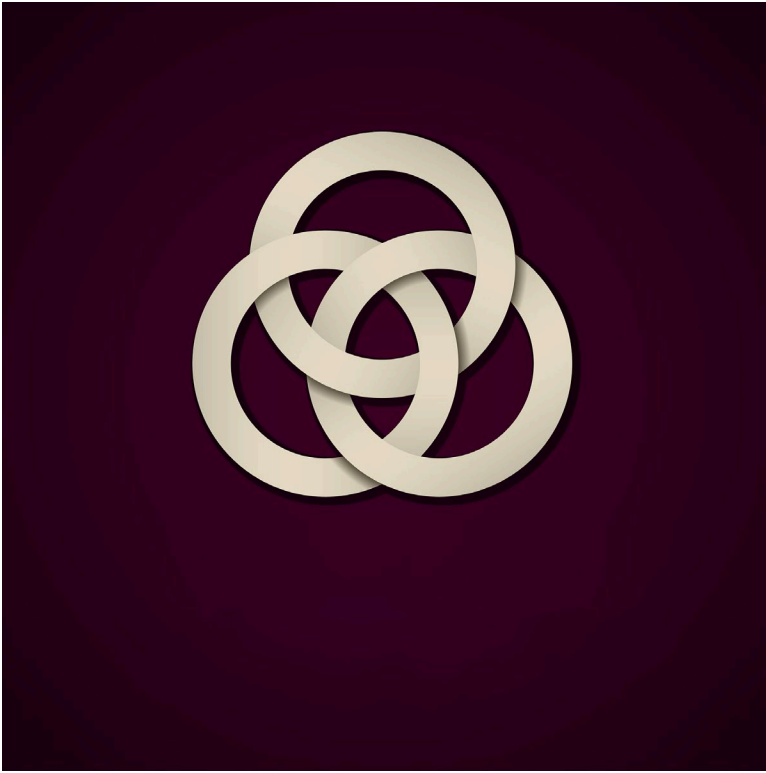
It is almost axiomatic that each beginning dharma student is like the proverbial bull in the china shop, with little awareness of the consequences of our actions. Yet, the same practitioner, given a little time, becomes like a kid in the cow pasture, tiptoeing ever so carefully toward the gate.

This is the result of the advent of responsibility in each of our lives, our ability (or lack thereof) to respond. Infinite responsibility is what it is called, in dharma terms, Absolute Bodhicitta. And our 'ability' to respond is called into question here. We all have our knee-jerk reactions, which are also a form of response, albeit a crude one, yet the question is how fine are we capable of responding and is that a part of dharma training? IMO, it seems to be.

If we are too rough or crude to pass through the straight-of-the-gate, then we need to better refine and purify that crudeness so that we can eventually see beyond just ourselves and our attachments. Much like the old phrase "Rust Never Sleeps," so does the process of purifying our responsiveness continue.

I feel that is what the 'Bhūmis' are all about and the lifetimes it takes for that kind of refinement.

Our ability to respond (responsibility) is crucial for learning dharma. Apparently, our reactivity has to be as fine as flour.



THE CONCEPT OF WHAT 'LASTS'

February 2, 2022

I can't imagine Insight Meditation not being interesting. For me, it is a conscious immersion into the function of whatever Insight Meditation method I choose, which for me usually is either photography or writing. I will use 'writing' here as an example.

With writing, my entry point is always some idea or aspect related to dharma (in most cases) that catches my interest enough to launch me into Insight Meditation quite naturally, and this means complete immersion into allowing the mind loose to follow its own way without intellection and forcing thoughts on my part.

As thoughts or themes come up, feelings occur, I try to put those feelings into words, fitting and matching sentences, discarding many, accepting others, and threading them together as sentences to create a paragraph of sentences linked together. I'm not saying it is like automatic writing, but there is a sense of immersion and letting thoughts and feelings rip as they will, mostly driven by a feeling that I have to express something. Often, it doesn't even have a name, just pure intuition looking to create.

Perhaps because it is Insight Meditation, the kinds of thoughts or insights are not so obviously intellectual, but more like having a live fish on the line. In other words, there is life to this. And I am not annotating, criticizing, arguing, or in any other way clouding the insight that is so vividly appearing with thought, but rather just allowing insights to present themselves in the sky of the mind, so to speak.

And what I do, and this without much of any thought, is to select and write down as sentences or phrases those

insights that seem both seminal and persistent, the most vivid ones that stand out and capture my feeling and meaning so that they might have a chance to 'last' against the normal erasure of time.

In the tumbler of my mind at the time, I accept only words and phrases that seem to defy time in that they appear to perhaps be able to last longer than less well-constructed phrases or sentences. They stand out or stand up. I see my writing as a kind of a dam or bridge to maintain continuity of the theme, words that will above all literally stand the test of time's tendency to forget just about everything. This concept alone could take an entire article to explain if I could even do it.

It's all about the concept of just what will 'Last' against time's ability to wash away just about everything we posit or create, including ourselves. How we work our words or make our words work to stall or inhibit time's force to forget takes skill and intuition on my part.

Time's force, the force of time, in general removes everything in this Samsaric world we live in, no matter how hard we try to sustain it. After all, rocks and stones are gradually worn away by time. And of course, our bodies decompose. Perhaps our words live on for a time, but even the works of someone like Shakespeare, who is as strong a writer of English as I have found, has become increasingly difficult to read as the centuries pass. Everything passes, as the Bible says, 'This came to pass'

and 'that came to pass'. Things do not come to stay; they come to pass.

My point is that those of us who do write words would do well to consider how it is we make our words persist and last longest. It is accepted, for example, that fine instruments, like a Stradivarius violin, last longest or play truest, because they were made most carefully to create the best sound, and so on. This seems to be true in almost all crafts and creative endeavors, that those items made with intense care and love are the most durable or at least the most sought after. They last, at least in our estimation.

I feel that this same principle is true for writing out our thoughts. Considering that time cannot avoid having its way with whatever we produce, we might want to take what care we can in how we put our words together and make them last. Our writing should be true, because 'truth' is the future, if only because it will last until then. Everything else, will fade. Like the old Rolling Stones song, 'Not Fade Away'.

And this kind of writing would require more than just a mechanical rearranging of the words to arrive at something we feel is right. I'm sure we each have different approaches to writing, so I will not guess at what you might prefer. I can say that whatever our approach, it should be one that will ensure that what we write stands up to truth, against time's tendency to wear

through it and consign it to the dustbin of history.

So, I recommend 'stand-up' words, words and phrases put together like an interlocking locking jigsaw puzzle to create sentences that as a unit can withstand the shocks (outbreaking) that time brings to us and our life.

I think of it as using words, as Noah used wood to build an ark, only we will build a ship of words designed to sail the sea of time. Or, if we are not concerned with the longevity of our words, we can just write loose words and forget about them.

I write words to last, true words, deliberately entertaining them, passing them through the intellect rather lightly, but mostly qualifying them emotionally, based on their ability to reflect feelings and stand up to time and persist. And Insight Meditation is very good for this process because it does not include criticism, comments, or asides. And when using Insight Meditation, my selection of phrases and the like, is intuitive, not conceptual. Insight and intuition are the arbiters of the words I write, and they arise automatically based on their perceived longevity, almost entirely upon my gut reaction to them emotionally and intuitively rather than conceptually. I feel my way through a piece of writing.

Here is a poem I wrote back in the 1960s that deals with the general idea of 'lasting'.

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 asleep,
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.

[A Celtic Knot of Eternity. I am mostly Irish.]

Single Shot Photo



Focus Stacked Image



Focus Stacked





PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEDITATION

February 3, 2022

I can remember when I first tried to share my explorations into focus stacking on various photography forums. I was treated as if focus stacking was equivalent to the garish style of HDR (High Dynamic Range) that was common at the time, and which was not considered 'real' photography by most. It reminds me of the endless argument on jazz forums, the thread: "Is Kenny G Jazz?"

I felt bad that 'Focus Stacking' was considered 'a cheap shot' or somehow just 'bad' photography. I'm sure that view will be denied having existed today or has been carefully walked back, but I remember it well.

Nevertheless, I persevered because I could see beauty in this emerging technique, if used tastefully.

Actually, I was coming to focus stacking, not from the HDR crowd, but rather from my 50 years or so of practicing Tibetan-style meditation. And I thought it might be interesting to sketch that approach out today, as it makes a certain kind of sense, the similarity of focus stacking and nondual forms of meditation like Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

Today the 'meditation' world has been muddied when it comes to describing 'meditation.' The word 'meditation' used to refer to the Asian techniques of 'mindfulness', meaning in particular what is called Tranquility Meditation (Shamata in Sanskrit). In this modern world the more popular meaning of meditation for many folks are the various forms of relaxation therapy, just the opposite from what teachers like the Buddha intended. The Buddha taught 'mindfulness', waking up and awareness, while relaxation 'meditation' is for cooling out, letting our hair down, and relaxing. Nothing wrong with either technique, just some confusion when one is mistaken for the other and vice versa.

And 'Mindfulness' meditation is generally subdivided into the beginning forms of meditation, which are dualistic, meaning they have a subject (ourselves) and an object (everything else) like Tranquility meditation, and the more advanced forms of meditation like Insight Meditation, which are non-dualistic, meaning we are in a state (or process) of complete immersion, without the

dualistic subjects and objects as a main focus of our attention.

It is the complete immersion and suspension in that immersion that allows the mind not to be bothered by self-consciousness, with its endless comments, annotations, and distractions. It's not that what we know as the subject and object in our dualistic Samsaric view are not present in the non-dual dharma practices like Insight Meditation and Mahamudra. Of course, they are. What made up the subject and objects are still present, just no longer present as subject and object, but rather seen as they naturally are in themselves, part of the whole picture.

In other words, it's not that the subject and objects that make the Samsaric view of 'Samsara' are not present and visible, but rather that, in the non-dual practices they are, as mentioned, no longer seen as subjects or objects, or this or that. They are just present as an equal part of the whole picture, but independent of being particularized or divided against one another dualistically.

So, it is not that what we are immersed in with Insight Meditation is not distinct or clear, but just the opposite. Insight Meditation is crystal clear and luminous because there is no confusion of subject and object. Everything in Insight Meditation is of one nature and our attention is not being led to the so-called 'subject' here as opposed

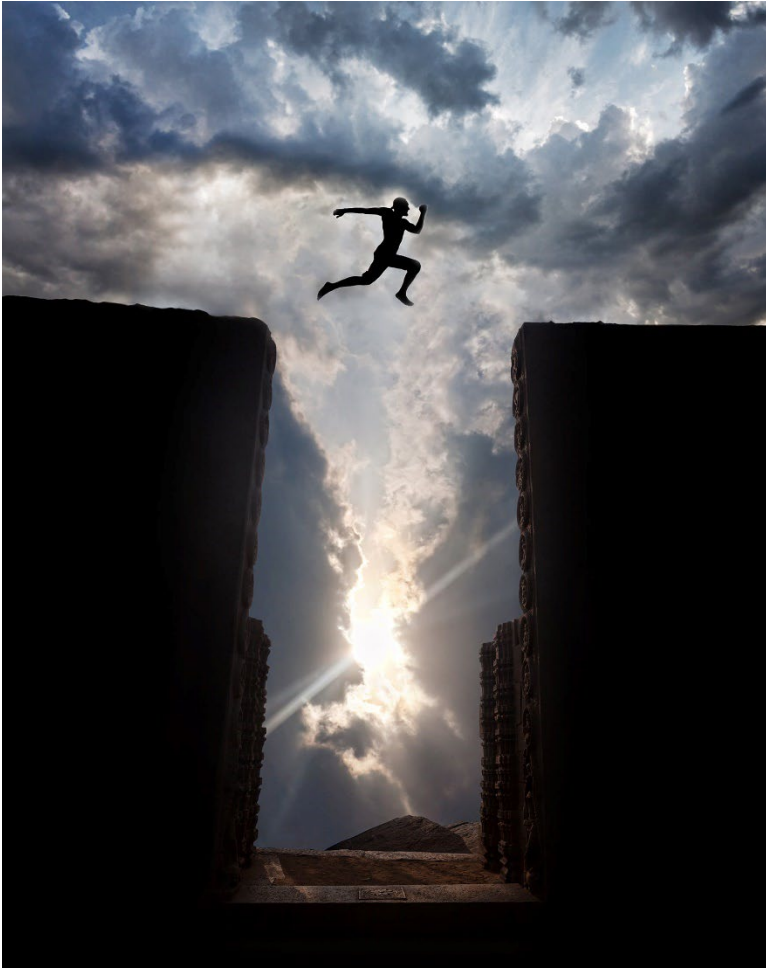
to the 'object' over here, and so on.

It's very much like what we do in still photography via what is called 'focus stacking' as mentioned above. Whereas with the traditional photograph we always have a photographer's view, a single point (and plane) most in focus that constitutes the center and our angle of the 'view', while with 'focus stacking', everything can be in perfect focus (or as much in focus as we want) and there is no particular subject or object and no particular view.

In my opinion, this lack of either subject or object confuses our habitual tendency to have but a single view and frees the mind to choose whatever view pleases us and we are not used to having that degree of freedom or choice, any choice at all for that matter. We are habitually used to being led or prompted to see a photo from a single angle/plane and point of view.

Take that single view away, and perhaps almost subconsciously we can feel and sense the difference. Instead of being led or directed within the photograph, we are free to just relax and look around the photo, free to choose our own view.

I find the similarities between the non-dual meditation techniques in meditation and the techniques of focus stacking interesting.



BEYOND DOUBT

February 4, 2022

This whole issue of 'Recognition' is an important stumbling block for those on the road to Enlightenment. If there is a place everyone more or less gets stuck while

practicing dharma, that would be waiting for the pointing-out instructions as to the true nature of mind to take effect, for each of us to get it. This appears to be where the candidates for the non-dual practices like Insight Meditation, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen eventually pool and wait for that event to take place. Apparently, there is no moving forward without it.

If you have doubts as to whether you have Recognition, the recognizing as to the nature of the mind then, as I understand it, you have not. Period. End of story.

I know, folks wiggle and squirm trying to rationalize that they have attained 'Recognition,' yet they have not, and this because IF they had, they would be head-over-heels busy with that event and what is required of them from that point forward. If they understood the function of Recognition, they would cease trying to circumvent or get around it and treasure that it exists, even if we don't have it yet.

The whole point of dharma Recognition is be introduced to and attain 'familiarity' with the mind's actual nature, and if you are still wondering if you (or if you have not) done that, there is your proof that you have not done so. And this because, Recognition, is not some speedbump, gate, or ring-pass-not that you have to get through... and then what? You don't know 'then-what'. There's your proof again.

If you wonder, then you don't know what to do, which is the whole point of the 'pointing-out instructions, because that is exactly the one thing you know at Recognition, how to meditate and how to guide yourself from that point forward. For the first time, you know.

So, stop wondering and get back to dharma practice with your teacher guiding you. Posturing is a big waste of time because you alone are exactly the only one you have to satisfy, and as smart as you are, even you cannot sneak up on a mirror. I will spell it out again.

All of the dharma practices leading up to these pointing-out instructions have been dualistic, something we approach, master, and move to the next practice on at least to some degree. Yet, 'Recognition' is not dualistic and is not negotiable. At Recognition, we leave duality behind or put it in the background. In fact, we cannot proceed WITH duality, so there is no one to impress or any method to do this.

The 'seeing' itself in Insight Meditation is not just another object to be seen, because seeing itself is not an object. And when we SEE the 'Seeing', it is only an awareness for us to immerse in, like diving into a vast pool, one that has no container. Once immersed, there is not outside or inside. There is only clarity and lucidity, which act like a perfect lens to look or see through. Everything seen with/through Insight Meditation is true beyond any addition or subtraction. In fact, consider

Insight Meditation to be like a 'read-only' file, something to see through and to know, but not something that is negotiable or modifiable.

In our Samsaric life, we are used to thoughts like a swarm of mosquitoes, swirling about our mind, for or against, good or bad, painful or enjoyable, and on and on and on. This includes doubts, questions, annotations, comments, worries, and every kind of distraction. We are used to that and seldom are relaxed enough to know anything else.

And this, all because Insight Meditation is something else entirely than we can imagine, and I have tried to express the inexpressible above. I know I will fail; everyone does.

Yet, you may get some kind of drift, or sense, and a pointer toward where to look. Or you may not. I had the nature of the mind pointed out to me a number of times and never managed to get it, not even a little. It took years more of practice to have me ready for actual Recognition, but it did happen, and I am very grateful for that. It was more than worth the practice for all those years.

The key sign about Insight Meditation is that it is 'without a doubt' clear to the practitioner. It is beyond any doubt. You don't need anyone to sanction it, although our habit is to seek permission or approval.



THE HISTORY OF UPSET

February 5, 2022

Since I have basically been a phenomenologist since I was very young, monitoring my own consciousness, this particular account is my personal history, although at heart I doubt I am much different than many of you reading this.

It appears to me that all of we humans try to do our best not to get upset. And while I'm mostly talking here about psychological and emotional upset, as we get older this becomes literally true. As an 80-year-old I even have to watch my physical balance lest I end up on the floor, so prepare for that too.

Upsets are, well, upsetting, yet they can serve as a good sign or a not-so-good sign, depending on what we do with them. Either way they are harbingers (or can be) of change in the life stream, especially the life-changing kind of upsets mentioned here. Yet, let's not forget the daily teetering if not downright upsets that go on around us, meaning those events involving us.

For me, one of the main upsets and certainly the most ongoing upset for me was simply the process of my education, meaning going to school. My mom told me that even in kindergarten I would skip school. They found me standing on the edge of a huge hole in the ground watching great earthmoving machines at work. I was fascinated.

Perhaps this propensity to follow my interests led to a clear division between formally going to school and whatever I was fascinated by at home. The net result was that I paid almost no attention to school for 12 or so years and gave total attention to my hobbies and interests at home. At least I had something that I loved to be doing.

This finally led to my never finishing high school, preferring instead to leave and hitchhike out to Venice West in Santa Monica and live on the beach, thinking I was going to be a painter of art. I eventually lived in an abandoned walk-in wooden freezer in the basement of

the somewhat famous beatnik art gallery/coffeehouse called the "Gas House," but that's another story. This was 1960.

Yet, that whole period from 1960 until 1965 (which year is the beginning of hippies) was a time of profound change for me. Would I say 'upset'? I guess I would, especially if you include 1964, the year I lived in Berkeley, California and the time and place I first took LSD, which I will get to in a moment.

Ostensibly, I was in Berkeley to study with a brilliant professor, but not much study was done. Instead, I gloried in hiking the sunny hills above Berkeley in my youthfulness and learning all manner of things other than the formal philosophy I set out to study.

I can remember living in Orinda, California (just on the other side of the mountain from Berkeley) and having to ride my all-Campagnolo Legnano racing bike (twice a day) over Grizzly Peak in order to get to work or study in Berkeley. And getting over Grizzly beak was a hike, even with a bike. I remember one morning, coming from Orinda over the peak to Berkeley, when a large Cougar or Mountain Lion walked directly in front of me while I was walking my bike up the steepest part of the peak. The huge animal was walking across the road from my right to the left-hand side and it was not looking at me, although it clearly saw me. In the middle of the road, it stopped and just turned its head at a right angle and

looked directly at me for what seemed a long time. It then turned its head back and continued walking across the road very slowly, while I cowered behind my bike. Just an anecdote.

Aside from learning so much from the life on the Berkeley campus, the main event, the one that was totally upsetting was when I took LSD for the first time. And first time, it was because acid was so new at the time that the only LSD we had was the original Sandoz acid directly from Switzerland. I won't detail here that whole story, although it changed my life forever, and for the good, yet I have written about it plenty elsewhere. Here is one account:

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/articles/Misc/THE%20ROOT%20OF%20THE%20SIXTIES%20-%20THE%20LSD%20TRIP.pdf>

Instead, let's talk about that upset and follow it out for a way. The heart of that LSD experience was that through it I realized (in real time) that the outside world I saw was to a great degree (largely) my own projection. In other words, I was creating my own world (and destiny) by projecting it on the screen of my mind, which for me was the outside world, and then being influenced by it. Such an experience (and insight) was stunning. Life as I knew it was torn down, leaving me to pick up the pieces and puzzle myself back together again. That shattering was permanent.

This attempt to regain stability was hopeless and took years and years, because I came out of the 1950s with a standard fixed dualistic view, that of me as a subject and the outside world as the object of my perception. Yet, because of a single cube of sugar and drop or so of LSD, that dualism was collapsed non-dualistically into a unified view. And this for the first time.

And however painful this extended LSD experience was, now that I look back on it, this was the first time I got even near seeing the true nature of the mind and how it worked. After that experience, my entire approach to life just changed, overnight, and the outside world which had been hanging fire over me my entire life, suddenly seemed workable because I was now in the equation. I could work it myself. That never occurred to me before, that this was 'my' world too and that I could change it by changing my mind and attitude. 'Who woulda thunk it', as they say.

Another entire article could follow the chain of my personal interests (hobbies) into the entrepreneurial businesses they became. However, the next really upsetting event in my life was meeting Margaret and falling in love. The full story is here for those hardcore relationship fans, but I will say at least something below.

HOW I FELL IN LOVE AND GOT MARRIED

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/articles/Misc/HOW%20I%20FELL%20IN%20LOVE%20AND%20GOT%20MARRIED.pdf>

As a popular musician and man-about-town in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I had any number of girlfriends and flings. I even thought I fell in love a couple of times. Yet meeting Margaret and actually falling in love was not at all what I had imagined it would be. I neglected to consider how total such an event had to be. I didn't have a clue and suddenly there it was happening.

Making a long and total experience a short story, in a nutshell while all these years I had been looking for someone like me who was motivated and a bit of a maverick, but a woman. Yet the reality was not even close.

Instead, that moment, sitting on a barstool, I looked deeply into Margaret's eyes for the first time; all I wanted to do was to endlessly take care of her forever, lest she (who seemed so fragile to me) would be damaged by the tides of life. Now, Margaret does not like this view, that she was fragile or helpless, which was not the point of what I mean. It was me who changed in that exchange. In that moment, I stopped searching for something that did not exist, another "one" like me somewhere out there (but a woman) and realized in that instant that there is only one being and not two, anywhere. And it was Margaret who showed me this, much as the philosopher Parmenides put it, "Being alone

is." There is but one being, and in this case, two bodies or persons celebrating that. That never occurred to me, but then it did.

And from that night in a local bar, "Mr. Flood's Party," we have never been apart. We were married soon after and celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in 2021. We have four kids and eight grandchildren, and their births also changed my life, but I include them here as part of the 'upset' a family invokes.

When I first learned that Margaret was pregnant, I was happy but also terrified as to how I could be a good provider. We had been living on fumes and not giving money a second thought. Yet, with the advent of a child I felt I had to change my whole approach and did, at once. In fact, the very next day after learning we were going to have a child, I went out and took a job on a garbage truck as a way of demonstrating my sincerity about having a child.

However, I soon realized that I could do other things than that and so I became a professional astrologer full-time and made a sign for my door. I had been doing astrology for others for years, but had never made it my career.

And, as for the final upset I will write about, aside from my three strokes (which I have well documented) is my bit of dharma breakthrough with the Recognition as to

the actual nature of the mind, which I have documented in the previous blog or so. Here are details of my strokes if you want to know.

THE SPIRITUAL ANATOMY OF A STROKE

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Spiritual%20Anaotomy%20of%20a%20Stroke.pdf>

My point is that major upsets upset us, but probably are some of the more important events in our lives. Their occurrence is troubling but their capacity to change our lives in a good direction are often the results. Or another way to put this is, upsets happen to each of us and it is up to us how we take them and what we make of them.

I find that when the rubber meets the road in life and an upset is permitted for us, that aside from the pain and anguish, I often am moved to make the best of it, and I do. It brings the best out of me.

[Photo of a Cougar, not my photo.]



THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH'S PASSING

February 6, 2022

Thích Nhất Hạnh, who was one of the most seminal dharma teachers of our times, passed on recently (January 29, 2022) at the age of 95 and thankfully there

are many of his books, articles, and teachings available through which to learn more about him. Here I just want to quote a few lines of what he taught that affected me deeply called "The Four Mantras."

THE FOUR MANTRAS

(1) "Darling, I am here for you."

(2) "I know you are there, and I am very happy."

(3) "Darling, I know you suffer. That is why I am here for you."

(4) "Darling, I suffer. Please help."

When I first read these four statements, it was like a punch in the gut. I was almost embarrassed to read them out loud. With a simple gesture, Thich Nhat Hanh came across with these 'mantras' that are obviously of another order of magnitude to what usually passes for dharma wisdom. They cut right to the quick and the heart.

I won't even try to paraphrase them here because that would only water down their meaning. They are perfect and shocking just as they are.

What I will say is that they remind me of the familiar phrase "Do unto others as you would have them do

unto you," but you do it first. Who among us has not wished to be seen, found, appreciated, and loved, and how little of that can be found in the world. And we are used to not making such a gesture except for our closest family. Yet, how much the world needs this.

Having practiced the Tibetan dharma practices for some 50 years myself, these four 'mantras' immediately remind me of what is called in dharma terms 'Absolute Bodhicitta', a term which is often mistaken for drummed up compassion or attempted kindness to others. Yet, Absolute Bodhicitta (compassion) in fact is an unstoppable desire in the Bodhisattva heart of each of us to share with other sentient beings the vast freedom and joy that the dharma provides.

The only similar experience to these four mantras of Thich Nhat Hanh came to me while I was in the village of Mirik in the hills near Darjeeling in West Bengal, India in 1997. I was there visiting the Ven. Bokar Rinpoche and his translator, our dear friend, Ngodup Burkhar. I was out walking in the courtyard of Bokar Monastery, when a small minibus drove up. While just standing there I watched how the door of the bus opened and people started to alight.

The first to come off the bus was Drupon Khenpo Lodro Namgyal, the retreat master for Pullahari Monastery outside Katmandu, Nepal. I remember this lama because as a young acharya, just out of nine years of training at

Nalanda Institute at Rumtek Monastery, this same lama lived at our dharma center here in Michigan (Heart Center KTC) while he was learning English. He went on to do three years of closed retreat and later was appointed retreat master at Kunzang Dechen Osel Ling, the Mahamudra retreat center at Pullahari Monastery. I had not seen him for many years, yet this was not the same young monk I remember.

His demeanor and presence were totally changed, and I marveled at what happened next. When retreat master Khenpo Lodro Namgyal was off the bus, he turned and welcomed his young retreatants that he was bringing to Mirik for special teachings. As each of the retreatants descended, Lodro Namgyal took their head in his hands and like a mother cherishing a child and held them close. I almost had to look away, so tender and personal was each greeting. This event was unforgettable for me, so precious was it.

Anyway, I had the same feeling when I first read the 'Four Mantras' of Thich Nhat Hanh, and want to share this story along with those mantras. Also, here is a little poem I wrote that echoes this sentiment.

EMPOWERMENT

There are many,
Waiting,

To be known,
But few,
Who care,
Enough,
To know.

Thich Nhat Hanh also taught of "Deep Listening" and "Looking Deeply," which also are worth learning about. And he shocked the wider dharma community by suggesting that the next Buddha to appear might be a community rather than a person.

[Photo by Duc (pixiduc) from Paris, France. - Thich Nhat Hanh.]



THE REAR VIEW MIRROR

February 7, 2022

If there is one thing that has been true about the dharma, it is that for me the sun of the dharma rises almost infinitesimally slowly, more slowly than I can perceive except perhaps in the rear-view mirror and even then, only every now and again.

I can't see any progress day-by-day or even week-by-week. In my case, it takes months or even longer for my own dharma progress to be recognized, yet just as the sun comes up each morning, the dharma is increasingly being revealed to me but often I just can't see the gain until months later. And then suddenly, through some event or other, I can see something as to how far I've come or not.

And what I mean by 'increasingly revealed" is that much like the legendary city of Atlantis is said to have arisen from the sea, so does the nature of reality, the true nature of the mind gradually reveal itself to us and be recognized. Perhaps progress is just too slow and too near to register.

I can worry, and I do, have expectations, cry to see progress, and occasionally gnash my teeth, and swear there has been no progress, yet somewhere down the road I'm suddenly made aware of the deep progress that dharma practice brings with it as it gradually reveals itself and I am satisfied once again that I actually am moving forward, however gradually. And thankful for that.

And it is in those odd moments of clarity that I can see and embrace how much more has been revealed since my last opportunity to view my dharma progress. I'm not saying sudden dharma breakthroughs don't happen, like the sun suddenly popping up into the midnight sky, yet we all know this is as rare as hen's teeth, as the Tibetans say. It happens, but not often.

And one other thing. In those moments when how far I have come is revealed to me, what is revealed is not any future enlightenment, as I may have imagined it might be, not how much I can expect, but rather how much I already have at hand within me here and now. It's never

like I have added something from the outside that I now see that I have. It's always revealing what I have always had right here within me all this time.

And so, my advice to myself is the same advice I give to you or to anyone, and that is we must hold out for the something we already have within us, and to realize that, and not to compromise our integrity and the purity of the gifts we already have within us but have so far been unable to realize.



RELEASE

February 8, 2022

Insight Meditation of the Kagyu Mahamudra variety has been my main practice for many years. I have been working all this time on expanding and extending my Insight Meditation (Vipassana) sessions, ever since the first time Insight Meditation arose.

Over the years I have been writing, trying to accurately describe my particular (perhaps unusual) method of using my photography work and my essay writing as part of my daily Insight Meditation sessions.

Yet, I have had trouble figuring just how that works because, while Insight Meditation is a non-dual practice, a practice of total immersion in the moment, yet I am using both my photography technique and my writing technique to invoke Insight Meditation, and each of those techniques are dualistic. I have tried to explain that to myself.

My friend and well-known dharma translator Elizabeth Callahan recently pointed out to me that what I am doing is using the photography and writing as supports for the Insight Meditation. The use of supports is a common practice and not all Insight Meditation is done without supports although perhaps most is. And so, there is Insight Meditation with support and Insight Meditation without support. It seems I tend to do Insight Meditation with support, because that is how it appeared to me initially.

And so, by using my writing and photography skills, as linked to Insight Meditation, I can work with these dualistic techniques while actually immersing myself in the process of Insight Meditation, and this continued immersion steadies the mind and makes it far easier to accurately put appropriate words and sentences together, as in the case of essay writing. With Insight Meditation I can clearly see ideas and thoughts as they are.

Now, with photography the process is the same, except I

am not manipulating words and sentences, but am very carefully taking (sometimes hundreds) of photos, each at a different focus distance, and then compiling them into a single photo.

Both methods or techniques, although quite different supports, have a very similar result, which is to step beyond conscious intellection and immerse myself in clarity and a lucidity that is not hampered by doubts, second thoughts, worries, annotation, and so on. It gets rid of the noise in the mind.

Insight Meditation is like having what is called 'read-only memory' on a computer, where whatever appears or is recalled is absolutely clear, vivid, and does not need to (but also cannot) be altered. The process is fixed in the sense that it is just the way things are, which is one of the hallmarks of Insight Meditation.

I'm sure that, with some imagination, Insight Meditation could be used with almost any kind of support, although since my supports are quite technical, it very much makes working with these techniques easier.

In summary, while with these two supports I am working very much dualistically, yet by immersing them through Insight Meditation, it's like freeze-framing the supports in time so that they can be examined without the usual mental noise or interference of dualistic thinking.

While my initial introduction to Insight Meditation was the result of years of hard work, coupled with the advent of a personal shock to my system that suddenly got 100% of my attention, the combination of the shock and meditation was such that apparently like the perfect storm, the necessary circumstances for Insight Meditation to arise occurred, and Insight Meditation arose.

And once Insight Meditation actually took place, since it is one of the nondual forms of dharma meditation, a realization, it can't just be walked back. In other words, we can't put the toothpaste back into the tube. Of course, we can let it go fallow, but otherwise, once Insight Meditation occurs, we continue to expand and develop it as best we can. And, of course, this is exactly what I have done now for many years.

Unfortunately, I am not the brightest bulb on the Christmas Tree. And once Insight Meditation arose in my life, I was worried that it did not arise as I always assumed it would arise, sitting on my meditation cushion. Instead, it arose spontaneously during a very difficult time and event in my life, probably very much with (and because) of the pressure of that very difficult personal event. Apparently, it took such an event to get my attention because I was too much on automatic pilot.

And so, being raised as a good Catholic, I took the

opportunity to feel guilty that Insight Meditation did not arise as part of my formal dharma practice, sitting on the cushion. I became too easily attached to that sense of guilt. I should have recognized it, but I did not at the time or for years afterward.

Instead, I searched my little universe for an explanation as to why I only discovered Insight Meditation out in nature. I tried to understand and did understand why that was. At the same time, I did not recognize that I was using photography (and eventually writing) as a support for my Insight Meditation. For me, that was a blank until now.

The moment I did realize this, thanks to a friend pointing this out to me, everything snapped into place, and pretty much instantly my attachment (or fear of attachment) to these photographic and writing techniques became clear and fell away.

And with that falling away of the attachment, I was instantly released and free to consider Insight Meditation without a support, which I now am looking at helping to happen.

It may seem just a little thing as I describe it here in writing, yet to me this is a pivotal point in realization and marks a segue away from my attachment to this whole form of meditation and a release, being free to move on with my Mahamudra practice.

[Graphic put together by me.]



MIND TREASURES: A STORY

February 9, 2022

As a young child, I was raised in the country on the outskirts of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a house my family built, wedged between two large agricultural farms. Ours was the first house there and there were not houses on either side, which meant that there were no neighbor kids for me to play with. Of course, I had four younger brothers, but being the oldest I mostly found myself walking point. I had to entertain myself.

The practical result of this situation is that as quite a young boy what I was surrounded with was Mother Nature and the natural history involved. And so, from early on I became interested in nature. And of course, I was who I am. Whoever that is I am still finding out, but apparently when I do things I do them thoroughly, as driven by interest.

In other words, one thing about me, perhaps even then, but certainly because of then (and recursive as well), was my interest in nature. It was intense. And that intensity remains pretty much until today.

The net result is that I carefully followed natural history in detail. I had collections of rocks, flowers, leaves, bugs, butterflies, and so on. Much later I was to find out that in the dharma teachings there is what is called 'The Lama of Appearances', which in itself is a perfect teacher of the dharma. And Mother Nature is exactly that. I can't say what I learned, but I can say my interest was keen and I paid close attention to what I saw in this world of natural phenomena we call natural history.

And I stayed keenly interested in nature all the way until my late teens, when I discovered girls, which had an interest all their own. However, whatever rules and laws of nature there are, were by then probably very ingrained in me. I had learned and respected natural law.

And this grasp of natural law, meaning my very sharp interest in it, became like a shield that prevented me from accepting much of public education, because I was sharp enough to see and sense it was a degradation compared to what I had managed to learn and taught to myself through many years of natural organic learning. I had no interest in most education (or teachers) and steadfastly ignored everything at school for some 11 or more years, especially any attempts to force me into learning in ways other than my own interests. I knew how to learn and teach myself. This fact had powerful implications. I still have many notebooks, detailed drawings, measurements, and notes relating to nature and my collections of it. I was a keen observer.

Now, fast forward up to my interest and study of astrology, which came over me in my late teens and onward. Of course, I already knew from my natural interest in nature how I was most comfortable at learning. No one taught me that other than nature herself. And this next part is important.

I approached astrology as I approached nature, at my own pace and as interest enabled. I achieved not only training in astrology and its history, but also a training through astrology of a general nature, which I will now describe.

I enclose a photo of my astrology book collection, the 'Heart Center Astrological Library' which is now part of

the permanent collection at the University of Illinois. I no longer own it and it is available to scholars or other interested parties. My point in showing you this image is to make clear that I had exposure to most of what is written in English on astrology. And I studied it carefully for many years, taking notes, creating notebooks, making diagrams, more notebooks, and the like.

And it is important to note that among all those books and their authors, only a single author could I credit as inspiring me to the quick, and that was the German author, astrologer, and climatologist Theodor Landschiedt, who was also a supreme court justice in Germany and this through his book "Cosmic Cybernetics." And my relationship with Landschiedt could be another article. We became friends and shared a vision of the future of astrology.

However, from all that reading, study, and contemplating came another kind of training that is not really about the books, one that very much is part of Tibetan dharma-culture, that of tertons (treasure finders) and what are called Mind Treasures, astrological 'terma' that are hidden in the mind itself, waiting to be revealed.

Briefly to note, in 2004 I went with a group of retreat lamas and senior dharma students with our teacher the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche to Tibet and China. And in China we went to Mt. Wu-Tai Shan, five mountains arranged in the form of a #5 die, four mountains

arranged in the form of a square, with the 5th in the center. We went to the top of all five mountains and offered puja, prayers, etc. We spent about a week at Mt. Wu-Tai Shan.

And while we were there, Rinpoche explained to us at the time that it was at Wu-Tai Shan that it is said that astrology first entered our world system. A young Manjushri first appeared there and from the top of his head poured the 84,000 astrological dharmas which were revealed and given to humankind. And to make a longer story brief, humankind love the astrological dharmas, even to the point of ignoring some of their dharma practice. It is said that Manjushri was not happy about that, so he withdrew all the astrology dharmas he had given, which greatly dispirited humans. And then Guru Rinpoche, feeling compassion for the humans, went to Manjushri and pleaded that this astrological dharma be returned.

Manjushri at last relented and gave the astrological teachings back, but with a caveat, that they be hidden as terma (hidden teachings) around the world and especially in the mind itself, where they became mind terma (mind treasures).

Well, the point of this story is that from years before, my in-depth exploration of astrology had led me (eventually) away from the thousands of books I had gathered on astrology and into the mind itself. And this I

learned on my own, with no introduction, no pointing out, and no support. And this perhaps explains why I did not learn so much from astrological authors as I did from just looking into the mind itself for astrology teachings. I had no idea this was difficult to do; it just naturally happened.

And from the mind, I produced a number of very powerful (and eventually important) astrological teachings and spent years understanding them myself, learning to experience and use them, and eventually realizing and being empowered by them, after which I shared them with my fellow astrologers. Some of them have become staples in modern astrology. Others are realized by me, but I have yet to see any students grasp them and be empowered.

My point here is to note that I understood 'terma' long before I knew about dharma terma, the tertons who found them, and all of that. I am skilled in astrological treasure finding in the mind and certainly am an astrological terton.

Some of the treasures I found would include understanding the dharma nature of heliocentrics, the astrology of Local Space and relocation techniques, heliocentric planetary nodes (and their relationship to the chakras), deep-space astrology, and others, not to mention that I programmed astrology on home computers and shared it with my fellow astrologers, the

first person to ever do so. Computerized astrology changed modern astrology forever.

The reason I tell all this is the following: When it came to my dharma study and practice, which began in the late 1950s with late-night conversations on Buddhism, yet quickened in the 1960s with Zen and trying to sit Zazen, and became my main focus in the 1970s and beyond, is that my habit of following my interest and my training in astrological tertons and termas affected my dharma training, the way I learned dharma. Exploring the mind in the present moment was a skill that I brought with me.

I already knew how to plumb the mind astrologically and while I watched my fellow astrologers, in particular in recent years, studying the ancient languages and texts in attempts to mine the wisdom of those teachings from the past, I realized that it was much easier and more germane for me to just dig in the mind itself for astrological truths than it was to try to learn languages and scour ancient texts. The mind is much richer, IMO. And every thought, word, and deed in history originated from the mind and came from this present moment. There is that.

Therefore, as I learned the dharma and worked through what are called the various Preliminary Practices, I encountered some of the same or similar learning problems with dharma that I had with primary and secondary education, mostly my distaste for rote

learning. It seemed unnatural for me. The resistance to rote practice were problems for me because of my training in following my interests and love of nature..

Even with dharma, it was easier for me to turn to the mind itself, just delve in, and experience than it was to endlessly recite or attempt to build muscle memory only by rote. I gently but consistently rebelled against it just as I always had in school. No doubt, I am hard one to teach. I can learn on my own.

And so, having said all this, my main point here is that even in dharma I am addicted to my interests, to what organically and actually interests me, rather than I am able to be bent by rules that I find artificial and cumbersome. In that way, I have kind of eked out a dharma training, trying to fulfill what I have been asked to do, as a way of dotting the I's and crossing the T's, while at the same time finding some oxygen in allowing my mind to rest as I learned to do with nature and with astrology, and so on. I brought this training to my learning dharma.

Of course, because I just don't 'go along' has been a bit of a lonely path in a way, but it seems to be my karma, and it also is absolutely refreshing when I am able to follow it, and I mostly have, and that because apparently, I don't behave well enough to do otherwise.

And so, in recent days, again with help from a friend to

point out what I have failed to grasp, has come some release, as mentioned in an earlier blog. It appears that I can't seem to ever get in harness, and I should stop feeling bad about it and just do what I am naturally trained to do, which is to continue to follow what organically and naturally interests me and not whine about it when I don't fit in.

It's my own choice and temperament. Apparently, when push comes to shove, I won't adjust enough to fit in unless it is intuitive and interests me. That's just the way I work.

[Photo of the 'Heart Center Astrological Library' taken by me.]



**THE FIRST THOUGHT: PRECIOUS HUMAN
BIRTH**

"First,
This precious human birth,
So favorable for the practice of the dharma, is hard to
obtain and easily lost.

At this time,
I must make this meaningful."



THE THIRD THOUGHT: KARMA

"Third,
At death there is no freedom, Karma takes its course, As I
create my own karma,

I should therefore abandon all unwholesome action. With
this in mind, I must observe my mindstream each day."



THE SECOND THOUGHT: IMPERMANENCE

"Second,

This world and all its inhabitants are impermanent, In particular, The life of each being is like a water bubble,

It is uncertain when I will die and become a corpse. As it is only the dharma that can help me at that time, I must practice now with diligence."



THE FOURTH THOUGHT: SAMSARA

(1) The Shortcomings of Samsara

"Fourth,
Just like a feast before the executioner leads me to my
death,

The homes, friends, pleasures, and possessions of
samsara cause me continual torment by means of the
three sufferings. I must cut through all attachment and
strive to attain enlightenment."

STARTING OUT IN DHARMA

February 9, 2022

What worries me is how to help beginning dharma practitioners get the ball rolling, so to speak, enough that they can see some return for their effort before their energy or interest in dharma practice wears thin. IMO, the dharma can be a hard nut to crack, especially if you are looking for instant feedback or even reasonable

midterm gains. Dharma practice, at least in my experience, takes time, energy, and actual dedication. It is worth the effort.

Let's start with sitting meditation, Tranquility Meditation (Shamata in Sanskrit). I have understood from Tibetans that in Tibet, Shamata was not usually taught until after the Extraordinary Preliminary practices (Ngondro) were completed. That's not true in America. I have been told and can't say whether it is true or not, that when Chögyam Trungpa introduced Ngondro to his American students, it was a bridge too far for them to accept (too difficult), and so Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) was introduced instead.

If true, it points out that Shamata is not so much designed for beginners as we may imagine. My point is that Shamata may not be easy to learn, without first having done some heavy-lifting, so to speak, with something like the Ngondro practices.

I know from experience that Shamata was very hard for me to learn. I spent a good 32 years trying to learn it through rote practice and never felt I had. Of course, I don't personally feel that 'rote' practice of anything is the way to go and prefer instead to find an area in the dharma where I have some actual interest and start with that.

A good litmus test for susceptibility to dharma is to spend a little time examining the "Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma." My guess is that if

you don't respond to the four thoughts, perhaps practicing the dharma is not for you. The "Four Thoughts" provide much of the driving energy needed to get into the dharma, in my opinion. So, if they don't strike a chord, I don't know what will.

THE FOUR THOUGHTS THAT TURN THE MIND TOWARD THE DHARMA

(1) THIS PRECIOUS HUMAN BIRTH

This precious human birth,
So favorable for the practice of the dharma, Is hard to
obtain and easily lost.
At this time,
I must make this meaningful.

(2) IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH

The world and all its inhabitants are impermanent.
In particular,
The life of each being is like a water bubble.
It is uncertain when I will die and become a corpse.
As it is only the dharma that can help me at that time,
I must practice now with diligence.

(3) KARMA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

At death there is no freedom,
And karma takes its course.
As I create my own karma,
I should therefore abandon all unwholesome action,

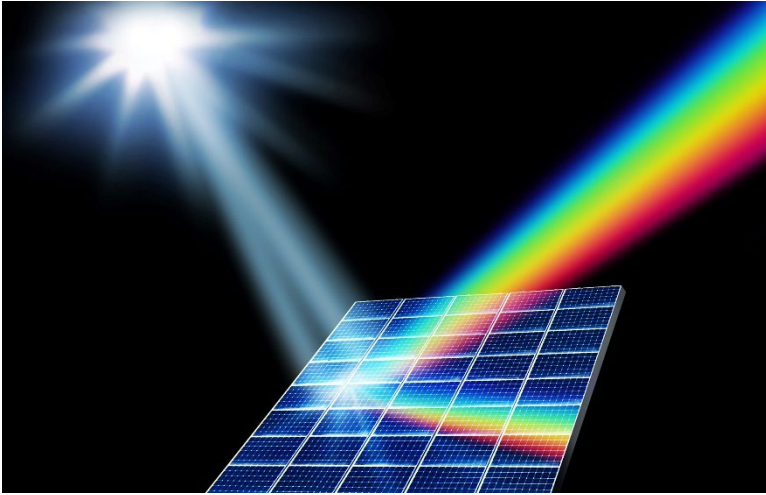
And always devote my time to wholesome action.
With this in mind,
I must observe my mind-stream each day.

(4) THE SHORTCOMING OF SAMBARA

Just like a feast before the executioner leads me to my
death,
The homes, friends, pleasures, and possessions of
samsara,
Cause me continual torment by means of the three
sufferings.
I must cut through all attachment and strive to attain
enlightenment.

That's the general idea. If you would like to read in more
detail on the 'Four Thoughts', here are some articles.

<http://michaelerlewine.com/viewforum.php?f=266&sid=814b28da991c30995f94c066623e53b7>



INSIGHT MEDITATION WITH SUPPORT

February 11, 2022

For years I have mixed Insight Meditation with various particular activities. My mixing has been mostly restricted to using either my photography work or my essay writing as supports, yet there is no reason I could not do this with other topics, but I would have to expand and extend my practice to include more areas of interest, which for me is not an easy thing to do.

Unless you have tried, it would be hard to know just how difficult it is to direct or guide the ship of Insight Meditation based on our rather weak will, something I have learned from hard-won experience. Once we have been introduced to the nature of the mind and become familiar with it (an event called 'Recognition'), further

expanding and extending the process of recognition is the order of the day, something we as practitioners work on all the time, and which results in the gradual revealing of the nature of the mind.

However, if we want to further direct our Insight Meditation to particular topics than that through which our original insight came through, like add other areas of interest on which we shine the light of Insight Meditation, I find it not-so-easy, actually very hard to do. Now, this may just be me, so you might have little to no trouble. More on this later.

Yet, since recently I seem to have pulled out a stop or two of blockage, perhaps now even I might find it easier. Hard to say and I don't have any particular areas I am concerned about focusing on. I would expect there is some bleed-over, something like a globalization of the Insight Meditation technique given time.

Yet up to now, at least for me, I have found that simply pointing Insight Meditation at various dualistic techniques (like I had to do with writing) was not a walk in the park. It is more like trying to walk with a Charly Horse or a leg that has fallen asleep, my trying to become flexible enough to mix Insight Meditation with various other areas of my life that interest me by just willing it be so. That, and a ticket, will get you a ride on the bus. Or, as they say, 'that dog won't hunt'. It took me over a year of daily intense effort to manage to extend using Insight Meditation with my photography to being also able to do that when writing things like this.

However, for the first time, instead of mixing Insight Meditation with various outside (dualistic) techniques (as mentioned, photography and writing), I believe I want to try just mixing Insight Meditation with itself, awareness with awareness, insight into awareness itself, or as it is most often put 'Awareness of Awareness. Why not? That is what Insight Meditation is designed for.

It seems that with 'mixing' of this sort, the non-dual Insight Meditation with dualistic supports, some recursiveness is unavoidable. In other words, I'm talking about falling into a cycle that reinforces itself, ad infinitum, or at least loops around a bit through Insight Meditation, before our falling back into duality. And we can do that again and again, like touching the tip of a tool to a whirling grindstone, Insight Meditation being the grindstone in this analogy. That's hot stuff!

And it's all about resting the mind, meaning not you or me 'resting' or 'placing' the mind. That does not work, but rather it's about our relaxing and allowing the mind itself to come to rest naturally. There is a difference. We must have confidence and utter trust as we let go of our attachments and allow the mind to come to rest as it will in its own time. Actually, the mind is already at rest; it is we who are not, thus the necessity of practice.

