

Spirit Grooves Archive

Dharma Writings — Book Four 2026

Articles 301–400

By Michael Erlewine

SpiritGrooves.net



Table of Contents

(Right-click below and choose "Update Field" if the list doesn't appear yet, or press Ctrl+A then F9 in Word.)

- My Dharma History 6**
- Toward "Recognition" 9**
- The Good in Letting Go 16**
- The Nature of the Mind 17**
- The Law of Urgency 23**
- The Flip Side 28**
- Bodhicitta..... 31**
- Liberation Without Meditation 33**
- Problems 35**
- The Four Kayas 38**
- The Spinning Wheel 40**
- The Phenomenologist..... 41**
- Kneading the Mind 43**
- Important..... 45**
- Lucid Dreaming 47**
- Making Dharma Sense 49**
- Visionary 51**
- Dharma Chart, Karma Chart 54**
- Interest in Interest..... 60**
- Some Days Are Just Like This..... 62**
- Inner vs Outer 65**
- Dharma Boot Camp 67**
- Occupied 69**
- Denying the Will 72**
- "I Like to Watch TV 76**
- Training the Mind 78**
- Row, Row, Row Your Boat..... 80**

Astrological Empowerment.....	82
Insight Meditation	85
Turning the Wheel of the Dharma	87
Astrology and Treasure Finders	89
Terma, Some Background	94
A Victim of Our Choices	101
The Crystal Cave of Guru Rinpoche -- A Story.....	104
An Offering.....	111
The Other Side of Sleep	113
Samye Monastery and Chim-Pik (Guru Rinpoche caves)	115
Compared to What?	123
Our Sister Dharma Center	125
We Arrive in Kathmandu	126
The Creative Urge	133
Writing in Water	135
"Much Ado About Nothing"	137
The Well of the Present Moment.....	144
The Cybernetics of Samsara	147
Visiting Tibet's Golden Child.....	151
Dharma in Ann Arbor.....	157
Karma Pays It Forward	162
StarTypes: Life-Path Partners.....	165
The Focu Point of It All	168
Watching TV.....	170
Undoing Effort	173
Dakini	175
Elision in Mind	176
Connate: Arising Together.....	179
Losing Touch	181
KOR-WA: Running in Circles	183
Wisdom Insight	185
Shamata: Tranquility Meditation	188

Doing and Done	190
"I Am My Own Grandpa"	196
Behind the Beyond	201
The Black Box	203
When Spirit Matters	205
Cycles, Circles, Centers, and Criculation	208
Whole-Chart Aspect Patterns	216
The Pre-Hippies	218
The Turning Point	220
Six Degrees of Contact with the Karmapa	223
The Wild Horse of the Mind	227
Throngdrol: Liberation Through Seeing	230
True Grit	232
Wu-Tai-Shan: The Birth of Astrology	234
The Vision of the Eclipse	242
Are We the Unborn?	247
Gilding the Lily	249
The End of Expectancy	251
A Puppet on a String	253
Relationship Charts: Part Two	255
Complete Immersion	259
The Flame of Becoming	260
Life is but a Dream"	263
Weaving Samsara	265
"What a Tangled Web We Weave"	267
In For a Nickel, In For a Dime	269
Khenpo Gangshar Wangpo	270
Casting Spring	274
Rinpoche's Remarks on Michael's Stroke	276
Seamless	279
Resting in the Nature	281
The Circus and the Sideshow	285

Throwing Waves Back in the Ocean 287

The Alchemy of Reaction..... 289

Inside Boredom..... 292

Appearances Appearing 295

Driving the Mind 297

One Instant at a Time 298

One Taste 300

Words of Advice..... 302

Falling Off My High Horse..... 303

My Dharma History

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ab686b53-d956-4236-8cfe-ae22e0871b56_2048x1536.jpeg

My interest in dharma and its practice goes back to the late 1950s when young adults like myself stayed up all night, sitting around together, smoking cigarettes and drinking bad instant coffee with powdered creamer, talking about European movies (Ingmar Bergman) and topics like Zen Buddhism.

Personally, I was in love with the films of Akira Kurosawa and probably watched every film he ever made. Kurosawa set the bar for direct action with a sense of humor that has remained with me ever since.

How I took that early dharma experience and stretched it into the dharma as it is for me today is a long story. I will attempt to give a brief account, but even that is a bit epic. They speak of how it takes the dharma something like 300 years to come into a country. On my personal scale, dharma took a very long time to come into me. Here is a synopsis.

Both the various Vajrayana dharma practices and the Rinzai Zen practices share a culminating or turning point in their practices with what is called Recognition in Vajrayana and the equivalent Kensho in Rinzai Zen.

In both cases, there is a transformation from relative (dualistic) practice to absolute (non-dual) practice, with Recognition and Kensho serving as the bridge between the two, dualistic and non-dualistic.

And just to clarify, all the dualistic practices have subjects and objects, typical and integral in Samsara, while with the non-dualistic practices, there is but one continuum, with no subject and no object, just full immersion.

And so, while the various dharma preliminaries (Common Preliminaries, Extraordinary Preliminaries, Lojong, and Special Preliminaries) are dualistic in nature, when those dualistic practices collapse, non-dualistic immersion arises. An example of what non-dualistic dharma practices like Mahamudra and Dzogchen are like is the following quote by the poet Sir. Edwin Arnold:

“The dewdrop slips into the shining sea”

This turning point or bridge from the dualistic practices to the non-dualistic practices marks a profound change. This transformation has certain qualities that need to be understood.

The non-dualistic practices like Mahamudra and Dzogchen entail what is called realization, both Recognition and Kensho.

And any realization we have is a one way trip, meaning once we realize something, we can't unrealize it. Realization is permanent. For example.

If we realize that turning the switch on a lamp turns it on or off, that realization stays with us. However, realization in the world of dharma practices is a little bit more complicated but just as permanent.

In fact, Recognition as to the nature of the mind on our part is a marked realization, something we can't undo or take back. And for most of us that realization does not come easily.

By the same token, Recognition of the mind's nature is a major step in the deconstruction of Samsara, this cyclic world of ups and downs we live in, and affects the ceasing or slowing down of the accumulation of karma.

While practicing the dualistic dharma preliminaries is something we can do together and easily talk about, once we reach the point of Recognition, we find that we know very little about what the experience of the non-dual practices are about. With all dharma practices, there is understanding, experiencing, and realization. Each of those follow one another in order.

We can hear about and read dharma texts until we have some understanding of what they entail. Yet conceptual understanding is far and away from actually experiencing those concepts in the flesh, so to speak. Nevertheless, the experiencing has to take place. And finally comes realization, and it is important to understand that in order to have full realization we first have to authentic bodily experience of what our conceptual understanding could only point at.

And, as mentioned, realization first requires a total and immersive experience. And until we understand conceptually and achieve the living experience of those concepts, we cannot have realization. Realization requires actual experience, and not just conceptual understanding.

What we find if we look around are many people with ideas and concepts about dharma and what it means, yet fewer folks who have a living authentic experience of those concepts, and still fewer yet are those who realize or are aware of what they are experiencing as they experience it.

OK, I feel we have some of the chess pieces for this topic on the table at this point, so let's move them around a bit.

Recognition and Kensho apparently are very difficult to realize, otherwise we would all have done this a long time ago, and the rinpoches would add, many lifetimes ago. And my particular rinpoche even said that we, you and I, are the stragglers who never realized the nature of the mind throughout all this time and innumerable lifetimes. So, it's not a slam dunk, this Recognition as to the nature of the mind that we all have.

My particular Rinpoche spoke to me of having introduced me to the nature of the mind many times. And he emphasized the need to become familiar with our own mind, and quite energetically at that. It took me years, so that rinpoches, or even the Buddha himself, could not just touch us on the forehead and we would be enlightened.

By definition, dharma is a do-it-yourself project, something each one of us has to do when and if we get around to it in this hectic samsaric world and its distractions. In other words, we each have to turn the wheel of our own dharma.

I will continue this story as I can, post by post.

[Photo by me yesterday.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Toward "Recognition"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6066a574-149a-4b4a-ae1-de8bdce8f702_2048x1536.jpeg

My teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche had given what are called the “pointing out instructions” once before at the yearly ten-day Mahamudra teachings, but try as I might, I had failed to grasp what it was that was actually being pointed out, and so my experience remained largely conceptual. I was not able to actually practice Mahamudra because I had not yet had a glimpse of the true nature of my own mind, which, as mentioned, is a prerequisite (by definition) for Mahamudra practice.

Then at the ten-day Mahamudra teachings at KTD Monastery in 2005, while studying a text by Karma Chagme Rinpoche called “The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen,” Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche again gave the pith instructions, what are called the “pointing-out” instructions, the instructions by and through which a receptive student may be able to recognize (or glimpse) the true nature of the mind. These instructions were part of the actual text by Karma Chagme Rinpoche, which my teacher was presenting and commenting on.

Analytical Meditation

Of course, I had heard all the words before. I had been repeatedly exposed to what is called the Analytical Tradition, the analysis of the Pandita, which is often introduced by asking the student to actually look at his or her own mind and answer simple questions like “Is the mind the color red?” or “Is the mind the color blue?” This kind of talk had always been a super yawn for me, because it was obvious to me that the mind was not red or blue. What was this all I about? I could never understand why something as profound as Buddhism could resort to such simple questions.

So, I had heard this kind of presentation for years and in many formats, and I always told myself privately that ‘this’ particular kind of teaching was probably not for me. Either I didn’t get it at all or it was too easy. I couldn’t tell, but I knew the mind was not the color red or blue. Perhaps some academic pundits delight in answering such questions, but it was the best I could do to politely ignore the temptation to be condescending of this approach. Is the mind red? Of course it is not red. The mind is not red or any other color! I not-so-

patiently waited until this section was over, so that we could hopefully get to some of the good stuff, something that would actually grab me.

But in Rinpoche's presentation I WAS intrigued to learn that in Tibet, when this approach was presented, monks would be given a question such as "Is the mind red?" and then asked to go off and think about it for three entire days and nights, then come back and give their answers, after which they would be given a similar question, but perhaps with the color 'green', and this would go on for something like three months. Hmmm.

Hearing this troubled me, for monks (not to mention rinpoches) are not foolish people. What on earth was this all about I wondered, this asking: what color is the mind?

And this is no secret teaching; this same analytical approach has been taught all over India for centuries. Anyway, I stopped trying to wait this section out and began to pay more attention to what Rinpoche was presenting. It took a while, but my take-away from all of this questioning stuff was that rinpoche was asking us to actually stop thinking conceptually about this and simply go and look at our mind and see for ourselves if it was red or green or whatever the question was. And that very slowly began to sink in.

Looking At the Mind

I meant no disrespect, but I had never before followed Rinpoche's request to actually look at the mind to see if it was red or blue because I felt the question made no sense to me. Yet I was also starting to pick up on the fact that Rinpoche was asking us to get off our mental duffs and actually make an effort to look at and search our own mind, right there on the spot.

I had of course always assumed I already knew my own mind. After all, I was a dharma practitioner and it was 'my' mind, but now I was hearing something just a little different. Perhaps my habitual familiarity with my mind had not included actually looking at the mind itself, although I automatically assumed I had already done that long ago, back when I first learned to meditate.

And so, very slowly at first (and not without some struggle), I began to make efforts to stop looking outward at what was going on around me and instead turned and tried to look inward at the mind itself. This was not easy.

Of course, I was already familiar with the little chatter-box inside my head, whoever it is that plans out my day for me, saying things to me like, "It is almost time for lunch" or "You have a dentist appointment tomorrow," and so on. I believe it's called the Self. Whoever that inner person is, it is not really me, and I didn't like him or 'it' very much. It is annoying and way too much of

a nag. And it yammers on ceaselessly. So, I began to at least differentiate myself from that uptight narrator in my head. That talking voice was no friend of mine, just not my kind of people.

And Rinpoche was asking that we look at whoever (or whatever) it is inside of us that is looking at all the stuff happening outside in the world. I guess that would be “Me, Myself, and I.” Now, this was a whole lot more difficult than just putting some distance between me and my internal narrator. When I tried to look at “who” in there was doing the looking at the outside, it or “I” just would not hold still. It was like those little scotty-dog magnets that repel one another I used to have as a kid. Every time I try to look at the ‘looker’, the whole thing would flip around. It was very tiring to even try. You can try it right now for yourselves: just look at who is reading this page. Try and find the ‘who’. I believe I wrote this poem back then and presented it to Rinpoche and our sangha at a question & answer session.

LOOKING AT ‘LOOKING AT’

I’m looking at “looking at.”

I’m not looking at what “looking at” is looking at.

No, I’m just looking at “looking at.”

That is: I’m Trying to.

You see: When I’m looking at “looking at,”

It’s not “looking at” I’m looking at,

Because:

What I’m looking at is also doing the looking at.

So:

Am I “looking at” or the looking at?

What was happening through all of this was that I was very gradually beginning to exercise ‘mind muscles’ that (to my knowledge) had never been exercised before in my life. And they were soon the equivalent of very sore or very stiff muscles at that - hard to move around. I had never done this kind of thing before and it amounted to giving myself a mental Charlie Horse. It cramped up my mind, and was very awkward, but it ‘was’ a new experience.

The whole thing was a little like trying to erect a large circus tent in the middle of my mind, struggling to push up massive tent poles to stretch and raise the canvas until I had some mental room to just look around in there. And it was

hard work, for these mental muscles had perhaps never been exercised before.

And as silly as it seemed to me, I even began looking to see if my mind actually was red or some other color, whether my mind was located in my head, my heart, or my belly, and so on. Of course, the answers were all negatives, just as I had always thought, but in the process I was actually up and walking around in there, getting to know the place a bit. And so, it went. Was that what Rinpoche wanted us to do?

Where before I had kind of mentally slept through this kind of questioning, now I was at least going through the motions – getting some exercise. I was also following the instructions from my teacher, which I had so conveniently ignored up to that point because I thought these questions went without asking. Instead, I was asking them again, doing what Rinpoche was requesting us to do. And that little bit of exercise began to open doors for me.

It went on like this for days, as Rinpoche very carefully led us into actually looking at our minds. And I was finally following along. These simple exercises, along with the fact that apparently by this time I had done enough practice over the years or somehow managed to accumulate enough merit (or whatever it was that I had needed) so that I actually was able to recognize or get the ideas as to the true nature of my mind. And it was not what I had expected. There was no lightning bolt, more like an exclamation point! Needless to say, it was nothing like I had led myself to believe all these years.

Of course, my expectations were whatever I had managed to distill from books and the teachings, mixed with the tales of other practitioners and then sealed with my personal take on things, in other words: a jumble. Like most of us learning this, my preconceptions had managed to thoroughly cloud and obscure an otherwise cloudless sky. Here it is worthwhile to backtrack and take a closer look at what I had expected.