Or, as the great Mahasiddha Tilopa said, "Don't alter the present." Don't mess with it. I can't forget the old blues song that says "Take your fingers off it. Don't you dare touch it. You know it don't belong to you."

Let the present moment be what it is, without our interference, adjustment, or any alteration. Work 'with' the present moment, meaning accept it as is, without our interference by reacting to it and any other attempts to alter it.

Certainly, mixing Insight Meditation with our daily activities ensures that the freshness and uniqueness of that natural well of Insight Meditation in the present moment can arise. Immersing ourselves in Insight Meditation promises clean and clear insight into which whatever we are mixing can be immersed. The result is the pristine clarity of awareness without noise or interference.

Or we may prefer bypassing the mixing of Insight Meditation with outside activity and just use Insight Meditation to look at itself. That might be a relief for a change.

Let's call it Insight Meditation without the 'worry beads', without something to use as a support or trigger. The 'worry beads' of mixing Insight Meditation with external support and activity are just a convenient distraction, so that we can see clearly. I like how my daughter May Erlewine, who is a great songwriter, put it in her song 'Heart Song':

"And everything goes round and round,
And up and down,
And side to side.

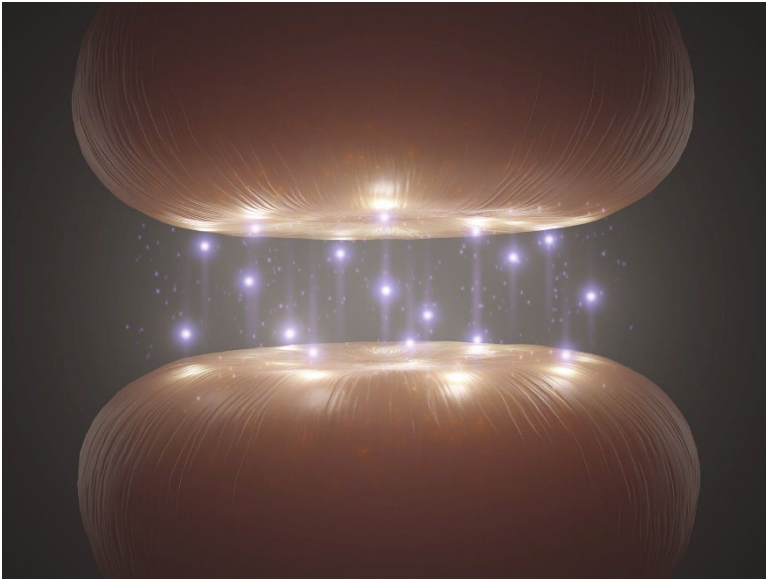
My heart
Is a rodeo clown,
Distracting the pain so that I
Can just ride,
Ride on by.
So that I...
Can just ride.”

Insight Meditation without a support is just that, meditation with no support to depend or hang on, not to the right or left, up or down, inside or outside, and on around. Nothing to riff on.

Using meditation with a support, we can lean on the support to center and deflect our distractions, allowing us to see clearly, aside from the constant hum of our distractions being distracted.

Our meditative support continually distracts us and triggers a loop of repetitive distractions like those old flip books we had as a kid, where the whirl of the book pages allowed us to clearly see the moving image. That is what a meditation support does for us.

Learning to rest without an obvious place for our distractions, without a support, takes some getting used to. We are used to the flicker-book of a meditation support allowing us to constantly touch into, again and again and again, that nondual immersion of Insight Meditation.



“TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC”

February 11, 2022

[Notes: 39-degrees out sent us hiking up the creek, through the woods, and across the meadows, wearing waterproof boots. We saw a lot of robins, which is surprising since tomorrow’s high is supposed to be 16-degrees. They seem here early. I hope that is a sign of an early spring.]

That title phrase is from the poet John Milton. Where to rest our foot or find a place to stand on? As my first dharma teacher used to say, “I’ve got no pot to piss in,” meaning he had nothing and no one to lean on. We all

leaned on him. Somehow, no matter what the problem, it's still our responsibility, because here we are, and we can't help responding. Any way you look at it, it's up to us.

I'm so tired of the naysayers, those whose only contribution is criticism of everything around them. Nothing and no one are right; somehow everything and everyone is wrong.

I'm of the glass-half-full persuasion. The future possibilities always look good to me if we work toward that. I'm particularly amazed at the rise of the conspiracy theorists around America in these times. Talk about living on fumes! One dear friend of mind even brought up the old chestnut that we never really made it to the moon. That too was all staged. Huh? I'm reminded of the old tune by "The Animals" and the lines:

"We gotta' get out of this place,
if it's the last thing we ever do."

No problem. We are all on our way, yet what makes you think that where we are going will be any better? How about we stand up, all pitch in here, and make the world better right now?

It seems that my strokes, including the recent mini-stroke (TIA), managed to loosen the connection between my mind and this body so that I have a chance

to sort of leap across the micro-gap synapse between mind/body, at least when it comes to spoken words. The mind is good, but I find myself at times hunting for words, putting words together, at least when speaking, and this can involve a bit of a reach, yet the pause, that occasional bit of silence itself is emphatic. Punctuating.

However, when I'm writing, no problem; the process of writing seems unchanged from the stroke. My mind and body are still connected and the synapses between the two fire like electrical charges. I have to work more for my words, yet they mean something, where before I tended at times to glibly rattle things off somewhat.

As for what the Buddhists call the 'Common Preliminaries', the 'Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to the Dharma', particularly as relates to that 'Fourth Thought,' which is often defined as the 'Repulsion of Samara'. I understand the concept, but have found it difficult to be repulsed by this world we live in. If you define Samsara as everything that is not enlightening, well sure. Yet, if you mean life as most of us live it, then my view is that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so it's on us how we view life.

For me, that 'Fourth Thought' is not about repulsion per se, so much as it is about not connecting to reality, understating (as in 'not resolving') the reality that is right before us. In other words, we can get disassociated. This makes Samsara simply our disassociation from Nirvana,

or something like that. We have lost touch or never had it.

It seems, for the most part, that we often don't (and sometimes this includes me) 'know' experientially what we are talking about. We haven't fully experienced it yet. Instead, we're still just talking about it, chattering. It takes some kind of intention and actual interaction with the physical to connect and get our attention, something to spark us to connect with the earth, with the ground of reality. As mentioned, synapses have to fire. Visualize the earth-touching-gesture of the Shakyamuni Buddha image. We are too much dreamers dreaming dreams of life and not enough able to actually connect enough to 'wake up'. We can seem to be endlessly 'reaching'.

So, instead of the traditional words 'repulsion of Samsara', for me it's more like amazement on my part at the shallowness (numbness) that we too often manage to muster instead of grounding ourselves in the lightning connection of fact. I'm not so much repulsed by, but rather struck by, the hollowness or emptiness of our meaning, our inability to 'mean' or actually know anything. The bottom line is that the rubber does not quite meet the road, leaving us high and dry – intellectual and unaffected. IMO, that's no way to live, if the mind and body do not connect.

In my case, as of late, the mind and the body are looser

(there's perhaps a gap), but they do connect, at least much of the time. The physical body each of us have is the ultimate talisman to which the mind must connect up. It is our good luck charm, so to speak.

Much of dharma training is about strengthening our mind-body connection, so the current of this moment, like electricity, runs through us and ties together mind and body into a complete immersion, which is called Insight Meditation, a part of Mahamudra Meditation. This connection needs to happen and be maintained in order for the more advanced dharma practices (nondual meditation) to occur.

The funny part is that if you are performing these non-dual dharma practices (Vipassana, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, etc.), it is obvious to you when nondual meditation is taking place in both yourself and in others. In fact, recognizing the actual nature of the mind is not something just conceptual, not something that one can imitate or assume. It really is what is called a 'ring-pass-not', a one-way gate that each of us must pass through sooner or later, with the help of an authentic guru, and the whole point in non-duality is clarity, lucidity, and that full immersion.

[Image of Synapses.]

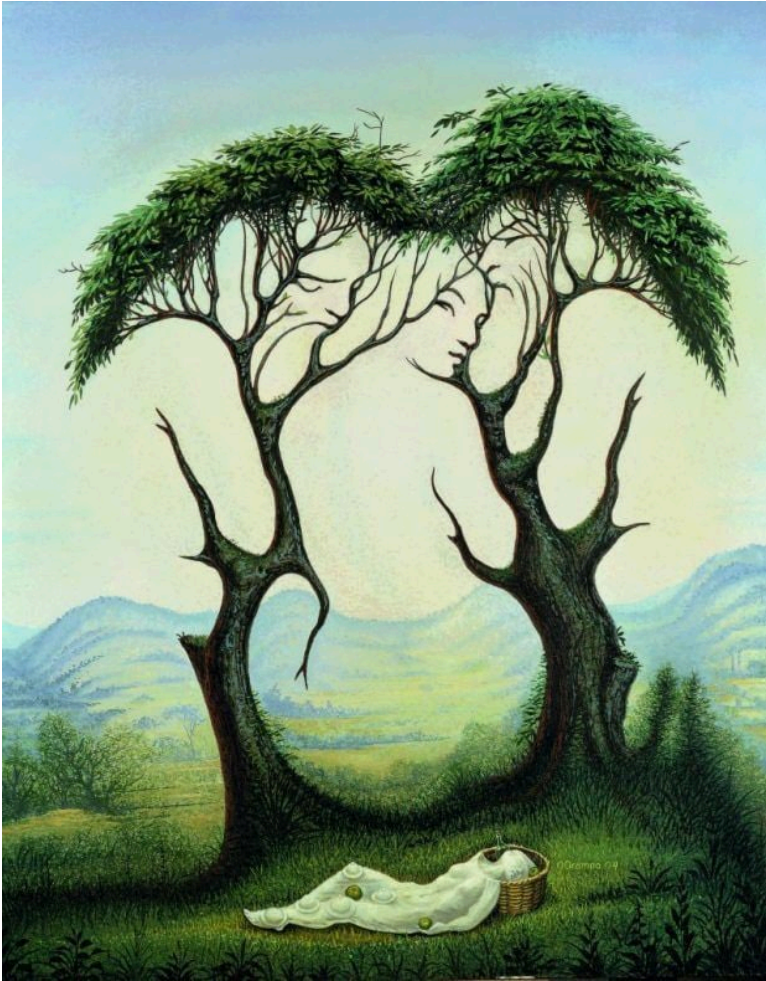


FIGURE-GROUND RECOGNITION

February 14, 2022

[Do you recognize the picture within this picture? If so, good; now try finding 15 more images in this one

photo? That's pretty easy. This blog is about recognizing the nature of our mind. Not so easy.]

Here is a little dharma exercise for those practitioners among our readers. The path to realization on the journey to enlightenment has many stages or waypoints that can be distinguished and are distinct.

Yet, the granddaddy of them all, the one waypoint that best demarcates or divides the dharma path into a 'before' and 'after' (at least in my opinion) is what is called in Mahamudra training 'Recognition,' meaning the point when the student recognizes the true nature of the mind.

This only happens for the first time once, and it is a 'realization', meaning once you have it, you can't walk it back. Once you 'realize" you realize. It's not like an experience that comes and goes. A 'realization' comes and stays. For example, when you 'realize' how to turn a light-switch on and off, it does not come and go. Once you realize it, you have it. It stays. Realization as to the actual nature of how our mind works is a wee bit more complicated than that, but it is the same principle.

If we have not recognized the actual nature of the mind, we will have no 'realization' at that point, just another experience that we have not realized, nothing to sustain us or empower us with the resulting meditation, and certainly nothing for us to expand and extend further.

That is why we can't fake dharma 'Recognition'. There is no point in that because without actual 'recognition' of the nature of the mind, we would not know what to do next, much yet have anything to do it with, nothing with which to be familiar, simply because we are not familiar with it. The whole process and the point of recognition is called 'becoming familiar' ('recognition') with the nature of the mind -- familiarity.

We first have to become familiar with the mind's nature, and then (and only then) can we extend or expand (carry on) that familiarity, that recognition. If we don't have that base recognition to start with, we have nothing to extend or expand. And this because nothing has been realized yet which we could expand. Since we have not yet definitively recognized the mind's nature, we don't have 'Recognition'. It is that simple.

To make this clearer, let's go over the sequence that marks the advent of 'recognition' in our dharma practice, which is the whole point of this blog.

Through what is called the 'Pointing-out Instructions' by an authentic guru (and the implementation of those instructions), the student is able to finally (for the first time, ever) recognize the actual nature of the mind and how it works, which is why this event is called "Recognition" in the first place. And that recognition is what we have to become familiar with (and is the

process of becoming familiar) before we can keep it in mind, much less extend or do anything with it. With 'Recognition', we not only realize how the mind works, but more important that we, just as we are, can work it.

And once we have recognized the actual nature of the mind, this is a realization and not just another experience that comes and goes that we have. We realize what we have never realized before, meaning that finally we have been introduced to the mind's actual nature so that we can use it. That is a point of no return, when we have recognized how the mind works and that we can work it. You can't 'un-realize' something.

Once introduced to the mind's nature to the point that we are certain about that nature, only then can we begin to expand or extend that recognition, because we have it. Without that recognition, we have nothing to speak of or to work with. We have not recognized anything until we do.

I hope you can see why without the initial recognition of the mind's nature, there is nothing to go on, nothing to extend or expand from or with. Therefore, if someone imagines they have Recognition, it is relatively easy for an authentic dharma teacher to test a student to see whether they have just an intellectual and conceptual idea of 'recognition' or whether they have grasped the actual nature of the mind and are then able to themselves work on extending and expanding their

realization to be ever more inclusive.

It's like dominos.

[Figure-ground image. Do you see the picture within the picture? If so, how about finding 16 images in this one photo?]



INITIAL EFFORT IN DHARMA

February 15, 2022

As any dedicated dharma practitioner knows, to some degree, meditation and effort don't mix well. Like a bobsled or sled run, pushing to start learning, making effort, is normal, but after that at some point we have to tuck it inside and take it from there, with little to no effort. 'Effort to meditate' is an oxymoron.

Effortless, as in 'effort less' dharma practice becomes imperative in the long run, perhaps after we have been practicing for some time, like years. When we stop just practicing and actually begin to meditate, meditation is by definition effortless. Meditation is not 'meditation' if it takes effort; it is 'practicing meditation'. How we streamline and gradually trim down our effort to

practice dharma is important.

Once immersed in doing actual Insight Meditation (Vipassana), there is no hurry to fall out of it and back into our normal dualistic view of subject/object. When meditating, it can seem like the times when we are feeling tired but not yet wanting or being quite ready to go to sleep. Instead, we try to stay up a little longer. However, even in Insight Meditation (at least with a support) there is still subtle (or not so subtle) effort required. And that effort, eventually, is tiring.

In learning to meditate, we can maintain clarity for longer and longer amounts of time. Or another way to put this is that we can maintain the clarity of Insight Meditation as long as we have the energy or interest to maintain that state. And we can work on making ourselves more and more aerodynamically shaped so that we lose energy more slowly and thus can sustain meditation longer.

Yet, this gradual leaking (expenditure) of energy in dharma practice (or even in meditation) remains a problem that we can improve, but perhaps not entirely reduce. That's more true in the effort to practice which I'm speaking of and not the effort to sustain meditation we eventually achieve.

As how to never lose energy, perhaps the more we are interested in what we are doing, the less effort-leakage

there is for us. And another view, perhaps also useful, is that there may be a sweet spot between streamlining our technique (not leaking energy) and the intensifying of our interest, a place where the two approaches overlap, become recursive, and create something like a perpetual motion machine.

To my mind, this is similar to what are called the practice of the 'Two Accumulations', the connate process of Merit (Skillful Means) and Awareness (Wisdom), where the more skillful our means become, the greater awareness that results, and these two qualities then feed one another recursively, the result of one being the input of the other (and vice versa), ad infinitum, propelling us with fusion along our dharma path.

Many small sessions of meditation are what my dharma teacher suggested. A session can be as long as it takes to pick up a cup of tea and take a sip. What we are training for here is to rest in the nature of the mind briefly. And it's 'briefly' because if our resting cannot be sustained, then thoughts arise, and thoughts can't be either maintained or rejected. They have a mind (our mind) of their own.

In fact, thoughts are just a sign that we are distracted and that it is time to look at the nature of the mind once again. And if we can't do that, we look at who is looking at the nature of the mind. Thoughts will dissolve effortlessly if that is done.

The point is to rest in the nature of the mind until thoughts begin to arise, which is a sign that we are already distracted and, as mentioned, should look at the nature of the mind's essence or look at who is doing the looking. Thoughts arising indicate that we are already distracted and tiring.



THE SWANS AND THE LAKE

February 16, 2022

The great 16th Karmapa, 'Rangjung Rigpe Dorje' was asked why he came to America, and he is quoted as responding:

'If there is a lake, the swans would go there.'

I feel the same way about what is called Insight Meditation, the particular type of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) that is part of Mahamudra Meditation. If I have a choice or can manage it, Insight Meditation is to me like that lake. I'm not a swan, but I would go there as often as possible, and I do. Every day.

In this sometimes difficult (for me) modern life of Samsara we are all living, it seems there is little rest, almost no place of peace, and few time-outs from the sharp-sided hail of events that stun us almost on a daily basis. Insight Meditation of the type I specified above is a relief and offers a precious time-out from these congested times we live in.

By now, I'm way beyond any other kind of relief. Insight Meditation is like a quiet cove in that lake the 16th Karmapa spoke of. As I was learning the dharma (not that I am done!), I found much of the practices I did difficult. Of course, the purification practices are difficult for all of us because they are purifying us by our doing them.

Yet, I sought and did not find any place to lay my head in my Samsara, so to speak, for something like 35 years of dharma practice and then some. For me, it was an uphill climb all the way and I tired, but never gave up because there was, IMO, no alternative! It's not that I had anywhere else to go. I felt this modern life we live in (Covid, politics, the world stage, etc.) was like a hellhound on my trail, and I have tried not to look back, but always forward, one foot in front of the other.

I don't believe in 'pie in the sky', yet at the same time I have looked for some relief somewhere, someday. Well, I never found that kind of relief until I was introduced to Insight Meditation by my dharma teacher, through his

kindness in putting up with me and pointing out to me (as I stumbled along) the actual nature of the mind and, after several attempts of not getting it, I finally got it. Even after that, I had to work harder for years at a special dharma practice to implement what Rinpoche had pointed out to me. It was like Sisyphus rolling the stone uphill.

And, on top of that, it took a fierce event in my life to drag me out of my ivory tower of concepts and thoughts down to the ground so that I could feel and touch reality. Only then, under that kind of pressure, did my dharma training kick in and help pop me out of where I had been all those years, and submerge me in the moment enough for me to learn to swim there.

And so, my point here is that, even with all the years of dharma training I worked through, apparently, I was still floating too high above the ground of reality to reach down enough to touch in. It took a harsh personal event to crush and grind me down to the level where the rubber actually met the road.

Of course, it was against my will, habits, and the trajectory I thought I was on. I fought against the perfect storm that life presented me and regardless, was plunged down the rabbit hole despite my protests.

However, once I was stripped of enough attachments, which is what it took, I stopped caring what happened to

me and managed to let go of what I was clinging to all those years. It was very painful. I was then squeezed through that wormhole or keyhole, and I emerged without the chaperone of duality and could for the first time see and became one with the 'Seeing' itself. I was 'One' with reality, and no longer two.

In other words, that's what it took to get my attention, and I didn't volunteer for it. Who would? I pray each of you fare better. Yet, it was then and there that I found some rest, clarity, and lucidity. And it was not conceptual, cerebral, or intellectual. It was visceral, gutsy, with the slippery taste of blood in my mouth, and experiential beyond thought. I was totally beyond all worry and hope, just like that, I was extruded, turned inside-out, until I didn't care whatsoever. I had never not-cared before.

That's what it took for me to get beyond duality, beyond the thought and self-consciousness of others and myself, to the point I could see beyond myself and all my attachments.



UNDERSTANDING CONCEPTS: OFTEN A BRIDGE TOO FAR

February 17th, 2022

Staying awake in the dharma, for me means being careful what dharma literature I read or try to read. If the dharma literature I try to read is too scholarly, whatever that means, I just fall sleep or tend to zone out or decide right-off that I will soon be falling asleep and put the book down. Perhaps some other time I will be able to read something that abstract. Sometimes I can read scholarly dharma and get something out of it, but more often I get little to nothing from it. And I'm sure I am not the Lone Ranger.

And for me, of the dharma teachings, especially the ones done in English over the last century, most have too

many Sanskrit words for me or are just too conceptual. I can't find the juice in them. In short, too often they are just a bridge too far. I am trapped within what I can actually understand, my conceptual limits. Often, I can't make enough sense out of the abstractions to keep reading.

As a musician at heart, I need a lot of 'juice' in what I read to stay awake. What I want or need is practical advice, something I can use right here and now, what can be used by someone like myself, who is not that advanced. I can't read about the ten Bhumis or the various bodhisattva levels and reduce them to sense. I would like to understand them, but they are way over my head. My area of experience is small, and what realization I might have is smaller yet, so I like to read around the area I know something about or the dharma path immediately ahead for me, and where that might lead.

It's like having a flashlight with a limited beam. I can only shine it so far ahead of the path where I am now and actually see anything. When you talk to me about the Bhumis, my eyes just start to roll. You may know about them, yet I sure don't, not yet at any rate. Yes, I can read it conceptually and understand most of the words, but I have no personal experience in that higher stratum and can't make useful sense of it. I have tried.

I have also tried hanging out with a group of dharma

scholars and all I came away with is confirmation that I'm not a scholar. I can get some intellectual and conceptual ideas from listening, but that's the last thing I need, more concepts. I already have too many of those. Instead, I want to feel my feet on the ground and, as they say, for me to get down to where the rubber meets the road.

I may not get very far along the road of dharma in this lifetime, yet however far I get, I want it to be visceral, hitting me in the gut, and to be fully immersed in the experience enough to hopefully have some realization as to what I am going through, or at least a sense that I am going through something. I can't (at least yet) make use of teachings that are over my head, teachings that are too scholarly or whatever we want to call them. As Popeye the sailorman put it "I yam what I yam."

I just need a little bit of heartfelt experience with the dharma. I have given up imagining I am going to get that far toward full enlightenment in this lifetime. However, I do want wherever I do get in the dharma to be a full immersion, and not just some empty concepts. That's not my idea of emptiness, being empty like a cup is empty.

Empty like a hologram? Well, that's a bit better, yet I still probably will hold out for yet another analogy. We have a certain 'suchness' to us just as we are. Yet, what we have is said to not be a permanent 'anything' and yes,

we are all impermanent. Impermanence is a fact for each of us.

Still, what sense we do have, even if it falls short of being permanent like the proverbial 'soul' people wish for, has to be enough for us, because it's what we have and all we have ever had. It's not like we had more and now we have less. This is it! I feel we do OK with what manner of being (or lack thereof) we have; at least I do.

Does life get a little thin every now and then? Sure, it does. I'd be lying if I pretended otherwise. It gets thick and thin, back and forth, like a pendulum, and on around again. That's how samsaric life is, cyclic. There's not much we can do about where we are, except work with what we have been given. Here is one story.

Back in the 1980s, one of the four 'Heart Sons' of the Karmapa (his four regents) came to our center. His Eminence stayed a week with us. At one point we were all in our shrine room, which for us is an outdoor building by itself. There were a handful of people present and His Eminence, many of them just townsfolk who had seen his picture in the paper and came over.

Then, for reasons I do not know, His Eminence suddenly decided he would give Mahamudra transmission right there on the spot, with all these folks who knew nothing about dharma present. And he did just that. He formally gave transmission for Mahamudra meditation while all

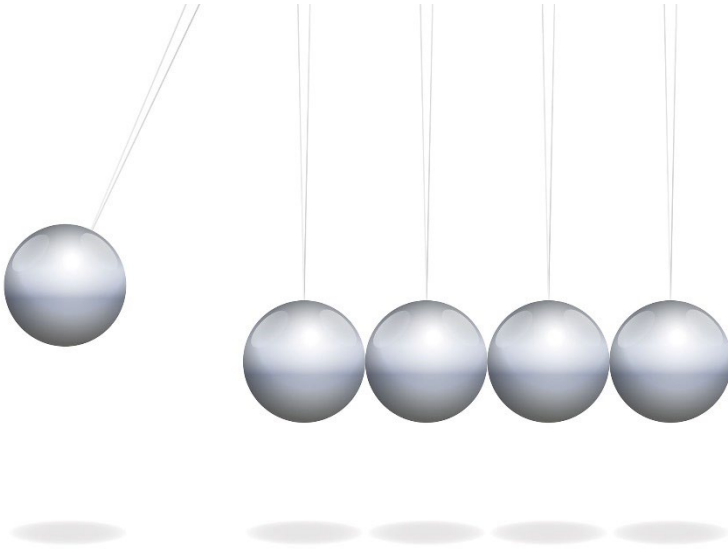
of us sat there.

I tell you true, dear readers, that as His Eminence performed this ritual, the walls of the shrine building we were in kind of faded and became shimmering transparent, like I could see right through them. Everything was golden translucent, and this went on for some time. It was like I was suspended way out there in space and time.

I have no idea exactly what happened but happen it did. I can only imagine what those townsfolk experienced. I know I was transported to some extended inner landscape I had never been before or since.

My point is that as samsaric beings, we need something more than just the conceptual understanding that many books and dharma scholars can share with us. I know they are valuable, but many are just too abstract for someone like me.

As for myself, I feel the need to connect to the dharma (the actual reality) at a root level and to experience the very ground of my being. As the pith dharma teachings say, "In the midst of experience, realization may arise."



EASIEST DHARMA PRACTICE

February 19, 2022

Meaning, the easiest practice that actually adds up and works, IMO. A problem for me when I started out with some dharma practice in my life was that I was already busy trying to support my wife and kids, pay the rent, and all of that. And so, while the specter of impermanence (and my eventual death) was on the sidelines trying to flag me down and I took that to heart, my day-to-day distractions and necessities always seemed to win out and take precedent.

Yes, I practiced, but the amount of practice I could manage, and a ticket, would get me a ride on the bus, so to speak. How to turn that situation around seemed mostly impossible. Yes, I wanted that dharma, but

perhaps not today. I kept kicking that can down the road.

Of course, I eventually had a little image of the Buddha and a corner of my office where I had a pillow to sit on, and the intention of doing some amount of sitting meditation each day, but you know how that goes. The emergencies of daily life ended up coming first, and the sitting meditation second, if at all on a given day.

I can remember remembering that I had done no meditation that day and sitting up in my bed and doing like a minute or so. However, I knew that was not enough. It would be like going to church for an hour on Sunday and expecting to get to heaven. Or playing guitar 15 minutes a day and becoming an actual musician. Not impossible, just not likely.

What I needed was some kind of dharma practice that I could do as I went along with my busy day doing whatever I had to do. I didn't know of any dharma practice back then like that, so I did the best I could, but it was (and I knew this) not enough to get much of anywhere with my dharma practice. At that rate, I would never get ahead.

I was eventually able to work my schedule and get more daily practice in, but never enough that I felt it was what I needed. Over time, the dharma became increasingly important to me, and in particular as I aged.

Samsaric life, by definition, is cyclic. Everything goes around and around and ends in death. Do we want to (or can we) take any steps in life to address this or do we just let it slide and hope for the best? Those were my thoughts back then.

Eventually, I was able to carve out a little more space and time in my life of cycles to at least put my foot in the door. It was not much, but it was all that I could manage. And also, the amount and kind of dharma practice I could do was a far cry from what was needed, IMO. I worked away at the problem, but it was slow going and not all that inspiring, at least what I could come up with.

Eventually, I did manage to gain on it a little and work through at least some of the basic purification practices, what are called the Common and Extraordinary Preliminaries. There was nothing very enlightening about those because they are all about removing whatever was obscuring me from devoting more time to dharma practice. I'm not saying it was not worth it. It was, yet I was not at the point where I could actually meditate, I was at the point of practicing for meditation. That's why we all called what we did our 'dharma practice.' We tried to practice each day, yet it was, as mentioned, practicing meditation and not actual meditation.

There is one dharma practice that I eventually discovered that I could do all day long while I carried out my duties that actually accumulated a lot of practice hours, which is what I most needed. I will share it with you. I still do it as well. It is called "Reactivity Tong-Len" and it is very easy to do.

All that it requires is to begin noting and becoming aware of our moment-to-moment reactions, the things we react to all day long, despite ourselves. We can start with the knee-jerk reactions and as we become more aware move on down the line to lesser and lesser reactions.

For one, we are already doing this, reacting, and mostly without our consent or meaning to. We do this all day long. It could be a reaction to something someone said, or a loud exhaust outside our window, to our kids interrupting whatever we are doing, and on and on.

The point is that we cannot deny that each of these interruptions is our reaction, and not that of anyone else. Even if we did not cause what we react to, in truth the reaction is all our own. And I found it is of no help to dwell on what caused me to react, but only useful to note the reaction, own it as my reaction (and no one else's), and then drop it. Move on.

And I could do this all day long. After all, I had already spent my own energy in the reaction itself, so it was

done and paid for. All I had to do was to take note that I had reacted, own the reaction as mine, and then just drop it, let it go. And then again.

This goes on all day. It may be that we react to a dress someone is wearing (we don't like it), the too-big nose that someone else has, or the color of their tie. These are all reactions. Yes, they are small reactions, but they accumulate; they add up to major proportions.

In fact, as we become more and more aware of our constant reactions, we realize that an enormous amount of energy is lost each day simply from our reactions. And, as we become more aware of reacting, we begin to tone back or tone down the reactions. Simple awareness of them and acceptance that these are our reactions is enough for them to gradually be recognized as they occur and be removed or at least toned back.

And all of that lost energy from these endless reactions and our reactivity is gradually restored to us. We gain back a massive amount of energy that we otherwise waste each day. Here is a free ebook on this dharma practice.

TONG-LEN: THE ALCHEMY OR REACTION

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Tong-len%20-%20Second%20Edition.pdf>

And here are a group of articles on the topic:

<http://michaelerlewine.com/viewforum.php?f=373&sid=a0dff2531d3c4650b44d891005f38c86>



WORDS CAN'T MAKE SENSE

February 20, 2022

[In this cold end of winter, I have few live plants to photograph. This Cyclamen plant, which we have had for years, will have to do. It keeps flowering every winter. Grateful to see it.]

Certainly, there are enough words in the world, but words themselves are not enough. In the history of words, no matter how many words are spent, they can but touch the surface of what they mean or point to. At best, words can only point beyond themselves or suggest what they mean. Words are helpless to express their meaning to us. Only we can do that.

I'm not saying we should not use words or even trim

them back excessively. That's not the point, which is that words are just what they are, words, a conceptual gesture or pointer toward or at what they mean. Words can help, but they also can misdirect. In fact, words can't help but misdirect.

The import or meaning of words, all words, depends on the sense they make, and 'sense' by definition means the five senses and that we must experience the meaning of words for ourselves, not in themselves but what they refer to. We must experience and live the meaning. Words all point as to their meaning. They say: "Go and live, experience."

And so, write, write, write those words, yet understand that in themselves they are a bridge too far as to communication. Sure, words are all we have much of the time, and they do, as mentioned, point beyond themselves at what they mean.

However, do we get their meaning? Not really. Perhaps with words alone we get a whiff of their meaning, yet we will never get their meaning unless we live and experience that meaning for ourselves based on the sense (senses) the words make. It's all about living experience. Words can but point in the direction of an experience that we must have to get any meaning from them. It's all about the sense words make, and sense always requires an experience. Otherwise, they are nonsense.

There is no such thing as a vicarious meaning we can get from words that is other than that, conceptual. We can't salt the salt. We like to think so, perhaps, but it's a logical impossibility. What words can but point at is what has to be experienced for there to be meaning. And only we can do that for ourselves. Words are like a road sign, yet we have to walk down that road to get to the meaning. We have to live and find experience to find meaning.

Take this photo. I can try to describe it in words but won't even try. One look allows you to experience it for yourself and take whatever meaning you can from it.

[Photo by me.]



WHERE THE PROCESS IS THE RESULT

February 20, 2022

This is about the result of a process as actually a byproduct. 'Writing' for me is like breathing and we all have to breathe. So, I write. It is the process of writing that for me is itself the point and not just what is written. I need that process in order to feel normal and I'm not so much concerned what I write about, although it is usually dharma related. It could be anything, but the process, the manipulation of words and sentences by means of clarity is the point. As mentioned, what is written is just the byproduct of the process of writing and not vice versa. I serve the process.

In my case, writing and photography are my usual

support for doing insight Meditation. They are the focus for my meditation. And while these two, photography and writing, have been the focus for many years, it seems that Insight Meditation in general has kind of flowed (at least a bit) into everything I do by now. I call it 'mission creep'.

I wonder how often folks acknowledge the various processes we are used to and depend on. We tend to think of a process as something that produces a result, rather than the result as the byproduct of the process. Breathing is not just a byproduct of the body; the body is also a byproduct of breathing.

The same is true for the many objects that we take for appearances in our life. While we have been focused on those objects like, forever, that is not the only way of looking at it, like 'who' is doing the looking at. We can defocus our attention and let it go free or at least let it lapse in importance and begin to fall into the background.

If we do, by that same taken, we as a subject also get relaxed and not emphasized. The two go together like hand and glove, subject and object. Is this just a backdoor way of saying that by this we are morphing toward the non-dual experience of life?

In other words, if we get increasingly flexible in just how we do things, if we articulate with increasing clarity,

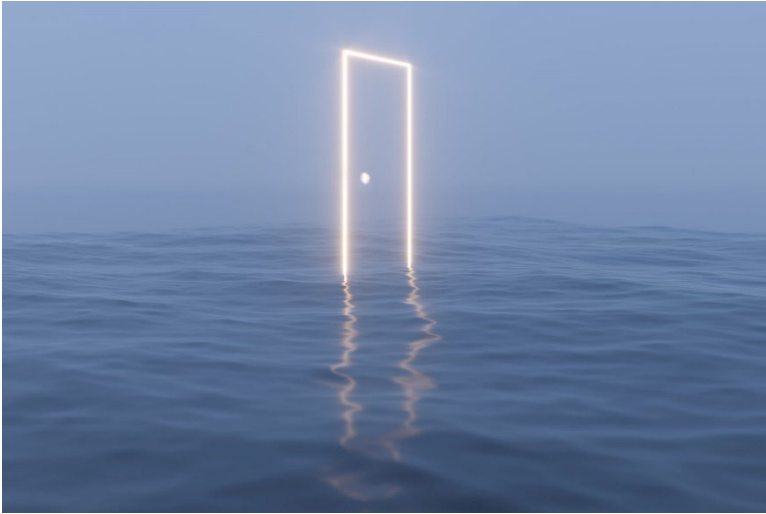
meaning exercise our means of experience, does that then become a window for us into another dimension of life? Are we through that 'looking glass', so to speak, and into another world or way of living?

Does this kind of earned flexibility I am pointing at function more like 'worry beads', meaning is it a magnet for our attention that distracts the restlessness that we may have and firmly holds our distracted attention so that something else within us is freed to gaze at the Moon instead of at the finger pointing out the Moon?

I see this approach as a particular (and useful) kind of meditation that, like a vortex, pulls our attention down into its empty center, to where it becomes a turbine that converts what would otherwise (and always has) been distracting for us, into a way of bypassing that distraction and instead seeing clearly, despite those distractions. In fact, it uses our distraction against itself.

Is this a shortcut to realization, collecting or focusing our distractions and using them as a fulcrum or pivot, rather than continue to allow them to ride herd on us as they always have. Or, rather than a shortcut, is this instead the path itself being shared with us?

Is this why mantras, prayer wheels, slogans, and various mnemonics are used and so helpful in dharma training. It's an entire genre of support for our dharma practice.



GETTING THE INSIDE OUT

February 21, 2022

My daughter Anne and her two daughters Emma and Josephine rolled into town yesterday and spent the night. Anne brought some sourdough bread dough that she had made and it had risen, and on the spot baked a loaf in our cast-iron Dutch-Oven. It was incredibly good. Wish I could do that.

Anne is a trained cook, even a chef, and has worked in restaurants, cooked and catered for many large events. We had some good talk and also a couple of wild kids running from room to room, until they went outside in the cold, at first with bare feet, but later with coats, hats, and shoes. And in the evening, we watched a replay of men's half-pipe finals (with skis) at the Olympics and

enjoyed that.

This morning, I made everyone breakfast and the group then went on their way up north to Traverse City to visit my daughter May and her daughter Iris for Iris's 6th birthday. They have been planning a sledding party, although (so I am told) perhaps another snowstorm is coming in. My wife Margaret also went up north with them. As for me, I remain here. Being outside for several hours in the cold is not a good idea for me just now. That or I could go and sit in a warming hut and wear a mask. That does not appeal to me either. Otherwise, I would like to be there. And so, now I would like to talk and share with those open to it more about one of my favorite subjects, Insight Meditation. Words cannot begin to express it, yet there is no other approach but silence.

It occurs to me that when I perform Insight Meditation with a support, in this case the support is language and writings like this, it is important to understand what 'with support' means. What it means is that we are doing Insight Meditation, not on itself, which would be sitting and being aware of awareness itself, but rather (as I like to do) mixing the awareness of Insight Meditation with whatever support I choose, in my case using Insight Meditation either to write blogs like these or do close-up photography. Here I will use writing.

And so, considering meditation with the support of

writing essays or blogs, a writing session with support is not just one long period of time during which I am doing Insight Meditation. If it were, that could be hours and I don't believe it works like that. Instead, so I have been taught, Insight Meditation sessions can be as short as the time it takes to raise a teacup and take a sip.

While I can do that, Instead I believe that over the years I have naturally fallen into the habit of doing just what the Insight Meditation teachings point out, that many short sessions are the way to become familiar with the mind through Insight Meditation. For example.

As I write, each moment I rest my mind, meaning that I let go and allow myself to immerse into what is called Insight Meditation, whatever we could agree that is. And I rest in that immersion, which is clear and lucid, and I can see (while immersed) what is there to be seen. And since I am also writing, I am wrapped around whatever idea I am shining the light of Insight Meditation on that is in my mind. I am immersed in that nonduality for a moment or two and clearly seeing, and then I fall back into duality (subject and object), and while back in duality once again) I make sure to write down what I have seen when I was immersed. It sounds complicated, but it is not. It is seamless and restful. Timeless would be the word.

And then I do it again, and then again and again and again, many scores of times much like we would put a

credit card in an ATM and remove it, not once, but repeatedly, over, and over. And so, a session of Insight Meditation is in reality a string of short sessions strung together like beads on a mala or rosary, merging almost seamlessly into one another, these many short sessions, but back to back for as long as needed.

And so, without being aware of it, I find myself doing many short sessions of immersion using Insight Meditation, each immersion is just that, an immersion and a withdrawal. Immerse, see what is exposed in the lucidity of that moment, withdraw, and then noting it, writing down (if anything stands out) and then re-immersion. I do it again... and again.

When I am immersed and am in Insight Meditation, one of the hallmarks of that form of meditation is its clarity and lucidity. So, as I go into submersion and touch into that clarity everything is crystal clear and there is no self-consciousness or any 'white noise' whatsoever. It very much is time out from time itself. Frequently the insight within is vivid and striking. I can't always take it all in, much less remember what I absorbed. And so, I go back again and again, gathering what I can.

And so, for me, over these many years, this repeated immersion has become almost automatic, a process that I repeat whenever I write. In other words, I allow myself to immerse into nonduality and in the clarity and lucidity of that instant I note whatever is shown to me from

within the mind, and then as I withdraw from the immersion, back into a somewhat dualistic state, I actually notate what makes sense (what I can remember) to notate. I write it out, but I also almost forget (or do forget) whatever is seen in Insight Meditation, so I go back again and again.

And that can go on for minutes or hours, yet (as mentioned) not in one long immersion, but rather a great many immersions, withdrawals, and notations. I am paused at the edge of nonduality, allowing myself to immerse in the unity, and then when that immersion falls back into duality, when I come out of it, I try to remember what that experience has shown me. And, in the case of writing, I write it down. It's not 'automatic writing' yet it is much like it.

And during it all I am riveted (and also comforted) by the clarity and lucidity of Insight Meditation in that instant of immersion. It is clear as a ringing a bell. And when I pull back or fall out of that immersion, I take note, if I can, of what was experienced while immersed, at least what I can remember of it.

And I have increasingly learned, because it feels natural to completely let go and surrender myself to that moment of immersion. I could say, I throw myself into it, but that is too deliberate. Rather, I abandon myself in the moment whole-heartedly and slide within the mind, and then when it can no longer be sustained, I fall back

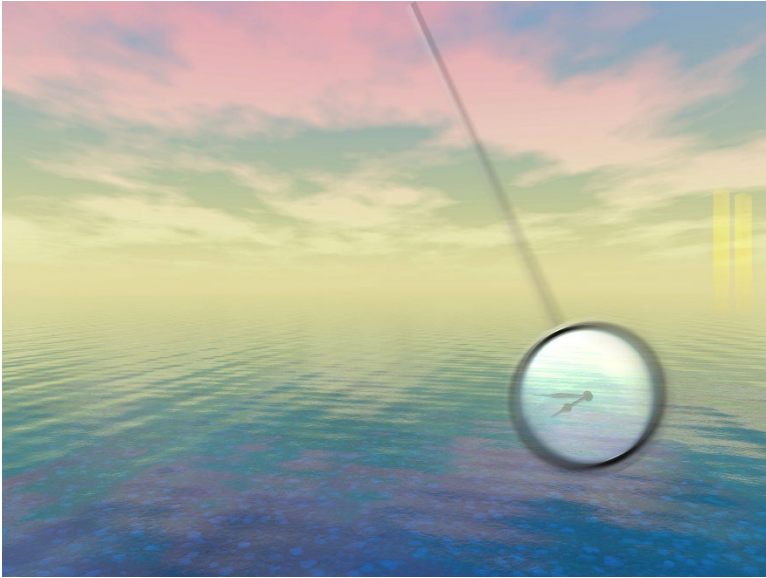
out of it. I do this over and over and over.

That's in a nutshell the process of how I write, at least as I understand it this moment. Nonduality and duality can work together. In fact, they have to. There is really no choice, if only because we cannot yet maintain the nondual state. Or to put it another way, we can only rest in nonduality as long as no thoughts arise. And we each can determine how long that is, but mostly it's not long. The arousal of thought signals the end of any nondual illumination I have managed because that is the definition of duality -- thoughts and an observer. The rising of thought marks that we are out of nonduality and have once again reentered the dual state of subject and object.

This whole learning of the dharma is an education, a becoming familiar with areas of my mind that are new yet always were a part of me. And I don't or can't see everything all at once. Instead, I slowly become familiar with the mind by degrees. There is so much I miss or can't just take in all at once. I like to say that immersion in Insight Meditation is like (using a computer analogy) like ROM and not RAM. It is read-only, but it is crystal sharp, vivid, and totally unencumbered by thought. READ ONLY, yet try not to forget.

I get glimpses that, while similar perhaps to flash bulbs going off, light up the inside so that what can be seen can be seen and then it fades. For a moment I see what I

can see, but as the illuminate fades that becomes hard to remember, so I end up with just a part of what was seen illuminated. This is an ongoing process, this process of illumination, what is called Insight Meditation.



SAMPLING ETERNITY

February 22, 2022

The simple truth is that it is difficult to sustain Insight Meditation, which perhaps is why it is almost universally recommended that Insight Meditation is best done in many short sessions rather than attempt to prolong a session.

It's really not up to us because it appears not to be in our control. We can sustain a session of Insight Meditation until it is interrupted by a thought that arises to break the ice so to speak. Once we are thinking again, we are not in a nondual state of mind anymore, so that's that.

Basically, like bobbing for apples, I troll the edge of my insight, probing for a soft spot that gives way, opening into my own stream of consciousness. And when that happens, I sample that stream. And I do it again, repeat doing it, probing my own consciousness and then falling out of the nonduality of Insight Meditation, but retaining some of the flavor or insight that was seen or shown while there. I do this repeatedly for as long as I need to sample my own subconscious mindstream. Remember, I am using Insight Meditation with support, and the support is writing articles like this one.

And when, while probing, a probe gives way to an actual stream of consciousness that is clear and lucid, I sample that by resting in that stream until I'm rocked out of that and find myself with thoughts again, back in this dualistic world we all share.

In other words, I'm siphoning my own stream of consciousness a sip at a time, just below the surface (sometimes deeper), and managing to retain the flavor of what is experienced or an entire insight enough to incorporate it into whatever I am writing. I am finding more intuitive words and ideas.

Anyway, that's what I call doing Insight Meditation with a support, and the support here, as mentioned, is the process of writing a blog like this. And I have done this for so long, so many years, that by now my sampling process is essentially seamless, with my repeated

excursions into the 'twilight zone' of nonduality via Insight Meditation, which are almost automatic.

These visits beyond time, this timelessness within clock-time, aside from being clarifying and lucid, are also deeply restful, a time out from the helter-skelter of samsaric life. I know of no way to sample eternity other than through the process of Insight Meditation.



A SIP OF TEA

February 23, 2022

I can mention this and should, for the importance of it, if not for the beauty of articulating it. When I first had my initial (I would call it a breakthrough) Insight Meditation experience, it took me quite a while to figure out what was happening to me. It's not like it came with a label on it that said, "Insight Meditation." Nothing of the sort.

All I knew is that I really, really, really liked whatever was happening, and I knew it was the dharma speaking to me, but not exactly what flavor, why, or how. I will spare you that (could be quite extended) story of how it went down and get to the point here.

I cannot express properly in words (I have tried) how

very, very difficult it was for me to expand and extend my Insight Meditation from and through photography (in which it first arose) to writing blogs like these, in which Insight Meditation is using my writing skills as a support for that form of meditation.

It took me about one and one-half years of constant, daily, effort to make that happen. I don't mean that I just took a shot at it. I anguished over it each day because I had tasted the joy of Insight Meditation as a photographer and wanted more than anything else to be able to do the same with writing, which I did a lot more of the time than I spent on photography.

I thought of little else every day, but try, try, try to extend Insight Meditation to accept writing as a support. At first, I thought I could just 'will' it to happen, you know, turn my attention to it like (as the dharma teaching say) a Buddha might to us, and it would happen. No sir. That did not in the least way work. Not at all. Nothing at all happened other than nothing.

And so, what it did take, as mentioned, is over a year of constant effort, inch by inch and millimeter by millimeter, attempting to make this happen. Now that I understand what is required, I can see better how to approach it, which is why I bother to share this with you, in hopes that those few of you who are ready to have this happen can do that without the time and effort I blindly had to put in.

For one, I did not know what was happening and had no name to label it with other than I saw my dharma practice was undergoing a sea change. And although I was willing (I was using my 'WILL' to make it happen), that had zero effect, my willing it. Yet, there I was, day by day, with every ounce of effort I could muster trying everything including the kitchen sink, as they say, to get this done. Yet the result was 'Nada'.

While weeks went to months and the months piled up beyond a year, I labored at this task because I wanted so much for it to be so. Well, it eventually did happen, and my point here is that it happened on a time scale (slower) than anything else I have ever thought to do. If you can embrace that requirement, it can happen, because it did in my case. Had I not persevered I could of easily assumed it was impossible.

As to what I did wrong, that would be a lot, yet I will suggest what I consider as the best steps for a result. And, to no surprise, what works is just what all the dharma textbooks say works, only I did not understand how to sequence all this. That's what I intend to explain here.

What the dharma textbooks and pith teachings say or point out is that when it comes to the special form of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) of the kind used in Kagyu Mahamudra training, the approach should be in very

short sessions. As my dharma teacher taught me, the length of a session might be as long as it takes to pick up a teacup and take a sip. That's not long.

What I failed to get consciously, but eventually ended up doing without realizing what I was doing, is that these small or tiny sessions can be strung together like beads on a string to create a much longer single session of Insight Meditation, and one that eventually becomes seamless. This is what I eventually did, although as mentioned, not realizing what I was doing at the time. I just naturally did that, and it worked. I was naturally finding intuition and was beyond considering it as 'technique'.

In fact, I was taking all those very short sessions of Insight Meditation, stringing them together, one after another, until what resulted was and amounted to one large single session. And each smaller session (going into Vipassana and coming out) so meshed together that I was initially not aware that I was almost recursively merging this string of sessions into a single (quite elegant) gesture – an extended session.

And so, my advice to those interested in all this is to first decide if you want to perform Insight Meditation with a support (as I have described here) or would you prefer to do Insight Meditation on itself, meaning, sitting and become aware of awareness itself. That would be doing it without a support.