THE POINTING-OUT INSTRUCTIONS

It is said in the Mahamudra teachings that the main and perhaps only function of the guru is to point out to the student the true nature of the mind. After that it is up to the student. “The Nature of the Mind,” this phrase immediately raises expectations reminiscent of the realm of Zen koan dramas. One thing I never had managed to understand is that recognizing the nature of the mind is not the same as enlightenment (whatever that is), so let’s start there, and this is important:

What is meant by the phrase “recognizing the nature of the mind” as I understand it is more like being able to finally see the actual problem I was

having with meditation all along, like: I had no idea what this type of meditation was, and that was embarrassing to even think about.

And, having some glimpse of at least what recognition might be, I then saw that the nature of the mind is not something beyond my current reach (as I had always implicitly assumed), but rather more like very simply seeing how the mind actually worked, seeing that the mind (my mind) was in fact quite ‘workable,’ as in: “Hey, I can do this!” I finally could see a little into how I might work it. And being a clever guy, this was a very practical revelation. So, this is what seeing the true nature of the mind is all about for me, a new take on practice, not some euphoric rush of bliss.

Perhaps the most important result of this conceptual recognition is that the responsibility for getting enlightened immediately switched from books, texts, and my teacher to me and my practice. What I saw or recognized made “me” responsible, and only me. I had involuntarily responded at last, taken a spiritual breath! That had never happened before. I was always looking for someone or something on the outside strong enough to affect me and somehow enlighten me. It doesn’t come from outside!

As obvious as it sounds now, I could see that was not about to ever happen, and I could now see why. Only I could enlighten myself. It was my job, not someone else’s. In pointing out the nature of the mind to me, and my getting the gist of it, Rinpoche had completed his responsibility to me and succeeded in making me fully responsible for the first time. I responded! I took a breath! Yet with that responsibility also came the insight into how this mind training business could or should be done.

When I originally read in the classic texts about “seeing the nature of the mind,” I assumed and expected some grand fireworks-like display and that I would be immediately transported into some transcendental state of illumination. You know: “enlightenment” or something like it, whatever I had imagined all these years.

Expectations are seldom ever our friend and almost always obscure the actual path and the reality. It might be better to say the teacher points out the nature of ‘how’ the mind works rather than simply say the teacher points out “the nature of the mind.” The ‘nature of the mind’ seems so mysterious, and the actuality is anything but that. In my case, the less that is left to the imagination, the better. My imagination has filled me with preconceptions and impossible expectations all my life.

In other words, at least in my recognition, the ‘Aha!’ experience was not “Aha!, this is finally some enlightenment,” but rather a simple: “Aha! I get it

now. So, this is how the mind works; even a beginner like me can do that! This is actually workable, something I can actually do.”

It is often cited in the Buddhist teachings that eons of darkness can be ended by the lighting of a single match. It is remarkable how in an instant my years of expectation vanished and were replaced by something simply practical that finally made real sense to me. How absolutely encouraging!

The “pointing out” instructions didn’t in any way mark the end of my practice and my graduation to some higher “bodhisattva-like” level (like I had always wondered or imagined), but rather to the end of my imitating what it is I thought practice was supposed to be, and the very beginning of actual useful practice. Finally, I got the general idea of how to work with my mind and understood in a flash that I had been mistaken about this all of my dharma life, like perhaps 30+ years!!!

For the first time I saw simply how the mind works and that there was no reason that I (just as I am, warts and all) could not just do it. And that WAS a new experience, to somehow be at the same level with reality – to see it clearly. It was up to me to figure out just how to work with this new information and to put the time in. Perhaps most important of all, I suddenly had the enthusiasm and energy to make it work that I had been missing. No more boredom and laziness when it came to practice.

And while the fact was less exotic than what I had mistakenly expected, it was perhaps (if my opinion counts) the first tangible result of many years of practice, and it was not just a passing experience, but a simple realization as to what had to happen next, like: when you realize how something works, you just get it. You don’t forget, because it is not a simple experience, but a realization. That quite ordinary insight was a form of recognition, and it was permanent.

In reality, for me this was a huge result after about 31 years of meditation of the “sounds-like-this” variety, years during which I sincerely went through the motions, but with little result that I could see. I had been rubbing the sticks and getting some smoke but no fire. Suddenly, there was some heat and also fire. While not what I had expected, this was what I had always dreamed about having happen: visible progress.

[Photography by me of the Mighty Muskegon river as take from the trestle bridge on the ‘Rails to Trails’ section at North-End Park in Big Rapids, Michigan.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

The Good in Letting Go

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0150e6f9-7bcb-43bc-8f7d-add38e511ae3_1024x1024.jpeg

One thing about letting go of our attachments is that what remains is the pure nature of the mind. Disentangling ourselves from our attachments can be a painful process, like each time I end up in the hospital for an electrocardiogram, with my chest covered with sticky patches (electrodes), when the electrocardiogram is done, getting those sticky electrodes off my chest is a very painful process because they pull at hairs.

In a similar way, detaching ourselves from our attachments, one by one or all at once, is often painful, yet the good news is that what remains is an ever-purer experience of the actual nature of the mind.

Like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, when all the sticks are removed until what remains is a single stick or nothing at all.

Well, with Insight Meditation, that ‘nothing’ is something, absolute immersion in the nature of the mind and the clarity that comes with it.

As we pick over the carcass of the Self’s attachments, removing one attachment at a time, we end up with an enhanced ability to rest in the Nature of the Mind, because the mind’s nature is increasingly exposed.

My root lama, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche taught:

“The mind not looking at itself is the single cause of beginningless Samsara.”

Samsara by definition is just that, the mind distracted and thus not looking at itself. By removing our attachments, we deconstruct Samsara (and the Self) and increasingly can rest in the nature of the mind.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

The Nature of the Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c1b4b9dc-c390-454a-ae44-0bec829d4b0e_1024x1024.jpeg

Let's be clear, there is a marked difference between what in dharma is called 'Recognition', meaning recognition of the actual nature of this mind and what is required for actually doing what is called Mahamudra meditation. For one, Mahamudra is not a form of meditation, but rather a type of non-meditation.

And Mahamudra, at least of the Karma Kagyu Lineage variety, is a combination of two types of meditation, Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) and Vipassana (Insight Meditation). And while they are distinct from one another, at the same time they are connate, kind of joined at the hip, and don't occur in Mahamudra except with one another, two ends of the same stick.

And while we need to achieve Recognition as to the true nature of the mind, so that we can work the mind at all, working with the mind, at least in Mahamudra practice, always leads to having both Shamata and Vipassana front and center.

And while most of us work away at establishing Shamata (Tranquility Meditation), Vipassana or Insight Meditation that befits Mahamudra is not so easy. Shamata is dualistic, meaning we work with it in our normal Samsaric subject and object manner, Vipassana (Insight Meditation), being non-dual (no subject or object) requires full immersion on our part, and we are not to used to complete immersion at all. We have never achieved that, or at least we have no realization or awareness that we have.

And the conceptual understanding of Insight Meditation, mentally, is beyond prolific. It is everywhere, yet nowhere when it comes to the actual experience.

Certainly, at that time, in my 50 or so years of learning to practice dharma, I never had a non-dual, full-immersion, experience that I was aware of or retained any memory of.

And so, one might ask, what was I doing about learning the full immersion of Insight Meditation, and the answer would be, not much. And this is because I knew next to nothing about how to precipitate it. However, I had read about everything one could read and understand conceptually about Insight

Meditation, short of actually experiencing it. I never had the experience, just the words about it.

Of course, I plowed through seemingly endless books and pith texts, handling the words and conceptions as to what Insight Meditation is, all of what the books say.