And second, I would suggest that although each session is very short, try stringing them together, much like we string together our breaths and breathing, to provide a single flow and process. Expect to work on this for a long time and with real effort unless you are very fortunate. And by 'real effort', of course I mean the effort to have no effort, for while our dharma 'practice' can be effortful, actual mediation has to be (and is) effortless.



MOON OVER WATER

February 24, 2022

How important, at least in my opinion, the use of the special form of Insight Meditation as used in Mahamudra training is easy to explain, especially given this samsaric world we live in.

Try as I might, it can be very difficult to get a clear reflection as to where I am in life, no matter where I look. And we each look for our reflection in the world around us, especially in faces of those we come in

contact with and know best.

The analogy is like the reflection of the Full Moon in the night sky as reflected in all the bodies of water on the planet that are capable of reflecting that lunar image. As mentioned, it seems that we all look for reflections of ourselves to guide us wherever we can find them in this samsaric life we share. However, the clarity of a reflection we get back can be a problem.

It seems that whenever I look into the reflection of someone from whom I can learn, I don't see where they are at, but rather where I am at. I see myself through or reflected in them. For example.

The reflection I received from my dharma teacher of 36 years was, for me, the most perfect and helpful, but just as the Moon in the sky is reflected in every pool of water that exists, the image reflection of the Moon in each pool of consciousness varies based on how much that pool's water is troubled or disturbed. Our own reflection as seen through their eyes is distorted to the degree they are.

Of course, we see ourselves reflected in family, friends, teachers, not-so-friends, 'enemies' and so on. In that sense, life can be like a hall of mirrors, a myriad of reflections but (as mentioned) there is no guarantee how accurate is the image we see of ourselves in them because of the lack of clarity of the images reflected in

their mind. This is why, in my opinion, the vivid clarity available to us in Insight Meditation is such a precious jewel and why it should be developed with love and great care. It does not depend on other people's reflection.

It is important to understand that Insight Meditation reflections or insights are of the read-only type, non-discursive. We can read it out but not write anything back or in any way alter what is seen through Insight Meditation. In that sense it is static, yet very, very clear.

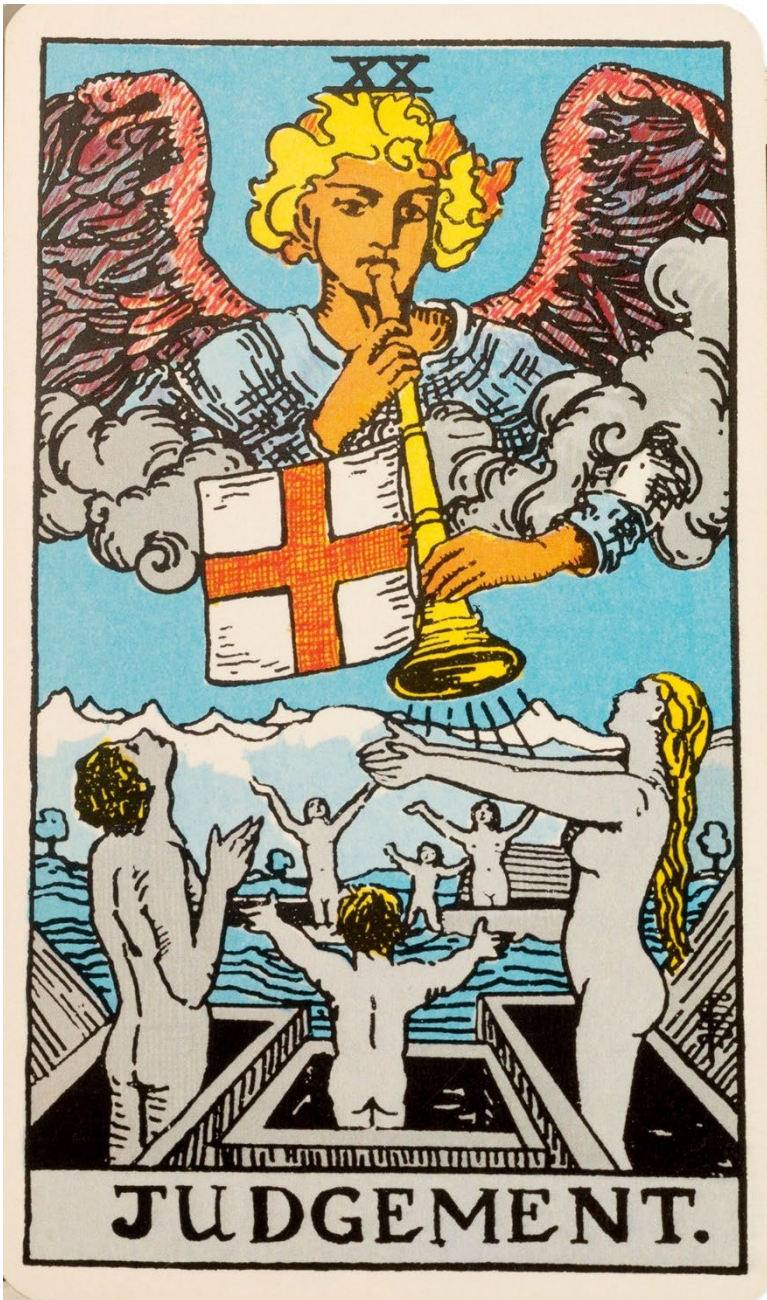
However, whatever we retrieve or see through the use of Insight meditation, be it an idea, impression, intuition, and so on, we are free to do whatever we want with. We can use it as it is, alter or modify it, change it, and so on down the line. Once seen as it is through Insight Meditation, any insight we take away back into duality is our responsibility as to what we do with it. That's a double-edged sword. It is up to us.

I consider learning to immerse in the present moment using Insight Meditation with a support (whatever type of support we choose, in my case photography or writing) is of great value in just the living of life. And this because of the clarity and lucidity of what is seen through this special type of Insight Meditation as used in Mahamudra training.

I'm not sure why this is so or just how it works, yet I can

attest that it does work because I have experienced it for many years now. And I can say that through Insight Meditation I am free of my dualistic habits at least for a time and because of that I somehow can see more clearly what life offers me and make better choices.

As to whether we are seeing the future or are things just more clear with Insight Meditation? To me, by using Insight Meditation, I feel like I am immersed in a sea of fresh ideas, images, intuitions, and truths unlike anything I have known in my current dualistic state of samsara.



THE LAST JUDGEMENT

February 25, 2022

Although I am a great believer in the Last Judgement, the last word or view, yet in a sense that has never come and never will come. Continuing to revise the present based on the past alone is an exercise in futility, IMO.

The present, while perhaps a product of the past, is being created by the future as well. It is the future that is being presented to us, moment by moment. The future too has to be discounted. IMO, the great Mahasiddha Tilopa said this as well as it can be said, when he wrote:

"Don't Prolong the Past."

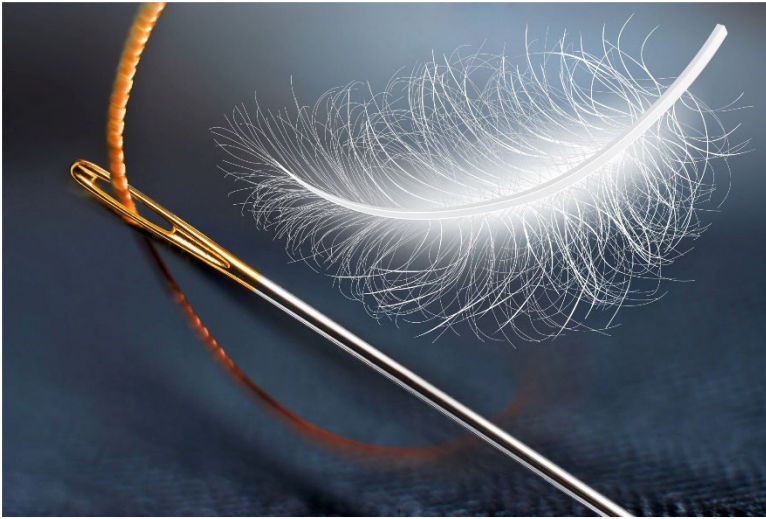
and

"Don't Invite the Future."

He also said, "Don't Alter the Present," and that about covers it, other than Tilopa added:

"Just Relax, as it is."

The above words are called 'Tilopa's Words of Advice', and IMO they are some of the most useful slogans in the world. Or course, most of us don't get it or if we do, we don't take it to heart. We ignore the advice.



GIVE IT A REST

February 25, 2022

The problem for many in discovering Insight Meditation for themselves is that it is not a relative or dualistic practice. It will not support samsara's habitual dualism of subject and object, meaning the 'I' of me over here and the object of 'you' over there, or vice-versa.

If we want to find out about invoking Insight Meditation ourselves, we will have to go it alone, which would be better phrased as we go it 'all one', parsing that word differently. We are not used to expunging our sense of Self, taking the plunge, so to speak. With full immersion, we fear for our very Self, as if we would be snuffing out the flame on a candle, which of course is not the case. Nevertheless, a common fear.

Probably, and more to the point, is that we don't know how to do Insight Meditation even if we wanted to. It is not a natural act or experience for those of us who are habitually dualistic and have never known otherwise, at least consciously. And so, there is not a button that we can press marked "nonduality" and we might be loath to press it. We wouldn't know where to start being nondual, that is, experiencing no subject and no object.

The way that most of the dharma teachings I have encountered suggest we begin with this is to simply, at the end of any dharma practice or prayer that we do, simply pause and rest in the present moment. In other words, take a break or have a brief time out from time's normal sequencing of events.

And if we want to get more technical about how to do this, we will note that in fact 'we' don't (or can't) simply rest the mind ourselves. We don't make this happen. Instead, we allow the mind to come to rest, or better said yet, since the mind is already always at rest in its own nature, we allow ourselves to let go and just let things be as they already are, at rest.

Actually, we do this all the time, get lost or distracted, just not consciously. Yet, with the nonduality of the special Insight Meditation (Vipassana) as used in Mahamudra Meditation, we are consciously giving up control and allowing our mind to relax, allowing

ourselves to relax. We just let go, becoming one with the moment, or as one dharma saying goes: "Relax, as it is." Is that so hard?

Well, yes, this seems for most of us not to be easy, just becoming one with the present moment. That's why if we are interested (if we have the natural interest), we begin to explore doing this (or rather 'not' doing this) and start to figure out how we can have or allow this to happen, our relaxing just as it is. It's 'we' who much change.

I can well remember, early on in my dharma practices, being asked to do this at the end of any sitting meditation I did, to pause and rest for a moment in the nature of the mind. It was, in fact, the most difficult part of any session, this doing of nothing at all. Of course, I tried, but I did not know what I was doing or just how to do it, as mentioned, this relaxing, just as it is.

And why is that? And how? I felt exposed and stupid even trying to do something that was unknown or foreign to me, this doing of nothing at all, this pausing for a moment. Of course, I understood the instruction, at least the words, that I was 'to relax', but actually resting on-command was like an oxymoron for me. And for how long? I just sat there waiting for nothing to happen, which did. Nothing.

It took me many years, first to even take that moment of

pause seriously enough, and second to actually allow the mind (or myself) to 'relax as it is.' Initially, and for years, I just sat there for a moment feeling kind of self-consciously stupid or something like that. It was like someone was watching me try to relax and let go. Apparently, that was me watching myself and feeling self-conscious.

Eventually however, with help from dharma teachings and an actual teacher I began to understand that the 'relax' that I was being instructed to do was the same kind of relaxation that I do when I watch a good movie, and not something religious or otherwise 'special'. That idea took a long time, to accept that the 'rest' was something I already knew how to do. Yet, that realization that I could rest was key.

When the instructions said to 'rest' in the nature of the mind, I had no idea whatsoever what the 'nature of the mind' was or meant other than as another concept that I did not understand. And then there was the actual 'doing' of it, the relaxing, the giving myself to it, the letting go. That was not so easy for me, because I come tightly wrapped, so to speak, although it helped (as mentioned above) that all I was being asked to do was relax as I already knew how to relax when I felt like relaxing at the end of a long day. I can do that.

And, as to how long I should sit there attempting to relax? That was important, and the answer is we should

sit there relaxed until a thought or thoughts arise. A single thought ends the session and reverts us to samsaric duality. Well, that was not so easy, because I was already filled with thoughts going in, if only those of being self-conscious for attempting to do this at all. So, the time I could sit there, and pause was pretty much instantaneous, like not any time at all. Thoughts were always already right there taking up all the oxygen. So, initially, there was no gap. Period.

And so, this took time, a lot of time, before there was any buffer or gap at all between my letting go and relaxing as it is (so to speak) and the first thought that arose. I already had thoughts going into the resting, so I did not have to wait to end the session. There really was no session. And this went on, like this, for still more years, I would guess.

However long it takes to just relax is up to us, so we can just kick that can down the road until we do or begin to figure out how this could be done. I mostly kicked the can down the road for a very long time, years, and sat there, dumb as a stone, waiting for a moment or two to pass and for thoughts to occur, so I could get up and on with my day. At that point in my practice session, that was the end of that. I was done with the session and back out of there, starting my workday and post-meditation. And that's how it was for me, the years of waiting for me to get around to figuring this out.

This resting in the present moment is perhaps intended to sow a seed, get us started in learning to relax and rest in the mind. It does not matter whether we are a dharma student or not. Learning to rest like this in the moment is something we can all learn to do. As small a step as this may seem, these short resting sessions can pay big dividends down the line if we can manage to actually learn to rest in the nature of the mind. Too bad we don't yet know what that nature is or how to do that. It seems the cart is a bit before the horse.

Yet it does no harm for us to attempt to rest like this, to rest in the moment many times a day, whenever it occurs to us, to give it a try. Gradually, our shyness, self-consciousness, or reluctance to try it out fades, as this resting incrementally becomes a habit, something that we are used to at least trying to do. Down the road of dharma practice, should we take that path, there will come a time when such practice comes in handy and is important. I can attest to this.

Remember, that the dharma teachings are not something handed down to us as rules from on high like the Ten Commandments, but rather simply the suggestions of the historical Buddha, who was a person such as we are. These dharma suggestions are just that, pointers that can help to make it easier for us to become familiar with the nature of our own mind so that we can learn how to use it.

Apparently, I never made the right kind of effort to learn to rest in the moment as I might have, had I grasped the importance of allowing myself to rest in the moment early on. When it did become possible to entertain Insight Meditation and actually do it, I had to learn to actually do just what I am pointing out here, learn how to let go and allow my busy mind to come to rest. I wish I had learned to allow myself to rest in this way, early on. I suggest you might want to consider this. As for further instructions in this, I will work on another blog.

[Illustration put together by me.]



THE TIBETAN ORACLE

February 26, 2022

When I was young, in my late teens and early twenties, I was all about the various oracles: tarot cards, the I-Ching, Runes, Coins, Tea Leaves, Chicken Gizzards, and others. An oracle is any device or support that allows the universe to speak to us directly and I liked that. I guess I yearned to be spoken to by the universe because I was listening for some sign of what I should do with my life. Even astrology, where I eventually settled, can be an oracle, just a rather complex one. It too speaks to us. Back then, it seemed that I could never get enough signs and messages along the path I was traveling.

Little did I know at the time that there is a dharma technique that is like 'all oracle all of the time', and that is the special form of Insight Meditation that is part of Mahamudra meditation. Insight Meditation is like an oracle, in that it speaks to us; We listen, and we don't speak to it. I write about Insight Meditation a lot on this blog, so here it's on with this story.

In 1997, I was in Lhasa, Tibet, searching around the alleys and back streets of the great Ramoche Temple area until I finally found a famous woman oracle (Ramoche Oracle) who lives there. I was carrying a question for her from a Tibetan monk, a Tsipa (astrologer) that was staying and working with me at our dharma center, the Heart Center KTC, here in Michigan. We had brought this astrologer over from Rumtek, in Sikkim India, to work on the Tsurphu astrological Calendar and its methods. And so, as I was going to

India anyway, he asked me to take with us an urgent question he had for this particular oracle. It was written in Tibetan and I was to carry back her response, which I did.

Well, it was not like she had a sign on the door or a store of her own. We had to wander the back alleys with our guide as translator, asking where we could find this oracle. We finally found the oracle living in a small house along a back alley, no sign, no mailbox, etc. She was quite dignified, perhaps in her 40s and she invited us in. The oracle used an ancient copper mirror for her oracle support, and although I looked into it myself, I could not see anything. Yet into this she looked and spoke. It was from this mirror that she produced an answer for our friend, as well as looking into the mirror with questions we had about my family. That would be another story.

As mentioned, oracle renderings are like read-only files, so to speak. They are not discursive. There is no discussion. And it is the same with what are called 'terma', various 'mind treasures' that are hidden within the mind itself for tertons (treasure finders) to locate and bring out. They are a lot like oracles. Traditionally, terma are first read out of the mind (or found in rocks or caves). They are then understood (and sometimes validated), and this is then usually followed by the finder (terton) experiencing the terma until that terma is fully realized by them. Only after that are the terma given out, so to speak, or shared with the general sangha.

So that's my oracle story. I could go on pointing out that the special form of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) as found in Mahamudra meditation is also like an oracle, because it too is a read-only type of experience, where we immerse ourselves or plunge into nondual awareness, a process without either subject or object, and "See" into the nature of the mind itself. As you all know, I am happy to talk about that, and Insight Meditation today is my current favorite form of oracle.

[Photo of the Ramoche Oracle by me.]



SIGNS AND SIGNATURES

February 27, 2022

We are all busy living life, each with our own interests and concerns. It can be hard to flag us down or even get our attention at a spiritual level from the outside, since we each are already fully invested in what we are doing.

To get our attention, someone from the outside has to give or show some sign or signature to us, one that we recognize enough to turn our attention toward them or vice versa. In the pith dharma teachings, it is considered

a big deal to have the attention of a Buddha directed at us. I would like to know more on that.

What I am pointing at here is basically in the realm and function of the shaman, someone who can get on the same level with us or at least within a context we are familiar with, a context that we ourselves already recognize and are interested in, one that gets our full attention.

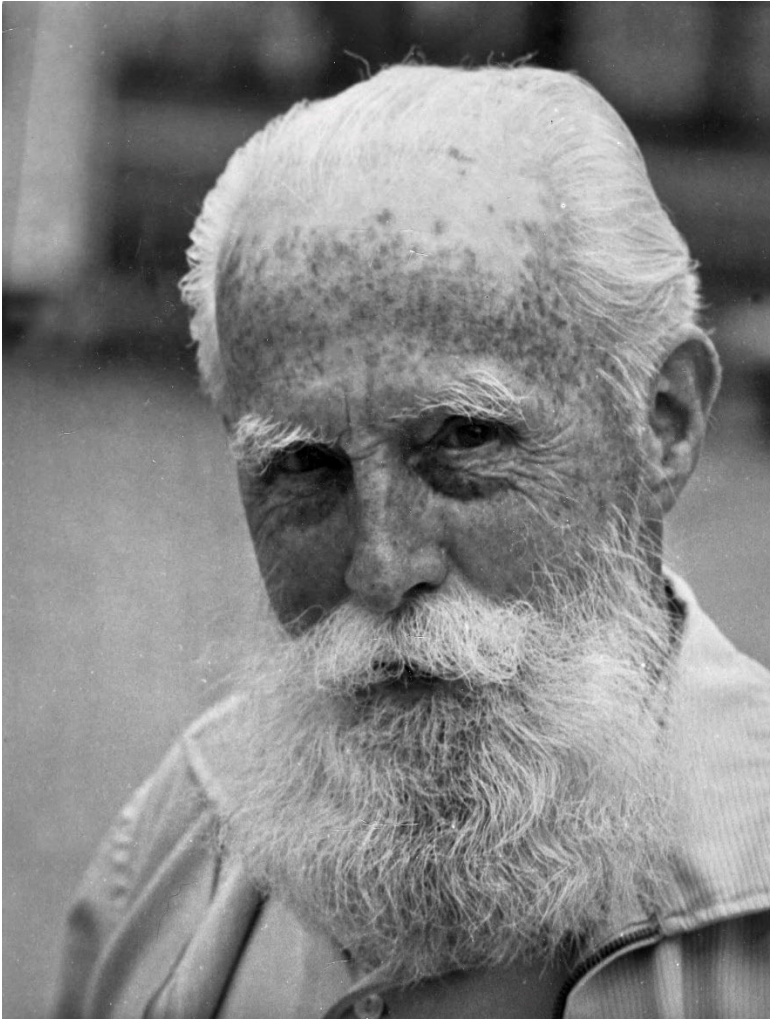
And there are all the different stages of life and each of us is at a different stage and even degree of that stage, so while connecting generally in a socially-conventional manner may be possible, direct personal identification at the root level of our spirituality may not be so easy. It's like when an older person who perhaps has some life wisdom tries to communicate with a younger person.

This is why I mention the concept of flagging us down. What does it take to somehow get our attention in the midst of this busy life, something that would have to be done before any real connection or empowerment can be shared or conferred? It seems that we are each like an isolate, with individual 'passwords' that would have to be shared before any real communication can take place.

IMO, it's too easy to just say that we should let time get all the wrinkles out of each of us. I get that, of course. Yet so much depends on us getting wise before we get

old and not vice versa. This life we live is also filled with turning points, climatic events, that mark or even determine our life. There are few to no classes or even books on this and most of us are just left to the process of life itself to straighten us out, hopefully before we are too old to be of much use to ourselves or to others.

If I find the time, I intend to give a few accounts of major life teachers I have had in the chance that this might be useful to some of you.





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THE ANDREW TEACHINGS

February 27, 2022

Although I have had many ups and downs in my life, I have been very fortunate in the area of having perfect life-teachers and guides. Of course, I had first to be open to them, wish for them to appear, and then look through life and find them. The universe has always provided me with key people who have appeared in my life, connected me with them, and transmitted information essential to my future. And I mean essential. Most of my friends know I have worked with Tibetan teachers for the past 50 years or so, but I had other teachers before that.

In this article I will share with you something about the most incredible teacher from my early years, and that is Andrew Gunn McIver, the man who literally changed my life. And, as I am getting older by the day, I must warn you that in what I present here I am not going to sanitize or tone-down my accounts of what happened back then. Why should I? I am putting it out there so that some of you might know that these kinds of experiences still exist in the world and are not just confined to movie plots or for spiritual books.

And after I introduce you to Andrew, in a second blog I may attempt to communicate some of the esoteric teachings and initiations he shared with me those many years ago, although that is more difficult because these

can be subtle and hard to communicate. Also, this is esoteric knowledge, and may not be of interest to everyone, so please know that. Here goes.

One morning, sometime in 1966-1967 (I don't have the date), I met with what appeared to be an old man on what is called "The Diag" at the center of the University of Michigan campus. To me, he looked a lot like the author Bernard Shaw. How was I to know that this meeting was to change my life forever?

In fact, what follows is a poetic (and exaggerated) account of that meeting as I wrote it down in a journal-entry long ago and which, while I agree is a bit over the top, will give you at least a flavor of what that first meeting meant to me and seemed like to my mind. Yes folks, there is hyperbole, so don't complain. I guess we have to call this poetry or at least inflamed prose, and I quote from those journals when I was about 25 years old.

"It was somehow ordained that they should meet. In this universe I live in, it was actually permitted. Preparation for this kind of meeting perhaps began far in advance. They may have put on their first disguises hundreds of miles and maybe hundreds of years apart -- lifetimes. Even the heavy layers of flesh were hardly adequate as they reached each other in that first moment. It seemed that all others even near wore protective glasses and thick shielding. Regardless, the light, which was all

around, was like a white-hot nimbus, and its transparent heat had partially hidden them.

"The old man's eyes (like crystalline stalks) burned bright, staring straight inside himself. Then, both their eyes, intensive, meeting no resistance in the transparency, shot out and into the other. The old man let his secret start between them and he was understood - known. The impulse from within each, shot out and into the other at the same moment. Eyes eyed other's eyeing.

"Their words resounded in that great silence and then wore off, consonants crackling, as their voices sputtered out in the silence. Silently speaking, this conversation sputtered on endlessly like static on a radio. There was no reason. No thought. Sight itself was seen seeing.

"And their eyes soon lost the heavy shine of flesh and flat out, they were seen seeing... eyes straight-out that sought support inside each, and inside, it settled, light itself shining out.

"When their sight struck, they stuck united in two, tying the inside into itself. They were then one and moved together parallel. In unison, they shared and mutually saw 'that' same seeing. In unison they sought to set inside each eye a sharp strength that shone. They were now inside insight and mind itself moved. They were of one mind and matter. What matter what remained?

"And they showed their soul's insight; it shot forth and froze forever already formed. Their eyes, once set singing inside, just shot out. And then the eyes, set singing, slowly settled, and shared insight."

This poem came from that time:

OUTSETTING SONG

That song is sung,
That singing,
Sets inside itself,
Outsetting song,
That sings,
And singing,
Sets itself,
In song.

Song that sang,
Which sung,
Is singing still.
"

.... End-of-Quotes

As fantastic as that account may appear, and it is, it WAS like that. And after, for almost two years we worked together. The old man walking with the young man walking. Andrew would talk; I would listen. Margaret, my wife to be someday, remembers seeing us walking

together and wondering about us.

Andrew Gunn McIver was born in Glasgow, Scotland on February 24, 1887. He served in the First World War, where he had the job of recording the dead. Later he emigrated to Canada where he worked as a lumberjack even though he was only a little more than five feet tall. As a young man he was burly, strong, had red hair, and very fair skin.

And he also worked for many years as a travelling initiator for a Rosicrucian order. Later in his life he ended up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he spent the final years of his life working as a custodian... "cleaning up after others," as he put it. During those later years, Andrew McIver became an important fixture on the U. of M. campus where he met and probably befriended hundreds of students like me.

At the age of 66, a time when most are retired, Andrew was caught in a boiler explosion at the University and was almost killed. He spent six weeks in the hospital covered with burns and had to start life all over when he was released. His hospital stay had used up all his savings and at the age most people are no longer working, he had to start over from scratch. As mentioned, he was a custodian at the University of Michigan until his retirement. After retiring, his last years were spent living in a single room on a very modest amount of money.

His passion was the mind itself and all the world religions, but particularly Buddhism, and of the dharma, Zen Buddhism.

Andrew was in his near eighty when I first met him there on the university campus in Ann Arbor. A red-head in his youth, Andrew's now-white hair contrasted with his fair skin, which had a reddish hue because of his exposure to the sun. With his long white beard, as mentioned, he looked for all the world like Bernard Shaw. Andrew's fierce eyes were intense and yet very vulnerable at the same time. He had no fear of any kind and would just address people straight out.

"It's not 'Touch me if you dare!', but 'Touch me if you ARE!'" Andrew would declare. To meet his gaze was to know what compassionate wrath is, fierce but open and kind at the same time, removing what had to be removed, supporting what needed supporting. There was no B.S. with Andrew McIver. Despite any shyness, your whole being rose to the occasion the moment your eyes met his.

In my experience, Andrew was the only person I had ever met up to that time who did not have some form of shadow or dark side. The effect of contact with Andrew was always positive. He consumed darkness and had a kind of ongoing love affair with the Sun.

As a redhead, his fair skin should not have been exposed to the Sun more than necessary. Yet Andrew (above all) loved the Sun and would sit in it for hours on an end until his pale skin would just peel away exposing red patches.

"Imagine yourself standing at the center of the Sun," he would growl at me, "That's hot stuff!" He felt he had been consumed personally in the very heat and cauldron of the life process, and that what remained had been purified. This seemed true.

"You have to choose," he would say, "between being a diamond or a pearl." A diamond to Andrew is the result of a very long time and immense pressures, while a pearl is created to protect the organism from irritating matter. Which one will it be?"

Andrew was, without a doubt, the diamond and he shone forth with an intense light. Many days I would look for Andrew around campus and often find him sitting on one of the wide cement benches along "The Diag" up near State Street, usually in the full sun. I would spend whole days with him listening to the various aphorisms and lessons he would speak to me of.

Although normally talkative (can't you tell from my writing?) I seldom spoke when I was with Andrew, almost never. I just could not find anything important enough to say to interrupt whatever he might be saying.

And I absorbed the information Andrew offered me with a great thirst. Communication of this kind was what I had longed and prayed for my whole life. Finally, this was the real deal.

Andrew would actually say to me that he was tuning me like an instrument and that one day, perhaps years from then, I would respond to the information he was placing within my consciousness. He told me that straight out many times. I took it in.

And the things he said were absolutely true and often, after ten or twelve hours of intense listening on my part, I would be so exhausted (as I stumbled home to my room) that I felt I would have to be sick and throw up. It was like chemical radiation, the information he shared was that strong and penetrating.

Andrew spent a great deal of time in the libraries of Ann Arbor, particularly in the Ann Arbor Public Library at the corner of 5th and Williams, where he read intently on mostly Eastern religious topics. He would write out short quotes from various books on tiny 3x5 slips of paper. At his death I found thousands of these slips, each with tiny writing on both sides. The sad thing to me was that the reason Andrew wrote down the quote in the first place, his own thoughts, were often more profound than the famous quote itself that he copied out from a book. I only wished he had written out his ideas in his own words. His juxtaposing of the quotes was more brilliant

than the original quotes. Think about that!

Andrew not only would repeat certain themes or sayings, but he would also sometimes ask me to memorize and recite them. And he did this in front of others, often at Circle Books, the local metaphysical bookstore where I worked. There, around a low circular oak table, Andrew would ask me to remember and recite particular aphorisms in front of a group of others who gathered there. I often felt embarrassed because my memory (on the spot) was not always that sharp, but it was a sign that Andrew took some stock in me as a student. When he died and I took care of his things, I found a piece of paper with the name 'Michael' written on it, and every word that could be combined from those letters.

Andrew had been for many years a traveling initiator for a Rosicrucian order. He was familiar with almost all branches of metaphysical and occult wisdom. His reading was vast and he was very familiar and had worked with the Max Heindel School of Rosicrucianism and knew the book "Cosmo Conception" inside and out. He was familiar with astrology, numerology, occult science, and about every kind of metaphysical study. He was perhaps most interested in Buddhism of all forms, and as I mentioned, in particular, Zen, also Sufi wisdom.

During my years with Andrew McIver, he initiated me into a lineage of esoteric knowledge, some of which I

will attempt to share with readers here in a second blog if I can find the words. As mentioned above, Andrew would tell me that he was reading-in to me this deep esoteric knowledge (like you would write out a script), placing it deep within my mind and consciousness. He literally would say that he was tuning me like one would tune an instrument and that many years from that time I would remember, and this knowledge would come alive in me and live on. Think on that for a moment. That was a powerful experience for me as a young man and I am sharing it with you!

And to give you just one example that amazes me even today, as I related earlier, he would repeatedly say to me.

“Michael, imagine yourself standing at the center of the Sun,” he would then growl at me and say, “That’s hot stuff!”

And years later when I became well-known as an astrologer, it was heliocentric astrology (sun-centered) that I became an expert in. Literally, I imagined myself standing at the center of the Sun. That is how it worked with Andrew. That is what initiation and lineage can be like.

And the proof of the pudding (to me anyway) came when I traveled in 1997 to Tibet to meet His Holiness the Karmapa (like the Dalai Lama, but of another lineage)

high in the Himalayas (something like 15,000 feet) at his ancestral home, Tsurphu Monastery. In that remote place the Karmapa (who did not speak English) through a translator, gave me a name. He said "You are Tenzin Nyima." Later, our translator explained to me that this means "holder of the Sun" or "Keeper of the Sun." Talk about confirmation.

When I knew him, Andrew spent much of his day working with language, with words. Palindromes were a favorite, words or phrases that read the same forward as backward, like the famous one about Napoleon, "Able was I ere I saw Elba." More often he would take a word and create a list of all the other words that could be derived from it much like the popular game today called "Boggle." And most often he would take the English language and spell words out on the spot to me, like the word initiate -- "In-It-I-Ate." Or the word "Evil," the opposite of which he pointed out was "Live," things like that. Andrew would declare that this helped to give insight into the inner meaning of the word. This was his gospel or as he would say it "Go Spell"

From Andrew's point of view the words themselves were signs or mudras that described their own nature. Their secret was in plain sight. He would also do any and all kind of word games, where letters were rearranged. Not crossword puzzles mind you, but other sorts of word gymnastics.

Andrew had very little money and true to his Scottish heritage was somewhat frugal on top of that. He lived until the very last months of his life in a tiny room at a boarding house. The few belongings in his almost empty room were always neatly placed. He often would invite me up to his room where we spent time.

Andrew loved to read newspapers and, in particular, learn of the fresh news of that day, but with a special twist. It seemed that whatever happened on a national or international level would also happen to Andrew in his life at the personal level. For one example, when race riots broke out in Detroit, that same day Black youths broke into Andrew's tiny room and destroyed something. Andrew was totally aware of this and felt it represented a level of consciousness he had earned by burning off various obscurations. "As Above, So Below" was happening day by day.

Just as we astrologers say that the cosmic dance up in the heavens is acted out down here on earth at the same time, so what happened in the news around the world seemed to happen to Andrew McIver personally and daily. Of course, I found this remarkable.

It was the imperfections, Andrew would say, that kept him still around on this earth and he would show his slightly-bent little finger on one hand that had been injured years earlier. This imperfection, he would say, helped to keep him from passing on. I never knew if he

was just kidding or using this example to instruct me in one of life's secrets, but he was not a kidder. I was always the rapt student, but it often took time for me to grasp the meaning of what Andrew presented. I am still unpacking what I learned.

And Andrew was an expert on just about every business establishment in the campus vicinity. He made a point of visiting them all and would not stand for bad service or the deterioration of service. He was a natural protector, always vocal about this sort of thing, and would make his observations known to management, and if unanswered, he would avoid the place completely. I would not like to own one of those businesses that Andrew shunned. Today, they are all gone.

And as mentioned, there is no question in my mind that Andrew McIver was a protector-being, perhaps what the Tibetan Buddhists call a 'dharma protector'. He was fierce, although his indignation at those who harmed others never burned anyone. He was pure living fire that did not burn. The correct term for what Andrew often exhibited would be righteous wrath, wrath at all and everything that obstructed and obscured the pure flowing of the life force.

Perhaps you can imagine encountering a five-foot figure in his eighties on the campus of the University of Michigan and casting this old man a condescending kindly glance, only to suddenly be eye-to-eye with the

most vital force in the universe. Unforgettable, I assure you!

And I will mention this just once: Andrew was 'with' us but not one of us, in that his personality had no shadow – cast no shadow. He was so perfectly clear that his presence was like a window in this dream we all have called life, a window through which I could for a time gaze. He was only there to help. Aside from that he was not there at all. He was there for people like me.

Andrew had a notable chance meeting of the governor of the state of Michigan, who greeted Andrew as if he was one more doddering senior citizen in a group of elders. "And how are you," Governor Romney said in his obsequious politic voice. Andrew responded, "It's not 'How are You?' but 'Who are you?' that matters," he replied, to the governor's complete confusion.

And Andrew was very careful with what he ate. Over his long life he had tried eating almost everything and learned what each thing did to his system. He could tell you exactly what certain foods would do to his body, producing a boil here, a rash there. For example, this brand of tomato soup would cause a rash on this or that part of his right ankle, and so on. He ate very simply and would cook food for me once in a while. Andrew taught me how to boil coffee by dropping the grounds into boiling water, turning off the heat at once, and covering the pan. We would often drink coffee together.

And he had real powers. I could recall many times when I approached Andrew at a time when I was in a bad mood. Andrew could sense this at once and would always tell some story that led to an emphatic action of some kind on his part. He would be talking along, getting more and more crisp about some point when, taking the newspaper that he usually carried, he would bring it down sharply in his hand or on the edge of a table or something. Whack!

In that instant, at the precise point where the sharp sound occurred, my headache or bad mood would just vanish. It was gone. Andrew did this all the time, like swatting a fly.

Andrew McIver must have had a number of students and I know that many people benefited from his presence. I only knew a few of his other students personally. As time went on, Andrew and I became almost inseparable. On Andrew's death on March 9th, 1969, I was the one who worked with the police, contacted his sister in Scotland (his only remaining kin) and saw to his burial.

Andrew is buried in the Forest Hills cemetery near the corner of Observatory Street and Geddes Road in Ann Arbor, up near the student's dorms on the hill. I saw to this and designed a tall granite gravestone with the symbol of the Sun on it, a circle with a dot in the center.

I enclose it here.

He would have liked that. If you want to visit his grave, it can be found just inside the fence near the sidewalk along Geddes Road, about 3 blocks from the cemetery entrance and to the East. You can't miss it and I enclose a photo here. I often visit there when I am in Ann Arbor.

Well, I have told you something about Andrew McIver, but for me the most important point was that in Andrew I had found an individual and a person who had no shadow, no personality flaw of any kind that I with my overly critical eye could discover.

Andrew McIver was absolutely transparent and empty as far as obscurations were concerned. He had none that I could see, and as I am very critical as a person, I had looked you can be sure. And yet his mind was as vivid and lucid as a cloudless sky. As mentioned, you could see right through him into yourself. And through Andrew I could finally see into the future of... myself, i.e. that I had a future.

It was clear when I met Andrew McIver that this man cared more for me than I knew how to care for myself. I sensed this and trust, along with confidence, arose in me (for the first time in my adult experience) for another 'person'. Through Andrew I could see clearly, and I was able to open my heart to him with no reservations. And with that gesture, all of my fear of other persons

vanished, and I ceased to be hung up on other people's personal faults.

This is not to say that I stopped recognizing flaws in those around me, but rather that I was no longer afraid that others could infect me, that I would end up like them if I listened to or learned from them. Andrew McIver was like a pole star in the general direction of my life. Because he was authentic, genuine, I was able to trust my own judgment because I had with me now the experience of the real deal, a fully realized being who, once known, left no doubt in me about who was a poser and who was not among those around me. I could see for myself!

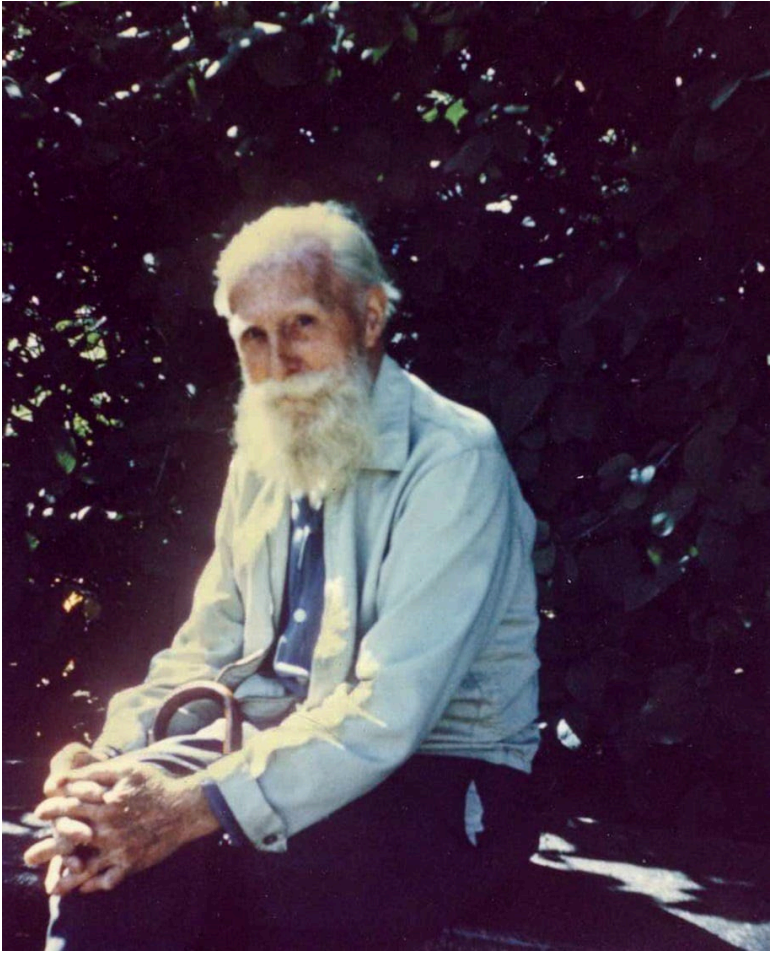
Once I had encountered someone like Andrew, I could never again get caught up with those who just pretend to know. I now knew the difference, and knowing that, I could have compassion for those who just pretended as opposed to fearing them, debating them, or thinking they were contagious. It made all of the difference.

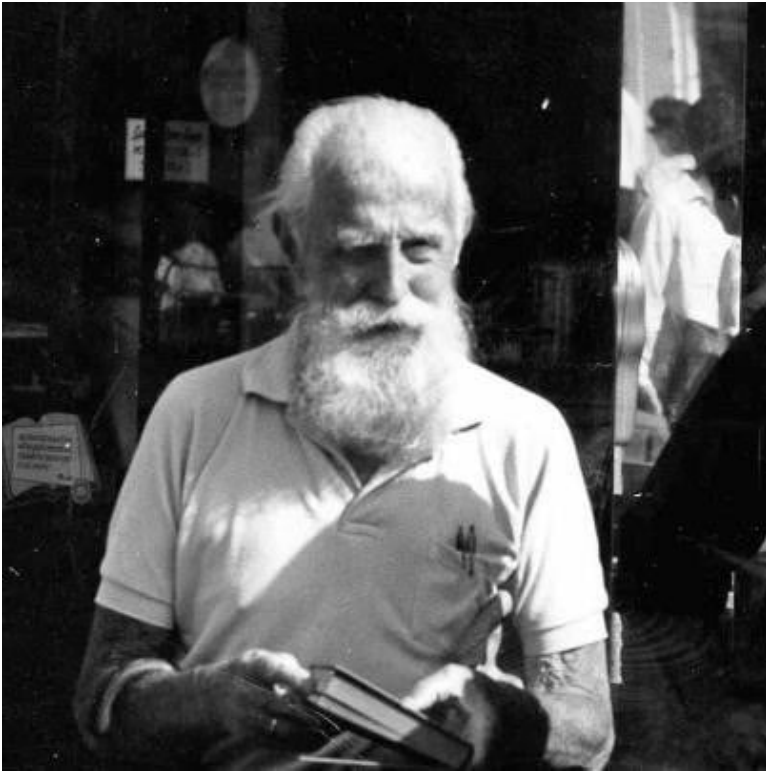
I will try to post on some of Andrew McIver's esoteric teachings in a future blog, if there is interest.

[Photo Andrew McIver and the tombstone I designed for him.]



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THE ANDREW'S TEACHINGS PART-II

February 28, 2022

The Vajrayana lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is not the only view or lineage I attempt to hold. I also hold an esoteric lineage that is part of Western spiritual philosophy and pointed out to me by my dharma teacher Andrew Gunn McIver in the late 1960s.

I want to give you at least a taste of Andrew McIver's teachings. As I get right down to doing this, it is clear to me that these teachings are not only very useful and

profound but also very, very difficult to realize experientially, to live them. There is a long journey between grasping these concepts vaguely with our mental understanding to realizing that they are actually true, much less living that reality consciously. Here are a few examples of what Andrew McIver shared.

And this is what is called esoteric or occult (hidden) doctrine and this kind of learning has usually been passed down from mouth to ear, not because it is secret or forbidden, but rather because it is self-secret, hidden from ourselves by our own ignorance of it, which means society chooses to ignore the obvious, And these kind of teachings are well hidden in the obvious, in plain sight, the one place we would never think to look.

Andrew McIver was very much about what are called climactic life events, pivotal points of change on which our life actually turns, times where there is a definite before, during, and after. These kinds of events are often called rites of passage or life passages, gates we each pass through whether we are aware of it or not.

Andrew called these passages 'initiations' and he would often say: "We are all initiates, but it is a question of to what degree." Andrew's view was that each of us goes through and experiences all of life's passages or initiations fully, but often with little or no awareness on our part as to what is happening to us, and thus no experiential memory of the event. In other

words, although we went through it, we never consciously recorded it. This is perhaps why Andrew was so fascinated by Buddhism because as we know, the word "Buddha" simply means awareness, being awake. Gaining awareness of what we are going through in our life WHILE we are going through it was very important to Andrew.

Recognizing these great life events or rites of passage is important, but even more important is celebrating them. So much of these deeper life initiations are never spoken of in public, much less actually acknowledged and celebrated. It would seem that in these troubled times each of us celebrates our own most intimate self-changes secretly, privately, or perhaps with almost no celebration at all. This indeed is sad and moreover unnecessary, but still quite true.

Andrew was very aware of astrology and in particular the motion of the great timekeeper, Saturn. The planet Saturn completes its first circle or return to its original birth position in the zodiac around thirty years of age, its first circle or cycle. According to Andrew, one of the key or main life passages (climactic events) is that first Saturn return heliocentrically which occurs at 29.4 years for each of us, like clockwork.

You know the old phrase, "Never trust anyone over thirty." Well, there is a reason for that. The area of time in our late twenties and early thirties marks a great life

initiation, a great passing or passage which we all must take.

Andrew used to say that 33 was the year that Christ died, and he would also say that 33 degrees is when ice melts. And then there is the 33rd degree of freemasonry, and so on. In life, the 33rd degree or year marks a pivotal change for every person, although most of us have only a dim awareness of it at the time, which is not so auspicious.

And although we all experience our Saturn return (this rite of passage), not that many of us do it or go through it consciously and with full awareness. Instead, we tend to sleepwalk through these life changes and miss or ignore these important inner passages or life events.

Andrew McIver was very much into helping people (especially young people) go through these rites of passage consciously (and with full awareness) before they were thirty rather than sometime later on. He did this with me. I went through my first Saturn return with my eyes open and with Andrew's instructions clearly in mind.

"Awareness is everything" was his view, so you can see it was quite natural for me to eventually wander into Buddhism, which is all about being more aware. Andrew was also very into the dharma and Buddhism in general.

He wanted those people under thirty years of age to go through the great Saturn initiation in their 29th-30th year with their eyes open and not ignorant (ignoring) and asleep in their bodies at that crucial time. His philosophy was proactive, very much one of "go and meet your maker" consciously, rather than be dragged into awareness reluctantly or not aware at all.

Waking up was what Andrew McIver was all about, and there is much more to learn if we want to hold his view, and it gets deeper. I will present here two esoteric truths for you to consider, and I warn you that they are not easy to grasp and may even appear to you as pure nonsense, so don't jump to conclusions. Just let it roll past you and take from it what you can.

Relax, and just let these concepts wash over you and do their work for a bit. Thinking won't help you now. These concepts work internally on their own. Here I will just attempt to point them out. You will either get a glimpse of them or you won't. If you don't, perhaps you can sense them.

The first esoteric concept is that all of the hoo-haw about being "born again" is nothing other than becoming aware of this great rite of passage that takes place around the thirtieth year. Although Christians have claimed it for their own, there is nothing particularly Christian about being born again in the sense Andrew shared it.

We all are born again by the simple virtue of living beyond the age of thirty years, but not all of us are equally aware of it. When we do become aware of this, that is what is called being 'born again'. Again, awareness of these events is always the key, not whether you experience the event. We all experience this passage, but we don't all remember it consciously.

And it is perhaps best to have this awareness of being born again 'while' we are actually being born again, while we are going through this rite of passage at around thirty years of age (because it is an event that happens to each of us). However, we can become aware of this event at any time after that. In other words, we can also realize that we have become "born again" anytime later on in our life. It is like those kernels of popcorn that pop after all the rest are done.

And if we are over thirty, we have experienced our Saturn Return and it is only a matter of time before we wake up or become somewhat ware of this fact. Many Christian sects thrive on triggering the awareness of being 'born again' in us, setting off that mousetrap. And there is such a thing as 'robbing the cradle', trying to force us into illumination of the event.

However, it can only happen once, this awareness, this being "born again," and not over and over. That is what defines a 'realization,' the fact that once you have

experienced it you never forget it. You 'realize'. It is indeed an unforgettable experience and not something that waxes and wanes, that comes and goes, but rather it instantly becomes a permanent part of us, a realization. And now for the really esoteric part, what I feel is the hard part for folks to grasp.

In the esoteric sense, the 'death' we all wonder about and perhaps fear, but have no choice but to look forward to, does not come as we expect, at the live-long end of life like we imagine or have been told. On the contrary, the important death comes right smack in the middle of life, around that first Saturn return at thirty years of age. It coincides with what is called 'The Prime of Life,' that peak in our physical trajectory each of us are on. In other words, death happens in the midst of life and after 'that' death are only the 'after-death' experiences, what the Christians call the resurrection. We 'are' literally born again, each of us, right in the middle of our lives. We rise up and literally float away.

In other words, we die and are born again right in the middle of life and not at the very end as we have always imagined and have been told. By the time we reach the old-age end of life we are about dead, physically, but the death that counts and that everyone fears happens right during life itself and in slow motion at that. In fact, the prime of life (like the top of the bell curve) is simultaneously the exact point of our psyche or spiritual death (and rebirth) for each of us.

I know this may be hard to understand for some of you who are reading this, so I can appreciate that you may want to just ignore all of this and move on. But there may be a very few of you who can grasp this very esoteric or occult (hidden) concept and make it real for yourselves: realize it consciously. And I will try to explain this in more detail in a moment, but know this:

Andrew McIver was very much into initiating anyone (those who could grasp it) into these concepts and helping to prepare us to experience this great rite of passage consciously and not have to piece it together later in life a bit at a time or as often happens, not at all.

After Andrew's death, I saw to his funeral, designed a gravestone, and sent all of his belongings and what little money he had to his sole surviving sister in Scotland. In thanks, she sent a little painting to me, which Andrew would have appreciated. It was a watercolor of a thistle, the national emblem of Scotland, with words above it that said "I looked for something Scotch for you, the thistles asked if they would do." Perfect.

Some of you have commented or messaged me that these concepts are hard to understand. Well, yes, they are. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger. It took me years to understand these concepts and that is pretty much par for the course, so relax and let it permeate and percolate. Let it work like pickles work in brine.

Keep in mind that the statute of limitations never runs out on this 'born again' realization because it is not about 'time'. By definition, it is outside or beyond time as you and I know that term. That is the whole idea of Saturn we are discussing here. Remember that in astrology Saturn 'IS' time itself, all the time in the world, all the time you and I will ever know. And once Saturn completes its first full cycle of the zodiac (which is around thirty years of age), it starts to repeat itself and to go over the same zodiac degrees for a second time. This repetition is key.

That is when we start to wake up, because during that first round of Saturn we are all totally caught up in time and unable to release ourselves, until around 30 years of age, when Saturn begins to repeat itself by going over the same zodiac degrees a second time. Before that, our body is busy growing itself. When Saturn gets repetitive, starts to go over the same material again at thirty years, it is like a Déjà vu experience for us. Somewhere inside we dimly know that we have done this before, been here before, and we stir and begin to awake.

Time's (Saturn's) grip on us starts to fail and we quite naturally begin to wake up and (as the Christians like to say) are born again. This 'born-again' experience can be sudden and all at once like a lightning strike or it can be gradual and slow like the Sun coming up. It takes all kinds, and this experience varies just as we all vary from

one another.

Since we live in a materialistic time and in a materialistic society, we have been trained or indoctrinated to focus only on the material body and its eventual death. That's materialism, plain and simple. But there is another more-important death or change that happens to us and that death happens (as pointed out) right at the prime of life, right when the physical body stops growing and is complete. And that change is (we could say) the "death" of death, which is why it is a rebirth or a being born again. Two negatives always make a positive.

It is unfortunate that the concept of being born again has been bogarted by the Christians. It is not their fault that they were smart enough to catch on to this, but their enthusiasm can be off-putting to the rest of us to the point of driving us away from our own experience of this climatic event, an experience we each need to have to complete the realization of ourselves. Here is more about the way Andrew presented this concept to me:

Andrew spoke of this 'being born again' epiphany as like a space capsule, a vehicle that each of us builds during the first 30 years that our body is growing and forming, those years when we are less than thirty years old and yet to reach maturity and be grown up. Andrew spoke of this time as if during these early years we are on Earth or somehow within the body. We are on the inside. And it is at that time that we can build and make changes,

choices, and otherwise modify our own personal vehicle, our particular space capsule and ready it for launching at 30 years.

However, so he taught, at around thirty years of age that space capsule we have formed through our youth (the body) is launched into space beyond time, and then time (as we know it) just stops. Think about this for a moment because that is the end of time or what is called the "end time."

In fact, time no longer has dominion 'over' us and ceases to fascinate or transfix us. We no longer have to be fixated on it. You could also say that Saturn (Satan as the Christians sometimes say) loses his grip, and we pull free of that force, the force of time. We continue to grow, but not physically, and are now beyond time. Some call that eternity, heaven, or whatever, yet we have to be aware of it..

Then, as Saturn starts to go around in its orbit for the second time (from 30 to 60 years of age), degree by degree, we are launched in spiritual space, ready or not, beyond time and floating out in that space. Andrew said that the second 30 years we live are spent repairing the damage that we made being born at 30 years, as we were being launched.

Because modern society has lost the awareness of deep inner changes (rites of passage) like these, there is no

discussion and little awareness of this natural life-initiation. We each are left to figure it out for ourselves privately, and forced to celebrate alone as best we can, what would better be celebrated outwardly with our family and friends. But as it is, we each get short services and then silence from those around us. And we enter that silence.

This great inner change (the loosening of the material death-grip on us) releases us from the body and we float free like an astronaut on a tether in space. In the occult tradition, as mentioned above, this is called "Entering the Silence" and it can be a somewhat frightening experience when time appears to stop, yet there we are still continuing to float on out beyond Saturn, beyond the physical.

This of course is just an analogy, but it is an apt one. Andrew McIver made it very clear to me that once our vehicle is launched beyond time (around thirty years of age) it can no longer be altered physically. Whatever we have achieved, however we have formed it, all of that remains just as we left it. We just arise and leave our work done or undone.

In other words, we leave the body at that time, just as it is, finished, half-finished, or unfinished. We are done building. We just up and move on, which is the awakening experience I am trying to describe here. I am not going to call it "born again" any longer because that

phrase carries too much baggage. We wake up or become aware which (as I keep saying) is what Buddhism is all about: awareness. Nothing more.

Andrew spoke of three orbital periods of Saturn, three cycles of thirty years each: the cycle ending at around thirty years, one from thirty years and ending at sixty years, and a final one from 60 years to ninety years. And he said this:

We spend the first thirty-year cycle building our vehicle (growing our body), the second thirty-year cycle repairing the damage we make launching our vehicle (getting out of the body), and the third thirty-year cycle (if we live so long) actually becoming a conscious part of the creative force itself. That last cycle is incredible, so think about what that might mean, we are being a conscious and actual a part of creating life!

A traditional analogy is that of a flower. First there is the bud (first cycle), and then the opening of the flower (second cycle), and finally, beyond blooming, and the total relaxing and physical fading of the flower (third cycle) into seed, becoming seminal. For those of you with an interest in this I have a free e-book on these concepts that I wrote years ago called:

“Astrology of the Heart: Astro-Shamanism”

It is all about this death-in-life concept and you can

download it here:

<http://dharmagrooves.com/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart.pdf>

This awakening experience can happen around the age of thirty or ANYTIME later on, whenever we start to realize that we have already left (or are leaving) the body, meaning, when we wake up to this rebirth.

This wraps up this piece on my life teacher Andrew McIver. Of course, words cannot express my debt to Andrew or my deep-felt love and appreciation for the man. He caught me in the throes of struggling with my own personality, successfully tamed me, and then proceeded to instruct and initiate me into my own mysteries. This changed my life.

Looking back from now, it seems that Andrew was some kind of emanation that appeared to me. I have no idea how I merited it and it came at the end (and caused the end) of years of my struggling to not-take anything from anyone. Remember, I never graduated from high school because I literally could not be taught.

Part of that problem was because if my would-be teachers had personal faults, I refused to learn from them. I used their failings as an excuse to ignore what else they had to say and would take nothing from them because I did not want to end up being like them. I did

not want the bathwater that perhaps came with the baby. This was a mistake (miss-take as Andrew would spell it) on my part.

Lucky for me Andrew helped to correct that mistake. He was so perfect in every way that I had no complaint of his person and just had to listen. He had my undivided attention. This is what I mean by "he tamed me." With Andrew I had run out of excuses, criticism, and withholding myself and the like. I ran out of time.... into eternity.

Even today, there is a quality about Andrew McIver in my mind that was more like a dream than real. A better way to say this is that the dream was real. He was more than I ever dreamed life could be. And through Andrew I got over my resistance to other people and (as I mentioned before) their personalities and in two ways. I was living my dream.

The first way is that by meeting someone I felt confidence in and that I could totally trust, my inside world or psyche was finally projected outside myself into (and through) Andrew and that opened a window on reality that gradually widened. In other words, my outside and inside began to mix and merge more than they had been, and this was key. Like a drop of water in a still pond sends ever-widening concentric circles that are more and more inclusive, so did my pent-up inner psyche go out into and through Andrew, gradually mix

with that threatening outside world, and both myself and the world become more balanced or equalized. This I call "mixing."

And second, having known Andrew, having known authentic wisdom, I never took another wooden nickel from those who had no authentic experience and literally did not know what they were talking about, those who had perhaps abstract knowledge but little experience and no realization. For me this was a big thing. Before Andrew, I could not tell who was authentic and who was faking it. I had no reference point or experience to go on or compare. Once I met Andrew McIver had a fiducial, someone I could refer to which stabilized me.

Although I did not know this at the time, it was a sign of strength that I was able to manifest a real-life teacher in my outer world, that it was even permitted to happen. And these things don't just automatically 'happen'. You have to want them, ask for them, and pray for them. You have to REALLY want and need this. Andrew was that bridge to the outside world that I needed and that I had been waiting for all my life up until then.

I will close by sharing with you what I now see is an important truth. Although I needed a pristine and perfect example in the outside world to have confidence and to forge a wormhole into a new dimension, this was a misunderstanding on my part. Of course, I found that

example in Andrew McIver, but since then I have learned:

It does not matter what the personality of your teacher is like. Of course, it has to be within the limits of your tolerance for differences, within your idea of what is acceptable behavior. But that aside, what is important (and the only thing that is really important) is that the life-teacher is capable of pointing out to you the way into yourself. That alone is initiation.

There is no teacher of any kind, nor has there ever been or ever will be, that can do it for us. The whole point is that we have to do it ourselves, to actually have the experience and to learn to "know." All written words, all spoken (and even all silent gestures) are only signposts, pointers to having the real-life experience for ourselves. All are signs that point to our jumping into the pool of life and experiencing it for ourselves. It is the only way to know.

A teacher is someone who can point out to us how to realize ourselves. That is their entire job. Period. They don't have to be your friend. They don't have to look or act perfect. Their personality is their business, not yours. The only question to answer is: CAN they (are they able) to point out to you a method for you to know yourself and for you to know the true nature of your own mind. In other words: when they present it, do you get it? As I understand it, that's all that is required.

Andrew McIver very much lived in the "now" and would say to me more than any other saying:

"Michael, this is it!"

And sometimes he would add "If this is hell, it is up to us to make a little heaven from it."

[Photos Andrew McIver and the painting Andrew's sister sent to me for helping with his things, tombstones, and all of that.]



Iggy Pop



Hear the band via some of the only recordings we have. They came out of the basement of my brother Stephen Erlewine, some years ago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZO5bsagUqY&t=1014s>



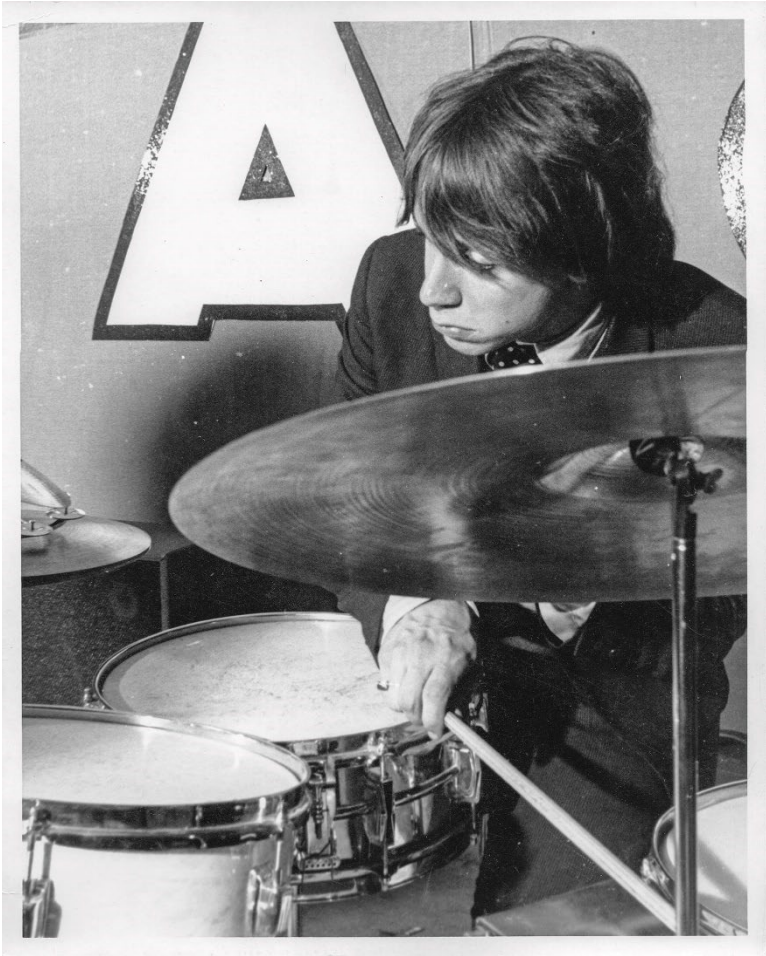
Prime Movers Blues Band at the 'Living End' in Detroit.



Left to right, Jack Dawson (bass), Michael Erlewine (vocals, harmonica, Iggy Pop (drums)



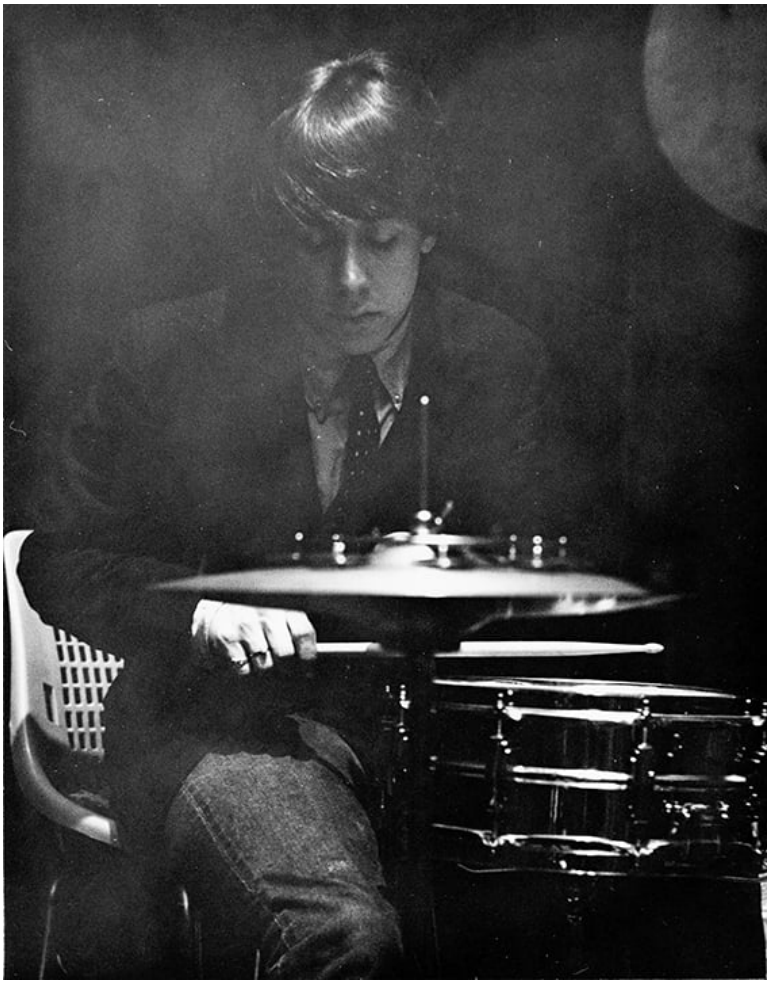
Prime Movers Blues Band at I'm not sure where.



Iggy Pop



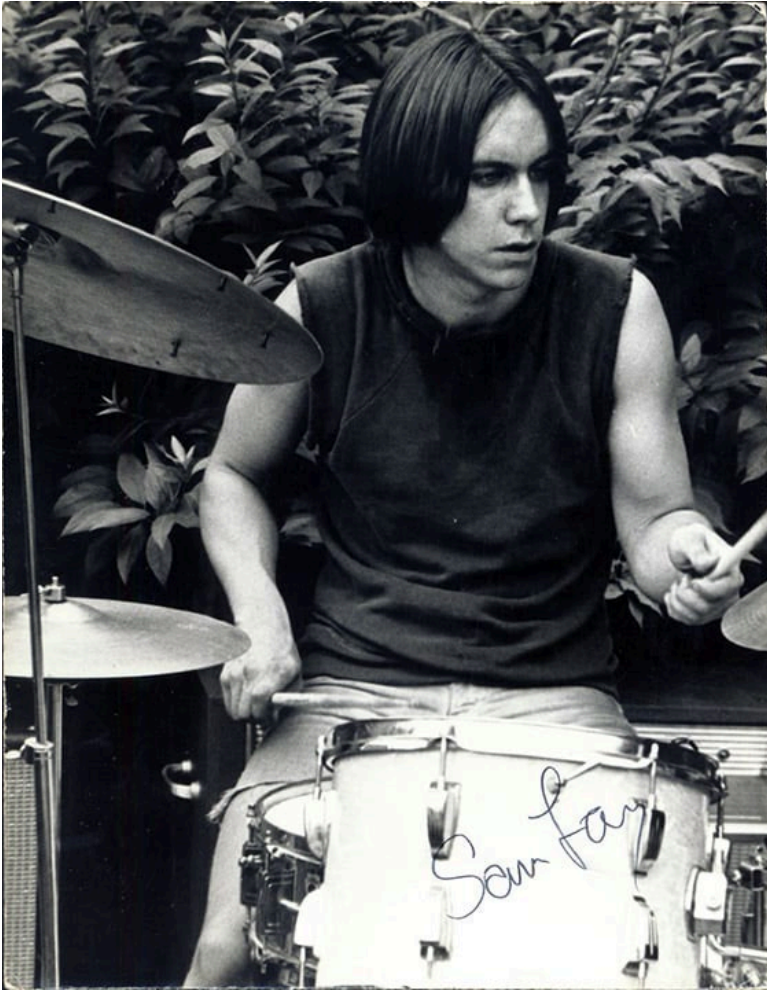
That's me, Michael Erlewine, back in the 1970s.



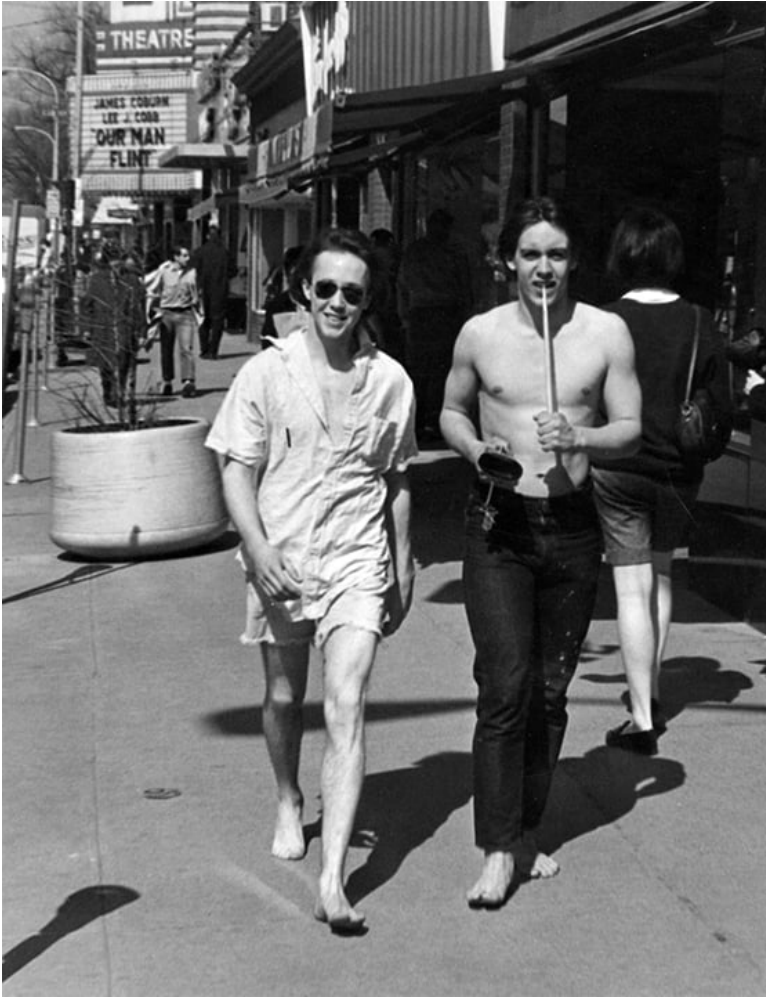
Iggy Pop



The Prime Movers Blues Band, Iggy on the right.



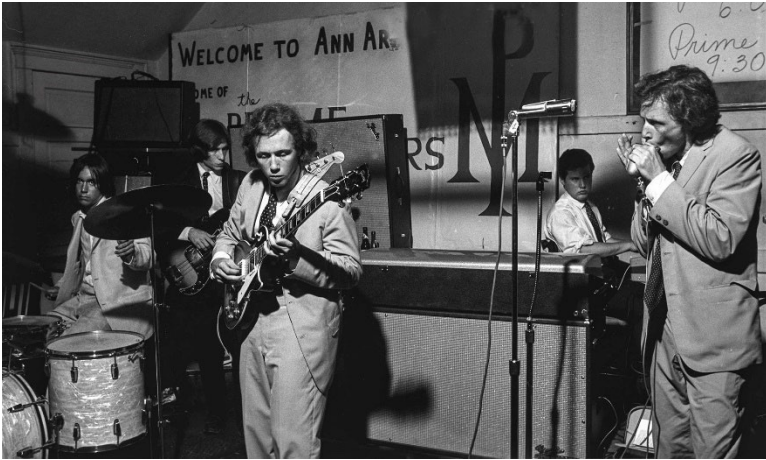
Iggy Pop



Dan Erlewine (lead guitar) and Iggy Pop (drums) in Ann Arbor.



Michael Erlewine (Vocals, Harmonica), Jerry Lewis (rhythm guitar). He is playing my Epiphone Sheridan.



The Prime Movers Blues Band at 'Mothers' , which was held in the Armory in Ann Arbor.

BY POPULAR DEMAND: SOME 'IGGY POP' STORIES AND PHOTOS

March 1, 2022

I guess Iggy Pop must be getting a wave of attention of late, as I am getting all kinds of notes and messages about when Iggy was in our group, "The Prime Movers Blues Band," or the fact that we named him Iggy, and so on. And some of you just want some more info about him as well, so here is a fairly short blog with a good number of photos of Iggy, and stories as well.

If you want to hear what our band, the Prime Movers, sounded like, I include that too, I hope this is what you want. That's me on harmonica and vocals.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZO5bsagUqY&t=1014s>

Also, here are some stories about Iggy, the band, and also me from an Iggy biography, "Iggy Pop: Open Up and Bleed: A Biography" by Paul Trynka.

"Robert Sheff [our keyboard player] observed Iggy from close up, both in the Prime Movers Blue Band and the Stooges and felt that Michael Erlewine was 'not a mentor exactly but Iggy made him one. The Prime Movers experience was important to Iggy in an emotional way. Michael liked very emotional situations and put that into the music a lot. Iggy's the same way."

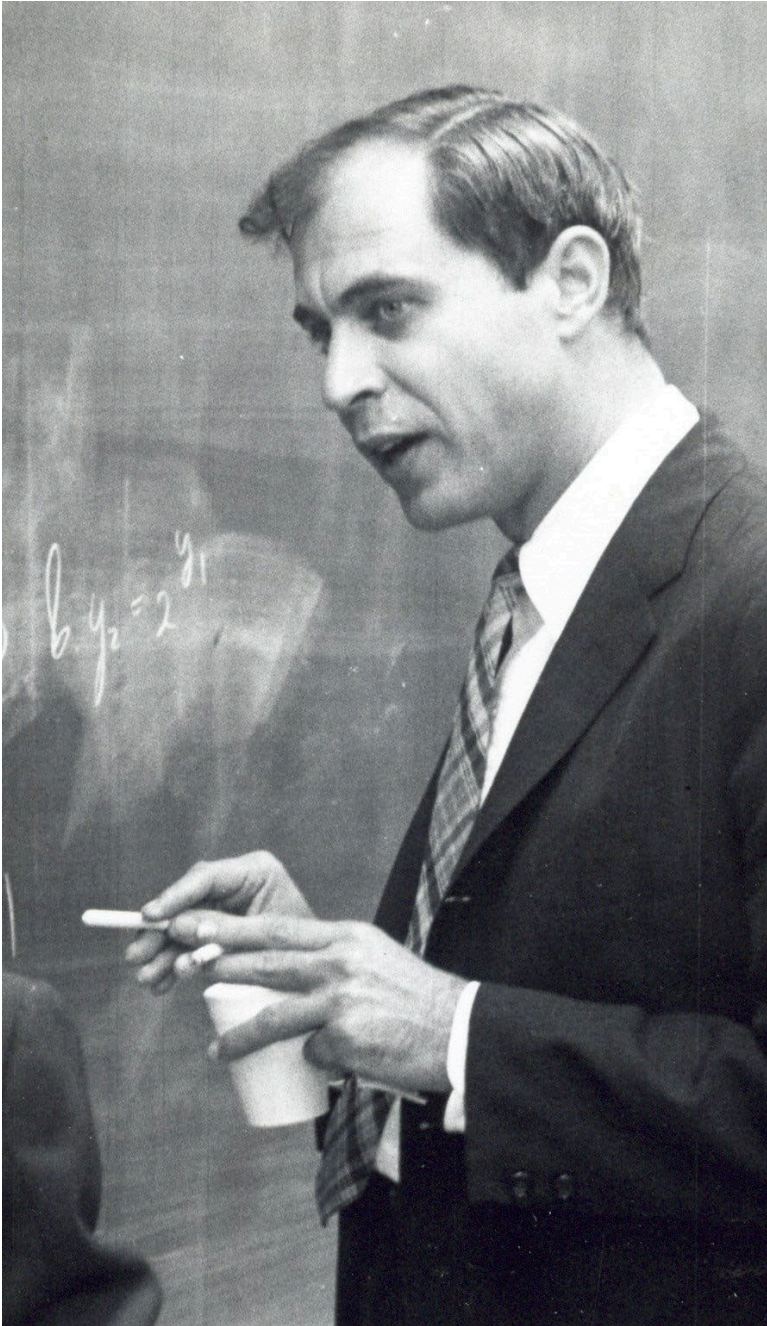
"An intellectual, inspiring, often infuriating character to this day –it's sometimes hard to extract his opinions of other people, for he's far more interested in himself --- Michael was ruthlessly committed to his music. But this wasn't a selfish commitment, for he was devoted to bringing the audience with him, sometimes literally so. There was on late-night "Prime Mover" show at "Clint's Club" [a Black bar in Ann Arbor] when he worked up the audience into such an exalted state that, after the final song, the band and twenty kids [and adults] from the audience followed him through the streets of Ann Arbor, listening to Michael speak, exhorting them to contemplate the beauty of everyday objects around them.

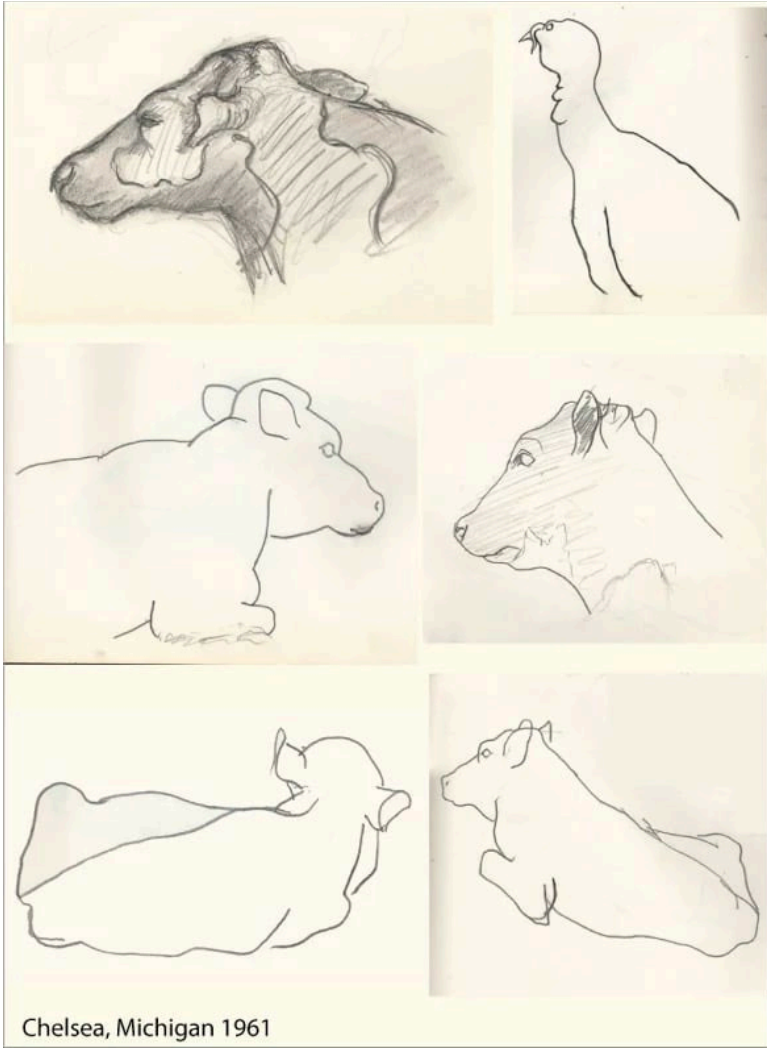
"They stayed up until six o'clock in the morning, sharing the spirituality of the night turning into dawn, before bundling into a twenty-four-hour Greek restaurant [usually 'The Wheel'] for more earthly sustenance. "It was an incredible experience," remembers Sheff, "a charismatic experience." Few other performers would have taken such risks, but Michael's commitment in stimulating and challenging his audience was a crucial lesson. And one in which the pupil would eventually outdo the master."

And for those who want the all-and-everything about the Prime Movers Blues Band, photos and stories, here is the motherload of photos kindly put together by rock-historian Bruno Ceriotti.:

<http://brunoceriotti.weebly.com/the-prime-movers.html>

PHOTO CREDITS: Since I can never keep track of which photographer took which photos, some of these images may be by Al Blixt, Tom Copi, or Andy Sachs. My appreciation to all of these great Ann Arbor photographers from back in the day who documented our group.





Chelsea, Michigan 1961

LIFE TEACHERS: STANLEY TENNENBAUM

March 1, 2022

[I've had trouble finding life teachers, so I'd like to celebrate the few I have found. Here is one.]

When I think back on people who affected me in a big way, they are few but those few had a most powerful effect. Let's see, the first has to be Peggy Dodge, an artist and friend of my mother, who lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I was born. Dodge lived out in the country on a place with a pond, meadows, and trees. Mom would meet at the Dodge farm with other fine-arts painters, and sometimes she would take me along. I was six years old.

It was Peggy Dodge who first sparked my interest in nature and all things natural, and at that young age I became a naturalist, and a serious one at that. I did little else but study nature until I was around the age of eighteen, but that is another story. In this blog, I want to tell you about the next person who greatly affected me, and that was Stanley Tennenbaum.

One day, when I was 19 years old (this had to be early in 1961), I was hitchhiking out on Huron Street, near my parent's home on the west-side (305 Wildwood) of Ann Arbor, trying to get downtown. It was only perhaps a mile, but it was cold and I didn't want to walk. I was used to hitchhiking and had already hitched to California and back, not to mention around five round trips to New York City, and so on.

Anyway, I was picked up by a somewhat strange character. This guy was immediately friendly, and he explained as we drove along that his name was Stanley Tennenbaum and that he had a research scholarship at the University of Michigan Department of Mathematics in the foundation of mathematics. In short, he was paid just to think and work with his own mind in the realm of math. I liked that idea. Later I would find out that Stan Tennenbaum was quite famous in the world of mathematics for work he did on a proof by the great mathematician Kurt Gödel. Stanley was interested in what are called recursive functions and other very abstract forms of mathematics. I didn't know what to think of him.

For one, Stanley had all the earmarks of the eccentric genius: long hair, thick glasses, and a wild and crazy (and I mean crazy) look in his eye. During that ride into town, Stan, who was very interested in education, couldn't resist striking up a conversation with me. He was very direct and became friendly and personal with me at once. At first, I thought this guy has to be gay, but he was not. Who else would be interested me, a 19-year-old kid who was a nobody? And so, we talked.

In that very short ride of probably only a mile or two, he managed to find out that I had dropped out of high school and was casting around for some direction in life. For reasons of which I have no idea, he fixed on me as

someone that he could help and immediately (on the spot!) invited me to come and live with himself and his family out on a farm near Chelsea, Michigan for that spring.

Do I have to tell you that this was odd? Even so, I was totally intrigued that anyone at all would have an interest in me. I had nothing going for me other than just being myself. Yet this guy was fascinating and sincere, so I accepted his offer and before I knew it, I was, living in Stan's attic out on a farm near Chelsea. Life was very fluid back then.

The idea was that I would live there for free (I had no money), and Stan would give me various study projects to complete under his guidance. American history was the first on his list, as I well remember. And that is how I came to live with Stanley Tennenbaum and his wonderful family.

I will never forget the first morning I woke up on that farm. There I was, half-awake in a tiny room in the attic and feeling for sure that I was in a different place than home. Suddenly, up through the stairwell from below came this deafening sound. It was something like music, but unlike any music I had ever heard before. It was almost terrifying. As it turned out, it was a Bach fugue played on the organ and at incredible volume. That was my real introduction to my sojourn with Stan, not to mention to Bach fugues. It was real enough for me.

I am sure Tennenbaum's wonderful wife and young family must have wondered what in the world I was doing living in their house, but I never heard a peep from them. I did study that book on American history. In fact, I came across some handwritten notes not that long ago, carefully copied out in my indecipherable script. I did the work, but I also took in the farm that spring in 1961. I remember watching the cows in the warm barnyard sun for hours. Some of my drawings from that time are enclosed.

As for the studying, as mentioned, I did the work, and it went OK, but I am very hard to teach. I tend to like to teach myself things, although you could not ask for a more enthusiastic teacher than Tennenbaum. Remember, I never got out of high school because I had trouble respecting teachers who were not (in my opinion) life-teachers. I thirsted for life-teachers, and Stanley came close. That being said, I did not always see eye to eye with Tennenbaum and he did have a bit of a temper. My own stubbornness eventually led me to leaving the farm, but it was not unfriendly. Did I mention that I am very stubborn?

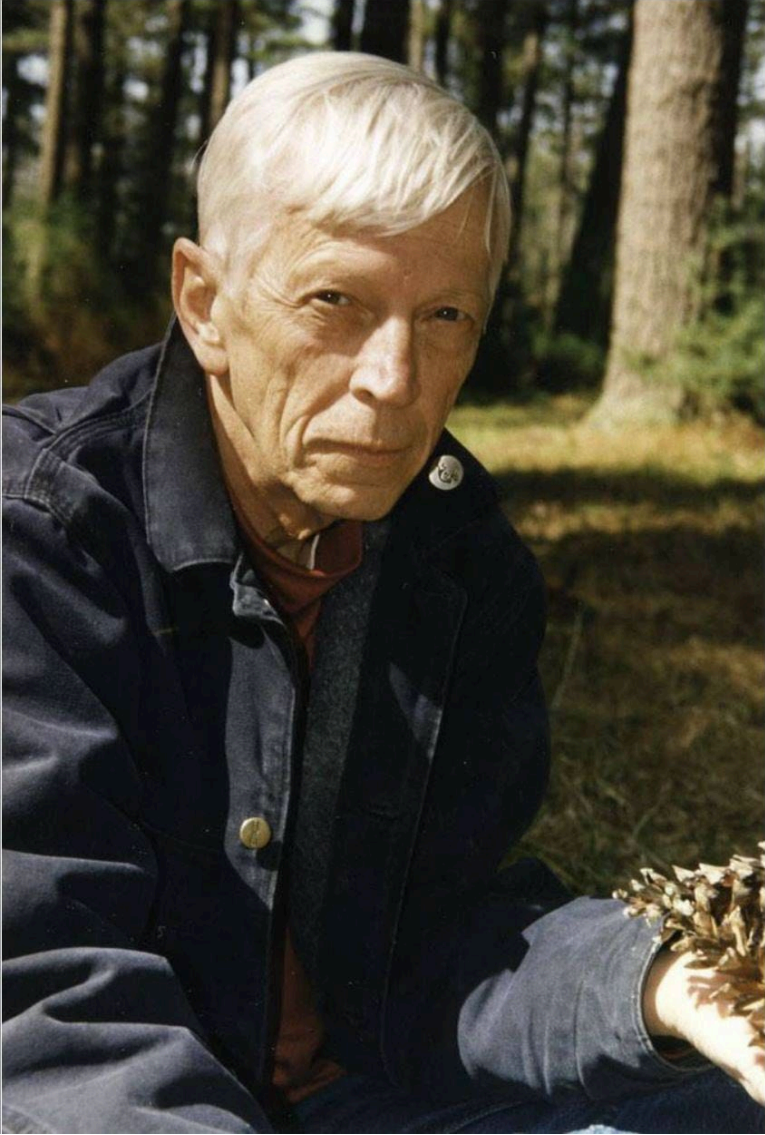
All and all, I got a lot out of that experience, not so much with American history, but mostly just the fact that someone was interested in how my mind worked and thought enough of me to try and help me by offering some direction. That made a difference. I owe Stanley

Tennenbaum my deepest thanks for taking the time to single me out for encouragement. It came at the right time, and it really meant something to me.

Years later I found out that Tennenbaum was a kind of genius (and maverick) in mathematics, part of the great tradition that came out of the University of Chicago in the early part of the 20th Century. His papers are legendary and the anecdotes about his life are too. Some have likened him to a modern Socrates, bouncing around from math departments across the country, at times without a job and means, but engaging (at times irreverently) those he met with a mind they would not soon forget. I remember Stanley Tennenbaum and thank him for his interest in me.

In the end, however, I was (even under those circumstances) pretty much as un-teachable as ever, and it was only some months later that I left Ann Arbor and fate found me out on the road again, this time hitchhiking and traveling with a then unknown songwriter by the name of Bob Dylan. This was the spring of 1961 and one of life's turning points for me. I am my own version of Forrest Gump, often on the edge of things.

[Photo of Stanley Tennebaum, and some contour drawings I did while living on his farm for a spring.]







LIFE TEACHERS: RUSSEL C. GREGORY AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALIST

March 2, 2022

“The Concept of Place”

Every college town probably has a local bookstore where everyone who is ‘anyone’ and educated hangs out. In Ann Arbor, in the late 1960s (pre-Borders), that was Centicore Books, originally on Maynard Street, but relocated to South University.

Somewhere I read that the official title was “Paper Back Bookstore and Centicore Modern Poetry Shop.” It was the South University period I am writing about here. Sure, there were other bookstores in Ann Arbor, but this particular one is where both the students and professors bought their books and hung out. Centicore was the place where you might run into Andy Warhol, Norman Mailer, or John Cage when they were in town. Centicore was “The” place.

And IMO, what made it that ‘place’ was a single individual, Russell Gregory. He didn’t own the store, but he made the store what it was. He knew more about books and literature than any of us, most professors included. And he was not simply a walking inventory of book names. He had read them all and could talk to you

about them with real intelligence. Literally everyone who read knew Russell.

And he not only read books, understood them, and could guide any of us to where the best parts were, he also was a poet and writer (journals and essays). It was not enough for Russell to hold forth at the bookstore, he also had years of weekly get-togethers at his home at which all were welcome and great discussions took place. While the above is remarkable, that alone was not what endeared Russell Gregory to me.

Russell Gregory was a living Transcendentalist, just like Whitman, Emerson, and Thorough, the only one I have ever encountered who not only carries that lineage but is able to project it into your consciousness, and what a view!

Russell Gregory in the Centicore bookstore pointing out which books on a topic are important and just why, is one thing, important in itself, but Russell after hours or off in a corner of the shop actually reenacting the mental landscape of the Transcendentalists, empowering you in its vision is quite another. His ability to make that unique American philosophy actually come to life and live again or live on in you was another. Gregory's sense of local history, his sense of "place," was profound.

I am not talking about imparting the history of people, times, and places from a bygone era, but rather a sheer

transport into those realms. You are there and those thoughts live again in you, now! Russell had that power and he shared it with those who could receive it, whenever possible. I would say Russell Gregory lived for those moments.

Personally, he was about as polite and careful in his dress and mannerisms as a human can be and yet he was also able to show you just enough of the edge of what he did not like for you to be guided. He was no stranger to opinions, just very careful to deliver them in such a way as not to be offensive. I wish I had that talent!

In time 'Centicore' and the 1960s went the way of the world and two brothers name Border took over and launched a completely different kind of bookstore in Ann Arbor. Russell eventually left Ann Arbor and moved back closer to his roots in Ionia, Michigan, where he retired and lived. He served as the editor of the local Ionia newspaper for twenty years and I wish I had time to research what he did with that newspaper. I am sure it was remarkable. Gregory later worked part-time at Schuller's Books in Grand Rapids, still guiding readers to the best of the best and I am sure occasionally empowering lucky souls in American ideas.

I can remember one time when I was being a little 'assy' and chided him for not writing any poems recently. He turned and looked my dead in the eye and said:

"Michael, these days, my best poems are walking around Ann Arbor." Enough said. I got the point.

Russell Gregory passed on June 11, 2016. He is one of my few root teachers. This four-part podcast (see below) is an afternoon at our home in Ann Arbor, Michigan in April 8, 1973, during which he spoke on the 'Concept of Space', meaning local environments. There may be a very few of you who, through listening to these tapes, can taste the transcendental plane that Russell Gregory projected and share in a living dream that still is America, at least in the land itself.

Russell Gregory: American Transcendentalist

Here are four podcasts of Russell Gregory speaking on the concept of Place.

The Concept of Place: Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNhQv8iYyP8>

The Concept of Place: Part 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M0T2Y5_WUU

The Concept of Place: Part 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giKXy1aN0Ck>

The Concept of Place: Part 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH6NJj0D8g0>

[Photos by Margaret Erlewine of Russell Gregory and Michael Erlewine conversing at 'Sailors Pines', one of the few stands of virgin white pines in Michigan, this stand is from around 1880. Some are two feet in diameter and over 100 feet tall.]





GETTING OUR OWN PERMISSION

March 3, 2022

[Margaret is traveling for a few days; I'm home alone, as they say. Trying not to eat stuff I should not. Here are some black beans, with diced organic tomato, and

canned green chilis. This will have to do for a treat. At least I'm allowed to eat it. It is not only good, it is pretty too.]

How do we rest in the nature of the mind when we don't know what the nature of the mind is, other than as a concept and words? If we have never found or recognized the actual nature of our own mind and become familiar with it, how then do we rest in it? Perhaps we can be resting in the nature of the mind and not know that we are? That would not do us much good and does not make sense. It's all about awareness.

Yes, as mentioned in other blogs I have written, in the basic dharma practices, mostly what are called 'The Preliminaries', which are purification practices, we are told or it is suggested to, at the end of a day's practice session, rest for a moment in the nature of the mind. Actually, it is stated to rest there as long as we can, at least until that rest is interrupted by a thought or distraction.

I note that when I was asked to do that, there was no introduction to what 'that' is, but rather just the request to rest in the nature of the mind. In this case, the cart is before the horse, so to speak. Such a request was just kind of slipped into the mix of things I was to do at dharma practice, with little to no introduction other than to do that.

And it's not just an afterthought that we should begin to get used to resting in that manner. It's an introduction that is at some remove from a time when resting in the mind's nature usually becomes a key part of our dharma practice. Dharma students all over the globe include this 'resting' at the closing of a practice session. Yet, for most, this is but a fumbling gesture toward things to come, without any real effort to explain or point out what it is all about. We just do it, and it's like putting our foot in the door, so to speak, without knowing why, or that we have even done that. Any significance is to come later, often much later for most dharma practitioners.

So, there it stands, this writing on the wall for most of us, but how to read it is still to come. As to when our practice all these years to briefly rest the mind clicks in and is the real thing, let's discuss.

First, aside from practicing it, there is no way to rest in the nature of the mind until we have actually recognized and become familiar with the actual nature of the mind. It is said that once we have recognized the actual nature of the mind, our practice from that point forward then becomes expanding and extending that recognition. There would be nothing to expand and extend without that initial recognition, so it's a 'Catch-22'.

And that's 'numero uno' on the list of things to do concerning this issue, become familiar with the nature of our own mind, through receiving the pointing-out

instructions for that from an authentic teacher, and doing whatever practices are needed until we have that Recognition. It is then, when we recognize the nature of the mind, that we can undertake the non-dual meditations like Mahamudra, which consists of two very special forms of Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) and Vipassana (Insight Meditation).

Without an introduction to the mind's nature and the recognition and familiarization that follows, we have nothing to expand on or extend. That's the whole point or reason that we can't just declare that we have recognized the mind's nature and have it be so. We would only be fooling ourselves, like most of us do anyway. Only in this case, there is no mirror to look into and thus no reflection. It's as simple as that. Without 'recognition' of the mind's nature, we have no recognition, and thus nothing to expand on. We can't go further, and so we are stalled, treading water so to speak, unto that recognition takes place. And it's a circular argument.

Who is to say we have not recognized the mind's nature? Well, we do, if we will look. We can't push forward if we don't know what to push and find ourselves right back where we have been for some time, looking outside ourselves for a solution to an inside problem. 'Recognition' comes from the inside, and not from the outside. We know because we 'know' and for no other reason. And if we don't know, well, we just

don't know. There is no button to push and make it happen, no certificate we can get or apply for that states we have recognized the nature of the mind. Only we can know this and if we don't know for certain, then we have not recognized the nature of the mind. It's humbling.

No matter how much we protest and complain, in the corner of our eye, we know or glimpse the fact that we are still pretending, doubting, wondering, and don't know precisely because we have not had that recognition. If we had, we would not still be trying to convince ourselves and others that we have had recognition. We would, instead, be on down the road toward enlightenment, because 'recognition' is the single greatest propellant toward enlightenment. We have to recognize how to work the mind before we can actually work it.

This is because 'recognition' is not something to 'have', but rather something to 'have' had, that signals by the 'having' of it exactly where to go from there. We then know, where before we did not know. And we know, without a wonder, doubt, or even a second thought, when we know, when we have recognized the actual nature of the mind and how it works.

Anything short of that is wishful thinking. It's OK to stop and cast around for information as to where we are dharma-wise in our practice. However, nobody knows where we are but us because the whole point of

something like 'recognition' is to know the nature of the mind for ourselves. And, if we find ourselves looking outside for approval or certification for that recognition, that fact alone is proof to us that we have not yet recognized what needs to be recognized. And this because the whole point of 'Recognition' is to recognize just that, the true nature of the mind, after which (and by which) we know exactly what to do.

[Photo by me of black beans, diced org tomato, and canned green chilis. That's for my note. The stoplight is for the blog. LOL.]



JUMPING THE TRACKS

March 4, 2022

Samsara is literally like a freight train headed down its linear track toward oblivion with us on it. This piece is about breaking that syndrome and getting off those tracks. A primary way to do just that is through the special form of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) used in the Kagyu style of Mahamudra meditation. This blog is about jumping those tracks.

As to the functioning of Insight Meditation and how it works, this is too difficult to simply put in words, but (as you know) I (and many others before me) are bound to try, if only to flag this information for those who are ready to see this.

Since Insight Meditation is a non-dual form of meditation, this involves some kind of immersion to the exclusion of what we call the Self, the 'me, myself, and I' part of us. Few of us (at least consciously) have done this, although we do something like it all the time, every time we are totally distracted until one thought, or

another wakes us up to our usual discursiveness (subject and object) once again.

And while we can perhaps understand all this conceptually, what this is all about, who among us knows how to invoke this nondual state or process at will? Few. That being said, how can we best approach this?

I sorry to say that I am not an expert in such training. I have undergone it, and successfully, but am not skilled at launching others in this form of meditation. What is needed is an authentic guru or at least a carefully trained lama who is capable of giving to us what are called the "Pointing Out" instructions as to the true nature of the mind.

These teachers exist, but may not be easy to find, plus it takes two to tango, so to speak. Not only do we need an authentic lama to point this out to us, but we have to ourselves be prepared to receive these instructions, not a small task, and have them pointed out to us, and also be able to accept them enough to respond accordingly. IMO, that's a bit of a tall order. And so, this point in dharma practice is where a lot of practitioners pause until they are ready for Insight Meditation.