In fact, I had pushed the whole mess of words and texts for future considerations, much like when swimming, our own motion and waves can push an innertube ahead of us, and just out of reach. That's how it was for me.

I was, at best, confused by it all, and as mentioned, kind of kept it at arm's length because I had never experienced it in the flesh, and was tired of beating my head against a wall. For me it seemed to be like one of those proverbial ring-pass-not that I could not get behind me.

Looking back today, and hindsight is easy, I seems to me that I has too distracted by my Samsara haunts, busy with doing not much of anything, and too much in my head to reach the ground and experience something as viscous as the non-dual Insight Meditation.

I knew Insight Meditation was out there, but where was the door to it? And, as mentioned, I had read about everything possible on the topic and all of that added up to no actual experience.

Sometimes our horse is just too high to reach the ground, and it took a perfect dharma storm to get my absolute attention and ground me in life itself enough to invoked Insight Meditation.

In late May of 2008, while attending an astrology conference in Denver, Colorado (along with 1,500 other astrologers), the head of the NBC outfit I was working for, who was also at the conference, told me that I no longer would have a job with them after June. In an attempt to pare down expenses, NBC laid off a lot of folks, and I happened to be one of them.

Of course, this was a real shock to me since I had been working so hard at it, and the financial ramifications simply meant that I would soon have no income whatsoever. At almost 67 years of age at the time, finding a job was probably not too easy, even though I had a lot of skills and experience, plus a good reputation. But it went beyond that for me. It was one of those corners life offers us that we somehow just have to get around.

"I got stones in my passway,

And my road seems dark as night.

I got stones in my passway.”

-- Robert Johnson

And then fate really showed its kind face. It turned out that I had to leave the astrology conference a few days early when I found out that His Holiness the 17th Karmapa was suddenly making his first visit to the United States and to his main seat in this country, our monastery, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery (KTD) in the mountains above Woodstock, New York.

I could not miss that event and, as it turned out, I was needed and could be useful as part of a three-man video team to film the event and personally was able to film some other events where they didn't really want much of anyone present. I had been around KTD so long that I was pretty much some kind of fixture there anyway.

I would love to tell readers about that visit of His Holiness, but that would be a whole other story, but the gist of it was that seeing his holiness was a big shot in the arm for me in the depressed state I was in after losing my job. I also took hundreds of still photos of the event and after I got home, within a few weeks, I had made a 200-page coffee-table sized book of the visit of His Holiness which I made available for the close sangha. Here is that book for those who want to see the photos.

www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/KarmapaKTD_2008.pdf

The book was inspired, not so much by me as a photographer, as by the fact that all of the people I was photographing had just been with His Holiness and were shining with happiness and light that is clearly obvious in the photographs.

The time with His Holiness certainly helped to put the fact that I no longer had a job into perspective, but to suddenly be without a paycheck was a shock, and it sure went through my system like a lightning.

Where before I was working long hours at my job, suddenly I had all kinds of time on my hands – a really big gap of time in my life. Talking about popping out of what you were focused in (the so-called gap in Mahamudra practice), well, this was a really shocking gap, and I popped out big time and here is how I was able to actually look at and use that gap:

When I say, “perfect storm”, I should detail that so we both are on the same page. I had just lost my job, any way to make a living and support my family of a wife, four kids, and two dogs. If nothing else, I had always been a good provider and probably was more sensitive because I had never finished high school and had no credentials to back me up as for getting a new job.

All of my life, I could just 'hack it', so to speak. That's how I made my way through life, by my wits, some intelligence, and sheer output. Suddenly that was all cut off and shut down. I was 67 and no longer prime material, although my history as an entrepreneur was solid.

All that aside, the fact of business, as they say, was that I was really down in the dumps, something that I had never experienced to this degree, not ever.

I didn't feel like doing anything at all, not looking for another job, not behaving, and not even doing my daily dharma practice. My whole being was in protest of my situation. I didn't even like facing my family. Instead, I found myself going out into nature, not with my wife, not with my kids, and not even with my dog.

I didn't think of it this way at the time, but I found myself just alone out in the woods, fields, and streams with a camera and lens. I had to have some excuse to be out like that, and photography fit perfectly.

If you asked what I thought I was doing, I didn't think anything about anything. I just found myself crawling around on my belly in the wet grass with a camera and watching the sun come up.

And I did this not for a day or so, but from late May until the snow and cold drove me inside in November. Up till then, I had not watched the sun come up for as long as I could remember, and yet here I was doing it for some six months straight. What was that all about?

Obviously, something was going on with me that I didn't even care to figure out. I was just doing it. Period. And I could care less about what anyone thought of it.

And to my utter amazement, I found myself reaching for stability and comfort but skipping right past my habitual dharma practice entirely and taking consolation directly in Mother Nature. My cushion and small shrine just sat there, bowls unfilled, completely bypassed in the moment and eventually for months.

What it was that was able to absorb me, which is what it used to be, was my original love of and comfort in the natural world that had been embedded in me since I was just a child. That was what was familiar to me most in the world.

Of course, dharma and my practice of it had been my preoccupation for many decades. No doubt. But when shit hit the fan, so to speak, I reverted to something I had not even paid much attention to since I was younger, Mother Nature.

Yet, that is what I most trusted and sought out, instinctively, without even thinking about it. I just went there and plopped myself down in nature's arms.

As to why I had not been doing this all along with nature, all these decades took me a while to realize. The answer was that nature herself had been so influential in my youth, yet nature never blinks. The pain of the directness of nature, the simple yet hard truth of impermanence was something I was steeped in as a child but had gently set aside as I grew older.

Yet, right then, the direct and hard truth that nature speaks was right in line with the hard truth I was experiencing after having lost my job and livelihood. I felt right at home and went directly out into nature and stayed there for some six months. Nature's hard truths and my hard truth resonated and felt like home, so there I was, kind of going home again.

Yet, in all that hard truth, certainly I was brought down from any high horse I had been on, tore down and now level with the ground. And, apparently, the grounding, although against my wishes, was exactly what I needed to introduce me to Insight Meditation full-fledged. That's why I called those circumstances the perfect storm.

I had been wrenched out of my groove, brought level to the ground and held there. And that visceral experience apparently was what I needed to take the plunge from the dualism I had known all my life until that moment and fuse all that together in the full immersion necessary to invoke Insight Meditation in me, because there it was.

One moment I was crawling through the wet grass as the sun came out, with my camera and fine lens looking at a tiny critter or small world. One moment I was looking at the object of my photography, seeing that small world, and the next I was seeing the Seeing itself, and as I like to say:

"The dewdrop slipped into the shining sea"

And that experience was not just fresh or pristine, it swallowed me up as the dewdrop slipped into the shining sea, and for the first time in my life I was all one with the moment, with both subject, object, and it was the 'Seeing' that I rested in.

That experience was unforgettable, a realization that could not be reversed, just I repeated time and again. And that is what I did and was why I was out there in the morning dew as the sun came up for six months straight. Because when I went home my mind was just ordinary again. If I wanted Insight Meditation, I had to go out in nature, peer through my camera and lens, and slip into the Seeing itself, where I was without any of the me, myself, and I.

To be continued.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Law of Urgency

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f44ed983-4c32-4fdb-b309-c93809296b25_1700x2200.jpeg

Here is the current helio chart, which shows how the nine planets are roughly equidistant from one another, with one larger gap in the direction of Libra. “Mind the Gaps” is what I am suggesting, something many of us have ignored.

This astrology technique does not work on the traditional geocentric astrology chart as well because the planets in the Earth-centered chart (geo) are not bound to the Sun by gravity as they are in a heliocentric chart. In the helio chart, if the planets are equally distributed around the Sun like, say, in a rough pentagram, all of the planets being bound to the Sun by gravity, this is an indication of inner balance and stability.

If there are, instead, large gaps or open spaces in your helio (or geo) chart, than this suggests areas where we will fill in, following the old slogan “We become what we want... or lack.” What we lack fascinates us and we try to fill that void with our sense of urgency.

In a nutshell, look at large gaps or space between planets, because they are an area that will require constant attention and energy spent. They are urgency portals. Those areas where we want or lack, the open spaces, we try to fill in. We try to “become ...” them, so to speak. Another way to put this is that empty spaces point to where we urgently try to gain experience and they kind of eat up our life. We have nothing, no planets there, but like a moth to a flame, we still attempt to fill that void.

So, if the spaces are evenly spaced and distributed, like a metal ring on a steel pole, if it is level, the ring slides, but if it is not level, but angled, it will stick. Empty space between planets in a chart, if that space is large or uneven, indicates a sense of urgency we will have to experience, to fill in the gap so to speak.

We all have the exact same number of planets in our astrological charts. The only difference is how they are separated in space one from the other. Those empty spaces or gaps add up and detract depending on the spacing.

And here I am talking about taking a look at your heliocentric chart because this spacing technique does not work ‘as well’ on the traditional geocentric

chart but the geo chart also should be looked at. Both geo and helio charts should be examined to see what large spaces exist, because that's where the 'urgency' to fill voids is found.

The roiling sea of the mind, is urgently driven by large spatial gaps. What we want or lack is like those great empty spaces where we will urgently attempt to fill in the blanks. This is as opposed to any sort of balance of planets distributing this space equally around the chart. A grand trine or grand cross would result with equal distribution. It is the large gaps or holes in chart space that suck up our energy, where we urgently try to fill in the gaps and get experience, where we are out of balance.

Now, let's talk about the geocentric and heliocentric natal charts because they are different and have different uses.

In the heliocentric chart the planets are bound to the Sun, the center of our solar system, by direct gravity. This is not true of the traditional geocentric natal chart only because that geocentric view is a snapshot taken from Earth of the entire solar system with the Sun as center, yet as we know, everything does not revolve around Earth. The Earth and all the other bodies revolve around the Sun. And the Moon orbits the Earth and is part of the Earth system. Here is a little historical reminder:

Some 500 years ago or so, astrologers and astronomers were the same profession. Astronomy kept track of what was happening in the heavens and Astrology (essentially cultural astronomy) did its best to tell us what all these astronomical events meant. Astrologers still do this.

However, Copernicus, back then, pointed out to the world that everything does not revolve around us, the Earth. On the contrary, Earth (and all the planets) revolve around the Sun. This was big news! Earthshaking.

Yet the reaction of astronomer/astrologers back then was varied. One group accepted what Copernicus pointed out as the truth and walked away from that time with two charts in hand, the traditional geocentric natal chart and the newly discovered heliocentric natal chart. And over time this group became astronomers. It is a fact that the two oldest academic disciplines are Botany and Astronomy. That should tell us something.

On the other hand, the other group, the ones who refused to accept that Earth rotated around the Sun, and not vice-versa, marched into the future with only one chart in hand, the traditional geocentric natal chart. And today, this group is known as 'astrologers'. As a rule, astrology is not an academic discipline.

I found this out very directly when many years ago I went to a bank and tried to get a loan to buy my first programmable calculator which resulted in my starting Matrix Software.

When I got to the bank and asked for a loan of \$500, the loan advisor asked me straight out what I did for a living. Of course, I was very proud of what I did, and I said that I was an astrologer.

The loan official then reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a financial-risk chart. He then showed the chart to me and declared that Astrologers were just above Migrant Workers as far as a loan risk. Loan denied.

Well, I went back three more times and finally they gave me the loan, which of course I paid back, and with the programmable calculator (HP 97) started Matrix Software, which eventually was the first astrological software company. And I gave my programs away free to other astrologers for many months before I had to charge for these programs because I was spending all my time recording and verifying tape cassettes. There were no disk drives back then, and I was having trouble supporting my wife and two kids.

An article for "Red Herring Magazine" declared that the only software company still on the Internet that was older than Matrix Software was a little company called Microsoft.

And the first book I ever published (1975) was "The Sun Is Shining" which was a 400-year heliocentric ephemeris (1653-2050), the first accurate helio ephemeris of its kind outside of the government's "The American Ephemeris and Nautical Almanac," which was only published in single year editions. So, there you have some history. Now for the meaning, the astrology of this astronomy.

I discovered the heliocentric chart for myself when I attempted to program astronomy. I had first to calculate an accurate heliocentric chart before I could have the standard traditional geocentric astrology chart because the geo chart was a simple coordinate transformation, once you had calculated the heliocentric.

And so, I ended up with my own heliocentric chart in my hand and, of course, I looked at it. Well, to my surprise my helio chart looked very unlike my geo chart which I had studied for years. What was I supposed to think about that? Suddenly I had two very different charts for my birth. Which one was me. Or were they both me?

It took me a while to sort this out. First, armed with all the astrological techniques I had acquired up to that point, I dove into that helio chart and started interpreting away.

However, after a while, quite a while, my little interpreting fever kind of died out. Why? Because I was noticing things about my helio chart (about me!) that I had never seen before.

Like many astrologers before me, I had mined my geo chart for information about who am I, why am I here, and what can I do in this life. That was some hard mining because what I found out is that the geo chart is not so much about who am I, as it is the circumstances and karma of this life I have to work out. Huh?

Up to that point, as an astrologer, I had bent over backward trying to extract spiritual information from my geo natal chart, when that is not what it is best at.

And the answer I came to is that the heliocentric chart is perfect for just what I most wanted to know, what is my spiritual path. where do I fit in, and what tribe or archetype do I belong to.

As it turned out, the heliocentric chart was so rich in information, that over the course of a month or so I actually transmigrated from my geo natal chart to identifying with my helio natal chart and ended up the heliocentric chart as to who I am and came to see the traditional geo natal chart as what I call my Karma Chart, the circumstances in which I faced in this life.

And the helio chart I call the Dharma Chart, because it showed me who I was, why I was in this life, and what I needed to get through it. The helio presented my archetype, the tribe, and inner group to which I naturally belong.

Once I transmigrated to the helio chart as being the fiducial, who I was, I realized that the helio chart is the mother chart and the geo the child. The helio charts our Dharma, the geo our karma.

And I believe that the difference in this modern world between astronomers and astrologers, today, is that 500 years ago, astrologers decided to not take the empowerment of the heliocentric chart. It's still not too late to have that initiation.

I have spent some 50 years exploring the heliocentric chart, the Dharma Chart. Here are some free e-books about our heliocentric archetypes.

“StarTypes: Life-Parth Partners”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/StarTypes.pdf>

“Dharma Chart / Karma Chart, Astrological empowerment in the 21 st Century”

www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf

If your are not a book reader, you can always have me walk you through your helio chart with a Zoom reading.

[The current helio chart showing roughly an equal distribution of planets at this time.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

The Flip Side

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 16, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f479e4e9-2166-4e92-8779-383bea514688_2048x1360.png

I have been practicing dharma as long as I have been studying astrology, since the late 1950s. I am 84 years old and counting.

I have spent many decades mastering astrology and am quite skilled in its exercise. With dharma, I worked just as hard or harder and can't say I have mastered it by any means, but I have given it my all.

And I get asked, every so often, what practicing dharma is all about and what it requires. This is a brief synopsis as to what dharma practice is all about.