I can say this: In my case, it took me a number of times when I was given the pointing-out instructions by an authentic teacher before I actually understood what was

being pointed out. Mostly, I was not prepared to receive them and so I didn't get what was pointed out, try as I might. I had to admit I did not have what is called "Recognition" as to the nature of the mind, and that because I did not know how to move forward at that point without it. I was just spinning my wheels, so to speak.

And when, at last, I understood the pointing-out instructions enough for them to register or imprint, that was not the end of it, but just the beginning of years of very diligent work on my part to implement the instructions. However, that work (years) was then fueled or driven by my having got the idea, finally. It took me some three years of great daily effort for me to prepare my mind just enough that I could then actually recognize the nature of the mind. That's one point.

Another point, more like a wild card, was the fact that, even after the years of concentrated work, I was still too cerebral or up-in-the-air and out of my body to ground myself properly. I was just floating out there, thinking many thoughts, so to speak.

And therefore, in my particular case, it took a very special (and painful) twist of fate to bring me down to where the rubber meets the road. And this was not something that I did, like sobering up, but rather something that was done to me that shocked and plunged me into 'seriousness' enough that I could at last

respond properly. I call it a 'perfect storm', yet it was not one of my own making, but one I had to endure nevertheless. It took that twist of fate to get me out of my ivory tower, so to speak, until I was tore down almost level to the ground. It was only than that I was able to invoke Insight Meditation successfully. In other words, it took that perfect storm to get my full attention. Please take note.

So, how do I tell you folks about how to do that? It's not as simple as my saying to go out and suffer a bit, get seriousness thrust upon you, enough for you to be sober, and then add that seriousness as a missing ingredient so that you can be successful in achieving Insight Mediation. As mentioned, I didn't do that to myself. It was done to me by 'fate' or whatever we might call it. Yet, it was, indeed, a blessing in disguise, to have enough 'bad' luck to be able to listen to the universe.

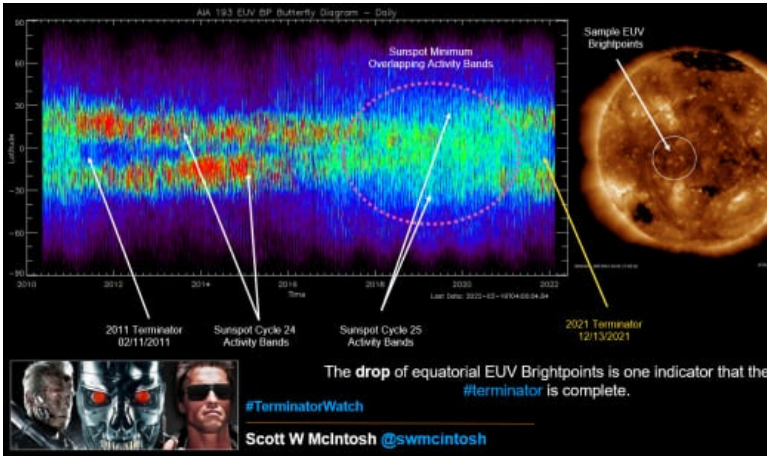
Whatever the case, it was permitted for me to suffer that kind of change, change enough to add that dimension of pain to, as I mentioned, my perfect storm. It was when all of these various ingredients were present that I was able to release, to actually let go, to 'not give a damn' enough for me to be launched beyond where I had been stuck all these years, riding a freight train down its linear tracks to I don't know where, perhaps to oblivion and 'death do us part'.

Nevertheless, that's what it took to make it happen, and

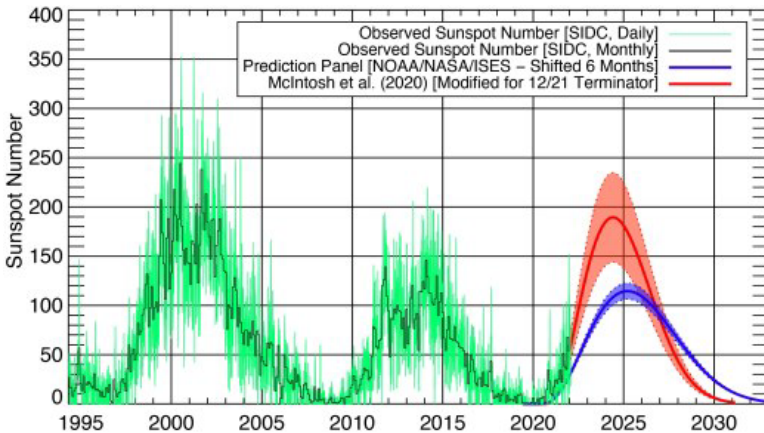
I hate to only offer you a recipe that includes the ingredient of fate, throwing us down the rabbit hole. Who wants that and, even if we did, how could we arrange it?

In truth, it was (and is) an initiation into something beyond my experience to date, being torn loose from my rigid linear train of thought, freeing my fixation on my expectations enough for me to give up my attachments and just be receptive rather than insistent on this, that, or the other thing.

Be that as it may, that's roughly what it took for me to open enough to receive an introduction to the true nature of the mind, as my dharma teacher calls it. My wish is that you find Insight Meditation without having to be brought down to the level of the ground, as I was. The point of this blog is just to mention that if we are too flighty, too caught up in the conceptual mind and its thoughts, sooner or later, something will have to catch our complete attention. May it be natural, organic, and not too rough to endure, yet may it be permitted that Insight Meditation may dawn.



Above: Bands of coronal bright points (hot spots in the sun's atmosphere) linked to old Solar Cycle 24 vanished in Dec. 2021, signalling a Termination Event. A Twitter thread from Scott McIntosh explains this in greater detail.



Above: Predictions for Solar Cycle 25. Blue is the

“official” prediction of a weak cycle. Red is a new prediction based on the Termination Event.

THE TERMINATION EVENT

March 4, 2022

[This is an article from [SpaceWeather.com](https://www.spaceweather.com), a few days ago. I could paraphrase it but, it is well-written and should be read as it appeared. Click on images to read legend. Here goes, and I quote:]

“Feb. 26, 2022: Something big just happened on the sun. Solar physicists Scott McIntosh (NCAR) and Bob Leamon (U. Maryland-Baltimore County) call it “The Termination Event.” “Old Solar Cycle 24 has finally died—it was terminated!” says McIntosh. “Now the new solar cycle, Solar Cycle 25, can really take off.”

“The “Termination Event” is a new idea in solar physics, outlined by McIntosh and Leamon in a December 2020 paper in the journal Solar Physics. Not everyone accepts it—yet. If Solar Cycle 25 unfolds as McIntosh and Leamon predict, the Termination Event will have to be taken seriously.

“The basic idea is this: Solar Cycle 25 (SC25) started in Dec. 2019. However, old Solar Cycle 24 (SC24) refused to go away. It hung on for two more years, producing occasional old-cycle sunspots and clogging the sun’s

upper layers with its decaying magnetic field. During this time, the two cycles coexisted, SC25 struggling to break free while old SC24 held it back.

"Solar Cycle 24 was cramping Solar Cycle 25's style," says Leamon.

"Researchers have long known that solar cycles can overlap. The twist added by McIntosh and Leamon is the realization that overlapping cycles interact. This makes sense. In the early 20th century, George Ellery Hale discovered that the magnetic polarity of sunspot pairs reverses itself from one cycle to the next; indeed, the sun's entire global magnetic field flips every ~11 years. When adjacent, opposite-polarity solar cycles overlap, they naturally interfere.

Termination Events mark the end of interference, when a new cycle can break free of the old.

"The timing of the Termination Event can predict the intensity of the new cycle. In their Solar Physics paper, McIntosh and Leamon looked back over 270 years of sunspot data and found that Termination Events happen every 10 to 15 years.

"We found that the longer the time between terminators, the weaker the next cycle would be," explains Leamon. "Conversely, the shorter the time between terminators, the stronger the next solar cycle would be."

"So, when did the latest Termination Event happen? Dec. 2021. This yields a specific, testable prediction for Solar Cycle 25.

"We have finalized our forecast of SC25's amplitude," says McIntosh. "It will be just above the historical average with a monthly smoothed sunspot number of 190 ± 20 ."

"Above average" may not sound exciting, but this is in fact a sharp departure from NOAA's official forecast of a weak solar cycle. It could be just enough to catapult Terminators into the forefront of solar cycle prediction techniques.

Stay tuned. We'll be back."



MIXING TRANQUILITY WITH INSIGHT

March 5, 2022

Someone sent me this quote from a Dzogchen teaching:

“Driving the nail of clear light unimpeded rigpa at the juncture of samsara and nirvana.”

What is this about and where is that juncture? The juncture is where samsara and nirvana meet or intersect, yet what does that mean? The place samsara and nirvana intersect or mix (in my experience) is in using Insight Meditation as a method to transform (clarify) samsara (in which we are all embedded) until we can see the nirvana in it, a bit at a time. Or, we could say straightening out samsara until it is nirvana. Or seeing through samsara to the nirvana behind it or as the nirvana it is and has always been. And these are just verbal descriptions, none of which are exactly what I mean or intend. These things can't be properly expressed in words.

In the pith dharma teachings, samsara and nirvana are connate, two sides of the same coin, two ways to look at the same thing. Either way, we are not going anywhere but right here and now, be it in samsara, nirvana, or a mixture of both.

If I understand that initial quote, it is exactly right and what I strive to do each day. The way I do it amounts to using samsara itself as the support for Insight Meditation. And since I do Insight Meditation in many short sessions, one immediately after the other so that they are effectively seamless, I then immerse myself in Insight Meditation while focused on, as a support, some particular element of samsara, in my case usually having something to do with dharma practice, which may result in my writing about it here.

And by repeated excursions (immersions) using Insight Meditation, light is shed or focused around and on whatever dharma concept I am considering. The repeated Insight Meditation sessions, when linked back-to-back so they make a seamless flow, allow whatever is the focus of the support to be clarified and lucid.

And through that kind of nondual feedback, which because it is nondual and has no subject and object, is presented without annotation, self-consciousness, commentary, asides, or any other kind of 'white noise'. And by that, I mean the whole nature of, not just that particular focus, but the nature of the mind itself is gradually (incrementally) revealed via Insight Meditation. As I like to say, samsara is straightened out until it is nirvana.

I'm sorry, but all these words are inadequate to illustrate what I am attempting to say. I will slow down and parse

it out as best I can. It may be kind of boring yet see if it jogs your attention in any way that is useful.

Most of us start out learning what is called some form of Tranquility Meditation (Shamata in Sanskrit), which is the process of learning to allow the mind (meaning in this case, ourselves) to rest. The problem with Tranquility Meditation is that it is very sticky in that it too easily involves our 'trying' to do something, rather than just allowing the mind to relax. In this case, the very effort involved with meditating (or trying to) itself becomes an obscuration and that effort is very hard to remove. It's like trying to get a sticky piece of filmlike plastic off our fingers, which is very difficult. That effort just keeps appearing in another (but lighter form), albeit perhaps increasingly less effortful, but still consuming too much of the oxygen in the room.

What eventually gets introduced to us is another form of meditation called Insight Meditation (Vipassana in Sanskrit), which is effortless because it is nondual, meaning it is like complete immersion in the mind, to the exclusion of both subject and object. We get lost in the mind all of the time, but in the case of Insight Meditation we are aware of being aware while we are immersed.

The "we" in us gets dunked and the sheer experience itself is all that is present, one without a subject (like 'me') or an object like 'it' or 'them'. Instead, there is just

a pure experience that usually lasts for but a moment before thoughts creep in and break it up with the result that we are back again to duality, with our familiar ingrained subject and object.

It is fortunate, however, that these short momentary excursions beyond duality can be mixed and strung together like beads on a string, back to back, resulting in a much longer sense of full immersion, again, one without effort or any subject/object. And these insight experiences are not discursive, but like static polaroid images, read-only.

The value of this special Insight Meditation, as least in my experience, is that miss-takes, things we have mistakenly viewed due to samsaric life, are corrected, seen correctly for the first time, and these actually are realizations, meaning once seen correctly, once 'realized', we don't fall back into mistaking them again. In other words, Insight Meditation actually corrects our vision or take on the world.

In other words, Tranquility Meditation steadies our gaze, and Insight Meditation corrects our mistaken views by incrementally revealing clearly the nature of the mind. The way I like to say this to myself: it's like trying to thread a very fine needle with shaky hands. The Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) steadies the hands, so the Vipassana (Insight Meditation) can thread the needle.

[Photo by me of one of the shrines around our dharma center.]



THE STOREHOUSE CONSCIOUSNESS

March 6, 2022

Not that it may interest you, yet I'd like to say a few words about what I am thinking a lot about during this particular time, meaning these last years.

I continue to examine the Yogacara school of dharma thought, in particular using the pith texts of Yogachara as a support for my daily Insight Meditation. I long have

been interested in what is called the 'Alayavignana' (Alaya), the storehouse consciousness, being the collection of unfinished desires and attachments that our karma pays forward through the bardos after our death to fuel our rebirth by creating another (a new) personality and Self for us. Not 'Michael Erelwine' continuing on in a new body, but an entirely new person based on a collection of unfulfilled desires and fixations that are stored, random-like, in the Alaya Storehouse Consciousness.

The Alaya is said to contain these 'vasanas' or seeds, which are unrequited desires that have been set in motion, but are yet to mature through rebirth, basically what we popularly call 'bad' karma. I know, this is kind of far out stuff, but nevertheless I am fascinated by it and want to follow it out as best I can.

A puzzler for me has been, given that this Alaya consciousness basically stores the problem-children we have generated, our negative karma, what about the 'good' karma we generate? Is that also somehow stored in the Alaya consciousness? Where does our 'good' karma get stored?

Well, to the best of my studying, positive karma is not stored in the Alaya, so where does it go? I'm sure I don't have it all figured out, but where I am as of now with 'positive' karma, is that basically it is the antidote to all of our problem karma, the karmic seeds that seek to

ripen (and will) in our mindstream.

Basically, the purification of negative karma involves untwisting whatever has been twisted, undoing or unravelling our negative karma, these karmic seeds that are stored in the Alaya and that seek to mature in our rebirths. And so, there is no special place to store good karma because the true nature of the mind, the Dharmadhatu, is already (and has always been) perfect. So, my take on this is that these negative karmic seeds are like pinching ourselves. And the antidote is simply to stop pinching ourselves, thus allowing that natural nature of the mind to be seen for what it always is and has been. So, there is no 'place' where we store good karma because it is one and identical with what is called the 'Pure Dharmadhatu' that has always been pure. By that logic, it seems to me that we don't need to store 'good' karma because it just is, as mentioned, what is called 'Pure Dharmadhatu'. To repeat, all we have to do is stop pinching ourselves, so to speak.

Please, those who have studied this further than I have been able to, please chime in and help me clarify this issue.

This reminds me of (and clarifies) a bit of prose that I wrote back in the 1960s during what I would call a 'clear day'.

"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.”

[This is the image I like to use to illustrate the Alaya, the
storehouse consciousness.]



‘GETTING DOWN TO OUR FIGHTING WEIGHT’

March 7, 2022

Insight Meditation. By learning to relax and allowing ourselves to be immersed beneath the normal conscious mind, we can feel, sense, and intuit whatever most interests us, whatever we are drawn toward or focused on. And when this immersion, which is part of Insight Meditation, ends or is interrupted by thoughts that arise, we are forced back into dualistic samsara, where we remember as best we can what we realized or saw (or some part of it) during the immersion in Insight Meditation.

And by continued re-immersion with Insight Meditation,

short momentary sessions, back-to-back and again and again, we can incrementally, using the pure clarity of Insight Meditation, mine the mind itself, gradually clearing up and rectifying our samsaric (confused) view. In my understanding, Insight Meditation is the antidote for 'bad' karma. And this process of increasing incremental clarity via Insight Meditation means we stop accumulating karma, as much karma as we can manage to straighten out and realize each issue correctly. We untwist the pretzel.

Insight Meditation is invaluable for providing a way to remove the causes of difficult karma and thus, as an antidote, by removing the cause, we do not accumulate more. Although I have done dharma practice over some fifty years, no single practice has been as useful, IMO, as the special form of Insight Meditation as used in Mahamudra Meditation of the Kagyu Lineage style. We need to have good Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) to invoke Insight Meditation (Vipassana) properly, and the two forms of meditation go together like hand and glove. As they say, they are connate.

However, Insight Meditation is not the low-hanging fruit, as they say, but rather requires considerable training and preparation. It's not that you can't just 'go for it'. I certainly tried, but soon found out that my own obscurations were far too thick and opaque to see beyond myself. That realization was a real showstopper for me. I was reluctant to jump into the purification

practices because they are arduous.

As mentioned, I sure tried to go right for Insight Meditation, and it took me some time to admit that my own impurities and blockages were in my way, much as if I wore glasses that were dirt, and I could not see through them. And there was no way of going around that problem because I carried it with me.

Ultimately, after getting little to nothing done, I was finally willing to do some of the purification practices (which at first seemed Medieval to me) like the 'Extraordinary Preliminaries', commonly called 'The Ngondro'. Ngondro is not for the faint of heart, but is quite difficult, usually a multi-year purification practice (for those of us who have to work a job) to help thin out our obscurations and get us, so to speak, down to a 'fighting weight' when it comes to our obscurations. We need our obscurations to be transparent enough for us to see through them, at least enough to see something beyond ourselves and our personal fixations.

There are hundreds of dharma practices available. What makes this particular form of Insight Meditation so special? And it's even called 'special', being the special form of Insight Meditation (Vipassana) that is intrinsic to the Kagyu Lineage form of Mahamudra Meditation.

To properly understand this, it is important to know that there are two basic kinds of meditation, linear, dualistic

meditation, which is meditation with a subject and an object, like all samsaric phenomena, and then there is non-dualistic non-linear meditation, meditation without a subject and an object, meditation by immersion.

Most forms of meditation are of the dualistic type, what are called 'relative truth', meaning, as mentioned, they are done with ourselves as a subject and the form of meditation focus as the object. Examples of dualistic forms of dharma practice or meditation would include Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), Lojong, the Common, Extraordinary, and perhaps some of the Special Preliminaries, and others.

However, there are a few forms of meditation (usually considered more advanced) that are not dualistic, but rather non-dualistic, often called 'absolute' truths, meaning they are done by complete immersion in the mind, complete in the sense that they are beyond our being the subject and something else we focus on the object. Examples of these more advanced forms of meditation would include Insight Meditation (Vipassana), Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Maha-Ati, and others.

And while anyone can practice the dualistic forms of meditation, or at least try, the non-dual forms of meditation often take some preparation before undertaking them. They are more subtle and often, as in my case, I was too crude, too obscured to see beyond

my own self enough to know what to do or to intuit what has to be done. We first have to work to refine ourselves and to thin out our obscurations enough until they are at least somewhat transparent. This, so I learned, takes time, effort, and lots of it. Not all of us have the time or are clear why we should put out the effort to achieve this.

In fact, the trail (if we could see it) of our dharma practice would show all of our attachments and obscurations scattered on the path behind us as we underwent the various kinds of purification practices to clarify our mind so that we could undertake something like this special form of Insight Meditation.

This is particularly true of preparing for Mahamudra meditation, although at the close of most dharma practices, even the most beginning ones, the practitioner is encouraged to rest for a moment in the nature of the mind, although we may not yet know where or what that is.

On the other hand, many of the Dzogchen approaches begin right off with learning to look directly at the mind itself. Both styles of nondual meditation have the same result, but the path or approach is slightly different.

Either way, the purification practices still stand us in good stead for both types of meditation. If we don't need any purification of our obscurations, fine, but for

most of us (like virtually all of us), our obscurations stand in the way of the more advanced non-linear (nondual) practices. If we can't see through ourselves at least a little, we can't see to do these non-dual practices. As they say, we have to get over ourselves.

I have been working on this for over 50 years, which length of time should not be assumed to be necessary for all. There is a lot of water over the dam since I first began with the dharma. Back then, we knew so little and had almost no access to teachers, materials, and training. Yet, times have changed, and while these kinds of practices will still take real effort and diligence on the part of any student, the progress in the last decades as far as understanding dharma and the availability of qualified teachers has much improved.

And while climbing the peaks of the mind may not seem as difficult as climbing something like Mt. Everest, I disagree, and feel Insight Meditation is just as difficult to master, our even becoming familiar with the actual nature of our own mind. We all know what Mt. Everest looks like, but who is there among us that knows or is familiar with the actual nature of our own mind? I ask you.



THE SIDESHOW

March 9, 2022

Using a circus analogy, my first dharma teacher used to say to me: "Michael, if you spend all your time in the sideshow, the main tent will be gone."

I often have to remind myself to stop looking somewhere else, like over my head, for something that is already right here in front of me and within my grasp. The mind and its true nature do not just reside in a book, hidden in the dharma scriptures, or only available through my attending dharma teachings.

We each have the all-and-everything of our mind with us right here and now and always have. The scholarly approach to mind training apparently takes many years

to learn. And while we are waiting to finish what can be an endless study curriculum, there is nothing stopping us from taking a time out and looking at the mind right here and now, and see how it thinks or acts, thus figuring some of this out for ourselves. It's right here in front of us, waiting for us to take the plunge.

There are two trains running here, one is to get in line and only take the scholarly approach, read, take teachings, do practices, and all of that. A second approach, which can go on at the same time as the more scholarly one, is to bypass years of just studying and start now to get to know our own mind firsthand and in person. After all, we each have all the options right at hand.

Ultimately, even if we study for years, after whatever we learn by that, it is still all about actually working with the mind itself in real time. For those of us who would rather read another book than jump right in, I can only say: think about it, which is what you are doing with study as it is. However, sooner or later, we each have to leave off with the reading and paddle our own canoe, actually become familiar with our own mind. IMO, there is no time like the present to get started.

There is a bridge between reading about something and actually doing it, and too often that scholarly bridge is what is called "a bridge too far," one that we will never cross unless we just stop studying and go and do it.

What are we waiting for?

There is an immense world to be discovered right here in our own mind, one that perhaps we have taken for granted and more likely one we have never or seldom even accessed, except on those rare occasions when life blows up in our face one way or another. I find it helpful to remind myself that every thought, word, and deed originally came from the mind itself on its way into this world. And so, there is a lot more down there in the well of the mind than we know or can even imagine.

And in my opinion, becoming familiar with the mind through hands-on access is way more convenient than running all over creation trying to find this or that in the books. It's like trying to use the rear-view mirror to drive into the future, when all this time we can just turn around and learn to ask the mind itself and get an answer. There is a point of no return for thinking about it and a time for just doing it.



ATLANTIS RISING

March 10, 2022

Finding the right choice and choosing. How we make up our mind depends on how our mind is made up. We follow, rather than lead in this area. It's a 'READ ONLY' affair because the nature of the mind itself is unchanging. We can only become aware of that nature, not alter it.

Anyway, at the edge of the deep well of the mind, we hover, and using Insight Meditation (Vipassana) we put

our 'head' into and under the water of the mind, fully immerse, and after a short time, when interrupted by thoughts, pull it out again. We are used to linear thinking, meaning thinking down along a line of thought that stretches out to an end somewhere, like a train on tracks. We are not used to ducking for apples (immersing ourselves) in the big mind pool itself, this sea of life that is the mind. It is the most unexplored realm this planet offers.

Perhaps we don't yet know how to live fully immersed, inundated. Instead, we teeter on the edge of two worlds, our habitual samsaric dualistic world of subject and object (and all the confusion that entails), as opposed to short sessions of immersion in Insight Meditation. And these short immersions can be strung together (like beads on a string) to effectively create a longer session of whatever length our interest can endure. Yet, even when strung together, the process of Insight Meditation remains the same.

In other words, there is the plunge (we take the plunge) and immersion into the nondual (nonlinear) 'sea' of the mind, Insight Meditation, with its special form of 'Seeing,' one with clarity and lucidity. And then, as thoughts come, they bring with them (and are a sign of) our withdrawal from the nondual state back into the familiar duality of everyday life, our subject/object world of samsara.

To repeat, on the one hand there is our learning to let go and our immersion beyond time into nonduality itself, which is the hallmark of Insight Meditation-with-support. And within that nonduality, there is what can be seen, felt, known, and determined in that undivided state, followed by our withdrawal from nonduality back to duality as thoughts intervene. And once back in our relative state (subject/object) of duality, what was seen or intuited while immersed can be checked (only by memory) for its usefulness in the context of what is being understood or noted from the immersion, to see if it fits in or whether something more interesting or intuitive would be better, and if so, we should reenter Insight Meditation again and search for that.

In another blog, I posted this quote from a Dzogchen (nondual) dharma teaching:

“Driving the nail of clear-light-unimpeded ‘rigpa’ at the juncture of samsara and nirvana.”

This phrase seems to be another way of saying that samsara and nirvana are connate, just two sides of the same coin. By using the word ‘connate’, this is just a fancy way of saying that nirvana is not some far-off ‘heaven’, and that there is no escape or place other than the right the here and now, only seen differently, from our changed point of view. In other words, in the long run, we change our view rather than our situation.

I also believe that in the not-too-distant future, we will have the equivalent of Rick Deckard, the detective played by Harrison Ford in the movie 'Blade Runner', who checked what appeared as 'people' to see if they were androids. My point is that instead of having degrees in whatever that the schools and colleges offer now, in the future we will also have degrees in mind training, perhaps in dharma, and the equivalent of a 'Rick Deckard", will check folks out to certify that they actually have attained this or that level in mind training. Folks who are certified as having a clear mind will be consulted just for those qualities. Just my two cents, yet IMO this will take place.

However, my first thought was that the above quote pointed out that where samsara and nirvana meet (and mix) is the natural support for Insight Meditation, call it the fringe of fire up front, so to speak, where our recognition as to the true nature of the mind is focused, and where we are increasingly realizing and straightening out the warped nature of samsara as in truth the nature of the mind, degree by degree.

The takeaway here is that the dharma event called 'Recognition" is recognizing the mind, its nature, and that we (just as we are now) can work it. In that event, we finally understand how to do that. However, 'Recognition' is not by any means enlightenment, but rather, at last, just becoming familiar with the mind itself , which is a solid starting point, IMO, for actual

meditation (and not just 'practicing' meditation), a recognition and familiarity with that mind that can and has to be expanded and extended from here on out until actual full enlightenment, whether in this lifetime or lifetimes away.

I have long been a great fan of the image of the ancient city of Atlantis slowly rising from the waters of Lethe into view. I find that, after the original recognition of the true nature of the mind takes place, with that increasing familiarity, and from that point forward, as my dharma teacher of 36 years pointed out to me, our day-to-day 'practice' becomes actual meditation, the extension and expansion of our original recognition as to the nature of the mind, to ever-increasingly recognize and realize this samsaric world (right here and now) as nirvana. This is usually done incrementally, to repeat, like Atlantis gradually rising into view. It's the 'view', how we see things, that's important.



LIFE TEACHERS: IOTIS WILDER

March 12, 2022

An important influence for both my wife and I came in the form of a Unity minister from Detroit. I met Lotis Wilder just before the birth of our first child. She was to be our teacher in so many ways. Lotis was a woman in her fifties. 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 met Lotis as part of a radio show in which I was asked to interview another astrologer, and he had brought Lotis Wilder along with him for God knows what reason, perhaps for support.

And I thought nothing out of the ordinary when I first met her until she began to retell an account of how she had removed a tumor from her own body. Ok. As she spoke, I went on with my own thoughts. There were several of us listening. When she had finished her account, everyone gathered around were remarking at what a powerful story they had just heard. At this point I realized that, although I had felt the emotional power in what this woman 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 very expressive and so careful not to let the world know how deeply she had

been hurt and had suffered.

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, for she had so much love inside her, if she could only realize that her 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 being 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 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 at the time, I was seeing her and how it was with her. It is a hallmark or sign of a life teacher for me, that they serve as a mirror and perfectly reflect our own state of consciousness.

We worked together with Lotis Wilder for many years. Margaret and I named our first-born child Lotis after her. "Lotis" is a Greek word that means both 'will' and 'desire'.

To repeat what I related above, one thing I learned from Lotis Wilder was that higher centers than our own are

reflective. They are a mirror that we can look directly into and through which we can see ourselves reflected.

[Photo of Lotis Wilder.]

BLOWING A FUSE: SOLAR ANIMATION

March 12, 2022

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BLOWING A FUSE: SOLAR ANIMATION

[I am sorry to post so soon again, but “We interrupt our regularly scheduled program to bring you for an important message.” And it’s my fault for not getting this news out sooner, but I was putting out other fires, so to speak. At any rate, below is what the space scientists are drawing our attention to and what is heading our way as early as tomorrow, but internally we should already be feeling it.]

And there is no avoiding it, what I call ‘forced animation’, like it or not, animation by the outside forces of the Sun when it decides to get overactive.

I find it a shame that modern astrologers (who are supposed to give meaning to astronomical events) have paid almost no attention to solar activity. They spend years and tomes on activity at a distance, like planetary aspects or even cosmic events from 'deep space' yet manage to ignore what is happening in our own backyard, here meaning the often-intense activity of the Sun itself and its effect on us.

And it's not as if we have a choice when the sun decides to get upset and eject some of its solar mass into outer space, often in the direction of our planet Earth, which it is doing right now.

Something like an intense solar flare or an incoming CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) does affect us, if only to grab us so tightly as to squeeze some life out of us. Scientists report that right now a full-halo CME is heading for Earth as I write this, expected to impact late on Sunday, March 13, 2022. This is the result of a long-duration C-class solar flare that took place on March 11th, which erupted for almost 12 hours straight, allowing it to pump an immense amount of energy in this coronal mass ejection (CME) that is now heading our way.

And it is said that the impact of this CME may well spill over into March 14th. I don't want to dwell too much in this article on the mechanics of solar activity, but rather to point out how these events also affect us internally,

through our emotions and feelings. And the next couple of days should clearly describe this to each of us, if we can manage to remain aware that this is taking place, while at the same time being put through it physically and emotionally. Often the best many can do under incoming intense solar energy is to go and lie down or otherwise stick our head in the sand until the impact passes. We agree to ignore what we find too hard to remember.

We are used to the sun delivering to us each day it's solar rays, the light that we can see by and that keeps us warm. It is like an extension cord between the Sun and Earth, regulated by the (usually) even voltage of the 'quiet' Sun. This variable voltage also controls our inner sense of life consciousness and probably our life stream itself.

So, what happens to all that when a sudden jolt of very high energy, super-intense voltage, runs through that extension cord? We know that intense solar activity like solar flares and especially Earth-directed CMEs can blow out power grids and greatly affect short-wave radio, and so on. That's the outer effect. How can we then not connect-the-dots enough to put two-and-two together and realize such intense solar activity must also affect us through and through, including our mind and emotional status.

If nothing more, such a sudden increase in solar voltage

will push our internal synapses to their limit, literally forcing us into animation and activity, like a puppet on strings, dancing the dance of the cosmos, whether we are ready for it or not. That's what I mean when I said earlier, such events squeeze the life out of us. They force animation, force us to go through stuff. For sure, it will tire us out. It overdrives our internal psyche and mental systems, gives us headaches, and pushes us out of our normal internal activity, and for some of us, blows a fuse or two.

This is a phenomenon that any of us can witness by developing some of awareness. And the next two days should be a good laboratory. My hope is that this does not additionally inflame the situation in the Ukraine. Nevertheless, everyone one of us here on Earth is bound to experience this and be forced to be animated by it and ride it out -- or for some, suffer it. Whether it animates us more than we would like or perhaps we manage to ignore or not be moved by it, we will see. I'm just pointing out the opportunity for those readers interested in these things. We are being made an offer we can't refuse.

[Photos from [SpaceWeather.com](https://www.spaceweather.com), which is always there if you want an update on what is going on in the heavenly realms.]



SOLAR SURFERS

March 13, 2022

Is astrology really so hard to understand? I find it quite straightforward. We have no problem with astronomy, the study of astronomical events, particularly those of our solar system. Astrology is simply cultural astronomy, taking the same astronomical events that science uses, and attempting to suggest what they mean to us, if anything. To me, searching for meaning is a part and parcel of this life here on Earth.

Everything else seems to have some kind of meaning, what about astronomy and its events? Why draw the line at celestial events? Where did that admonition come from?

Is it like trying to mix sodium with water? We get an explosion, and the same seems true with mixing celestial events and meaning. Somehow it is off-limits to ask what is the meaning of these astronomical events that surround us? It is forbidden to look into this, yet quantum physics does.

However, astrologers brook that opposition, jump right in, and ponder what a New Moon means, or a Mars/Saturn Conjunction and on and on. After 60 years studying astrology, I must say that trying to determine what astronomical events mean is where astrologers differ and find their difference. Some astrological interpretations mean something to me, IMO, but just as many do not.

Just because we can't agree what astronomical events mean, does not signify they mean nothing. Everything means something, including astronomy. It seems to me that interpreting astronomical events is just more difficult to determine, at least in my experience. What do they mean or what does life itself means? These are legitimate questions IMO.

For example, we are now in what amounts to a solar inter-tidal period of a few days, a time when the constancy of the quiet Sun is interrupted by the 'angry' Sun, the injection of intense solar energy thrown at Earth, a huge surge of voltage that tries our psyche and health, challenging our emotions. For many, this roller

coaster ride of solar energy is welcome, while for others, it blows a fuse somewhere inside. And it varies, depending on our ability to absorb it.

As for this current time, these days, I can only speak for myself, and I find this particular extended solar flare (launched from the Sun on March 11th) and the CME that it rides in on over the next days touching the quick more than a little. When the goal posts actually start to shift, move, and even dissolve, even one day's worth of intense solar change has more peaks and valleys than we are used to, so I just can't help but take notice. And as mentioned, these solar tidal waves are often quite individual in how they affect us; we are not all natural solar surfers. And we may be up for change one day and down for change on the next.

Right now, astrologically speaking, the heavenly view (astrologically speaking) is clear and lucid, thanks to the Grand Trine (Kite pattern) that's holding forth heliocentrically in the solar system, but these same emotional tides themselves shimmer, shake, and slip their stays, launching us on like a kayak trip down the solar rapids; at least in my case this has been true of late. I'm no sooner heading in one direction, when I find myself heading in the opposite direction, all within the confines of a single day. This is unusual, IMO.

I happen to like a touch of the psychedelic, ever since 1964 when I first took some Sandoz acid. And so, these

type of intense solar surges remind me of old times and I'm not above a voyage 'Into the Mystic' either. I know my Van Morrison. I see and feel all kinds of things threatening to manifest these days, as I'm plunged back and forth, in and out of experience, again and again. It's a merry-go-round. As mentioned above, of late, for me each day rises and sets like the tides, flooding my consciousness, and filling me with content that conflicts, carrying me with it each step of the way with its the highs and lows. Hold on to your hats!

[This Illustration I put together features a Grand Trine whole-chart pattern in Kite formation, an aspect pattern that is holding forth these days in the heavens. A Grand Trine whole-chart pattern or archetype is the perfect way to avoid sending a cross (Grand Cross, T-Square) through the center of the Sun. In the current case, as mentioned, this Grand Trine is a 'Kite' pattern as shown in the graphic.

This Grand Trine Kite pattern is a very sensitive archetype, one that senses things, which is the opposite of 'sense' immersion, as in touch-feely. The Grand Trine is sensitive to anything physical rather than being sensual. With a Grand Trine comes the ability to see the 'Big Picture', to see the forest as well as the trees, and to put everything in perspective, as from a distance.]



Photo of the Northern Lights by John Dean from Nome, Alaska.



Photo taken by me during this CME time.

“THE SKY EXPLODED”

March 13, 2022

I feel I owe a little more explanation about this current Geomagnetic storm that resulted from the recent CME hitting Earth. I will share two photos, one of the Northern Lights by John Dean from Nome, Alaska, and a second taken by me during this event. They both are different photos, but capture the same event, IMO. Here is a burb from

“As predicted, a CME hit Earth's magnetic field today, March 13th. The impact has sparked a moderately strong G2-class geomagnetic storm. When the CME arrived, “the sky exploded,” reports John Dean, who sends this picture from Nome, Alaska: “I was out from 2:30 am until sunrise,” says Dean. “The coronas (auroras that seem to fall from overhead like rain) were phenomenal.”

And here is my report on the inner sky.

These last days, at least for me, have been like a waking dream. Just getting through the day, I’m walking through dreams or dreamlike debris much of the time. And all my dreams or dream-like states have not ‘schooled’ like a school of fish school; they don’t all point in the same direction.

Instead, I’m dreaming up one side and down the other,

going in opposite directions, one dream perhaps only for a short time, but as one fades another arises. Throughout the day, I'm sensing these dreamlike states and any given dream vanishes like the morning dew, and I find myself in another. Dreams, within dreams within dreams. Before you think I've got a free pass to Netflix, what I call here dreams are not like movies or videos, but more like transparent overlays that subtly weigh me down and in which I wander in and out of, not quite being able to put my finger on them. It is almost subconscious.

It makes for a long day, which is unusual for me. At eighty years of age, days go by like clockwork for me, usually very fast; however, these days are different. They stretch out and are filled with vignettes, little dramas, starts and stops, much like daydreams, but unlike daydreams, this is not what I would expect to dream in a daydream. It seems beyond my control and not very clear.

I wander around, almost in a vague stumble, wrapped in these mini-dramas, filtered by these dreamlike sequences that don't quite touch on reality. They are not full-on dreams, but are more like a holographic filter or transparent overlay, floating just beneath my awareness, yet I am partially aware, a kind of spiritual cataract or filmlike filter. Something has unleashed the subconscious, but in piecemeal.

I credit all this to the intense solar activity of late and probably to some sensitivity on my part to solar influx. As to how to respond to all this, it's hard to say. I tend to sit back and just take note, almost like watching a film, and these episodes are certainly a 'read only' event. I take it in, but so far have had no response to offer, other than these words.

[I will share two photos, one of the Northern Lights by John Dean from Nome, Alaska, and a second taken by me during this event of the only flowers around, since we still have snow, ice, and very cold temperatures here. Both photos were born from the same solar moments.]



THIS IS IT!

March 14, 2022

That photo is not a gesture offering 'Pie-in-the-Sky', meaning a 'heaven' somewhere else other than right here and now. This is it!

Even the most advanced dharma practices must reference this samsaric state we all are in because that is what we are trying to realize or straighten out. How can we achieve any kind of Nirvana (or 'Heaven') without referencing Samsara to do that? The two are connate, joined at the hip. So, no matter how far out or far away we try to get from the situation we are in right now, that

'far out' refers, by definition, to far out from the Samsara, which is right here and now. We each must transform Samsara, our here and now, and not try to work around it. We have no choice but go through Samsara to reach the future, and why? Because there is nothing beyond Samsara as far as a place to be other than Samsara transformed. There is no 'heaven' out there somewhere.

That would be making the mistake of placing 'heaven' beyond our reach. My first dharma teacher would say, and often, "Michael, this can be hell. We have to make our own little corner of heaven right here in whatever hell we find ourselves."

That's the point, the whole enchilada, so to speak. Samsara (our current situation) is not a steppingstone to somewhere else. The most frequent phrase my first dharma teacher said was simply: "This is it!"

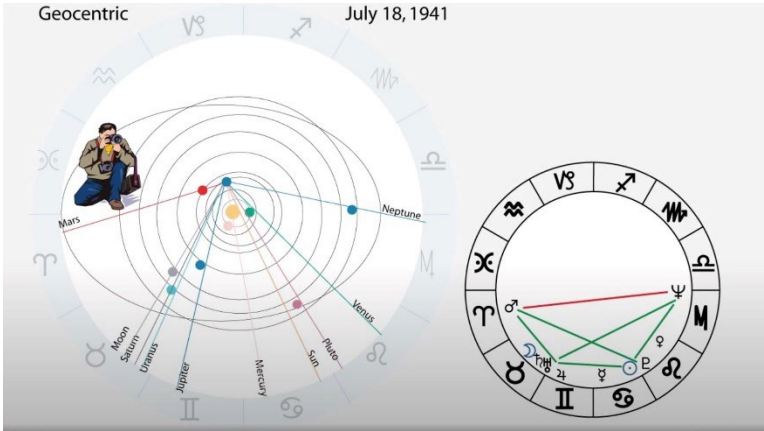
Talk about recursive and recursively; it all points back at itself. It's not that we go from here on to there. We are always and forever going to be right here and now. Think about it. There is nowhere else but the here and now. The "there and then" can only be found by starting with the here and now.

And so, we best get busy working with the here and the now and making it into whatever we can or want it to be, because it's not like there is anywhere else for us

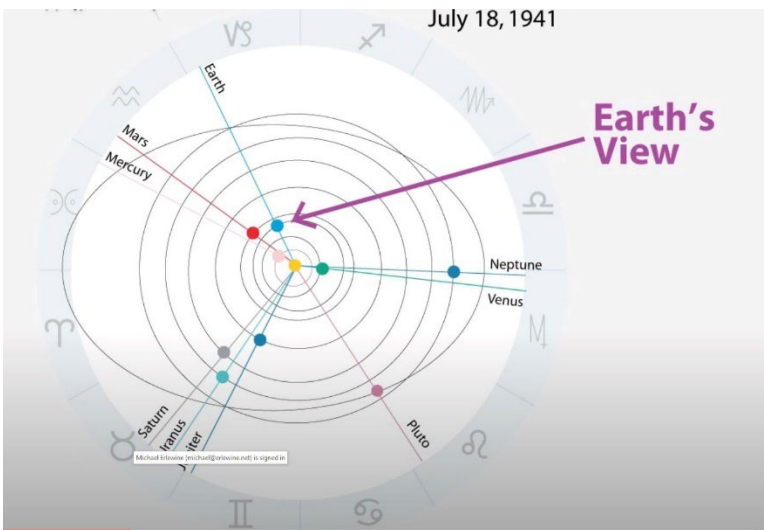
unless we create it, starting with what we have at hand
'here and now', our current situation.

To me, this is the first and last rule: we cannot change
what we refuse to accept here and now.

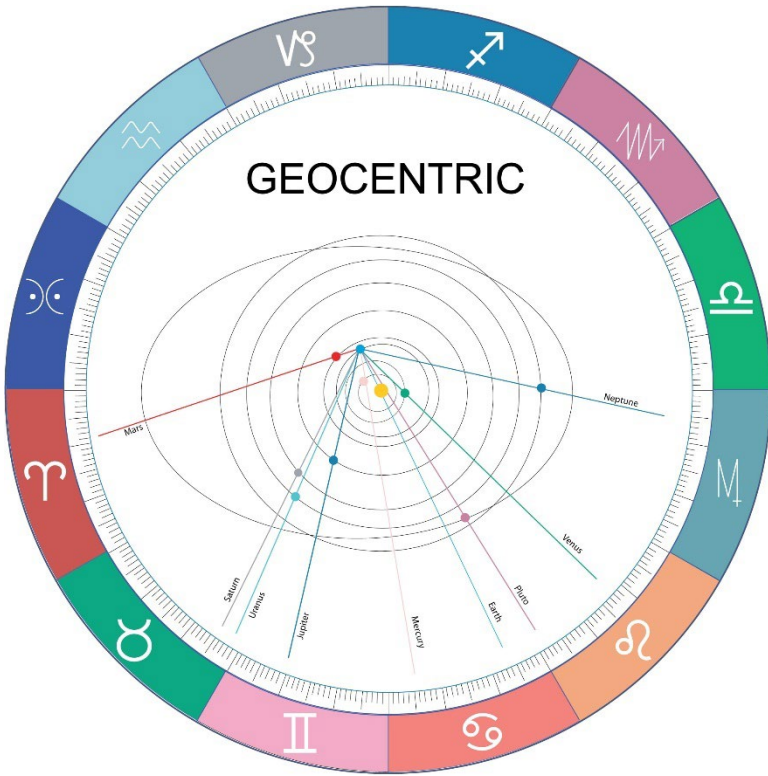
THE ONE-EYED ARE HALF BLIND



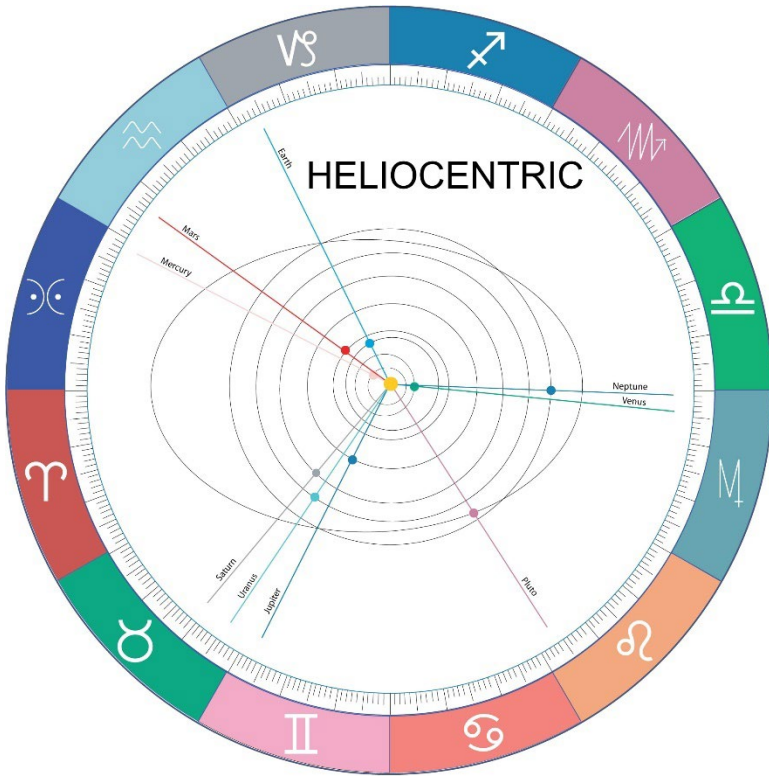
This is the view of the solar system from Earth, the geocentric (Geo) chart.



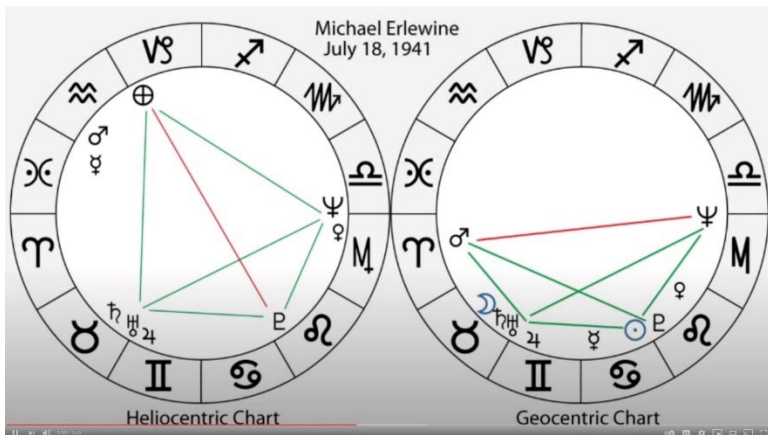
Note: Similar to the last view. This is the view of the solar system from Earth, the geocentric (Geo) chart.



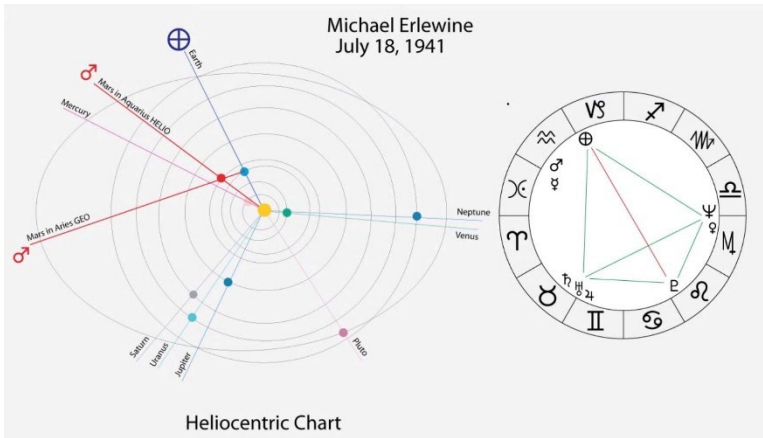
And yet another view, showing the geocentric chart.