Many years ago, my Tibetan lama, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, came to our dharma center here in Big Rapids, Michigan (Heart Center Karma Thegsum Chöling) and gave a talk on astrology. The Tibetan monks and rinpoches all use astrology and carry little astrological calendars. Rinpoche knew I was an astrologer. I worked with this rinpoche, my root lama, for 36 years. And travelled and attended 10-Day Mahamudra Intensives for 31 years, driving 1600 miles each way, enough to circle the Earth's equator more than twice.

After a fascinating teaching on astrology, Rinpoche took me aside and said to me through a translator. "Michael, astrology is one of the limbs of The Yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

He explained that astrology was one of the relative truths, designed to be useful in this world and life we are living here in what the Tibetans call Samsara. As much as I love astrology, it's similar to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, in that while astrology can improve our lives in this world of Samsara and can be useful and very helpful, helping us to improve our situation in this world we all live in. However, it will not help to prepare us for the bardos when we pass on to our rebirth. Only attention to dharma can assist in that.

There are two main forms of meditation, Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) and Vipassana (Insight Meditation), which really are connate, meaning they can arise together, are the essential components of Mahamudra practice.

An analogy of their relationship is like the threading of a very fine needle. Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) steadies the hand, while Vipassana (Insight Meditation) threads the needle. These two, stability and insight, are required for Mahamudra to function.

*****8Reality weighs in and eclipses fiction and TV, at least for me. Satisfaction is hard to find, IMO. How is that remedied?

For me there is no satisfying remedy other than what is called Insight Meditation as used in the Karma Kagyu Lineage for Mahamudra, which is a form of non-meditation. For me, dharma practice is a very detailed curriculum, with two major speedbumps.

The first challenge or speed bump is that we recognize (“Recognition”) for ourselves the actual nature of the mind we have been using all our lives, meaning we realize how the mind works and that we, warts and all, can work it just as we are. And then we actually start to work it. This is only difficult if we actually do not get our hands deep enough into our own mind so that we come to know it. It waits for that.

The second overcoming or speed bump is that we somehow manage to invoke Vipassana (Insight Meditation) and learn to rest in non-duality with full immersion. “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.”

The first mentioned is a jump-start away from our ignorance of how we can use the mind and the second, and more difficult, is the ability to rest in the present moment to the exclusion of duality, and such full immersion brings also a reduction of karma accumulation.

Anyway, that’s what has to be done. As I look around, I see dharma practitioners at least getting involved in working with their own mind. That is called ‘Recognition’. It happens.

Much more difficult, yet of even greater importance, is dissolving our dualistic habit of separating ourselves from others and everything else by the distance of conceptuality. That is the hallmark of Samsara, and because of that endless dualistic habit, learning what is called Insight Meditation is much harder to invoke.

Insight Meditation is not something we grasp with the mind as it is a complete immersion we have to achieve, if only for a moment. Recognition is as simple or difficult as becoming familiar with our own mind. This can be done. Yet, that gets us only halfway there.

What is and has been grasped has then to be let go of and that appears to be the reverse of everything we know to date. If we can rest in the nature of the

mind authentically for at least a moment and reflect on or from that, then we can repeat that moment as often as we want until it is a seamless stream of insight.

However, an here is the point, that is like looking for a needle in a haystack. We can't do that because it is NOT something to be done, but rather something to be undone. To achieve that, we have to let go, relax, and I mean let go completely, and that is something we don't know how to do and don't do easily. Apparently, from a close reading of the pith dharma teachings, that is something we have to be shown by an authentic guru.

And that's my two cents.

[Threading the needle.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Bodhicitta

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cec4b595-8aef-4618-99d9-83e943349582_1024x1024.jpeg

The Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche wrote:

“To realize the quintessential instructions of Mahamudra and the coemergence of thought and appearance, we need to recognize not only the resting mind, but also the nature of the mind.

“We need to understand what resting mind is, not only through inference but also through direct observation. And when we realize emptiness directly, we have understood the nature of phenomena.

“Therefore, in addition to achieving Shamata and arousing great Bodhichitta, we also need the Vipashyana that realizes the nature of phenomena. When we have some experience of these three qualities of Samadhi, Bodhichitta and Vipashyana, we have a fully qualified meditation.”

End of quote.

I hear the above and note that while Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) and Vipassana (Insight Meditation) are discussed with Mahamudra, not so much is said about Bodhicitta.

Exactly why this is true, I can't say. I do know how very, very important Bodhicitta is with or without Mahamudra.

There is an argument where it all comes down to Bodhicitta, understanding it and achieving it. It's not a mystery term, yet it seems less understood than many other dharma terms.

The term Bodhicitta is often translated as “Enlightened Heart,” yet something like “Compassionate Heart” says the same thing.

There are two types of Bodhicitta, “Relative Bodhicitta” and “Absolute Bodhicitta.” As beginners, we start out with “Relative Bodhicitta,” and this simply means we have the intent, a good intent, to benefit all sentient beings. We mean it and we mean well. And this Relative Bodhicitta and its good intent is something we avow. And so, what then is Absolute Bodhicitta?

While we can avow our good intent with Relative Bodhicitta, we can't just turn on or jump start "Absolute Bodhicitta." "Absolute Bodhicitta is a gift that comes with our recognizing the actual nature of the mind and the invoking of 'Insight Meditation' (Vipassana).

When we do finally achieve what is called "Recognition," when we recognize the nature of the mind, which means we see how the mind actually works and that we, just as we are, can work it, that increase in confidence inspires us to want to share our experience with all other sentient beings. And that is not just a little inspiration or a passing thought, but an undying compulsion to assist others in doing the same.

"Absolute Bodhicitta" just arises and is this constant urge to share the dharma with all who are interested. And when this Recognition leads to the Vipassana (Insight Meditation) portion of Mahamudra, we are further galvanized in Absolute Bodhicitta.

And one of the spontaneous benefits of Absolute Bodhicitta is that it is pure, authentic, and requires no thought or thinking on our part, thus bypassing any ego or selfishness we may have. Absolute Bodhicitta is beyond ego, heartfelt, genuine, and constant.

This is not to say that we no longer have an ego and its problems, but rather when it comes to Bodhicitta we are of one mind, and that is a sense of urgency to benefit others.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Liberation Without Meditation

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 18, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/def2bb66-123c-4b43-8691-06de4295a762_1024x1024.jpeg

I am impressed by the Tibetan Vajrayana teachings concerning the five senses (or six) and their purity, undefiled until they reach the external world and the various thought and conceptual obstructions.

In fact, the pith teachings enshrine what they call the “Five Methods of Liberation Without Meditation,” which are formed around the five senses.

The Five Methods of Liberation Without Meditation

Thongdrol is the first in a set of five (or six) tantric methods for achieving liberation without formal meditation, emphasizing sensory liberation in Vajrayana:

THONGDROL (liberation through seeing):

Empowered images like sacred scrolls or mandalas, but also photographs, graphics, movies, and media.

THÖDROL (liberation through hearing):

Through mantras, dharma teachings, but also music, songs, all kinds of sounds.

DRIDROL (liberation through smelling):

Via blessed incense or substances, food, perfumes, flowers..

NYONGDROL (liberation through tasting):

Through consecrated pills, foods, or elixirs, food of all kinds.

REGDROL or **TAKDROL** (liberation through touching/wearing):

Via amulets, diagrams, or contact with sacred objects, textures.

Sometimes a sixth, **YONGDROL** (liberation through remembering), is included.

These methods highlight Vajrayana’s accessible approach, making enlightenment available through our everyday senses.

In my own approach to dharma practice, I did not want to miss the baby in the bathwater, and on the advice of my root guru, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, who when I suggested that because of all my years of spiritual practices like astrology, I might place out of ‘Meditation 101”, he suggested instead I start at the very beginning as to learning meditation, which I did.

[What was I thinking!]

And 25 years later, after practicing the Common Preliminaries, the Extraordinary Preliminaries (Ngondro twice), Lojong, Deity Practices, and the Special Preliminaries, I was at last introduced to the nature of the mind, through visceral searching the mind and familiarization.

And all those years of practice served to take off some of my rough edges and perhaps limber me up enough for what are called the non-dual dharma practices like Mahamudra and Dzogchen, forms of “non-meditation.”

Yet, shining through all that dharma practice were the five common senses, flowing like natural springs: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, as pure as ever.

And if we follow our senses as far back toward their source as possible, they never fail us. When our senses begin to mix with the outside world, their effect can be degraded, and we are confused.

However, no matter how complicated the duality of our thoughts and conceptions get, our five senses remain completely non-dual and fresh, like rainfall in a desert. We may say that we have not mastered the non-dual practices like Vipassana (Insight Meditation), yet our sense of sight, like reading these words, is totally non-dual, not interrupted or nickel and dimed by dualistic conceptuality.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

Problems

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dc9aef5b-cac0-44a5-9eee-056a692fcea_1024x1024.jpeg

I got 'em, You got 'em. We all got 'em.

The heart of the problem for me comes with those who have problems, whatever they are, and they don't know that. We cannot expect folks with problems NOT to have problems, when that's what they have, and they are not always going to be reasonable because they are not even aware of them.

We have to adapt to them, rather than they adapt to us because (aside from our own problems) they have problems. We have to accept them as they are even if their problems are unacceptable. It's not fair, but that's the way it is.

There is, however, a point of no return, where there is no return coming back because there isn't any, not because there shouldn't be, but as mentioned, because there isn't.

This is perhaps most difficult with those we love, those closest to us. They don't know better and if we do, we can't expect them to know the difference because that's exactly what they don't know.

For example, if a person we care for is having a problem and what they need from us is support and only support, not criticism or advice of any kind about their problem. That is common. They are counting on us supporting them just as they are and the least lack of support on our part makes their problem worse and further upsets them.

That my friends is a conundrum.

Now, fast forward to the whole world and all its problems. What are we doing about that? We also have to accept the world, just as it is, problems and all. How do we get our arms around that?

I sure don't know. I guess we endure.

Perhaps this is where 'art' and beauty come in, something beyond words, a gesture or mudra that itself acts as a sign or signature and describes and points not at the problem, but at the beauty that exists despite or beyond our problems.

When we run out of space or time, I feel we are reduced to signs, signatures, and mudras, a wave of the hand or a smile. Is this where a sense of humor comes in? I do have a sense of humor, yet it may be hard to find. We all have to laugh a little.

Samsara is this cyclic world of ups and downs we circle in, and that is all we know. Yes, it's confining, smothering. And we can't just step away or outside of Samsara. Up to now, we never have.

And so, while we are struggling with all of that, what and where is the sign and signature of freedom? I feel art and beauty are the sign and signature that point beyond our present situation.

There are all kinds of beauty, the beautiful.

Perhaps my favorite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, invented for his own use the concept of "inscape." An inscape is that point in time or space where we are turned around from looking outward and are suddenly able to look inward, when we break away from our hard-edged attitude, develop awareness, soften, and bend with the wind, suddenly again seeing the beauty in life.

I frequently find this while photographing on a walk in nature. I like to get away from the whip and whorl of the busyness in life and take a break. Only, it's not quite as easy as just getting out in nature. For me, it can take a while.

And for that same while I tend not to see anything I want to photograph. And then, somewhere along the trail, my eye catches a glimpse of, say, a ray of light reflecting on the forest floor, or it may be a songbird, the turn of a leaf, whatever.

And that moment is what Hopkins calls an inscape. Suddenly, I'm inside the outside busyness I am carrying. That brittleness collapses and all around me I find beauty that demands photographing. That's what inscapes do, they open us up to our own inner worlds and in a way, we are home again. The mind is at rest. Here is a poem I wrote.

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 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.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Four Kayas

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/21aca298-a82b-4772-843a-defa4b39b71a_1024x1024.jpeg

“Seeing delusive appearances as the four kayas is the unexcelled protection emptiness gives.”

“The way to see confusion as the four kayas (also translated as the four bodies or four dimensions) is to regard any difficulties or troubles we may experience as a dream or a magical illusion. How is this possible?

“Because the true nature of external phenomena reveals that they do not inherently exist – they are like the phenomena in a dream and ultimately do not exist. The realization of this absence of true existence is the dharmakaya or reality as it is.

“While phenomena do not exist ultimately, on a relative level, due to dependent origination, they arise like appearances in a dream – this is the nirmanakaya.

“These two qualities of being non-existent and yet perceived or experienced are an indivisible unity – this is the sambhogakaya.

“The unity of all three kayas or dimensions is the svabhavikakaya. In this way, we can train in treating confusion as the four kayas, which is how they actually are. This practice is called ‘the unexcelled protection of emptiness.’”

End of quote.

IMO, this is pretty deep stuff, like walking through walls. The closest I came to something like this was my major stroke, when what we call Samsara (and my Self as part of it) just deconstructed before my eyes and I became a raw floating consciousness with no cover or refuge whatsoever for many weeks, as my Self gradually reanimated itself.

I post this teaching here because of my reverence to the Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche, who has been to our center here in Big Rapids, Michigan, and I to his ancestral monastery in Kham, Tibet, Thrangu Monastery. I have also had many teachings from Thrangu Rinpoche, including taking the complete set of empowerments needed to enter into the three-year closed retreat.

And last but not least, the teachings of Thrangu Rinpoche and my root lama Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche are so very similar, perhaps because in Thrangu Monastery in Tibet, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche was chosen to be the practice partner with Thrangu Rinpoche, and they worked together, side by side, for many years.

As for the walking through walls stuff, if I tried it, I would just get a bump on my head.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Spinning Wheel

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 22, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b976221f-3dd0-4a9e-acc4-98dcb56860bf_1024x1024.jpeg

Let's talk about the mind for a moment.

Increasingly I find myself up against it and breaching new territory, a strange land I have not seen the likes of before. This is new ground.

Maybe I'm reaching the end of the line, emerging, so to speak unto a vast flat plane. Then again, perhaps I am just once more alone and on my own, forging my way, treading territory I don't know and have never seen. I keep running these words of the high Rinpoches through my mind.

"One moment is the last moment in this life, and the next moment is the first moment into the bardo after death. May they be equal."

I understand. I hear their words. We work now that we may be of equal mind -- even minded, with no shock or suddenness, but remain regular, tranquil like a spinning flywheel or gyroscope balanced on the tip of life. One step away from this life, the next step into the bardo, no difference. May we now practice to that end.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Phenomenologist

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d766210f-3b0e-4413-a2dc-66a4ee8184f1_2048x2048.jpeg

As to what kind of philosophy I represent, aside from dharma, etc., I am a Phenomenologist, meaning I focus on conscious experience or phenomena as they subjectively appear to me through increasing awareness, a first-person perspective, putting aside any assumptions about the external world's objective reality.

My view is inherently relational, dualistic, trying to uncover the nature of consciousness and the nature of the mind without assuming any objective reality. I focus on lived experience as opposed to thinking or conceptual experience.

I have not seriously studied the major figures in phenomenology, like: Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger.