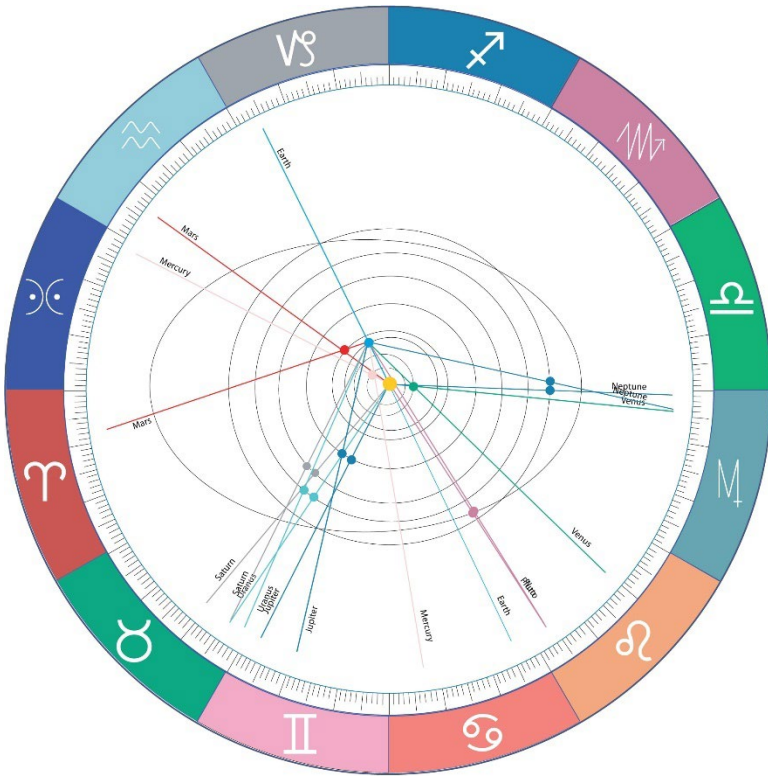
And here is the astronomer's chart, the heliocentric view (Helio) chart.



And here are both the helio and geo charts



Showing how the position of Mars is very different in the Geo Chart and the Helio Chart. This is true for each of the planets, although the outer planets positions do not vary much.



Complicated chart of both the helio and geo views superimposed on one another. Look carefully as to how they differ please.

THE ONE-EYED ARE HALF BLIND

March 16, 2022

IMO, the problem facing modern astrologers here in the West, is as simple as that, for all these centuries, we have insisted on pulling all interpretation from a single geocentric (geo) chart, when that geo chart itself is but one view of the solar system as seen from Earth's

position circling the Sun, and we don't use a chart or map of the actual sun-centered solar system itself.

In other words, we have a chart or picture of what Earth sees or is looking at from where we are, yet no chart of the solar system itself. We have no map or chart of the solar system itself to compare our Earth-bound view to. We need both charts to understand what is going on in the charts.

It's not that there is no map of the solar system. Copernicus gave us that some 500 years ago. We astrologers just refused to accept it and never used it, while astronomers (who back then were also astrologers) understood that everything does not revolve around us here on Earth. In fact, the Earth revolves around the Sun and not vice versa. Today's astrologers, back then, refused to accept the Sun-centered chart. Heaven knows why.

To repeat, there is nothing wrong with the geocentric (geo) chart modern astrologers use, other than we also need a second chart of the actual solar system itself, a heliocentric chart (helio) of our actual solar system, that the geocentric chart is a view or chart of, and then, given these two charts together (geo and helio), we can begin to triangulate the two and meaningfully plot our course through samsara, this world of cyclic existence. In a nutshell, geocentric astrologers are, to use an analogy, one-eyed, and lack the perspective and view of the two-

eyed, those who have both geo and helio charts, plus know now how to use and compare them to one another.

I have spent a large portion of my life trying to point this out to my fellow astrologers, with little success. Essentially, they still act and believe that everything revolves around them (the geo position of this Earth), when in fact, in truth, everything (including Earth) revolves around the Sun. As mentioned, Copernicus pointed this out to us 500 or so years ago. In fact, while 'Mother Earth' may be our mother, Earth is not the mother of the solar system. The Sun is that and that alone. In addition to our standard geocentric natal chart, we need a map of the mothership, a heliocentric chart. Together, we can see how astrology works.

And, it's not that a heliocentric chart of our solar system does not exist. Astronomers use one, and have for 500 years. It is we astrologers who have refused to take it to heart, and be empowered by it.

What more can I say? I have done my best to point this out, and astrologers have done little other than to respond with quips like "We don't live on the Sun." Of course, we don't live on the Sun, yet we live 'off the Sun' and depend on it for life itself. The geo is bound to the helio at the hip, so to speak. I am embarrassed by astrologers crediting themselves for all the beauty that our mind and life offers, yet they assume that the Sun is

just a big fiery ball of gas and nothing more, not sharing with us our spiritual nature.

Wake up, friend Owl!"

[Geocentric Chart, showing how it is a look at the heliocentric solar system. Then, my Geo and Helio charts. See how different the Earth's view (geo) is of the Solar System (helio) chart. The Geo chart is a chart of our karma, while the Helio chart is a chart of our Dharma, who is dealing with the karma.]



MY INTERVIEW ON ASTROLOGY HUB

March 16, 2022

Interview with Michael Erlewine by Amanda 'Pua' Walsh
(Astrology Hub)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNPnUoWGjMw%2F>

Here is an interview of me, done today by Amanda 'Pua' Walsh of [AstrologyHub.com](https://www.astrologyhub.com). I have to apologize for being so old, going on 81 years of age, but I am still relatively coherent. LOL.

Amanda is a wonderful listener and brilliant at asking questions. You may not want to hear the whole thing (about an hour), but if you have time give it a listen, please do



'IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO': BEING ABLE TO RECEIVE

March 19, 2022

I feel like a war veteran, not home from a battle, yet battling various health problems for years. It's still me in here looking out, but I have to look out through several heart attacks and three strokes, not to mention the little stuff.

My mind is clear, which it was even after my major stroke. The only problem was that right after that stroke I lost touch with my own history and sense of self for a time. I couldn't hide or take refuge in my familiar

samsaric haunts or find ways of filling my life with enough entertainment to cover over the anguish of life itself, you know, that sound of nature living that we call silence. I was just 'right there', 24x7, in the hospital, and for weeks into months later at home while recovering. That, my friends, taught me more than thousands of books ever could.

I do find that, today, instead of glibly rattling off a lot of talk (as I used to be able to do), my mind has to hunt a bit for words, and by that search, actually put words and phrases together that make the sense I am meaning. It's not all bad, actually. I have had to be more careful in what and how I say things, yet what I say is more coherent, at least to my mind.

Of course, I continue to do my best to get the word out, and by that, I mean share my experience and what little realization I may have managed with those of you out there who are ready and able to hear it. It is, as they say, a thankless task, because 'thanking' is not the point. Connecting and communicating is the point, passing information on, 'paying it forward' as they say, hopefully to make the road ahead for others less blocked and slow.

'Clarifying the mind', that's the ticket, and is why any of us undertake the so-called purification practices, in order to get our obscurations down to at least a deafening roar, rather than a torrent. Why else would we

want to refine our senses?

Of course, I'm writing about this because in my own life I was a worst offender. I assumed that my mind, emotions, and what not, were good to go, just as I came out of the box, so to speak. It never occurred to me (and if it did, I resisted it) that my mental glasses were not crystal clear. Of course, they are the only 'glasses' I had ever looked through.

And it took a number of years of my ramming my head against the wall of meditation, before I would accept that the problem was not with the difficulty of meditating, but rather in my own inability to become flexible enough to receive and implement the dharma teachings. For years, that thought was out of the question, simply a non-starter. I assumed I was good-to-go, just as I am. And when, after several decades (32 years) of trying to practice Tranquility Meditation, I gradually came to accept that I could not fit all the pieces of life's struggle together.

In other words, after years of trying to practice Tranquility Meditation, I finally deigned to examine and 'think the thought' that perhaps I was the problem, and that I was not actually fit to accommodate and receive these dharma teachings, I, at last, paused or entertained the shadow of the thought...."I was not receptive enough," and it was my problem.

Well, that slowed me down, 'big time', as they say, that I was not a good recipient, and perhaps had to go another route. It was then that I took another look at what the Tibetans call the 'Preliminary Practices' and it was then that the word 'preliminary' sunk into me. These 'Preliminary Practices,' are the practices that 'go before' our actually learning to meditate.

Hmmm. What a novel idea. And, of course, these preliminary practices were just those I never took seriously for myself... because I didn't want to be a 'preliminary' anything. I assumed that, smart as I am, I should of course place out of dharma 101 or whatever we can call it.

And of course, I flash back on the first time I really discussed dharma practice with my root guru, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. I was explaining to him how many years I had been an astrologer, which was also a spiritual discipline, and on and on, and that I hoped that I could kind of place out of 'meditation 101' and get on to the more advanced practices.

And, of course, Rinpoche, who is very kind, said very firmly that although I may have done many years of spiritual practices, when it came to meditation, he felt that I needed to start at the very beginning, which of course was his equivalent of 'Meditation 101'. My mind may have wavered for a split-second, but I did just what he asked, started at the beginning. I am so grateful that I

did.

And of course, that was just the right thing to do. And so, the same goes for my eventually coming around to doing the 'Preliminary Practices', the purification practices. And it's not like I needed a quick rinse, and I was good. As it turned out, I needed to get out some deep-down dirt and stains. In fact, I was such a hard case that, after some years of doing the quite arduous purifications called 'The Ngondro', which involved hundreds of thousands of repetitions of various practices... when I finally finished and went to Rinpoche and said, "OK, I am ready for those more advanced practices, Rinpoche said.

"Michael, do you want to know what I would do, if I were you?" And I said that of course I wanted to know what he thought I should do. He was my dharma teacher. And Rinpoche said, "I would do another Ngondro," the whole thing all over again, which, after a moment's freak-out, I said I would do and did.

That's an indication as to how little I knew about what I actually needed when it came to dharma preparation. The moral of this story is that it takes two to tango. Of course, we need an authentic (to our mind) dharma teacher, but to match that, we have to be able to receive the teachings, which, as I found out is not a slam-dunk. So, as the old saying puts it: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." This student had to get ready.



NATURAL EDUCATION

March 21, 2022

We all know that it is hard to get the toothpaste back into the tube once it is out, so I'm not sure what's the best approach in dharma practice to gaining 'Recognition', meaning our being able to recognize the true nature of the mind. I can say that for me, rote recitation or rote dharma practices did more to hinder than help me. When I point this out to other dharma folk, I am told that all those rote practices were helping me all along, but I doubt that. I just don't believe it. Thanks anyway.

Another, quite different, approach to actually meditating, as opposed to forever 'practicing' meditation or rote recitation, is to follow our own native interests and allow that natural interest itself to keep us awake and propel us as the driving force in our learning dharma. What if our interests just run out and leave us uninterested? I have not found that to be true, not even or ever. Sure, like everything in this samsaric world, all things wax and wane, including interest, yet IMO, our natural interests are the best of the lot.

I did my best at rote recitation and practice with Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), for some 32 years straight, yet I cannot say I had much result. Yes, for sure, the Ngondro preliminary practices (purification) were functional and worked, although I had to do Ngondro

twice due to my stubborn obscurations. Yet in this article, I am talking more about what has not helped, and this is the rote learning of Shamata by placing and replacing our focus in an attempt to be mindful. Of course, this method is traditional, but there are other ways that I feel are more intuitive and worth a look.

I used to think that just by being born, being a baby, we are pure and unstained, and that society, as they say, is 'the corruption of infants.' Yet, although for years that sounded good to me, in the long view this does not seem true. Or that as infants we are naturally mindful, without any practice needed. The only way I have found that to be true is if we discover what interests us and follow that in cultivating our particular mindfulness. And please don't tell me that can't be done because I know better. I have done just that.

In a way, my whole life has been a reaction to rote and mindless action. Apparently, I don't like it. At the heart of all this for me, of course, was the education system that I had no choice about. It's not my intention to be critical just to be critical. My opinion is that a carrot is better than a stick and we all know that much of what rote learning is about is just to create a habit, muscle memory, and that, IMO, too often leans toward the side of forced learning. I happened to find out, early on, that I could not respond well to rote practice. Even at a young age I already knew better, and I will explain.

How this happened to me is simple. Perhaps because, as a child, I lived way out in the country, with no neighbors or neighbor's kids on either side, I ended up having to entertain myself at an early age, and that I did, mostly by studying Mother Nature and her natural history. I did this diligently and even at an early age was keen on whatever interested me. I just naturally followed my own interests.

By the time I reached into grade school I already had a sound habit of following my natural interest in almost everything. And so, when public school began to apply its clamps to follow rules that I did not understand, instead I just kept on following my own interests and passively ignored directions to do otherwise by the schools because they made no sense to me. I did not act out or fight the system, but just quietly and carefully ignored it.

The school caught on early to my ignoring them and, without knowing what was happening to me, I found myself (probably as a 6-or-7-year-old) in a flurry of tests to see if I was retarded in some way. As it turns out, I was not slow but quite the opposite (according to the school authorities), I had a high IQ and was, in their estimate, just bored. Well, yeah.

It was not so much that I was bored, because I had plenty of interests, just not at school and being told what I had to do, whether I felt like it or not. And yes, I

was not interested in their way of corralling my attention by rules and meaningless discipline, and this only because it was not interesting to me. I could find nothing to like in that.

And that led to me entertaining myself for some 11 years while at school and only learning what school asked of me if it actually interested me. By doing that, I feel I protected myself from some of the worst dangers of modern education, IMO. They were unable to tame or harness me, if only because I was not wild, just quiet. And that has made a great difference. I have had to teach myself almost everything, and I like doing that.

The human mind needs to be trained and is not just 'good to go' right out of the box, so to speak. Yet, the training methods must be intuitive, organic, and natural, not arbitrary, or thoughtless. Mass education is something of an oxymoron. Individual attention and interest is a requirement, not an option.

For example, we have home-schooled some of our kids and the result is good. They are creative kids. And we have done the best we could to shelter our four children from the storm of rules, laws, and arbitrary treatment. For example, we never had a babysitter for 21 years, and even then, the older kids would babysit the younger. This might sound extreme, but that's not the way it was. We just never felt there was a good enough reason to leave them. We took them with us, and if you didn't like

kids, you didn't see us.

And so, I can't help but have some different ideas about education than average, because by insisting on following my natural interests, I did not submit (or be damaged) by strongarm methods of shaping me in the cookie cutter ways that public education often resorted to.

I believe that within every child, even if are now grown up, there are natural interests (like threads) through which we come alive and which, if followed, will lead us forward to become all that we can be and want to be, and this is, IMO, is especially true in dharma practice.

Dharma purification is a little like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, where we very gently remove stick after stick from a stick-pile (without moving the other sticks) until nothing remains. In dharma training, the same is true with removing our obscurations, one at a time, and very carefully at that. For me, the formal education system is crude compared to the fragility and sensitivity of our natural mind.

In other words, 'How' we are educated is as important as that we get educated. And this is especially true of dharma practice.



“ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE FOREVER”

March 22, 2022

I'm speaking of Insight Meditation with support, and here the 'support' is my using language and words, in this case searching how best to express an idea that is in the mind to create this article. To do that, I have to actually immerse myself in the mind itself.

There could be a thousand ways to view an insight, and I'm feeling for just the right one that seems to mean what I am trying to express. I do this through a special form of Insight Meditation (with support), by actually immersing myself in the mind, non-dually, to the exclusion of the usual subject and object, and seeing non dually, so to speak, 'under water'. Through Insight

Meditation, done in short sessions, I can sense and see innumerable threads and insights, and perhaps each thread is connected to the insight or this particular window that I am peering through, while trying to find the best way to express an insight. I do this by taking many very short sessions using Insight Meditation, a second or two, going under, and returning, over and over again.

And this is creative, in the sense that I am fashioning and creating sentences by assembling them, word by word or phrase by phrase. Each immersion clarifies, and through repeated immersions (and returning to duality), gradually an article such as this emerges. It is true for me, because each short immersion clarifies what is seen in the mind, and gradually what results is assembled and strung together into sentences. And the results are (at least to my mind) crystal clear, because what is seen using Insight Meditation is always clear and lucid.

I have jokingly said Insight Meditation is like bobbing for apples; we get 'wet" with these repeated short immersions in nonduality, returning with results which, when accepted, are strung together like beads on a string to create, in this case, written prose. It is something that we can learn to do, yet it takes time and diligence on our part to do that.

The remarkable thing about this process is the clarity and lucidity that Insight Meditation provides, which is

not discursive like ordinary prose, but rather are freeze-framed insights, much like ROM (Read Only Memory) on a computer. We can only read or see what is there, not argue or discuss it. We see what is.

In fact, we literally see things as they are, truth at least for us. There is no confusion, no quips or asides, self-consciousness, criticism, or annotation. Everything, just as it is, is just clear as a bell. It's like I'm witnessing the truth, and this clarity is unlike anything I had ever experienced before because it is not another 'experience' that comes and goes, but rather actually a recognition (at least for me) of what is, just how things are beneath the everyday confusion and fogginess that my usual Samsara clouds me with.

Like the old saying, "On a clear day you can see forever." I use Insight Meditation each day to provide the clearness and lucidity I thirst for, where before all I had was the opaqueness of Samsara.

COMPARED TO WHAT?

March 23, 2022

Like a great many astrologers, I have spent years (especially early-on) delving into my geocentric natal chart, doing my best to squeeze whatever meaning I could from it. It is not just one of many 'oracles' that I used; astrology was the main one, albeit a complex oracle.

And when looking at my own natal chart kind of ran dry I went into push mode, trying to find the meaning of finer and finer chart details. Astrological charts, IMO, are a lot like different algebras, in that any given algebra brings out or focuses on a certain part of the whole, while suppressing the rest, putting it in the background. The takeaway from that point is that we can't expect to get all and everything out of one view of our nativity. It takes a variety of views, and a variety of natal charts, to triangulate or give us a complete (3D-like) view of who we are (heliocentric) and the circumstances (geocentric) we are embedded in. I have written about this in detail, probably almost 'ad-nauseum', so I won't go into that. Those of you who want to read my 'whitepaper' on this, here it is:

"Cycles or Circles, and Circulation"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Circles%20or%20Cycles%20->

[%20Centers%20and%20Circulation%202021%20FIN.pdf](#)

Or, if you want a more 'hands-on' and pragmatic approach to the two main views of the astrology chart, then here is a free book on that.

"Dharma Chart, Karma Chart: Astrological Empowerment in the 21st Century"

[http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf](#)

How fine we want to resolve the parsing of a whole, any whole, tends to rapidly outdistance our ability to resolve the subdivisions with meaning from our own experience. We can think up a storm of details, yet how many we are actually aware of through experience, much less realized, is questionable.

In other words, we can subdivide any spatial whole into finer and finer sections, far finer than is our ability to feel and interpret those subdivisions. In fact, it is quite easy to go beyond, through purely conceptual analysis, our ability to know, experience, or realize many of the finer points. Whether such intellectual-conceptuality is useful or not is something to consider.

In other words, we can go from interpreting our chart as best we can, to devising and even inventing new things in that chart to interpret, perhaps more than we even

mean to. Of course, with a whole space of any kind, like the universe, our life, or our natal chart, there is no limit to how fine we can parse it. The limiting factor is not how finely we can think to divide it up mentally, but rather how sensitive we actually are to these fine points we imagine that could be interpreted. It's just space. However, our sensitivity to the finer aspects of the division of space is up to us. Just how sensitive are we?

Similar to ley lines, we can define (or declare) imaginary lines, such as the line (and any line is a great circle) that marks, for example, the midpoint of Saturn and Mars, or even finer subdivisions of that. And we might want to note that these lines run right through our living room and make something of that thought. As to actually being empowered or stimulated by those refined subdivisions is another matter. For that we may have to purify ourselves, and more than a little.

We can talk about these fine distinctions academically until the cows come home, and many astrologers do. Yet, at some point, to me what seem important are what we have actually felt, known, and experienced; conceptuality for conceptuality's sake does very little for me.

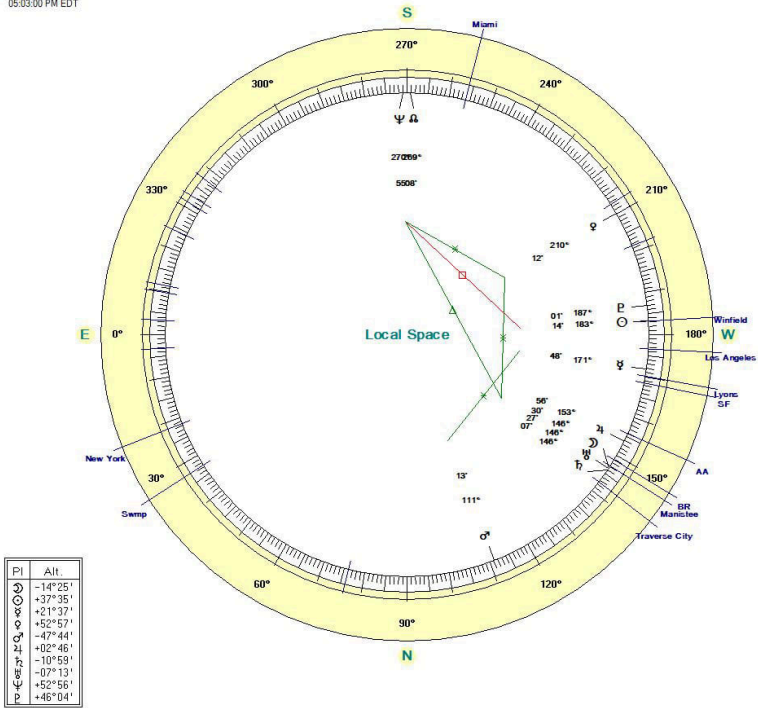
We can 'Blue Sky' all we want, but at home, alone and standing in front of a mirror, where does that leave us? I feel our feet must touch the ground, and the rubber meet the road. IMO, the rest is just talk and too often we

don't 'know' what we are talking about.

[Three of my astrological charts, each offers a different view of me, the Geocentric, Heliocentric, and Local Space charts (azimuth and altitude). The Geo chart shows me the circumstances into which I was born, my Karma Chart. The Helio chart shows who I am and what tribe or archetype I belong to, and the Local Space chart shows the spatial locale in which I operate and can move around in.]

Michael Erlwine
 Lancaster General PA
 Jul 18, 1941
 05:03:00 PM EDT

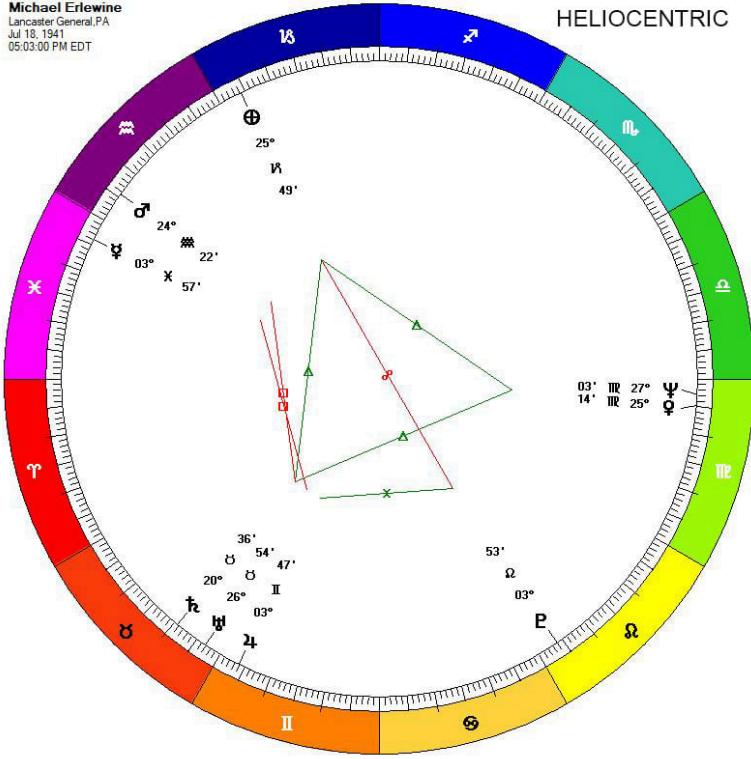
LOCAL SPACE CHART



Here is my Local Space natal chart, a charting of azimuth and altitude at the time of my birth.

Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
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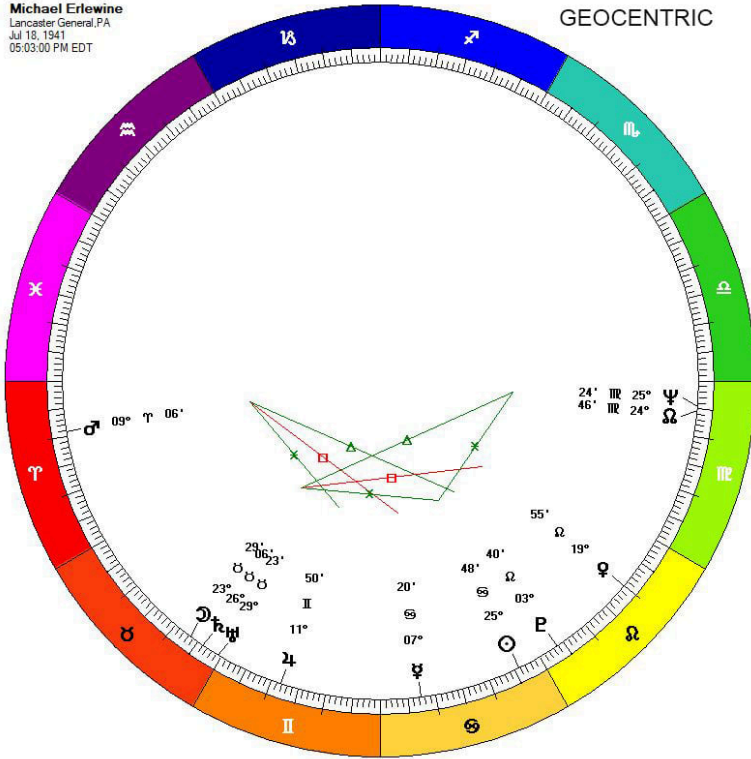
HELIOCENTRIC



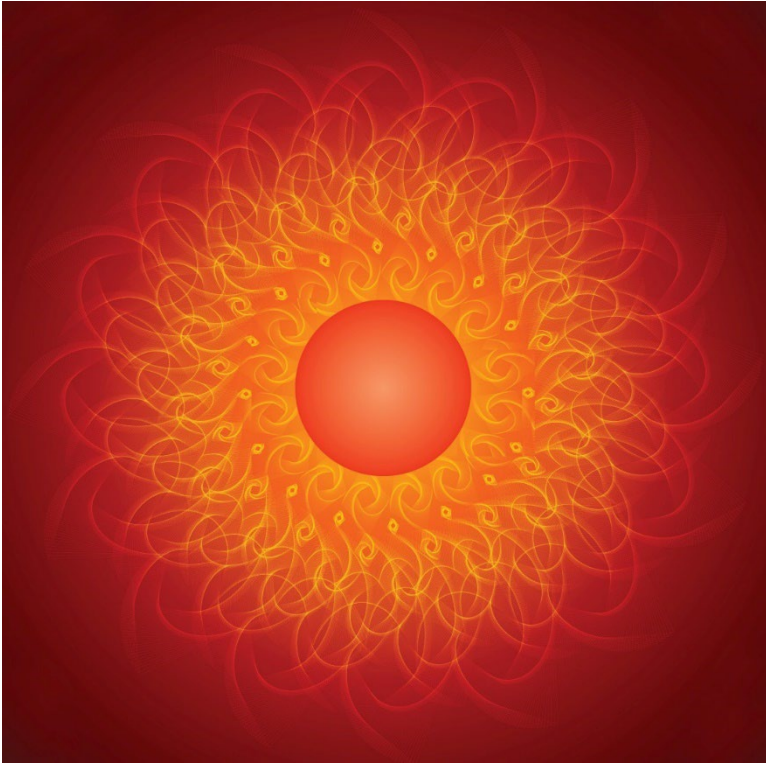
Here is my Heliocentric natal chart, a charting of who I am and what tribe or archetype I belong to. My Dharma chart.

Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
05:03:00 PM EDT

GEOCENTRIC



Here is my geocentric natal chart, a charting of the circumstances and karma I am born into - Karma Chart



THE POINT OF NO RETURN

March 24, 2022

[An esoteric astrology introduction.]

Scientists report that Earth's thermosphere is heating up rapidly just now. It is suggested that soon the thermosphere could hit a 20-year high, which may indicate that this current solar cycle will be above average with increased intense solar activity. You can read more about the thermosphere today [here](#).

<https://spaceweather.com/>

The great solar flares run deep in the mind when they come and they flutter the dovecote and stir things up, me included. Since I often can't sleep, it has me thinking back to my very first dharma teacher Andrew Gunn McIver and his main teaching. Andrew was a traveling initiator for a Rosicrucian order. I met him in the mid-1960s. He was the first human I met outside of my family that cared for me more than I knew how to care for myself. He tamed me and I became his student. When he died in 1969, I who saw to his burial and designed his tombstone, engraved with the symbol of the Sun, a circle with a dot in the middle.

I received my first esoteric transmission from Andrew, and I will share something here of what he taught me. I warn you that this is esoteric astrology and abstract, so please feel free to pass on by. It is not for everyone.

The one thing my first dharma teacher was perfectly fascinated by was palindromes, words or phrases that read the same forward and backward. Examples of palindromes are words like desserts (stressed), snap (pans), live (evil), and stop (pots), or phrases like Bonaparte's "Able was I ere I saw Alba" or "Do geese see God?" What was his point?

His point was that life reads the same forward as

backward. The fact is that this simple statement is terrifyingly true, although it can take decades to sink in, if ever. What can I say? I could repeat it, underline or underscore this, and emphasize it in ten other ways, but it still might not register... yet. However, it is 'the' esoteric truth par excellence.

Like the snake shedding its skin or the glove turning inside out when it comes off, our life is a palindrome. It is reversible and the pivot or turning point is thirty years of age, that first Saturn Return, also called the 'Prime of Life'. I have written many articles about the return of Saturn to its natal place in the zodiac at that age. This is one of the great climatic years in life that marks a rite of passage that, sooner or later, cannot be ignored. In fact, I wrote an entire book, my most esoteric, about the meaning and effect of the helio Saturn return at 29.4 years. It is called "The Astrology of the Heart." Here is the link:

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

While this blog may appear as just a clever piece of writing on my part, you will be humbled to find (as I was) that this is a profound truth from which there are no variations. Even more incredible, the concept is not even linear, but rather cyclical and spherical, like the Sun and its planets. It was no accident that the title of the first book I ever wrote and published (back in 1975) was

"The Sun is Shining!," a 400-year heliocentric ephemeris.
The Sun is so important to our lives.

Feel free to note my remarks and move on, for now, but I promise you that this concept will bookmark itself in your mind and, if you consider the mysteries of life much at all, you will eventually return to this concept in the future. Why? Because like the bird who flies from the mast of the ship far out at sea, we have nowhere else to go. The truth of this life we live, as Andrew would say, is no beggar. It does not need me or you to help make the ends meet. The ends already meet.

As my first dharma teacher pointed out to me, life is a palindrome, and the pivot, balance, or turning point, is around thirty years of age, the peak or prime of our physical body. A rite of passage is something we pass through. It has a before and after, and afterward we are not the same as before. We have passed on, yet don't know it. There is a turning point in life for each of us, which is actually the meaning of the outer planets: Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. In other words, there is nothing out there, nowhere to go. Words of prose for this fail me, but this poem I wrote some years ago says it clearly.

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

[A Poem for My Daughter Michael Anne]

The point of the "point of no return" is that:
When you have reached the point of no return,
From which there 'is' no return,
The point is to turn and return.

That is the turning point.

Every life has a turning point,
Whether it's in the echo of age,
Or in the very midst of life's prime.

As we reach 'our' point of no return,
We pause,
Then we turn.

And, in turning,
'We' begin to reflect.

In our reflection,
And rising into view,
Perhaps for the very first time,
The Sun.

Where before it was 'we' who were seen,
And others seeing,
Now we are the mirror in which others see themselves,
And we can see our self in them, as we formerly were.

What we once saw shining before us, as youths,
That which we gladly embraced in our prime,

And what we now see etched in the mirror of reflection,
Is our eternal Self,
The Sun,
Ever burning in the darkness of time.

That's it.

I understand this.

What I find harder to understand,
Yet still believe is:

We didn't know it then,
We don't know it now.

We never knew it.

In truth,
It never was.

IT 'NEVER WAS';
It never will be.

It is not now,
And still, it is.

It still is:

This most brilliant illusion,
Shining in the mirror of the mind.

Feb 14, 2006 2-4 PM
Grand Sextile Helio



“IT’S BEEN A BLUE, BLUE DAY”

March 26, 2022

The title is from a Don Gibson song I grew up with, a hit in 1957, which tells you how old I am. Here’s that song, for you youngsters, so you can see how old fashioned we were.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9VAHd5DFTY>

And this blog is about hard times and, believe it or not, how each of us we might need some, especially if we are looking for a spiritual break-through in life. I found out, much to my chagrin, that I’m at my best when I am pushed out of the box and don’t give a damn, yet getting me there is painful and rare. I care too much and that alone is an obscuration. A play on another old song

might be "Looking for dharma in all the wrong places."

If I consider what events in my life led to what I would call a dharma 'break-through', meaning recognition as to the nature of this mind we all have, I have to admit that (for me) it was either drug induced (LSD or other psychedelics) or induced by misfortune, very hard times. This does not speak very well of me, I agree.

In other words, I did not naturally fall into dharma break-throughs on my own merit, but had to be kind of dragged to them by either drugs or a really hard time, events that seriously upset my life. With psychedelic drugs, it is easy to see how I found myself outside the box and not minding my P's and Q's, but rather willing to not give a damn at all. Anyone who has successfully dropped acid knows that.

As for 'outside' seriously disruptive events, all I can say is that they work too. One of my strongest dharma break-throughs came at one of my hardest times, fate-wise. There was nothing I could do about it and because of it, I reached the same point, that of not giving a damn, and finding myself outside of the box.

Apparently, in my case, and I doubt that I am the only one, it takes some hard-knocks to get my attention and thrust me beyond the pale, so to speak, to the point where I don't care anymore, give up control, and open my mind so that nature can take its course.

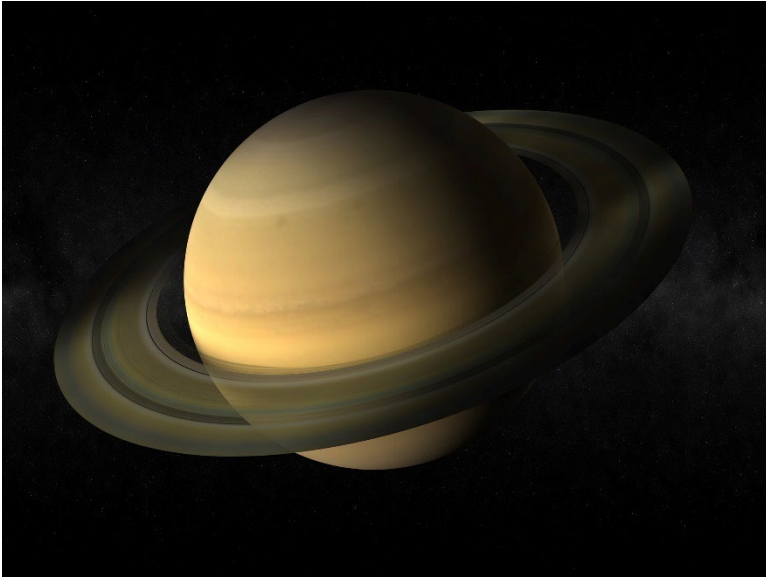
Perhaps many of us are in this situation. Life has been too easy for us for too long, that we are never brought down to where the rubber meets the road. Is that what Medieval monks tried to do by flailing themselves" I can't say as to that, nor how successful they were. And it's not like I was repenting when life got tough for me.

So, I can't suggest we run out in front of a bus or anything like that. I'm just remarking that in my case, left to my own devices, I naturally choose the easiest path I can find through life and don't tend to tough it out or choose hard times for myself.

However, hard times do come from time to time, and life-changing or 'very' hard times also come once in a great while. And while I never choose them, I do notice that, from a dharma standpoint, I benefit from these very hard times. It's just the truth. I can't seem to get down to the nitty-gritty without encouragement, i.e. very hard times.

And so, as mentioned, I can't recommend trying to find hard times or that a self-inflicted hard time could have the same result that fate's hard times can, when something in our life is 'permitted" to take place that disciplines us. About the best thing I can say is that hard times in my case have had good dharma results, either that or by use of psychedelic drugs, the outcome of which I found VERY hard to control.

Perhaps it is just the price we must pay if life is too easy on us. At least I can draw your attention to the need (for some of us) for whatever it takes to get us to wake up a bit. I would love to hear what some of our readers have to say about this in their lives. Please.



LIFE AS A HOSPICE: THE SATURN RETURN

March 27, 2022

Of course, the above title makes sense. Life is a hospice, our brief stay here on Earth, preparing us for passing right on out. Something I have thought a lot about, something I have missed out on myself, which is why it has been on my mind, is that we do not celebrate enough the climactic events, the sublime life passages, that each of us goes through as part of living.

These life passages describe in our lives an arc, a rainbow bridge across the sky of our lives, complete like a prism with all the colors from infrared to ultraviolet, and of course the conscious visible spectrum.

In my youth of the 1960s I wrote this poem:

"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."

Here I was, born and present in the 20th Century and no one knew me. I was not found. No one was there (or few) to welcome me into this world and to celebrate with me the mysteries of my life and their own. I am not alone if sometimes we feel this way.

Like a comet, we pass through this world on probably what we fear is a hyperbolic orbit, a shooting star, escaping the gravitational pull of the Earth and we may not even know what is happening to us.

The dharma tells us we are on a reoccurring orbit based on our karma if not our personality, which perhaps is comforting, compared to a hyperbolic orbit, yet how can we pass through our first Saturn return, without some kind of recognition and celebration?

Many years ago, I wrote a book about the return of the planet Saturn at around 30 years of age (actually 29.4 years heliocentrically). Our first Saturn Return marks one of life's great mysteries and initiations. The book was called "Astrology of the Heart" and it was first published by astrologer Robert Schmidt & Ellen Black, as part of

Project Hindsight, with an introduction by astrologer Steven Forrest. This is a book of what is called 'esoteric astrology', so it may not appeal to many because to a degree it is occult or hidden knowledge, which is generally called, as mentioned, 'esoteric astrology'. I will discuss here part of that book concerned with the outer planets, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, and it will be their esoteric meaning, IMO.

"Astrology of the Heart: Astro-Shamanism"

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

Straight Line Curve

If we have been caught up in our early life by the exposition or revelation of Saturn (degree by degree), as it makes its first cycle after our birth, this ends (heliocentrically) at 29.4 years, and we may have become used to thinking of time as linear, as a straight line or linear journey that we have been on. This is a common and quite a natural mistake that most of us make.

When Saturn completes its return and turns to repeating itself (going over the same degrees of the zodiac for the second time), that linear (straight-line) sense we may have had starts to fade in our minds, and the idea of a circle begins to dawn for us, that we are going around again. The straighter the line, the finer the curve or cycle. In other words, physical life begins to turn to repetition.

Before and through the Saturn return at 29.4 years, most of us are used to conceiving our life along a timeline, in a linear format. Time in this view stretches on into the future, with birth at one end and death at the other. This is the common view, a timeline from birth to death. Yet, with the Saturn Return, this linear sense of time begins to be challenged by the essential circularity (cycles) of life, the tendency for all things to repeat or cycle. This is the first sign (for some) of a major initiation, and a source of great confusion for many.

I am not suggesting here that this is a sudden realization. For most, it is not. In fact, this is an altered sense of time, as a cycle or circle is very, very gradual for most, and apparently non-existent for some. The ingrained time as a "straight line" theory is slow to give way to the reality of time as 'returns', and returning. At heart, life is cyclic. We could say, that anything that does NOT repeat, is not there because a single event would have passed eons ago. To exist, persistence is required, repetition.

Yet, beyond the 30-year Saturn return, time stops as we have come to know it, and begins to repeat itself, to go over the same ground (zodiac-wise, degree by degree) for the second time around. This is what we might term a climactic event, one with far-reaching implications, and one that should be studied in a section by itself. Here, I will just touch on the main articulation points, but I have

gone into this in much greater depth elsewhere in the book "Astrology of the Heart."

The Physical End of Life

At our Saturn return, we as a 'thing' or body are complete (prime of life), and we (our body) are launched beyond time itself for the first time. Time as we have come to know it up to that point just stops. Let's take a quick review of what this kind of time suggests.

Up to this point throughout our life, Saturn or form has been positing or declaring itself, zodiac-degree by zodiac-degree. Over the course of our formative years, the activities of the inner planets, which complete their initial circle or cycle around the Sun, one by one, have caught our attention, each in their turn. This too is explained in the above-mentioned book in much greater detail.

But after our Jupiter return falls to repetition at around 12 years of age, we can (perhaps) begin to pick up on Saturn's heavier 'beat' and story. And the second Jupiter return, around 24-years of age, marks a real turning point as for tuning in to what Saturn is (and has been) laying down all this time. We could mark these first 30 years as the track or line of time (as we mentioned earlier), this almost unavoidable sense of linearity, of time seemingly stretching endlessly toward the future.

The Bewildering Display of Time

Keep in mind, here, that all during our first 30 years, Saturn is developing or positing the form or physical experience that we have up to this point. It is all that we have known, and it is captivating (encircling). It would seem that each of us is fascinated, if not entranced, by the seeming-endless (often bewildering) display of form and the layering of new experience. As I pointed out, there is a quite natural assumption that this stream of new experience will go on forever, and that this is just the nature of life. Like the proverbial deer in the headlights, we are caught up in this bewildering display of time.

When Time Stops

It is my contention here (in the esoteric sense) that time literally stops, as Saturn reaches its first return and turns to repeating itself and begins going over each section of the zodiac for a second time.

This is not an "Aha!" experience for us. In fact, most don't get it all at once, and some never seem to get it at all. Instead, as Saturn falls to repetition in our experience and begins to go over the zodiac for a second time, that sense of something new as always appearing at the "present moment" point of our timeline fades. It begins to fall away. There is nothing further physically forthcoming. There is no more "more." You have it. This

is it! And there is a great silence that sets in.

For most people, this is not easily recognized, but perhaps at first somehow just intuited. We "feel" different. Something has changed, but we don't know what it is just yet. Some part of our deeper consciousness is monitoring all this, and we sense a gap or change in our experience yet can't quite put our finger on it.

Entering the Silence

In the Western esoteric tradition, this has been referred to as "Entering the Silence," for the great motor of time has been turned off for the first time. The rush and roar of time (Saturn) that has been there all our life fades to silence.

My esoteric teacher, who was a traveling initiator in a Rosicrucian order, had his own way of explaining this concept to me, and I will pass this on to you, since I found it totally helpful myself.

My teacher spoke of this whole Saturn-return transition like the launching of a rocket into outer space. Our time within the Saturn cycle, until we reach its return at roughly age 30, is the time during which we can work on and build our own personal physical space capsule (our body). We are still grounded, so to speak, yet we have all the tools and resources we might need to construct as

perfect a vehicle as we can manage during that time up to that first Saturn return. That is the time to 'make hay' as they say.

The Vehicle is Launched

At the Saturn return (29.4 years heliocentrically), that vehicle is launched, ready or not, well-built, or not-so-well-built. We have had our chance to make something of ourselves. Literally, there is no more 'time' after that to work on the vehicle, and this point is often termed 'the Prime of Life'. The physical growth or development has reached an end. For better or for worse, our vehicle is finished and launched as we enter the space beyond time, what we could call here: outer space, the space outside what we had been, up to that point, enclosed within – a major initiation.

Our journey beyond the realm of time (Saturn) to a very great degree depends on our vehicle, how it was constructed, how well it was made, and so on. After thirty years of age, we are literally floating out there, beyond time, floating in the space beyond time, if that phrase makes any sense.

One Generation

If you are older than thirty years of age, you are already out there beyond time. For many people, this transition is not consciously registered and seemingly not a great

problem. We can be oblivious to it, or so it seems. However, for others, this transition can be very problematical. In particular, those who begin to awaken to this experience, and try to put all the pieces together, may not understand what they are going through, and even become fearful, frightened by what they feel is but don't know what is happening to them.

And it is this group that can benefit from some form of shamanic astrology, some spiritual handholding and guidance. And there can be so many questions that occur to those making this transition. A spiritual friend or guide to these regions can be a friend indeed and serve us in good stead.

The Outer Planets

And thus, the whole concept of the outer planets, the planets outside Saturn's grip, comes up. How are these planets to be understood?

Of course, we have quite a long history by now of using these outer planets in astrology (Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto), so I am assuming you already have that. What is being presented here is not in any way contrary to that material, but rather our focus here is on what shamanic astrology can bring to the picture. Let me try to describe this.

Using the linear sense of time we discussed above, as we

hit our Saturn return at 29.4 years of age, it is like driving out of town and hitting the outskirts. Suddenly, there are no more houses, no more stores, no more "town," and we are looking down a line of highway that is empty, and perhaps, we hope, going somewhere. To our eyes, it appears to stretch out toward what we have always viewed as the future. It is what we are used to. It has always been something like this for us, time as a line going somewhere. This appears after we reach 30 years of age.

A One-Way Street

Now imagine that as we drive out from town along this straight highway, we encounter three signs, much like those of us who are older used to see as a series of road signs for products, like the old Burma Shave slogans of the 1950s, that had one phrase on each sign as we drove by, things like:

A guy who drives,
A car wide open,
Is not thinkin',
He's just hopin',
Burma Shave.

Sorry, but I had to do that. Well, in our case there are just three of these signs, in the order Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. We can add more, as more trans-plutonian planets are added, but they will ALL tell the same story.

And what is that story?

That story is as simple as that there is nothing more out there, no place to get to or go to, AND you had best turn around or at least take a look back over your shoulder at what you are leaving: all of the planets and bodies within Saturn's orbit, life as you knew it.

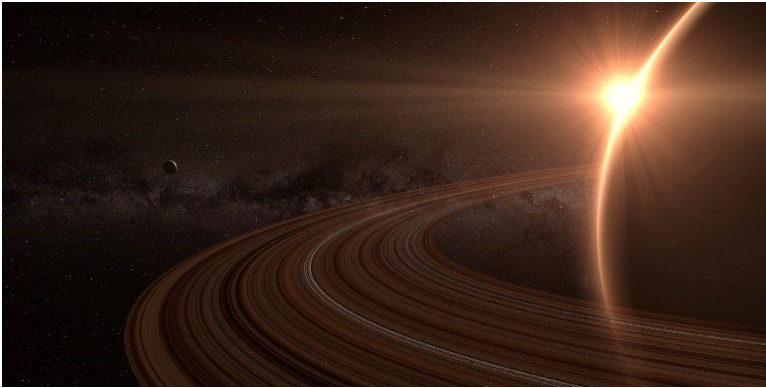
If you do look, this is what is called "discovering your inner life." If it happens all at once, it has been called "discovering your Self" and the Christians call it being "Born Again." It is the physical point of no return, and, therefore, a major (perhaps THE major) turning point in a life.

The esoteric principle here is that the only thing to be seen when you get out of the body is the body itself, just as we gaze at Earth from the space shuttle. Out-of-body experiences are a vantage point only and not a place to get to. This is a key point, that the only thing we see when we are out of the body is the body itself, yet from an outside vantage point. There is nothing else out there. This, my friends, can be a revelation.

Here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

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

[To be Continued]



BEYOND SATURN: THE OUTER PLANETS

March 28, 2022

So much that has been made (and is still being made) about out-of-the-body experiences, astral travel, and related experiences. And this is just what we are describing here, how we exit the body and pass from that body to a more subtle experience of all things.

There are scores of books about out-of-the-body experiences. And although these books appear quite exotic, for the most part, if you read them with the concepts being presented here, they will make more than a little sense.

Out-of-the-body experiences are not uncommon. In fact, they are ubiquitous and universally experienced by all of us, all of the time. Our consciousness is always moving in and out of our body, but starting with our Saturn return (after 30 years of age), many of us begin to

consciously experience this and become aware of those experiences.

In other words, what may have been rare up to this point (the Saturn Return) is an awareness of what we all experience, this passing beyond time and the physical, to the meta-physical – life beyond (and after) the physical has peaked.

Somewhat of a Big Deal

This trans-Saturnian view is not a minor piece of information for most of us, those of us who have been assuming that there IS something out there at the end of life, more of something for us along this linear road of time, and especially perhaps something for us at the end of that road, like heaven or hell.

The usual scenario: we are trying to proceed along our straight timeline, as we always have up to the point of the Saturn Return, and suddenly, instead, here are signs that are telling us to "Go Back!" What are we to think?

I hope by now you are beginning to get the general idea. These outer, transcendental, planets are not physical, in that they are (by definition) beyond Saturn or the physical. They have been called the meta-physical planets, and rightly so. They are not going to manifest in a physical way. They are meta-physical, that is: beyond the physical.

However, these outer planets can (and do) 'reveal' the physical, perhaps in a new light. They are planets of revelation, and the only thing tangible (physical) they can reveal or render is the physical world and all that is within it, the same old physical world we are used to, but now viewed differently. And this is what these planets, in fact, do.

Revelation and Rendering

What do we mean by "revelation?" Revelation is just that, a true revelation, and in the biblical sense: a revealing of the true nature and sheer importance of the Sun, Moon, and planets out to and including Saturn.

And what do we mean by the statement that the outer planets "render" the inner planets. We are using the word "render" here in its sense of "to give back" or "hand over." The outer planet initiation can give back to us that which we have come to take for granted, perhaps been unaware of, or perhaps lost an appreciation for, including our entire sense of the Self.

By saying that the outer planets are the revelation of the inner planets, it is meant that the outer planets are the realization (growing awareness of) of the absolute value of the inner planets we have spent our life in until some 30 years of age. The outer planets are really all about the inner planets, the value of which is being pointed out by

exposure to the outer planets. We learn to value what we formerly took for granted. With one foot firmly on Earth, we might think to step out with the other off the Earth, but we only sink back into Earth, because there is no other place to step to. We are stuck with and on the Earth and begin to see it differently.

The View from Earth

When astronauts leave Earth, what is it that they see and most commonly photograph from the trip? It is not the dark and starry sky beyond the earth – the relative emptiness of space. No, it is Earth itself, that great blue and white planet that looks so awesome and peaceful from a distance. That is what we all look at and see. That tells us something.

In the same way, when we emerge beyond our Saturn return, the most important thing to see is not outer space, but rather inner space, the same-old space within, including the Sun, planets, and Saturn. We discover not what is out there, but rather what we just left behind or are leaving. There is nothing out there, but we now know this. This is just common sense and beyond that is 'nonsense'.

Saturn represents the physical form of things, and planets beyond Saturn are beyond the physical form and are non-physical. As my teacher would say to me, they are "transcendental," and he would snap his teeth

together, literally beyond the mental or physical. It may take time to understand this, but it is time worth taking. These outer planets will not add one iota to the physical world, because, as pointed out, that is the domain of Saturn and at 30 years of life, we are complete physical. We go beyond.

The outer planets are the realization of the rest of the solar system, the Sun and all the planets, their production, and presentation degree by zodiac degree. We indicate this in that, for the most part, these outer planets are by age (return) longer or beyond the personal experience. We each of us don't live that long, so they are what we have yet to fully know, even through death, especially after the mini-death of the Saturn Return. The outer planets mark the aura of the solar system, and point (or refer) back to the Sun center, and not (as we may have imagined) out beyond to deep space.

Lineages: Outer Planets

In a very real sense, these outer planet's cycles are of duration longer than an average lifetime. For sure, the 84-year cycle of Uranus is now within range of the average lifespan, at least here in the West, but that was not necessarily true when it was discovered. Neptune and Pluto's orbits are, of course, well beyond any one person's lifetime. We don't personally live that long.

This fact, itself, is of interest. We could say as fact that a single person will not manage to encompass all the degrees of the zodiac these outer planets cover within their personal experience in a lifetime, and that, because of that, in a real sense we do not personally "know" the whole nature of these planets.

I suggest that this may very well be why there are groups, brotherhoods, and lineages of an esoteric nature. Some of this information, which we cannot experience ourselves, may be passed on from mouth to ear, above ground so to speak, and may not travel through the womb, the birth process. This is pure speculation on my part, but something that makes a certain amount of sense. Does it not? There are indeed many whispered stories of what is beyond death, the process explained here offers a fresh view. After death, there is the after-death.

Outer Planets in the Chart

One common question that we can clear up right away is: If the outer planets are not physical in the sense that Saturn and the planets it contains within its orbit are physical, how can we use them in the astrology chart? That is: if the outer planet's only purpose is to reveal the true nature of the inner planets, then what do they mean in themselves? Do they have no intrinsic meaning?

First, most of you are already using the outer planets in

the chart, and nothing you will learn here will alter that fact. The point to grasp is that, since we can agree that Saturn rules the physical, the outer planet meanings will still be communicated mostly by means or through the physical, through some form or another, which is all the touchy-feely-ness that we know in this life.

That physical form also comes or is expressed through Saturn, of course. We could equally say the same thing about Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, and Jupiter. They do not represent or rule the physical, but are revealed to us through the everyday physical life each of us lives. When we get physical, we are speaking of Saturn (perhaps interdependent with another planet), and if we want to examine the physical effects of planets like Mars or Neptune, then Saturn (form) will be involved in some way. This, again, is by definition.

How Outer Planets Manifest?

So, the question to ask is how do the outer planets (Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto) manifest to us, physically or in any other way? And the answer is: just as they already are manifesting, and have been manifesting in our astrological charts, since their discovery.

We are not replacing any experience we might have with these outer planets, but just enhancing (or fulfilling) that experience. Here we are showing how these outer planets can be used to tell a shamanic story, a journey

each soul takes.

That is what we should take away from this presentation: that aside from separate planetary concepts, these outer or metaphysical planets describe or point out an inner journey of discovery we all take, and that we all are taking. It is that journey that we are pointing to here, and that story is part of any shamanic astrology. For clarity's sake, let's summarize what has been presented here relating to the outer planets.

As we pass the age of 30 years, our sense that time is a linear line running from birth to our death at old age begins to fade. When we are past our physical prime, there is nothing more physical being added on. We stop growing physically. In the physical sense, we have nothing more to look forward to.

Up to this point, we may have intellectually thought about this fact, but we have not known it through experience. Now we begin to experience it. Suddenly we are past our prime, however marginally this might impact us at first. This fact may be unspoken, but its silence (we don't talk about it) speaks volumes.

Suddenly the lifeline we have been on does not have the same kind of future it apparently did when we were growing up, when we were within Saturn's orbit and grip. We are looking at decline and eventual failure, not on growing (physically speaking) any more or better.

This fact gives us pause. No longer does the linear line of life point onward to "more." In fact, it points onward to less, and to ever increasingly less. Most of us are not in a hurry to go there. At best, we each must learn to fail successfully.

In fact, perhaps for the first time in our lives, we pause and perhaps even turn around and begin to look back, back at where we came from. In that act, we reflect for perhaps the first time. We can't go back into what we came out from, but we (most of us anyway) begin to view our past with more appreciation. Nostalgia of some sort usually sets it. Where before we always looked forward toward the future, now we begin to look back at the past, but with a new understanding.

The three outer planets, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto are waypoints or markers on that linear journey we have been on up to this point. Rather than adding something more on, these transcendental planets take something away, if only our ignorance. In turn, they gently (Uranus and Neptune) and then not-so-gently (Pluto) inform us to "go no farther" in this linear direction, but instead to turn or circle back on what we came from, and to cherish that.

If all the earlier years we thought that we were going somewhere in our line or life, the outer planets reveal to us ever increasingly that there is no place to go to other than right here where we have already been. Another

way to say this is that the place we have to go to is to value and cherish what we have already been given. We will be given no more, other than that information.

Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto bring us that message, at first through this insight described here (Uranus), then through acceptance of the fact (Neptune), and finally through direct experience that life is circular or cyclical and not linear (Pluto). A whole book should be written about this outer-planet journey. Here we will just briefly say something about these three metaphysical planets.

The Outer Planets: A Step Toward Interpretation

Although this section is not primarily material on outer-planet interpretation, it would be a shame to leave you without a quick tour of that realm. Here are some keyword-style interpretations for each of the outer planets, and a just a bit of their shamanic story.

Uranus Keyword: "To see eternity in a grain of sand."

Uranus represents our keyhole beyond day-to-day reality into the future and has to do (so modern astrology tells us) with discovery, invention, and insights. "To see eternity in a grain of sand," that is Uranus, finding new uses for everyday objects. It has come to stand for anything out of the ordinary: the unusual, eccentric, unconventional, novel, and innovative. It also brings independence, rebellion, and revolution. It is the

opposite, reverse, and the 'undoing' or unravelling of Saturn.

The Uranus Journey

Uranus is the first planet beyond the Saturn cycle, and it brings the first glimpse of the breaking up of the saturnine grip on us, with flashes of insight and recognition, brief glimpses of the more general awareness that is to come.

Through Uranus, each bit and part of Saturn's physicality becomes a lens through which we now can peek and see a glimpse of eternity, the eternal process of awakening that awaits each of us beyond time or Saturn. Uranus is ever the planet of inventors and inventions, of lightning-fast insights, of discovery, and new ways of seeing things. Makes sense, does it not?

When Saturn begins to release its hold on us, and starts to break up, when we begin to glimpse or see through the chinks in time's armor to what is beyond time, that is the function and sign of the planet Uranus. It is the lightning insight, where physical time itself becomes the lens into something beyond time itself. As mentioned, "To See Eternity in a Grain of Sand," as the poet William Blake put it; that is the work of the planet Uranus.

Every grain of Saturn, every physical part and form, in and of time, becomes a window for us into eternity. At

first, there are just lightning flashes that light up our awareness for brief moments, glimpses into another world, the timeless. But these flashes, as time progresses, as time fails to hold our gaze, become longer and light up more and more of our inner sky, until at long last the great Sun dawns, and we have constant light. It dawns on us. We finally get the idea. Our spiritual life begins. This constant light is the province of Neptune, which we will turn to next.

The Neptune Journey

Neptune Keywords: "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

Neptune traditionally represents compassion, acceptance, unity, and universal love. "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea," is what this planet is about, anything to do with communion, and non-separateness. Neptune rules the imagination, dreams, mysticism and inspiration, including music, movies, film, and anything related to our ideas and images.

If the Uranian experience involves flashes of insight, then experience of Neptune dawns slowly and evenly. Neptune is more like the finale at a fireworks; it lights up our entire inner sky. Through Uranus, we break through Saturn and began to discover our inner life. With Neptune comes the dawn, and it is like the Sun coming up. With Neptune we can at last get our arms around

the whole idea, in this case the whole world of existence.

Our process of self discovery has gone beyond counting mere glimpses and insights, and merged into a cacophony of light. We finally get the whole idea, that beyond life as we knew it, we find that same life, alive and well, but now within us – our inner life. It has become our inner life, where before we were withing it, looking out. Now we are outside, looking withing.

As Sir Edwin Arnold so aptly put it, "The Dewdrop Slips into the Shining Sea." Neptune is the archetype of the "big picture," the Grand Trine illumination of the planets. With Neptune, we reach the point where we not only realize that we are now outside time or Saturn, but that we have (and we have always had) an inner life, and that the same hard-edged life we grew up in and through is now something to be cherished and cared for, with we as the caretakers.

Neptune embraces life, and with no exceptions. It is pure compassion, and everything is valued equally. In the Buddhist hierarchy, Neptune represents the Bodhisattva, the one who vows to care for and cherish all sentient beings until every last one reaches enlightenment.

The idea here is that what we discover in the planets beyond Saturn is not something out there beyond Saturn to "get," but the true fact that there IS nothing else out there. This is what we can call the turning point,

and as we turn, we discover the life we left and grew up in and through, to be the only game in town. As the philosopher Parmenides so eloquently put it: "Being alone is." In other words, there are not two, but only one. Neptune is our finally discovering that one. Uranus provides insights and flashes into this fact, and Neptune illuminates our inner sky with full daylight as to this truth, which leaves Pluto.

Pluto Keywords: "Touch me if you are!"

In the tradition of astrology, Pluto points to deep inner change and transformation, always touching the raw nerve, just where we are the most sensitive and vulnerable. If we can't stand to look change in the eye, Pluto brings it about by force, if necessary. For many, this has to do with our thoughts of death, dying, and what rebirth is all about.

Pluto Keywords: Identification is Circulation.

The Pluto Journey

Thus far, each planet beyond Saturn brings home the point to us that looking outside or down-the-road of linear time will never work. Uranus and Neptune point out that we must look within to find what we are looking for. Therefore, speculation about finding more and more planets beyond Pluto, whether they be large or small, should be tempered with the fact that we cannot hope

to get any different message from them, even when they are found.

They will all tell the same story to us, and that is: Look no farther out there. Turn around and begin to look within, embrace what you already have. It is precious. That is the key.

Of course, philosophers and poets have been telling us this for centuries. Regardless of how many more heavenly bodies will be found out there at the edge of the solar system, their meaning will all be the same: turn around, look within.

Pluto represents that message more clearly than the insights of Uranus and the embracement of Neptune. If Uranus is breaking out, and Neptune is turning back and embracing all that is, then Pluto is the knowledge that this whole process will repeat itself, endlessly.

It is one thing to discover our inner or spiritual life (Uranus), another to embrace it fully (Neptune), but yet a very different thing again to grasp that we will do all this again, and that we don't only go around once, as the beer commercial would have it, but we go around again and again.

Pluto is the planet of rebirth and that experience, not as an abstract idea on the pages of a book, but as a vital realization of the nature of life. Pluto is the experience

that all life, all people, and all sentient beings are us, and that when we look into a young person's eyes, we are seeing ourselves, not as an abstract thought, but seeing ourselves in the (and through the) eyes of a child. That is Pluto, daring to see that the "them" out there in the world is you. The light in the child's eye is you looking at yourself.

Pluto has only recently been discovered (relatively speaking), and its message is still being sorted out. I associate Pluto with the rise of modern psychology and everything that this entails. This planet is still somewhat hard to put into words.

Uranus is pretty clear by now as to its meaning in astrology. When our Saturn construct (physical body) begins to self-destruct and to fall apart (as it does for each one of us), Uranus has to do with the holes or chinks in time's armor through which we peer and glimpse a larger reality, something beyond time.

Neptune has to do with the state when the peep holes in Saturn's grip are larger than what remains of our linear sense of time. When there is more light than shadow, the dawn comes, and that has to do with Neptune, and the cherishing or embracing of all that is. In Neptune, we are outside and able to embrace our inner life, to savor each moment and fact. Yet up to this point we are still dealing with subject and object, self and other – whatever you want to name it.

Pluto carries us beyond the experience of cherishing, the experience of Neptune where we are the subject and the world and other people are the object of our care.

With Pluto, the distinction between subject and object is lost forever and the experience of our own inner light is identical with the light looking out at us from eyes of a child. Perhaps the best keyword for Pluto is "identification," to identify yourself with another, without the dualism of subject and object.

All these words here are very abstract and fail to communicate the very direct experience that Pluto provides us, the in-your-face presence of complete identification of "I am you" and "You are me." As you can see, words fail, which is as it should be.

Let's just say by way of Pluto that "identification is circulation," the lifeblood of the cosmos knowing itself through us, through our eyes. Identification is nothing more than the circulation of cosmic knowledge, and the Pluto experience is as close as we come to realizing this fact. It is through constant identification that the universe we live in communicates with itself and continues to cohere or exist.

There you have a brief introduction to the outer planets, from more of a shamanic point of view. If interest, I could offer the esoteric meaning of all the inner planets.

Let me know if you can handle all this esotericism.

Here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

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



ASTRO-SHAMANISM

March 28, 2022

[Some of you have requested more 'esoteric astrology' teachings, and I am game to put something together here. Before we get into the thick of the esoterica, it is important to understand 'shamans' and their role in astrology, so please read through this as a prelude.]

This article is about the shamanic tradition within modern astrology, what we could call Shamanic Astrology, and astro-shamanism is nothing new. Astrologers have been performing a shamanic function in society for centuries, and they continue to do so today. Astrology, and the astrologer's role as shaman or guide, is becoming increasingly more important in modern society. Not all astrologers are shamans, in fact

not many, but many do utilize some of the shamanic techniques.

Shamanic astrology is not often openly discussed, and is generally considered, as already mentioned, a part of what has been called "esoteric astrology," the inner or more secret aspects of astrological knowledge, because it has to do with the ecstatic tradition, what is commonly called out-of-the-body experience. That tradition is what we will be presenting here.

Before we describe the process of astrological shamanism, let's review what a shaman or shamanka (female shaman) is in the literature of the world. Here we will use the better-known term "shaman" to represent both male and female shamans, so as not to have to repeat both terms endlessly.

The word origin of Shaman (SHAY-men), from the Siberian Tungus language, means one who "knows," one who has attained some degree of spiritual realization, awareness, in particular awareness of the other worlds, the next life stage or planes.

TRADITIONAL AND 'CORE' SHAMANISM

We should distinguish here between what is called traditional shamanism and the popular-today derivative called "Core Shamanism." Traditional shamanism is a vocation that chooses you (there is no choice), while

core shamanism is an avocation, a form of shamanism which anyone can choose to study and learn to use.

Core Shamanism is, in a word, a sanitized form of traditional shamanism, stripped of most of the dangers and risks, something that almost anyone can sign up for, study, and eventually practice.

Both forms of shamanism exist in the world today, so it is meaningless to say that traditional shamanism is the only one to be used, and the other simply an imitation, although there is some truth to that assertion. Here we are focusing on the parts of shamanism that make sense in modern astrology. Any counseling astrologer, almost by definition, is probably using one or more shamanic techniques, with or without the mind-altering experiences of the traditional shaman. These techniques are what we will study here.

That being said, I have found it much more useful to first understand the nature of traditional or classic shamanism, and take what we can from that, then to try and take from "Core Shamanism," which is already an extract. In other words, we can each make our own core shamanism by absorbing, as much as possible, from those parts of traditional shamanism that make "sense" to us, that fit our personal experience. That is the approach being followed here.

THE SHAMA'S SPIRITUAL CRISIS

The traditional shaman does not choose to be a shaman. Shamanism of this kind is the result of a series of psychological visions or experiences, whose very nature estranges (at least for a time) one from conventional society and the normal way of seeing things. The shaman is somehow, against their will, thrust outside of how everyone else sees life, into a space and view that is markedly altered and mostly non-communicable with the society around them.

The shaman, usually through a personal psychological or spiritual crisis, has become aware of the inner sequence of life processes typically hidden from society by their very obviousness, processes that are thus somehow "self-secret." This propensity can come about through having a near-death or life-changing experience, mind-altering drugs, or somehow becoming psychologically separated for a time from conventional societal consciousness.

NOT THE SAME AS THE VISION QUEST

The shamanic experience has some similarities to the Native American vision quest, but, unlike the vision quest, which is generally voluntary, the shaman's own internal psychological chemistry thrusts the future shaman beyond convention and into an altered state of consciousness, until such time as he or she can manage (often through what is sometimes a life/death mental

struggle) to find a balance, stabilize, and return to normal society. The shaman cannot communicate what he or she sees to others, because society is not able or prepared to understand it. Society in general (by the very definition of conventional) has not had the experience needed in order to understand the shaman's view. The shaman by virtue of their unorthodox experience is just "out there" by his or herself.

Unlike organized religions, shamans act alone and are "self-chosen," rather than appointed, in that the intensity of the shaman's own internal experiences separates them permanently from the other members of their society. They are outsiders not by choice, but by the nature of their own inner experience and awareness, permitted to see and experience realms of the psyche the average person does not.

Typically, a shaman may take years to stabilize the vision or mental experiences that they are thrust into, often struggling against mental imbalance and even madness. The shaman can be discriminated from a madman because he or she learns to control and understand what has been experienced. He or she masters those altered states of mind and rejoins society, but with a permanently altered view. The shaman always exists in conjunction with and in contradistinction to his or her society. They are the original outriders, literally defining the edge of conventional time and mentality.

A ONE-WAY STREET

It is generally agreed that once a shaman, one is a shaman for life. There is no going back and, no matter what other career or work the shaman may undertake, the function of shaman always takes precedence and is their heart function within the society.

In other words, shamanism is not an avocation, something one chooses. We do not choose to become a shaman, but the very intensity of our own inner experiences determines a vocation as a shaman, and to what degree we are a shaman. Although in some societies, shamanic powers can be inherited or run in a family, it appears to be more a product of sharing a similar mind-set and training, with the parents initiating the children. However, as pointed out, most shamans are "called" or chosen by their own internal experiences and awareness. They come to know what others do not know and cannot know. And this change in view is permanent. They cannot forget what they have seen, and it is this knowledge of altered states that makes them valuable to society.

All societies have shamans or their equivalent because shamanism is something that happens to one, rather than something that can just be learned or passed on. In any society, there are always a few members whose personal inner experiences are such as to separate them, at least for a time, from the group. Knowledge gained

from this separation then gives the shaman an alternative view of life that makes them of use to the community. They alone understand other members of the community who become estranged for one reason or another and the shaman's experience allows them to communicate with those souls who fall through the cracks. It is pretty much axiomatic that the shaman can only help others in those areas where he or she has personally had a similar experience.

SHAMANS ARE NOT PRIESTS OR MINISTERS

As pointed out, shamans acquire special knowledge or abilities through their own life-changing experiences, and they are distinct from the rest of their society by the very intensity of these spiritual experiences. In this sense, they are more akin to the mystic. "The shaman," as author Mircea Eliade puts it, "is the great specialist in the human soul; he or she alone 'sees' it, for he or she alone knows of its 'form' and its destiny." The shaman knows the story or journey of the soul. In a very real sense, the shaman wakes in these realms, while society sleeps. They are the watchmen and protectors of the community soul.

Shamans are to be discriminated from priests or ministers, and other members of organized religion, those who work cooperatively with one another to inform and shepherd the entire society. For the most part, shamans are independent, solitary, depending only

on their own internal experience or revelation, and they don't work with or attempt to convert all the members of their community. Instead, they assist the stragglers in a community, those who, for one reason or another, have fallen out of the conventional mindset and are somehow temporarily spiritually estranged.

Shamans acknowledge other shamans, but seldom group or come together. You would not expect to see a shaman conference, at least of the traditional variety. They are loners, and their knowledge is personal to themselves; it serves to separate them from their particular group or society. The idea of a shaman convention is pretty much an oxymoron.

SOCIETIES AND BROTHERHOODS

Shamans also differ from secret societies or esoteric brotherhoods, in that they typically are not part of any lineage or organized group and, as mentioned, do not attempt to shepherd or initiate the entire society, but instead, only initiate those like themselves, those who have the propensity to sustain ecstatic (out-of-the-body) experiences, that is: those who find themselves in an altered state of mind. In other words, shamans guide and inform particular members of their society who are in spiritual flux — those who have somehow fallen through the societal cracks.

As mentioned, there is no attempt on the part of the

shaman to convert the larger community to their vision, a vision which in the shaman's view is a calling, an exceptional state of mind. Shamans are psychic healers and stand watch over society to protect the integrity of the human psyche. They are the shepherds of the human soul through time.

THE SHAMAN IS NOT A DOCTOR

Although many shamans are also healers of physical ailments, medicine men or women, this function is distinct from their role as a shaman, at least in this material. The shaman is primarily a doctor of the soul, not of the body, and administers to the psychological and spiritual realms, rather than to physical symptoms. The Medicine Man is very much a vocation on its own.

Although the shaman may also use various medicines and can be a healer or doctor of the physical body, they are primarily a healer of the soul, a master of ecstatic (out-of-the-body) experiences. The Shaman works on the psychological and subconscious level, seeking out the soul of an individual in distress, identifying with them, and directing them away from their current struggle or mental suffering to the next level or stage: the so-called afterlife. He or she is an intermediary between the visible and the invisible (or not yet visible) worlds.

The work of the shaman does not pertain so much to

our physical death, at the end of life, but to the many smaller deaths we each die in life, climacteric events (rites of passage) in life that find us dying to one phase of life and struggling or not-yet-born into the next phase. One seeks out a shaman because one is temporarily lost, and the shaman somehow can see both the realm in which we are leaving and the new phase which we are about to enter. Sound familiar? It should, because the public seeks out astrologers for very similar reasons.

SHAMANISM IN ASTROLOGY

In this material, we are not going to try to pursue shamanism as relates to personal totems, power animals, or any the more exotic practices that we might read about in books like those of Carlos Castaneda, and other worthy writers, although these are, of course, very legitimate interests. We are not going to skin animals, dig (or take) herbs, draw magic circles, and all of the many rituals that you might find in a book on traditional shamanism.

Here we are looking at shamanism within the tradition of astrology itself, in particular the role of the modern astrologer as a ferryman or guide to the inner states of the mind and life.

In this sense, most astrologers perform (at least to some degree) this function of the shaman, that of the

ferryman from one phase to another. Because of this fact, the counseling astrologer may find shamanic astrology of particular interest.

The shaman helps others to accept their changes or deaths on one level and obtain rebirth and develop familiarity on other and new levels. It is said that the shaman restores the road between earth and heaven, a road that has been temporarily lost or has become unclear or uncertain. Another way to say this is that the shaman knows the way from one state of being or chakra to the next state and is able to guide or prepare the initiate for that journey. The shaman often guides the would-be-initiate from an unstable or dangerous state of mind to stability and future productivity.

In the esoteric literature, the shaman traditionally escorts the souls of the dead away from their corpses and dying places, and on into the next world. The shaman is capable of entering and holding an altered state of consciousness, at will, and can act as an intermediary between the known world of the would-be initiate, and the supra-natural or "next" world.

The shaman does not have to enter an altered state, as in somehow going there. His or her experiences are forever fresh in their mind, and they react spontaneously to the psychological distress signals coming from any person they encounter. It is automatic and does not require any ritual or preparation. It just happens. A

shaman can appear to those in need at one moment, point out the way, and be transparent or invisible the next, as if nothing ever took place.

By knowing both worlds, the shaman is able to predict or control the future of the would-be initiate, who does not yet know their way around these future worlds. This is a fancy way of saying the shaman can converse or reach one who is lost in an unconventional state of mind, make contact, and guide that person out of their situation to higher ground, so to speak.

DEAD AND ALIVE

The shaman is said to be dead in the land of the living, but alive in the spiritual worlds, and therefore knows the future for those living now, who must one day make the same transformation (or death) that the shaman has already taken. The shaman has, in some sense, gone to the next plane or world before other members of their society, and can reveal that world to those who themselves are about to cross over to it, or who are crossing now. The shaman is, therefore, above all, a guide to these other worlds. The shaman has a certain power over time, actually possessing the ability to "make time," and to penetrate between the seconds of clock time to touch on the timeless or eternity — the space beyond or within time.

To repeat: the shaman is one who has themselves

already gone beyond, who has crossed over into the next world or level and has returned with knowledge of these adjacent or other worlds. He or she can then instruct or prepare others for their forthcoming initiation into these other worlds. Above all, shamans mediate between the world of the living and the dead, between one phase or level (chakra), and the next one. Those with a propensity for shamanism often apprentice themselves to an accomplished shaman, through the process of mentoring and initiation. The shaman is an initiate and thus an initiator. This, then, has been a brief introduction to the traditional nature of the shaman. Sound a little familiar? It should, because most counseling astrologers practice the shamanic techniques we will be presenting below.

OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES.

Before we turn to looking at astrology and shamanism, let us be clear about what we mean by ecstatic or out-of-the-body experiences, which is the especial province of the shaman. Shamans, as part of their initiation, are by their own life experiences somehow thrust out of the body of normal conventional societal experience into an altered state of consciousness, what can only be called unconventional. Because these altered states are unconventional, then, by definition, they will not be understood or easily grasped by conventional means and conventional minds. These have been called altered states of consciousness or out-of-the-body experiences.

Everyone, each of us, has out-of-the-body experiences all the time. Consciousness is not some static state, but ebbs and flows, constantly. We are always going out of the body and back into it. However, what is missing for most of us is the awareness of this process. We tend to ignore and not recognize what our mind is doing, and don't often register when we are more in or more out of our body. Instead, we assume our consciousness is stable and, more or less, the same each moment. In fact, most of us struggle to keep it stable. We don't want to go out. We don't want to be that different. When the waves of change wash over us, most prefer to take a little nap and just ignore what is happening. They do not witness their own birth and passing on through the various planes. That is mostly left to the role of the shaman.

If we have not, as have traditional shamans, been forced to look at our mind from an altered state, then, if we want to learn something more about shamanistic states, we will have to study and become familiar with learning to recognize the various states of our mind, the map of our mental states. This is part of what we could study here. Lacking life experiences that force us into an altered view of life, one can learn about the mind through various forms of meditation, in particular, what is called insight meditation or Vipassana meditation.

There is not room to go into that here, but there are

many books and teachers available on this topic.

THE ASTROLOGER AS SHAMAN

Astrology can also be (and is often) used as a shamanic tool. In other words, astrology is used to guide individuals who are lost or stuck in one area of their lives, introducing them to the next or to a different realm. This is a common practice. How that can be done is what will be presented here.

This material could be presented in a wide variety of ways. Here we will present it as this writer (and his teachers) understands it. It should go without saying that from these descriptions, each of you will find your own way of understanding this, and fashion your own shamanic astrological coat. In no way is this author trying to be dogmatic. It is just the only way I know of this knowledge. You will find your own words, please.

ARE ASTROLOGERS SHAMANS?

This article is about the use of astrology in a shamanistic way, not how to become a shaman. True shamanism, as pointed out earlier, is an inner calling, not an avocation, and requires sensitivity gained from life experience not found in the average person. That being said, any astrologer with a successful counseling practice is probably performing some shamanic activity and has had experiences in his or her own life that have prepared them to better understand others.

It is my belief that most astrologers already have some form of heightened sensitivity or they would not be pursuing the study of astrology. As mentioned, any counseling astrologer is, to some degree, probably already performing a shamanic function to one degree or another. This article may help you become more aware of what you are already doing.

What I hope to do here is to point out to you how astrology can be used as a shamanistic guide. It will be up to you to determine if there is a connection and if what is written here makes sense and is useful to you.

SEEKING THE SHAMAN

The shaman, unlike the priest, does not seek out or try to share his spiritual knowledge with the general community. Members of the community who are suffering in one way or another seek out the shaman, who then agrees to see and work with them. This is not much different from the way the average astrologer receives clients, often by word of mouth.

There is much written about the shaman taking special herbs or substances to enter into a heightened state in order to communicate with the client, but this is not often necessary. The shaman already exists in an altered state, one altered by their own internal experiences. They don't need any mental enhancements; they already

have that.

In astrological shamanism, the shaman, who has previously had initiations or personal life experiences related or synchronous with the client, is able to reach and connect with the client by virtue of already having knowledge of the general psychological landscape the client is going through.

The shaman is able to attract and flag down the attention of the client, establish communication, and provide the client with signs that the client will recognize, signs that signify to the client that the shaman has had similar experiences, that is: that the shaman knows where the client is at, through personal experience. Once mutual trust and recognition are established, the client allows the shaman to guide or lead them out of the situation they are stuck in, and on to another area of the mind, what amounts to their next or future stage of life.

ALTERED STATES

The shaman, who, through virtue of their personal experience in altered states, can somehow speak the language of the client, can converse with them and establish communication. He or she is able, due to having had a similar experience, to answer questions the client may ask, and satisfy the client's fear of being misled by someone who does not actually understand

their state of mind.

In summary, the shaman is able to get the attention of the client through displaying signs of experience that the client can recognize and acknowledge as true. Once the client understands that he or she is not alone, and that the experience of the shaman in fact encompasses their own experience, they can submit to allowing the shaman to lead them out of their current predicament and on toward another place, one hopefully more comfortable for them. The act of realizing that they are not alone, and that someone else has had similar experiences, is often a key step for a client in this process.

BEYOND CONVENTION

The client, typically, has somehow wandered into a state of mind that effectively isolates them from the rest of the society, if only temporarily. Their society has no answers for them and, by definition, cannot but exclude them from their own consciousness. The isolated person thus is cut off from the nourishment of the community, until they can resolve their unrest. This is where the shaman comes in, and why they are sought out. In many societies, any person with mental instability or a wavering consciousness is told to seek out a shaman, either to be cured or to take up shamanism themselves.

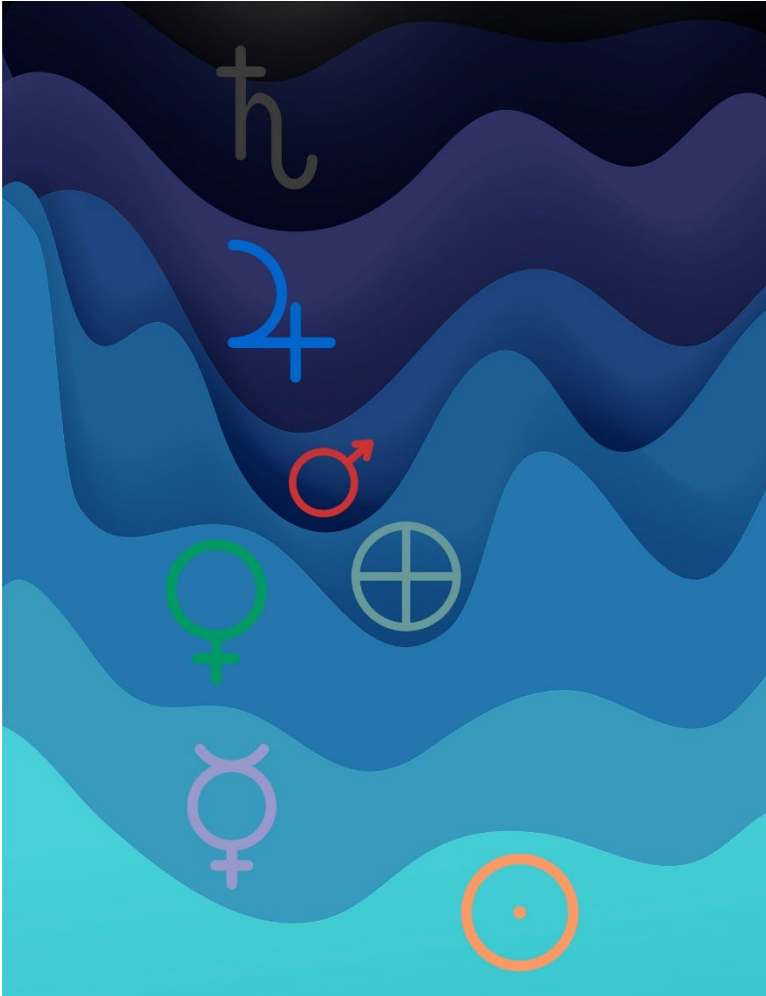
The shaman, who is already permanently outside of the

conventional community in some sense, is capable of grasping the degree and nature of the suffering of the client. He or she already has this experience of isolation, and can measure the degree of separation of the client from the community, and guide the client to make adjustments.

The shaman calms the client, assists in their stabilization, and eventually restores the client back to the community, as whole and usable once again. The role of the shaman is to guide the client from one state of mind to the next obvious state and help them to stabilize. As astrologers we do this all the time. This article and perhaps others I will add will present a variety of esoteric shamanic techniques of interest to the astrologer.

Here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

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



LIFE CHAKRAS AND ASTROLOGY

March 29, 2022

[This article is about how the chakras are used in astrology to find meaning. Here we are going deeper into esoteric astrology and the concept of the chakras is

far beyond the familiar image of a string of lights running up and down your spine. In reality, chakras are entire worlds through which we project and then wander through, each with a set of rules and view, and successive chakras, from Saturn into the Sun, are invoked, where the planet sphere within the next most outer planet becomes to key to that chakra.]

Jupiter is the key to Saturn

Mars is the key to Jupiter

Earth is the key to Mars

Venus is the key to Earth

Mercury is the key to Venus

In this part, we will start by examining the astrological planets as they relate to the system of subtle internal energies called the chakras, a branch of esoteric astrology. Also called occult or secret astrology, esoteric astrology is by definition somewhat difficult to study. It is occult (hidden) or secret, not because it is some deep dark secret, and not because someone or some group is trying to keep it from us, but because it is, by its very nature, subtle and hard to grasp with the mind. It might be more helpful to say, as the Tibetans do, that it is self-secret. It hides itself from us. We can't grasp it.

And this knowledge is hidden or secreted in the one place we might never think to look and that is: in plain sight. In other words, the secret heart of astrology (esoteric astrology) is hidden by the fact that it is so

obvious and present to us, so in our face, that we have no way to grasp it or keep it in mind. Although it is with us and present all the time, our mind has trouble grasping or maintaining an awareness of it.

Self-Secret

An example of something that is self-secret would be consciousness itself. Try using your consciousness to look at itself. Take a moment right now and look at who is reading this page. Who is that? See what I mean?

This subject is, by its very nature, hard to grasp and thus is "self-secret," which is what mind training or meditation techniques are all about. If you just tried the little experiment mentioned above, you have some idea of how difficult it is to point out the nature of the obvious, yet that is our task here.

Although esoteric astrology of this type is very subtle and hard to grasp, it is very much worth our efforts to understand it and has very practical benefits. To rephrase this: Unlike our day-to-day world, in the realm of esoteric astrology even the tiniest bit of increased vision or progress can radically affect how we see things. What separates the initiate from the uninitiated may be only the width of a hair in terms of understanding, yet this difference could be all the difference in the world. It could be the difference between ignorance and vision.

Esoteric Teachers

I have been studying astrology for more than sixty years. During that time, although I am considered quite technical by my fellow astrologers, my primary interest has always been esoteric astrology, what astrology means, refers, or points to. I have had the very good fortune to be instructed in esoteric studies by a number of fine teachers. It is to their credit that I am able to present any of this information here.

In particular, I trained for a number of years with Andrew Gunn McIver (a traveling Rosicrucian initiator), who was born in Scotland and later settled in Canada and then the U.S. It was he who introduced me to some of the inner workings of shamanistic astrology, the esoteric or hidden side.

There have been a number of other fine teachers that I have been lucky enough to meet in this world. One such teacher was Lotis Wilder, a Unity minister from Detroit. In recent years, since the early 70s, I have been working with Tibetan psychological methods of mind practice, in particular with Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama. It was Khenpo Rinpoche who introduced me to the Eastern view of esoteric knowledge. I have made two pilgrimages to Tibet and China, one with my teacher.

In these pages, I would like to share with you various esoteric ideas. I am not claiming to be any great expert

in all of this, but I do have a sincere interest in the subject and am happy to examine and discuss these ideas with others. My wish is that this discussion may be of benefit to readers and to astrology in general.

THE PLANETS AS CHAKRAS

The chakras, vital force centers within the body, are much discussed in the esoteric literature of India, not to mention in all kinds of New Age literature. I imagine that most of you reading this have seen illustrations of a yogi sitting in a meditation posture, with a vertical line of colored spheres (the chakras) running up and down their spine. These diagrams, while accurate in themselves, don't tell the whole story, and can be misleading in that they suggest that the chakras are, somehow, only something (points of light) within your personal physical body.

While the chakras or planetary force centers can be said to be within your physical body, as in the diagrams mentioned, these seven centers within our body are but pointers to chakras also outside our body in the world itself, vast areas of life through which each of us live and wander. Or another way to put this is the term "physical body," in the esoteric sense, does not just mean your personal body and your arms and legs, but the physical aspects of all life, the physical body of the life in this world — the world itself as our physical body. We are all wandering in that world. And better yet, the inner world

of our own mind is practically unknown to most.

THE CHAKRAS IN THE WORLD

In other words, our physical body (shamanistic-ally speaking) is also the entire world out there. While it can be somewhat difficult to grasp the chakras as spheres of light along the spine, it is not so difficult to see these same chakras in the world around us, and to learn to use them in astrological counseling. That is what this section is about, learning to use shamanistic techniques for helping yourself and others, particularly through the counseling process.

Here, as mentioned, we will not primarily be focusing on the planets as physical points or centers within our particular personal body. Instead, we will examine the idea that the planets (chakras) are vast areas of consciousness and life within the larger body of our existence, the external life of the outside world in which we each wander and learn. We are concerned here not only with the chakras as states or "places," but also in the process and journey each of us makes from one to another of these chakras.

REFLECTED IN THE WORLD

So, let's put aside for now trying to find the seven planetary force centers or chakras along our spine. You can't see them in the mirror and, although you may be

able to sense something about them from meditating on their qualities, there is a much easier way to learn about these sacred centers, as projected by ourselves onto the world around us. We each have a built-in projector within us.

As astrologers, we are already comfortable with associating celestial events (planets, aspects, houses, etc.) in the heavens with corresponding events personally here on Earth, so we can extend that kind of understanding to the chakras. These areas along the spine correspond with the vast planetary centers in the world around us.

We are familiar, from day-to-day life, with the idea that the mind controls the body, and that if we can learn mental control and stability, the body will usually follow along. If nothing else, we know that what we see and feel in our mind psychologically can affect how we view life outside ourselves, which in turn can affect us physically. We project our inner view onto the outside world, and then proceed to live in that outside world, colored by our own inner psychology, by what we believe and see. If we are still 'more' experienced, we know there is no absolute difference between inner and outer, no hard line – subject and object are one -- interdependent.

We live in a world of projectors, and every person projects their inner world on the screen of life around

them and then proceeds to live in that world. The phrase “when worlds collide” takes on new meaning in this context.

Then it should not surprise us to learn that the chakras, these great planetary centers, are also vast areas of our mind and life where we exist and live out our lives. If we want to think of the chakras as areas within our body, then we should understand that we are speaking also here of the entire body of existence — our life.

THE WORLD IS AS WE SEE IT

Yes, these centers are subtle energy centers, a part of our mind, but that mind, for better or for worse, very much controls and colors (projects) how we see and act in the outside physical world. In other words: there is no outside physical world that is not filtered or first colored by our mind, by the view in-here from which we see that world. Inside and outside are hopelessly interdependent. If we change our mind, we also change the way we see the world. This is not a new idea.

That having been said, it remains to point out how to identify and experience these inner planetary chakras in the world we are now living in, and this is not that difficult. So far, I have indicated that you will be looking outside in the world around you for these subtle planetary chakras, and not just within your mind or along your spine, in the sense that we tend to think of

the mind as connected to our head or our personal body. The chakras are also magnified areas of the mind projected in the world around you and quite easy to see.

LIVING IN THE CHAKRAS

Although we all have seen diagrams of the seven chakras or sacred force centers within the human body, without a lot of instruction and practice, these diagrams are hardly very useful. As pointed out, it is misleading to think that the chakras are limited to a series of glowing spheres along our spinal cord within our physical body. We don't see them in the mirror, and without a lot of training, we can't really sense them within our personal physical body.

As pointed out earlier, more useful to most of us will be to learn that these chakras are more practically understood to be vast areas of our mind (and therefore our life) through which we wander, a journey each of us takes through life, one that lasts as long as life itself. In other words, at any given time, each of us is centered more-or-less in one chakra or another, and I don't mean, as mentioned, looking at a little glowing sphere along our spine. We are out there in our life in the midst of the chakras, always, like right now. The question for most of us might be: which chakra are we in, and how can we tell?

WANDERING IN THE CHAKRAS

We are now (and always have been) wandering in the chakras in this vast body of existence that we call our life. When we read in books about spiritually opening the chakras, one by one, or opening them in this or that order, this refers not to focusing on some glowing sphere within our physical spine, but to our life's journey through time and the mind. We move from one chakra to another, in a very slow progression that will take our entire life. Recognizing this fact can make understanding the world of esoteric astrology very much easier.

At any given year or time in our lives, we tend to be centered or "living" in one particular chakra, one particular life area, and we very gradually move or progress from that chakra to the next one in line, and in a given order. That order is usually the same for most of us, but it can vary between individuals. The opening of the chakras for each of us is the story of our spiritual awakening, our spiritual journey beyond time.

SUCCESSIVE CHAKRAS

It can take years (or a lifetime) to move from a particular chakra or planetary sphere to the next one in succession. And, in general, this process is irreversible. In other words, once we have made ourselves at home in (and mastered) a planet or chakra, we move on. We don't go back and live in the previous chakra, but we do remember how to get around in that chakra. We know

how it works and how to use it. It becomes part of our personal spiritual toolbox.

It is important to understand that when we speak, here, of moving from one chakra to the next, or moving through the chakras, this concept can be misleading. We are not really going anywhere, and we don't ever get anywhere, other than right here and now. Both the past and the future are always accessed from the present, that is: right now.

All of our previous changes, all of the chakras we have been in are with us now, and not somewhere left behind or discarded. And this is true for any future chakras we may inhabit. When we master a chakra or planet, it does not disappear, but it does no longer challenge or interest us to the same degree. We are the master of it, and can handle it from that point on, without thinking, automatically, much like when we master steering a car; it becomes automatic for us, part of our expertise. That is how to understand how we move from one chakra or planet to another, in our spiritual unfoldment.

PLANETARY LANDSCAPES

Each chakra or planetary sphere has what amounts to its own particular landscape and series of rules or laws that govern life in that chakra. We gradually learn to find our way around in each chakra; we learn those rules, and master how to live there. It is not unlike going to school.

If we take chemistry one year and graduate, we move on to studying physics. We don't have to take chemistry again, are not studying it now, but we do remember how to get around in a chemistry book. We can use it. It is a permanent part of our education.

In this life as we live it, nothing vanishes or just goes away, because everything is a part of life. Each stage of life we have passed through, and each chakra, is still right here with us, and other people are now living in chakras where we once lived. It is not behind us, just because we passed through that stage. In other words, passing through a chakra means knowing how to get around in that chakra, how to work it, not leaving it behind.

When we learn to breathe, we don't stop breathing, but we keep breathing automatically as long as we have life, but we no longer focus on breathing. That is a better way to conceive of chakras and our journey through them. We never really get anywhere else, but we do learn to handle these parts of our lives with skill and understanding. We master them. We become initiates.

MASTERING THE CHAKRAS

What follows will be explained in great detail later on, so don't panic if this does not make perfect sense right away. When we clear out of a chakra, master it, and graduate to the next chakra, we are no longer motivated

by what first motivated us within that chakra. It is no longer new for us. We have moved on to the rules and complexity of the next chakra and are now motivated by what may be a completely new set of rules, and are working within a wondrous new landscape. Each new chakra is somewhat like a new or completely different world for us.

The previous chakra or area of our lives is still with us yet is now void of interest to us. It is empty for us. We have been there, done that, and we continue to do that (whatever it is related to the previous chakra), as needed, from this point on. We have mastered it, like steering on an automobile or breathing air. We drive on.

An important point is that the essence of each chakra we are currently in, the essence of the rules for that chakra or planet, is always the next innermost chakra, that particular chakra or planet that is "inner" to the current one. For example, if we are alive and living in the Saturn chakra, the essence or key to that chakra will be the planet that is next innermost to Saturn, which, of course, is Jupiter. The orbit of Jupiter is next inside (toward the Sun) from Saturn. Jupiter therefore is the esoteric key to Saturn, the key that unlocks how to use and master Saturn. This is true for each of the chakras, in turn. Mars is the key to Jupiter, Earth is the Key to Mars, Venus is the key to Earth, and Mercury is the key to Venus and so on into the Sun. More on this soon.

I am sure this is sounding a bit too mysterious, but as you will see, it is quite simple and easy to understand. What we want to know as shamanistic astrologers is: in what chakra are we now living? Where are we? If we are a counseling astrologer, we need to determine what chakra our client is in, and what are they seeing and experiencing? Once we know what chakra they are in, we can direct our clients or ourselves in a variety of useful ways.

BACKGROUND: DIGRESSIONS

Before we get into the specific chakras and how to recognize each of them, let's take one step back and make sure you have all the background you need to understand what we are pointing out here. This will be a digression, but hopefully a very useful one.

In fact, let's even digress one step farther yet and talk for a moment about the process of initiation into the esoteric mysteries, what has been called holding or obtaining the "view." And this might be important to understand.

Beginning students of esoteric astrology, although they acknowledge they know little about the subject, can't help but have already formed in their minds some idea of what this subject is all about. Otherwise, why would you read this article? Although preconceptions are common, they are seldom helpful, and by and large,

having a pre-formed opinion about a subject is most often the first obstacle any teacher or mentor must overcome, the fact that the student "thinks" he or she knows what the teacher is going to point out to them. Of course, if they did know, they would not be a student, and the teacher, who would see that the student already gets it, would not be trying to point out the topic.

EXPECTATIONS CAN'T DEFINE

Now let's introduce a more important factor yet, and that is: the truth of any topic is seldom what you expect, almost by definition. Expectations can't define, and you can't expect to find what you expect. Expectations usually don't help a situation.

Students tend to assume that there is something to get at, some thing or object of knowledge that the teacher will point out, that they can then get their hands on or their mind around. In esoteric studies, there IS nothing (no thing) to get to, any more than there is a particular end to get to in life, other than the physical end of life, and few of us are in a rush to go there.

What I am trying to say here is that learning about esoteric concepts is more about preparing the student to have the right attitude or view, than it is about getting "at" something. If all it took was telling the truth, then the sages and philosophers throughout history have already told us everything. If we didn't "get it," so

to speak, it is because we were not prepared to receive it and did not have the right mind set. Our mind was not set, like a receiver, to gather it, to take it all in. We couldn't tune in. That is what I am working on here.

BACKPEDELING

So, what frequently can appear to the student as endless backpedaling on the part of the teacher, endless digressions (like this one here), and putting off getting to the point, is simply because there is no point, no such hard and fast thing like a "point" or fact when it comes to these esoteric studies, in particular. And that is not a bad thing. The teacher has to break this news, to successfully disappoint the student from looking for the "point" or preconception that the student has pre-formed in his or her mind, and instead, gently help to orient the student to receive and experience the actual idea, an idea that, by definition, the student does not know or have, and has not yet experienced. It is more like setting the sails on a boat, often nothing more than an adjustment of attitude or approach. The student does not yet have the correct or right attitude. They are not properly aligned or oriented.

In fact, in most cases, students come with a linear attitude, looking for something they can imagine they will get down the line, the next step, so to speak. Often, what is given is not a next step, linearly speaking, but a change in attitude that enables a fresh view of the same

old world. In fact, if you think about it, that is what most of us need, a new way of handling what we already have.

This is not unlike the task of the midwife, who on occasion has to turn the baby around in the womb until it is oriented properly and can be born, same idea here.

In other words, the teacher has the unenviable task of turning and tweaking the student's mind to receive knowledge, and here "to receive knowledge" means to be able to experience and thus "get" for themselves what the teacher is pointing out. Real knowledge is not a "thing" to get or understand, but a knowing, an experience and orientation we each need to have for ourselves, and after which we don't need a teacher on the subject.

The teacher points it out, the student tries to get it, and the teacher questions the student for signs that the student got what was being pointed out. If not, the teacher continues to try to adjust and position the student's mind further, and then repeats the pointing out instruction, and this process goes on and on, until the student gets it or gives up.

INTELLECTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In the realm of esoteric knowledge, simple intellectual understanding is not enough. We each must experience for ourselves what is being pointed out. In the realm of

esoteric knowledge, simple intellectual understanding, although possibly helpful, is just not enough. As mentioned, we each must experience for ourselves what is being pointed out, if we ever hope to be able to point out to another what we have learned. Pointing out or understanding, intellectually, what we read in a book is just rote memorization. Learning must be a visceral, life experience we have, not just some words on a page.

So, to recap: teaching or pointing out esoteric knowledge is more like setting the sails on a boat and waiting to see if the student catches the wind and heads off in the direction desired. The teacher adjusts the attitude of the student, and gradually gets him or her in a position to see or receive the knowledge. It is all about receiving the knowledge. There is no "knowledge" per se, nothing to "get" all at once, but there is the act of knowing, the experiencing for yourself what the teacher is pointing out. The teacher tweaks the view of the student, until he or she gets it, and has the experience themselves, after which they perhaps could then point it out to someone else. This process is part of what is called mentoring. It is also an integral part of what make lineages so important. And that is the end of this digression.

APPROACH IS EVERYTHING

This last point is so important, let's go over it one more time. In shamanic or esoteric astrology, approach is

everything. Your attitude or approach, how you take it, how you are oriented toward it is most crucial. If you come at it wrong, you will see and experience nothing or very little of what I am writing about here. And here, I am not just talking about understanding this material, per se, intellectually. I mean being aware of the content of this article in your life. With the wrong approach, you just won't get it, and you will pass right through life and never know these experiences were there. You won't be aware of them. It happens to countless people all the time.

It is my intention here to tease these ideas out in the open for you, to turn your mind around until you can receive them, until you get it. That is why I have been telling you that this knowledge is not something for you to "get," not an action you must perform, but rather an attitude or approach you must assume or take – reception. The key to esoteric astrology is to be receptive, to prepare your mind to receive and take this knowledge in, like a satellite receiver – a big dish. You can be active in your passivity or reception, but you must be passive in your action. Don't push on, but give, as in "give way."

WE SAIL OUR SHIP ALONE

I am trying, here, to tune you like we might tune a radio receiver to pick up a music station. The music is playing all around us, but you can't hear it unless you tune in.

And tuning in is all about receptivity and preparing your mind to get it. The analogy of setting the sails on a ship, so as to pick up the wind, is a good one. We have to work with the rigging and set the sails. There is no doubt that the winds of change will come, and if our sails are set right, we will begin to move through the chakras, to feel the changes I will be describing.

The point here is that shamanic knowledge is not only conceptual, not merely something for you to understand, but rather an experience we must have and an attitude we must take. As an intellectual idea, shamanic knowledge is more or less just obvious, but as a living experience, it is profound. I am doing my best to prepare you for that experience, and to help set your sails.

FIGURE AND GROUND

Now, we need to spend some little time painting the background for all of this, giving you a picture of how all of these thoughts fit together. I don't expect you to get it all at once. This is subtle stuff, and anyone who studies esoteric astrology learns to see the chakras in and against the landscape of life. It is a little like one of those pictures you first look at and see nothing. But suddenly a new image pops out. It is a question of figure and ground. If it were not, this would not be esoteric knowledge, but public knowledge. Everyone could and

would already see it.

POINTING OUT

In a subject so subtle or esoteric as shamanic astrology, the reader can't be expected to get all of these concepts right away, much less have experience with them, and certainly not at first to expect much realization of them. So, what I will be doing here is pointing out important concepts, some of which may not seem to make very much sense at first.

Here is how I suggest you approach this: I will point out an idea or concept that is important to grasp, and in most places, I will tell you I am doing just that. Here are the traditional steps:

In a subject so subtle or esoteric as shamanic astrology, the reader can't be expected to get all of these concepts right away, much less have experience with them, and certainly not at first to expect much realization of them. So, what I will be doing here is pointing out important concepts, some of them which may not seem to make very much sense at first.

UNDERSTANDING

Your initial task is to understand what I am saying, to make any kind of sense you can of my words. But intellectual understanding is only the beginning, the first

step in the process and, by itself, is not going to take you that far. Understanding is just that, developing an intellectual or conceptual idea of what has been pointed out. We do that all the time.

EXPERIENCING

Once you feel you understand what has been said, the next step is to develop some actual experience with the idea, to look in your day-to-day life for living examples of the ideas that have been pointed out. It is your responsibility to test these thoughts against reality, and to determine if what is being pointed out actually makes sense to you. Making some kind of sense is what this stage is all about, developing actual experience from the understanding, something you can feel and use. Experience has its ups and downs, and is the story of our embodying the concept with meaning through our own investigations.

REALIZATION

And the last step is to accumulate enough experience with the concept, until it becomes a permanent and living part of your life, until you realize it. Realization does not have ups and downs but marks the point where your experience stabilizes and there is no more change taking place with what has been pointed out. You get it and you get it 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. This is also the point when you will realize the

emptiness without the realization of the experience for yourself.

THREE-STEP PROCESS

Understanding, experience, and realization mark the three-step process that you will ideally undergo for each concept and for every idea I will be pointing out. This is not to say that this will happen with every concept that is pointed out, or that the process will be an easy one. It may be enough, at first, to just get a rough idea of what is being said, and perhaps a glimmer of a feel for what it might mean in the world around you. No problem, but don't confuse understanding with realization.

With understanding, you have intellectually taken the concept in and can paraphrase it. With experience, you have actually grounded the idea that was pointed out in reality and developed a real feeling for it that is sometimes present and sometimes absent. With realization, you become the living proof of the concept, and can empower yourself and others with this knowledge. With realization, there is no change in the experience. For your own sake, it is best not to confuse these three steps. The most common problem is to mistake understanding for realization. As my teacher used to say to me, "Michael, some day you must become the book."

Here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

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

[Chakra worlds design by me.]



DIVINE ASTROLOGY: THE MONAD

March 30, 2022

“THE SUN IS SHINING”

[And now folks, in our journey into true esoteric astrology, it's time we go down the rabbit-hole, and to support this I am going to use a Christian theme, because they do this so well, so hang on to your hats. After this out-of-the-body and timeless exposition, in the article that follows this one, I will get down to sharing how to use these ideas to interpret natal astrology charts, but first a little 'Blue Sky'.]

I am assuming here, since this is a more advanced article, that you have some basic knowledge of astrology, knowledge of the Sun, Moon, and the

traditional planets, what they mean or stand for. If you don't, no problem, much of this is self-explanatory.

There are a couple of other main concepts that we will go over very lightly here, just enough to make sure you are aware of them. We will go into much more detail later on, but for now I want to introduce you to the concept of the solar system as a living process, and this is often called, in the history of esoteric thought, the Monad. And second, we need to talk a bit about the Saturn and the Saturn Return that each of us experiences at around thirty years of age.

The word 'monad' comes from the Latin word for unit, and prior to that from the Greek word "monos," which means single or unique. There are many uses for the word monad, but here we are using it to mean a single entity or process that is self-enclosed, recursive, and eternal or infinite — beyond time. The monad is self-existing, the "I Am That I Am," and for no other reason.

In this study of esoteric astrology, the monad here refers to our entire solar system, with the Sun as the center, as a single living entity or life. In other words, astrologically the "monad" is the Sun, as a life-giving process. The Sun is now shining in the darkness of space, spewing forth light and life, a life-giving being. It seems unfortunate that the overreach of science has colored everything with the paintbrush of materialism, until the only way we can conceive of the Sun is as molecules and atoms – a

hot sphere of gas. Yet, we have no problem identifying the soul of life within ourselves. We are quickly to acknowledge that “we” are alive and have a spirit or energy, but that which gives us life and light, the Sun, is to us nothing more than bricks and mortar - a hot ball of gas.

How can that be? It does not make sense. At the very least, the sun should share whatever consciousness, spirit, and soul we have, since it supports and provides for it. I hope you get the idea here: how can we be so concerned about our own consciousness, and assume that our great Sun is spiritless? It boggles the mind, and it was not always so, and it will not always be so. This is materialism to the max. It might be useful to make a note of this particular materialistic viewpoint.

THE ASTROLOGY OF NO TIME

This next point is a very important point: most of modern astrology, as I hinted in the above, is presented only through the measurement of time, Saturn or Satan. Satan or Saturn is only one of the planets although, as the Christian faith clearly states: Satan is the prince of time and of the material world. We should be very clear to realize that awareness (spiritual realization) is (and has always been) described as the overcoming of time (or Saturn) in the experience of eternity and everlasting life — the larger life we all share, call it enlightenment or what-have-you.

The planet Saturn, however, only governs our physical form and the laws of time itself. It is unfortunate, as mentioned, that most of modern astrology is so materialistic that all of the planets are seen only through the prism of time and the physical, that is: in their material or Saturnian aspects. In the esoteric or mystic tradition of the planets, only the planet Saturn relates to the physical. All of the other planets each have their own plane and sphere that, while interdependent with the physical (Saturn), are also separate from the physical. Think about this with care. We will get into this very important point, gradually.

Let's take the time here to at least describe what the monad, the Sun and solar system might be like, without the domination of the materialism we have just pointed out, sort of a divine astrology, and we can even allow ourselves to get a little biblical, while we are at it, since those kind of words fit the reality here. Here is what a non-materialistic astrology would be like:

THE SOLAR SYSTEM AS A TREE OF LIFE

Non-Materialistic Astrology: The solar system as a whole or unity is an endless Tree of Life, and Saturn or time is only one portion or planet in this whole process, although: dealing with Saturn (in the world's scriptures) has been said to be crucial to knowing God (developing realization or spiritual awareness). Overcoming Saturn or

time has ever been the first key to real awareness (knowing God, spirituality, etc.) and entering eternity — going beyond time.

Before we start to work with Saturn or time, with which we should all be familiar at this point in our lives, it is important to give you at least a brief feeling for the concept of what we could call a non-materialistic or "Divine Astrology," that is, an astrology free from or beyond time, where time is but one part. Here is a more biblical way of putting this. Please excuse the prose.

A DIVINE ASTROLOGY

The Tree of Life of our solar system is a tree of endless life, pouring forth life forever, like a great cornucopia.

This life is ever present and always new. It is all ways fresh and continuously happening, and this continuousness lasts, and it IS an everlasting life. This life of the solar system can never die or end, but is living now new, as always it has been living, and as it will continue to live. This endless life is what we have to look forward to and we have it here now.

THE TREE OF LIFE

Astrology is one description of this Tree of Life. The Christian description of 'Revelation' has a very clear way of expressing this concept. In Revelation (22:1), we read:

"The Angel showed me the River of Life rising from the Throne of God and the Lamb of God and flowing crystal clear down the middle of the city. On either side of the river were the Trees of Life ... which bear TWELVE CROPS OF FRUIT IN A YEAR, ONE FOR EACH MONTH, and the leaves of which are the cure for the unbelievers ..."

And further:

"Happy are those who have washed their robes clean, so that they have the right to feed on the Tree of Life and can come through the gates into the city."

If we do not realize this Tree of Life now, it is somehow as it is written because: we have not washed our robes clean. In Genesis (3:24) we read:

"He banished the man, and in front of the Garden of Eden he posted the Cherubs and the Flame of a Flashing Sword, which turned all ways to guard the Way to the Tree of Life ... "

THE FLAME OF A FLASHING SWORD

The Sun is the symbol of this everlasting life, and it is the center or throne around which all else revolves. The Sun and the Moon are what are called, astrologically, "The Lights," and for good reason. The Sun is the "Flame of a

Flashing Sword" which turns all ways to guard (not block) the way to the Tree of Life. The Sun is the living sign of the "Lord of all Creation."

This same Sun is the deafening blast of nature living that we call silence. This endless blast of creation is our Sun endlessly sending forth and generating light. This radiance is the trumpet of the Lord of Creation endlessly blowing through our mind night and day.

THE FOUR BEASTS

This is Revelation (4:6):

"In the center, grouped round the throne itself, were four animals with man's eyes in front and behind. The first animal was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third animal had a human face, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four animals had six wings and had eyes all the way round, as well as inside, and day and night they never stopped singing:

HOLY, HOLY IS
THE LORD GOD..THE ALL MIGHTY...HE WAS, HE IS, AND
HE IS TO COME."

This endless radiant song pours forth day and night its never-ending life in a continuous process of generation. To use a metaphor, this fountain of life rushes forth unceasingly from itself in an unending fountain of water

that, spewing straight up into the air, reaches the height of its column and, unable to rise higher, opens from the center of its force equally outward in all directions and, arching, it falls back around itself, enclosing within itself, the main stream out of which it emerged, signified by the form of a torus.

THE FIRST GENERATION

This generation is a continual process. As the Sun, in shining, throws off light all ways, thus does that generation process perpetually husk itself — forever renewing itself. And this newness throws off what came before, like the snake shedding its skin. The Sun is the archetypal sign or identity of all creation and generation.

There is one and only one generation, and this is the process of constant generation — overflowing life. We are all of the same generation for: it still is. We are only one generation old. The so-called generation gap is but the failure to witness this fact of one generation and, witnessing it, to remain aware of the fountain of youth and everlasting life. Generation is continuous and of one age. We are all of one age and that age is: AGELESS. So much for the poetry.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN SEALS OR PLANETS

To begin with, we are concerned here with the historical bodies: the Sun and Moon, and the planets Mercury

through Saturn. We will get around to presenting the outer planets somewhat later in this series of articles. As for the Moon, it is part of the Earth system and that is the subject of another article and does not figure into a chakra-oriented approach.

The Seven Seals (Biblical) or centers of force (Chakras) are the seven solar system bodies from (and including) the Sun out to Saturn: Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. These are what are called the traditional astrological bodies, the seven centers of force or levels of being in the process of the whole life of eternity --the infinite solar-system process of life around us. The seven seals are created or made in a certain order (as we mature) and, in most (but not all) cases, these same seals are revealed or opened in exactly the reverse order, after our Saturn return at 30 years of age. This article is mostly about how the seven chakras or seals are opened, the process of spiritual awakening after 30 years of age.

FORMATION OF THE SEALS

When we study how these seals are created or formed, we are studying the planets, with the Sun as their center, moving outward to the limit of time or form, Saturn, at about 30 years of age. This is the study of the birth of a child and the formation of the physical body, as we age from that birth through our Saturn return around our 30th year (29.4 years, heliocentrically). Contained within

that physical body of Saturn's cycle are, of course, the completed cycles of the other traditional planets: Mercury (mind), Venus (love), Earth (Self), Mars (emotions), and Jupiter (career).

OPENING OF THE SEVEN SEALS

However, when we study how these chakras, centers, or seals are opened or awakened, we study them in the reverse order, from Saturn (the physical) or outer shell, inward toward the Sun. In that process, we study the process of our psychological awakening and spiritual awareness. In other words, each of us experiences in our personal lifetime first the formation (growing up), and then the opening of all seven of these seals or chakras. We all experience our physical body forming and maturing. These are literally our formative years. It is the awareness and realization of this entire process that is rarer and that constitutes what we could call spiritual work or spiritual awareness. It is this awareness and the process of awakening that we are most concerned with here in this article.

FORMATION OF THE SEVEN SEALS THROUGH TIME

Let's look at the nitty-gritty of how this process works in a nativity. Examine the list above very carefully. It is the measure in time of exactly when in growth (during each child's personal existence) the various planets complete one whole revolution of the Sun (their first) and pass on

to repeating themselves. This concept of zodiac repetition is a very important one.

From the moment we are born, each planet continues in its orbit around the Sun, degree by degree. As time passes, one by one, the planets complete their first circle of the Sun (and the zodiac) during our lifetime.

First Mercury, at about three months, then Venus, Earth, and so on. These complete revolutions are the first in the life memory or experience of each child, and after that first revolution, the planet continues on in its orbit, but begins to go over ground (degrees of the zodiac) that it already has covered since the child was born. There is a repetition.

REPEATING ITSELF

Whatever we can agree that each planet represents in our astrology, after that first cycle each planet ceases to introduce anything "new" to us but turns or falls to repeating itself within our personal life. It circles or cycles, and in some fashion becomes a constant part of life. As each planet, in turn, begins to repeat itself, we are freed to pick up on or monitor the next most outer planet, the next planet which HAS NOT yet completed a revolution. In other words, when Mercury completes its first revolution and begins to repeat in our memory at three months of age, we have that, and start to pick up on Venus, and then Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and finally

Saturn, which completes its return at about 30 years of age.

I wrote this poem about 'The Monad' back in the 1960s.

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 asleep,
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.

Here is the whole course: "Astrology of the Heart" (2022)

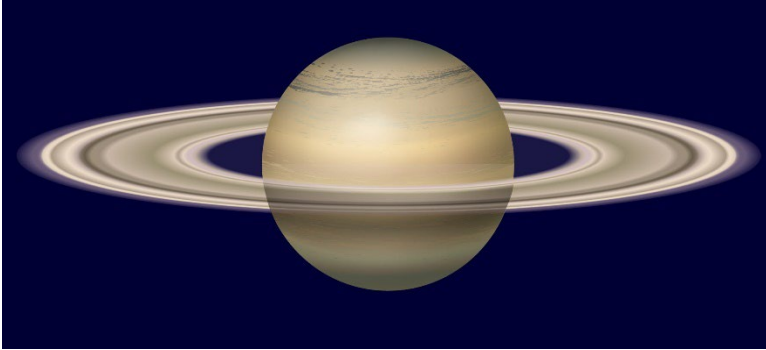
<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>

Astro-Shamanism



Astrology
of the
Heart

By
Michael
Erlewine



Astrology of the Heart (2022)

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V2.pdf> The symbol came to me in a kriya, with a vision to go with it. It became the "Heart Center," a communion center and since the 1980s, a dharma center.

THE INNER IS THE KEY TO THE OUTER

March 30, 2022

[A little housekeeping, please. Now we start getting into the nitty-gritty of esoteric astrology, down to where the rubber meets the road, IMO. This article should introduce you to the basics, which we can expand on in future articles.

Or you can download the whole course in a free PDF file and read it as you will. I just re-edited the whole book, to bring parts up to date. I removed many meaningless

graphics, leaving only a few. I will perhaps offer here on Facebook a few more blogs of this material. It is a compendium of esoteric as taught to me by my teacher, Andrew Gunn McIver, a travelling initiator for a Rosicrucian order. And I addend some of my journal entries on navigating the astrological chakras from the 1960s. Now, it's up to you to see whether it communicates. Here is the entire book. I am glad to take questions, if that would make things clearer.]

Astrology of the Heart (2022)

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

On now, on with this article:

SATURN THE TIMEKEEPER

Saturn or Chronos is the planet of physical form, the timekeeper of the zodiac, and when it completes its first cycle at around 30 years of age, our physical form is complete, and no further growth is forthcoming or can be expected with our body. In fact, this is traditional called "The Prime of Life." You get the idea.

A complete revolution of a planet seals or separates the infant from the one non-manifest state out of which he or she is being born into this world of time. There are traditionally seven seals including the Sun (which is

timeless) out to Saturn and, with each seal, as the child grows, the rule of Saturn or time takes a greater hold on the lifetime. This is how we incarnate. Here is the list:

Mercury – Communication

Keywords: Everything mental, thoughts, ideas, words, written or spoken, connections, communications, communicating, links.

Mercury returns at about three months of age. In studies of child behavior, we find that after the third month, the child's basic awareness and vision approximates that of an adult and he or she begins to see in color. The child's motor responses switch around this time from reflex to voluntary.

Venus – Love / Values

Keywords: Love and cherishing, also: value, valuation, evaluation, appreciation, and appraisal. Possessions, money, have and having. Women.

Venus completes an orbit of the Sun at about seven-and one-half months. Studies show that, around this point, the child perceives the mother as separate from itself, and begins to become strongly attached to the mother. The child can now distinguish and vocalize both pleasure and displeasure. In other words: a separation or duality occurs that allows appreciation.

Earth – You / Future

Keywords: You, the future, what you will become, all the changes you have not yet taken, authority, elders, mentors, men.

The Earth completes its orbit of the Sun in one year, and we all know that this is usually when baby steps out into the world on his or her own two feet.

Mars – Drive / Activity

Keywords: Action, initiative, the activity that generates space. Also: urges, ambitions, and drive. Exercise and Physicality. Sports.

Mars completes its orbit of the Sun in a little under two years, and any parent is familiar with what has been nicknamed the "terrible twos" — when baby discovers emotions and struggles for independence.

Jupiter – Career / Guide

The guide or guru, your own way through life. The life path or career, vocation. Also: solution, solving, continuity.

Between Mars and the next planetary orbit is relatively the most-vast change, as measured by time or space

between any two planets. Mars makes six revolutions before Jupiter completes one at twelve years. In between these two planets is the great asteroid belt filled with countless particles. The six-year molar occurs as Jupiter reaches his halfway mark and opposes himself, but more important, around 8-9 years the child passes from the more eternal or expanded time concept quite rapidly to the adult perception of time's passage.

After the twelve-year molar and Jupiter's return, the child expands into adolescence and begins to pick up on and to monitor the next and most definite set of cycles, that of Saturn. At Saturn's opposition, puberty has set in, and time or Saturn moves to complete its cycle at around thirty years, after which point, spiritual awakening or unsealing of the Seven Seals proceeds, and at an accelerated rate.

MAJOR PLANETARY ASPECTS

Below is a chart of all major planets' aspects to their own natal horoscope positions, as they transit to complete their various cycles, for a period of 85 years. What should be clear in a careful study is the bunching of important aspects at certain points and years in any lifetime. Space prevents elaboration here, but examination on your part will show you how and when the "seven seals" are formed, as well as how they open or come apart.

Any good dictionary will list certain crucial years under the term "Climacteric," but not as linked to the cycles of the planets. The most well-known are the years: 30, 42, 63, and 81, but you will as an astrologer recognize these years as important as well: 7, 8-9, 13-15, 21, 29-33, 36, 50-51, 59-60, 66, and 72-73.

Our physical life process as measured by time follows a very regular pattern of growth, sustaining, and aging.

The physical body is not independent from the spiritual, but reflects the spirit, and vice versa. Our physical body is the ultimate charm or talisman. It is the sign or signature of spirit, however much it may fail at any point in time to reflect our intentions. As the adage says, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

THE PLANETS AS CHAKRAS

THE INNER IS THE KEY TO THE OUTER

The entire process we are about to describe here refers to the process of our spiritual birth or awakening and, for most of us, this does not occur until after our Saturn return (or just prior to it) at 29.4 years of age. What follows here has to do with the opening of the chakras, what has been called the process of spiritual awakening or self-discovery.

In each case, in order to reveal, open, and use the outer,

we learn to take from within, we ourselves must go within. It is a personal journey. Each planet (from Saturn into the Sun) is the entire essence and key to the planet just outside its orbit, which brings us to what might seem at first to be a paradox:

The key to this external world is not found outside in the external world itself, no matter how hard we may search, but can only be found within us, by looking inside, by going within. We have all heard this concept. The religions of the world have made it a constant refrain: look within. The process of how this is done, step-by-step, is what will now be presented. This is the mystery of the seven seals or planets.

THE PLANETARY KEY

As for the astrological use of this information, what follows is a simple planetary KEY to personal horoscope interpretation that any counseling astrologer can use with confidence. The natural ordering of the planets outward from the Sun is literally a description of their function and use. In this article, there is only one key thought necessary in order to use the planets in your own natal horoscope and that is: the inner is the key to the outer.

THE INNER IS THE KEY

To repeat, the KEY idea presented in these pages is that

THE INNER IS KEY TO THE OUTER. We must learn to take from within ourselves, discover and bring what we find there out, and manifest our good intentions (inner) in this world. Learning to take from within, to look within, is what we are studying here. It is something that can be understood, learned, and realized. It requires that we stop only looking outside for answers and learn to look within ourselves for direction and support. How we do that will be what we are presenting in this article.

Most astrologers would agree that, in our personal horoscope, we can look to Saturn in our chart to see just how we will be tried and tested. Saturn is time and the test of time. Saturn represents form and limitation, and is the limiter. In this approach to shamanic astrology, the key to overcoming and working with our Saturn or limitations will always be our natal Jupiter, and meditation and study on this part of our chart (Jupiter) will gradually help us to succeed in rising above and handling our Saturn. Jupiter is the next planet within Saturn's orbit, so we can look within to that planet.

Again: In this approach, the inner planet is the KEY to the planet outside its orbit, from Saturn into the Sun. The outer planets (Uranus, Neptune, etc.) follow another pattern, which will be discussed later in this series of articles. "God helps those who help themselves," but from within.

When doing astrological counseling, we use the same

concept: the key to the outer is the inner. For example, the key to Saturn in the chart will always be the planet Jupiter, the next inner planet. Now let's look at all of this in more detail.

SATURN: A FORMAL DEFINITION

Most of you are already familiar with the astrological nature of Saturn, but let's go over it again:

Saturn or Chronos rules time, form, and the physical in all its aspects. Saturn IS limitation, and thus the great limiter. Saturn (sometimes called Satan) has been said to be the prince of the material world. Saturn is the very narrowness that makes the way felt, the raceway or spillway through which course (Jupiter = the course) the waters of life. Jupiter is the pathway through which the blood courses, the "way we go," but Saturn is the course walls of the arteries, the resistance that allows pressure to build to something definite, to real "feeling."

SATURN THE SHAPER

Saturn is like a wood shaper that is adjusted to produce a certain piece of molding. Any wood presented to this shaper has no alternative but to pass through, and then only where it conforms to the desired or possible shape as set by the limits. All other wood is shaved away. In this analogy, Saturn is that limiter and we are the wood.

Eternity or truth dictates the limits, and Saturn is the shaper or test of form. When we talk about "getting straight" or "getting in line" or "in tune," we are talking about getting within the control that already is. In this sense, Saturn helps to determine the shape of things to come. All of these Saturnian laws working together: form.

SATURN: WALLS THAT MAKE HOMES POSSIBLE

Saturn is most simply the system of natural laws, the functioning of which determine what is possible in this material world (such as the law of gravity) — the laws that hold things in place, the walls that make homes possible. Saturn is the laws that govern the forms things take, as well as (simply put) the form things take. The forms things take is only the form things are taking (the process). Saturn represents those laws to which we will be physically determined. Saturn is the form to which we each must submit before our evolution or unfolding may take place. Without that form, there can be no unfolding.

Saturn is the laws against which we may ram our head, until such time as we learn, by feeling our way, to walk around or even to build upon them, to count on them.

Saturn is literally where we are bound to learn. It is simple: We don't break nature's or Saturn's laws; they break us if we go against them.

THE TEST OF A LIFETIME

Saturn is the test of a lifetime and equally a lifetime of test. We are subject and tested by these laws until such time as we learn to use these laws in our own behalf and put them to use working for us. We rise above Satan or Saturn in proper use and obedience to the physical laws. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." Handling Saturn is the province of Jupiter, the lawyer and guide through Saturn.

Saturn is where you come to grips with yourself and first learn of spirit. It shapes the end to which we are tending, but also affects how we tend to get there. "Call what carriage as you may your hearse," for Saturn holds you together, as much as it may appear to hold you back.

That is the general idea of Saturn.

THE SEVEN CHAKRAS

The chakras are paired with the traditional planets, from Saturn in to the Sun, and that would be Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Earth, Venus, Mercury, and the Sun. The Sun and the Moon, the Lights, are not directly used here, but will be covered elsewhere. The traditional seven chakras, using their Sanskrit names, are:

Saturn (Muladhara Chakra) Base of Spine

Jupiter (Svadhithana Chakra) Genital Region
Mars (Manipura Chakra) Navel
Earth (Anahata Chakra) Heart Center
Venus (Vishuddha Chakra) Throat
Mercury (Ajna Chakra) Third Eye
Sun (Sahasrara Chakra) Crown of Head.

Let's go over them one by one.

Saturn (Muladhara Chakra) Base of Spine

Keywords: Rules and obligations, responsibilities. Also: obstacles, hardships, blockages. What you have to go through in life.

Chakra: Saturn (form, circumstances)

Key to Chakra: Jupiter (career, life path)

The Saturn chakra represents the physical world of form and the process of time that created that form. As we grow to complete our Saturn return around the age of 30, we each gradually come to grips with the rules, laws, and limitations of Saturn.

The Key to the Saturn chakra will be to invoke Jupiter, and without activating the Jupiter chakra, life would be very, very difficult in the Saturn chakra, as we will describe later on.

Jupiter (Svadhithana Chakra) Genital Region

The guide or guru, your own way through life. The life path or career, vocation. Also: solution, solving, continuity.

Chakra: Jupiter (Career, life path)

Key to Chakra: Mars (Meaning, Union, Marriage)

The Jupiter chakra is the key to Saturn and has to do with the life path or career, the particular way to pass through Saturn or form. Jupiter is the way we go through life.

The Key to the Jupiter chakra will be to invoke Mars, which has to do with the directionality or the meaning of life. Once the Jupiter or career is functioning and we have our head above water (making a living), the next chakra, Mars, has to do with "But what does it all mean?" and this is the chakra Mars, which leads to marriage and union.

Mars (Manipura Chakra) Navel

Chakra: Mars (Meaning, Union, Marriage)

Key to Chakra: Earth (The end of meaning, what it all means)

The Mars chakra is the key to Jupiter, and has to do with what life means, the sense life makes, and this leads to some sort of yoga or union, marriage being the most common form of yoga.

The Key to the Mars chakra will be to invoke the Earth chakra, which is the heart of what it all means, the Self, or simple existence itself. Earth is where we are all trying to get to and where we ultimately live.

Chakra: Earth (Anahata Chakra) Hear

Key to Chakra: Venus (love, compassion)

The Earth chakra is the key to Mars, and has to do with simple existence, being the end of all meaning, the point we have been striving to reach. The end to meaning.

The Key to the Earth chakra will be to invoke the Venus chakra, as the literature of the world has told us forever, the key to life on Earth is love, loving kindness, and compassion.

Venus (Vishuddha Chakra) Throat

Chakra: Venus (love, compassion)

Key to Chakra: Mercury (Light, Mind)

The Venus chakra is the key to Earth, and refers to love, kindness, and loving compassion.

The Key to the Venus chakra will be to invoke the Mercury chakra, an inner chakra, which refers to the light in our eyes, the mind itself.

Mercury (Ajna Chakra) Third Eye

Chakra: Mercury (light, mind)

Key to Chakra: Sun (life process itself)

The Mercury chakra is the key to Venus, and refers to the light of the mind, the light in each of our eyes.

The Key to the Mercury chakra will be to invoke the Mercury chakra, the innermost chakra, representing the entire life process itself.

Sun (Sahasrara Chakra) Crown of Head

Chakra: The Sun (the entire life process and center)

The Sun is more than a chakra, being the whole process of life itself, all of the planets and their interdependent interaction.

In the next article, we will learn how to know which chakra you are now in and where you spend the most time.

[Book cover design by me.]



WHAT CHAKRA ARE YOU IN?

March 31, 2022

[Find out now. At this point we are into how to use the planets as chakras we wander and spend huge amounts of time in, using the rule “The Inner is Key to the Outer,” meaning the key to any planet is the next planet inside of them in planetary order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Earth, Venus, and Mercury. The outer planets, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto follow another path, which we will get to, as do the Sun and the Moon. Here will start to get used to working with clients (or our own chart) using the planetary chakras.]

As a counseling astrologer, you want to be able to determine which of the chakras your client is currently

living and learning in. It is not that difficult, and here are some general rules that have proved helpful to me in figuring this out.

Most of the clients you encounter will be in the Saturn, Jupiter, or Mars chakras, somewhere on their journey to reaching the Earth or Heart chakra, which is where each of us is trying to get to. Those who are in the Earth chakra will not need our help, and these are pretty rare anyway. The type of person who would seek out astrological council will most often be, as mentioned, those in the Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars chakras, one of these.

Forget about the Venus, Mercury, and Sun chakras. There are inner chakras, internal to Earth existence and, while we all aspire to their qualities, you will probably not encounter (or at least not be aware of them) anyone living at this level. In my entire life, I have only met one living person that appeared to be fully in the Venus chakra, and that was a very high lama in the mountains of Tibet, who was fully realized in that chakra, realized enough that anyone in his presence experienced themselves (not the lama) as pure compassion, which is the nature of the Venus chakra.

IDENTIFYING THE SATURN CHAKRA

Those living primarily in the Saturn chakra are very easy to spot. For one, they can't manage to make a living, and

have not found a way to get through or handle the demands of Saturn, and simply to survive. This would involve invoking Jupiter, and gradually making their way to that chakra, and, once there, maintaining that chakra. By "maintaining," we mean, simply, making a living, surviving and learning to handle and negotiate their Saturn, keeping their head above water. In other words, they have not yet found a career that works for them. They cannot handle or cope with Saturn.

You will find a great many clients that are in this state, or who wander in and out of the Saturn chakra, trying to learn it, and master it. It is not as if they have anywhere else to go. Jump-starting one's Jupiter is pretty much required to have any sort of life in this world.

CAN'T MAKE A LIVING

So, if the client has no way of making a living and is constantly besieged by one onslaught of Saturn after another, trying to find a way to just survive in a minimal way, then you have someone in (or mostly within) the Saturn chakra.

The Key to Saturn:

You will want to read to these folks from the "Book of Jupiter," helping them to identify what is their particular way to go through life, their career or life path, some way for them to cope. Of course, you can use all the

astrological techniques you know relating to career, such as sign, house placement, and aspects for Jupiter, and probably the north lunar node as well. These are all solid vocational indicators.

In general (not always), you may find that until the Jupiter chakra is awakened and routinely functioning, that inner chakras like Mars, which has to do with marriage and settling down, will probably not be very workable. The traditional order of opening these chakras are Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and not Saturn, Mars, Jupiter. In other words, it is going to be hard to help a client stabilize their marriage (Mars), if the Jupiter chakra is not first stabilized, that is: if they can't first make a living. You have all seen the old movies or read the articles where the young man first finds a career and then gets married. This is the normal way these chakras are opened, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, etc., in that order.

INVOKING JUPITER

I always work with the client who is lost in the Saturn chakra by helping them to invoke and stabilize their Jupiter (career) chakra, and that stabilization alone is usually enough to bring more stability to any inner chakra, like Mars, if that chakra is already activated, that is: if the client is married. A married client, with a weak or unstable Jupiter chakra, more often than not, will have trouble with the marriage. The first step then, is to first strengthen the Jupiter chakra, and THEN work on

the marriage. A strengthened Jupiter will already bring help to a struggling Mars or marriage.

Keep in mind that each of us has all the chakras available to us and, of course, we cycle in and through all of them constantly. However, each of us tends to spend most of our time in one particular chakra at a time and determining which chakra that is can be important in a consultation. What we are looking for and speaking of here is stabilization, practically mastering a particular chakra, so that the client can use it at will, when they need to.

For example, if you have found a career, and know how to make a living and hold a job, that is a permanent part of your makeup. You learn to make a living, and you keep on making a living. It is a constant, like breathing. At that point, you can operate in the Jupiter chakra, and have more or less mastered it.

IDENTIFYING THE JUPITER CHAKRA

Identifying whether the client is in the Jupiter chakra is also straight-forward, usually as easy as determining if they have a successful (or at least a workable) career AND are still unmarried. That is the pure Jupiter experience plain and simple: working, but unmarried.

Once the Jupiter chakra is activated and some path or career is discovered and maintained, this is considered

sufficient mastery of this chakra. The client is able to keep a career open and functioning. If they have a solid career and are happily married, you then want to be looking into the Earth chakra. Otherwise, Jupiter is where to focus.

CROSSING THE GAP

The gap between Saturn and Jupiter, between the Saturn and Jupiter chakras is not great, and most of us are able to come up with some means of making a living, some work that will keep the wolf (Saturn) from our door. However, the gap between Jupiter and Mars (relatively speaking) is very much greater than any other two planets. We could say that it is somewhat of a long journey from making a living (Jupiter) to being happily married (Mars). This is simple statistics. There are many people who have jobs, and less people who have a successful and happy marriage. Right?

It is one thing to have sharp career skills, and another to translate those skills into a marriage that is as stable or content. The vast asteroid belt is located between Jupiter and Mars, and there are countless small bodies (asteroids) there that never made it to being a planet, a fact that we will pass over for the moment, yet the asteroid belt is wasteland of broken dreams.

JUPITER'S LIGHTNING

Astronomers are even now marveling at the immense lightning storms beneath the surface of Jupiter, the largest such storms in the entire solar system. I mention this, because Jupiter is very much also an intellectual trip, literally using the mind to control matter. It is not without meaning that the Sanskrit word for Jupiter is 'Guru', the pathfinder. Remember, aside from his role as guru or guide, Jupiter is also the lawyer, the one who handles (Saturn), and the law.

There often can be a lot of manipulating and not a little conniving, when Jupiter is invoked.

THE LAWYER: SKILLFUL MEANS

Jupiter is the career or life path, but finding that path involves using your head, and figuring out how to get around or at least work with or handle Saturn. This is the planet of skill and skillful means, and Saturn requires real skill to master. The legal profession is full of those with a pronounced or highly active Jupiter chakra. On the near side of Saturn, the Jupiter chakra leads to using the intellect to master the law and matter, lawyers and what not. On the side of the Jupiter chakra closest to Mars, we have more of the guide or guru Jupiter types, leading or guiding others. More about this further on.

To repeat myself, it is a LONG way from the Jupiter skill to the more feeling and intuitive nature of Mars. As we each journey from Jupiter to Mars, we learn to ground

our skill (our sometimes too clever minds) in directionality or meaning, that is: to mean what we say, and we learn to say things with meaning. There are many stages and stories on this Jupiter journey, and we will detail some of them in the journal entries in a later section.

MARS: THE KEY TO JUPITER

Here, we will just point out that the Key to Jupiter will always be Mars, and that the point of all our skill and directionality (Jupiter: where we are going in life) has to do with what it all means. Those who are awake and successful in the Jupiter chakra, who are no longer struggling to make a living, will always be concerned with "But, what does it all mean? What is the meaning of life?" They have achieved material (have mastered Saturn) success, but what does it mean? What's the point? This is how you will know the Jupiter chakra client.

The Jupiter client has mastered simple survival, has overcome Saturn through one career move or another, but where does one go from there? What is the point of a life of simple survival? They are now a free-floating agent, freed from Saturn's demands, but they have not found love (other than perhaps fleetingly), much less taken the plunge, tied the knot, and settled down to a marriage. The Jupiter chakra person is fascinated with what things mean, the sense of things, but they have not

followed those meanings down to where they end to where the rubber meets the road, in the sense world itself. They are not grounded. The rubber has not yet met the road.

STILL UNMARRIED

We will go into how this Jupiter-to-Mars journey might manifest later on in these articles. For right now, it is enough for you to identify that the client has a successful career, would like to find a life companion, but is as yet unmarried. This is the nature of life in the Jupiter Chakra, and is easy to determine by just asking the client.

For these Jupiter chakra clients, you want to read from the article of Mars or marriage, encouraging them to ground their thoughts and desires in experience, and to make some "sense" out of whatever they can imagine. This can be as easy or difficult as pointing out to them that all their speculation, their interest in what things mean, where things are going, the drift of things, all point to the sphere of action, to actually taking the plunge.

And the Jupiter-chakra person is invariably caught up in one form of dualism after another, always on one side of equation with some "other" or "negative" forces on the reverse side. Jupiter is always trying to resolve difference or duality, trying to find the One in the Two, trying to

make sense of it all — sense.

All thoughts, to the extent that they have any meaning at all, are only as useful as the sense they make, and "sense" has always to be an experience, an experience that we each must have. Article learning is not enough. The Jupiter type must be encouraged to stop thinking so much, and to act on their feelings, and to more fully immerse themselves in life, to somehow take the plunge, and that plunge is into the realm of marriage or Mars.

CAREER PROBLEMS

If the client has some sort of career, but that career is sputtering on and off again, or is generally unstable, you may want to look to their Mars, for the Mars chakra is what drives Jupiter.

Mars is the meaning and movement or drive of thought, what it all means, where it points to. And finally, all thought points to experience, to action. The meaning of any thought is the "sense" it makes, and thus all thoughts end in experience or action, the sense world. Mars is the planet of action, movement, ambition, drive, urges, urging, anything that motivates us to the sphere of action. Mars drives us to act and experience life. Mars propels us through Jupiter's course. It keeps the career moving along.

The experience of life itself is what life means; that

experience is its own meaning, and this, traditionally, is Earth or the Heart Chakra, the end of all meaning or directionality. It all points to experiencing, the Earth chakra. We will get to that soon.

IDENTIFYING THE MARS CHAKRA

Identifying whether a client is actively initiated in the Mars chakra is as easy as determining whether or not they are (more or less) happily married, that is: committed. That is the simple test.

The Mars chakra is all about union or yoga (resolving duality), and the most common form of yoga practiced in the world today is that of marriage, the joining of two persons in one life. A better way of saying this would be the realization that the two are already and always have been one. The Mars chakra is another major initiation, one involving simple acceptance, saying "I do," which is what marriage is all about, the recognizing the "one" in the two persons, a common bond.

We do not have to be married to a physical partner. One can be married to one's work in the world, to whomever or whatever. The point is that in marriage, there is somehow the realization and acceptance of another person or the world, just as they are or it is — treating another like you would treat yourself. The two (duality) is seen as one, as always already being one.

In fact, after the first Saturn return, we all are, in effect, married to life, whether we know it or not. We must accept or embrace our personal situation. At some point, soon after 30 years of age, anyone who has not said "I do" to life is living an imaginary separateness, is just unrealistic.

THE MOST COMMON FORM OF YOGA

The dualities that we had previously seen and struggled against in our self, and in the world, are, after Saturn returns, somehow now seen as one; the two become one. Where before there were two, man and woman, you against the world, etc., that is seen through to the unity uniting both, the two become one. In fact, the two have always already been one; we just didn't know it. Being married, spiritually, is when we realize that, when the concept of duality is seen through. As Parmenides said: "Being alone is" or "Being all-one is."

Once we have accepted a partner, whether in the form of a person or the world itself, we enter into union or yoga, a relationship that gradually works through dualism in all its forms, resolving differences into the unity that embraces them. In other words, experience in the Mars chakra gradually stills the rush and roar of the mind, solving its dualities, reducing at last, over time, dualities to stillness.

The Mars chakra follows all direction or meaning to the

sense it makes, and this is finally an experience in itself.

IDENTIFYING THE EARTH CHAKRA

We might think that all of us, by virtue of having been born on Earth, are automatically masters of the Earth chakra, but we would be wrong. In esoteric astrology, Earth is not something we are given by virtue of our birth, but rather something we aspire to, and earn. In fact, masters of the Earth or Heart Chakra are few and far between. Moreover, anyone skilled in this chakra does not normally need astrology of any kind, and will probably not seek it out. We should seek them out.

THE EARTH OR HEART CHAKRA

Let's review what it takes to reach the Earth chakra. It means mastery of Saturn, and that means a successful career, one that can be maintained, and is under our control. That is the Jupiter chakra. In addition, it means a successful marriage of some kind, the Mars chakra, and a thorough knowledge of meaning and emotions, an acceptance and resolution of any and all dualisms, which is what would bring someone to the brink of the Earth chakra.

The Earth chakra is pretty much the master of the external world, not in some arrogant or aggressive sense, but in a peaceful and confident sense. As I mentioned, these initiates don't, for the most part, seek

counsel, because they have no need for it. They are their own counsel.

Although we might be quick to point out that spiritual adepts (rinpoches, Zen masters, enlightened priests, and so on) would qualify, but so would masters of any trade or station in life, anywhere we find someone who is confident, content, and present.

THE CHAKRAS INNER TO EARTH

There are two chakras or planets interior to Earth (aside from the Sun itself), and they are Venus and Mercury.

The inner chakras, those inside the orbit of Earth, are just that, inner, ones that we won't find by looking in the outside world as we know it. They represent something interior to Earth, inner qualities that perhaps we can only aspire to and dimly sense.

IDENTIFYING THE VENUS CHAKRA

The first of these would be the Venus chakra, that of love and compassion. Poets and bards, throughout the long traditions of song and literature, have always written that the key to life here on Earth is love and compassion. Venus is that love.

How appropriate, for Venus is the next interior planet to Earth and it has always been associated with love and

compassion. Venus is the key to Earth.

IDENTIFYING THE MERCURY CHAKRA

Mercury is the other inner chakra, one that we may perhaps visit on the best days of our lives, but probably not where we live or get to spend much of our time.

Mercury (the Sanskrit word is "Buddha") is awareness itself, the light in our eyes that we see shining! Again, like Venus, Mercury is an inner quality we all have, and reach for. We don't live there in any real sense.

And the Sun chakra is that about which nothing can be said. I shall be foolish enough to say something, but the Sun (monad) is, pretty much by definition, beyond description or words.

We will go into these inner planets in more detail later on, but for now let's examine the life experience for the chakras Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and Earth.

THE SATURN CHAKRA

Experience under Satan's Seal (The Seal of Saturn) The Saturn Chakra

In the counseling experience, it is important to be able to recognize if a client is living mostly only in the Saturn chakra or realm. One obvious clue is if they have no

career going for them, no way or path through Saturn, and are thus unable to make a living and simply support themselves. But there are psychological correlates as well. Here is some prose from my journal from the 1960s that should make the Saturn experience more clear:

"The psychological experience under Saturn or time is to know only total fear for our life. The external world sulks, looms ominous, and threatens disaster and accidents at every street's crossing. We are wrapped in the rush of time, tearing at hour's hearts. Every single thing, every outer edge and hard person, only serves to cause us to put off our life, to postpone real living, and sends us scurrying fast into the future, hoping, hoping, hoping ... someday, somewhere, to find the chance to be ourselves, to have the time and space to live. Living in this state of fear, we put off endlessly until tomorrow what we find just too hard to do today."

If you have ever been out of work or unable to make a living and support yourself, you have had a glimpse of what living under Saturn's seal is all about. It is about waking up at 3 AM and wondering how you are going to pay that bill. It is about panic and fear.

THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL

The Saturn experience is somewhat like the "Beautiful Soul" that the German philosopher Hegel describes in the book "Phenomenology of the Mind" so exactly :

"This soul lacks force to externalize itself... the power to make itself a thing and to endure existence. And, to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from actuality and steadfastly perseveres in a state of self-willed impotence to renounce a self which is pared away to the last point of abstraction... and to give itself substantial existence or in other words: to transform its thought into being and commit itself to absolute distinction, that between thought and being."

THE POETRY

Life under Saturn is an endless imitation and a rehearsal, boredom, and a long, long wait. The way we tell it asks a lot, and, in all our talk, we hear our own hollowness echoing back upon ourselves to inform us that we still have not begun. We are the prey of time and Satan (Saturn) as this poem only too clearly portrays.

This poem was written in what I would have to say is a masochistic state of mind, the result of having my sails set wrong, taking life in the wrong way, where our life is being taken from us, rather than our learning to take life in our stride.

INNER EAR

What will eager issue out,
And into us would enter,

So, to stare, to stuff itself,
To eat itself the center,
Of what we wait to wither in on,
After it is all.

It eats us out.
It only is,
In every inward eaten,
The echo of an endless ache,
That arches heart's hard hearing,
And open up each inner "enting,"
And enters it as out.

All of the above is just a taste as to how to use the astrological planets as related the concept "The Inner is Always the Key to the Outer." This we will go into great detail with in the following sections.

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

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