I have studied Existentialism, early on, and some Heidegger. I would have to say I am an existential phenomenologist, cultured by Mother Nature rather than through written philosophy.

I grew up thinking about and writing in the first person and as mentioned, I am fascinated by authentic lived-in experience as a relief from the freeze-dried bones of concepts and thought.

I came up under the aegis of European artists, poets, and philosophers but hit a radical turning point in the 1960s when I discovered Asian philosophy, in particular the actual practice of Tibetan Vajrayana dharma.

I also consider myself an extension of the American Transcendentalists, folks like Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau

I am self-taught and never got out of high school, preferring to go out into the world and experience with little to no school training. I have trained in dharma and followed a strict curriculum for many decades.

In short, I never read about being a 'Phenomenologist' until late in life. I was just always that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Kneading the Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/709135b2-9728-41af-9ab1-2451c1692263_1024x1024.jpeg

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche:

“With discriminating wisdom, we can see the actual, true nature of mind, just as it is. But before this can happen, our mind must be workable, which means that we can do whatever we want with the mind—if we want to send it somewhere, it will go. If we want to leave it in a particular spot, it will stay there.”

“As we know from experience, our mind normally acts as if it belongs to someone else—it just wanders off somewhere on its own. So, we need to have complete control of our mind in order to see the nature of things with the understanding that vipashyana gives.”

End of quote.

Certainly, the above quote by Thrangu Rinpoche points out exactly what it took me many, many years to understand. And until I did, I made very little progress in dharma practice.

The key phrase here is our learning to work the mind, instead of just thinking with the mind as we always have. The mind can be made workable, yet we are the ones that must work it. How is that done?

As mentioned, we would have to stop using the mind as just a ‘thinking’ machine, and discover for our self that the mind itself is also viscous. It can be kneaded just as we knead dough to make pizza or bread. To do that we would have to get our hands, so to speak, deep into the viscousness and depth of the mind.

We do this by actually searching viscously, not with thinking thoughts, but as mentioned), with physical viscosity. Thus far in life, we have been mostly mental beings, with our mind being used conceptually, and we have used it like a flashlight to look outside ourselves, shining it at and on the world.

Instead, we have to turn that around, from looking outward to looking inward and we have to actually examine the mind as if it was soft clay or dough, squeezing it, handling it, working it until it is pliable and flexible. Starting out,

the mind is brittle and conceptual and pointing outside itself in its hunt for meaning. Our view must be flipped and turned inward.

This reminds me when I was a kid, my mom would have these bars of white margarine, and she would have to mix and knead into it the yellow package of coloring until it was perfectly mixed and pliable.

Becoming familiar with our own mind as flexible and pliable is the first step toward recognizing how to use and work the mind.

Familiarity with the mind is essential.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Important

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e34f14a0-4bf7-4f97-87c7-cc02c6568e39_1024x1024.jpeg

I remember early-on in my study and practice of dharma, after a number of years of practicing under Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche direction, I asked when I should start helping others who are just starting dharma practice as best I could.

Rinpoche's answer was clear, that it would be down the road quite a way before we are given permission to teach dharma. You can't teach something that you don't know, and that point of 'knowing' is not anywhere near.

It has been almost 70 years since I first flirted with Zen Buddhism and even today, I consider myself someone who shares dharma, rather than I am a dharma teacher. I am not.

And the reason is that I only know the path (yidam) that has worked for me, which may be of little use to others, especially if we consider that traditionally there are 84,000 dharmas. I only know one of those from personal experience, yet that I do know.

The people who are trained to teach dharma are monks and nuns that take the traditional 3-year closed retreat. I used to think that doing the 3-year closed retreat was to get enlightened, but I subsequently have learned that the main purpose of the retreat is to learn the basic main dharma practices so that you could teach them to others. If you get some realization along the way, all better, but to come out a dharma teacher and instructor seems to be the main point.

So, in the quicksand of time where there is so much uncertainty, what do we know for certain? It took me a while to figure that one out, but finally it is clear to me that only my own authentic experience with the dharma is something I know. Anything other than that is only hearsay, thoughts and conceptuality, and that and a ticket will get you a ride on the bus.

Anything other than my own experience is like trying to walk on a quaking bog. Just parroting what we have read or heard about dharma is pretty much a waste of time and a dangerous footing at that. It rings hollow and should not be passed on to others. At least, I do my best not to do that.

If I stick to my actual dharma experience, any realization that comes from that is generally solid ground. I learned pretty early-on to share only my own dharma experience, because right or wrong, it is all I really know anything about. If it feels too much like my personal story, it is.

The path that I have walked is the path that I have actually walked and know. It is what is authentic for me. As mentioned, by definition, our personal yidam or dharma path is only unique to us and while perhaps at best interesting to others, not the path that they will end up walking.

We each must turn the wheel of the dharma by ourselves, yet I encourage others to share their own authentic experience, dharma or other experience

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Lucid Dreaming

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/155cf028-8faf-4be1-a8e0-184b3862e244_1024x1024.jpeg

“Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.”

Something I have wondered about in dharma is ‘dream yoga’, a meditative discipline aimed at recognizing the dream state as illusory, cultivating lucid dreaming, and using dreams to realize the empty, luminous nature of the mind. I have never been taught or introduced to recognizing “This is a dream,” while dreaming.

There is a Tibetan proverb, “If you master dream yoga, you master death.”

As I age, I don’t seem to find my dreams are any more or less transparent. However, a dream-like quality seems to be entering more into my waking life. I do sense that the veil of ‘solidity’ of my day-to-day life is getting patchy and now includes some thinned out layers. Daydreams and the subconscious have started to overlap subtly. This is hard to explain.

Perhaps there are different forms of ‘dream yoga’ or what amounts to the same thing. As to realizing dharma, it is important that I keep in mind that any realization I have or get is not going to be like what I imagined from reading the various pith dharma texts and teachings. Nothing seems to be hard-lined or fixed and only one way.

IMO, expectations are just another case of ‘don’t anticipate the future’, but instead patiently wait for realization to naturally dawn. Realization never comes from somewhere out there, but always from in-here, from within.

Since I am puzzling this here, I may be a bit premature and even jumping to conclusions. Many times, in my life I have found dharma realization just naturally arising all on its own, and it almost always is not what I imagined from reading the texts or listening to the teachings, not how I anticipated it should be, not that I ‘know’ anything.

In other words, I don't know what I don't know, and it is a serious waste of time to guess what spiritual experiences will or should be like before I actually experience them. It is much better to simply note what experiences do arise and wait for a "View" to be assembled as it will.

All I can say at this point is that reality itself, for me, seems to be thinning out. It now includes patches of blue-sky, cosmic portals, transparencies, and thin spots, and they all seem to be mixed together.

Perhaps my only insight to share here is the sense of perhaps achieving something like dream yoga, but it happening, not in my nighttime dreams, but right here in the middle of this waking life.

And I don't intend to 'jump the dream', so to speak, or like the old Gertrude Stein quote "Before friendship faded, friendship faded," only here we would have something like "Before my dreams become lucid, waking life itself seems to be fading out," and as I mentioned, patches of blue-sky, cosmic portals, transparencies, and thin spots seem to all be mixing together. As to what do the dharma texts say other than "before dreams become lucid, waking life itself fades."

Padmasambhava said, "Before I wake up in the dream, the dream wakes up in me."

And Tilopa said to his pupil Naropa,

"When waking life becomes a dream, sleep becomes enlightenment."

In The Six Yogas of Naropa , it says:

"If the yogi realizes the dream in the day, the night will care for itself. If the day remains solid, the night will remain dark."

And so, my takeaway from all this is that my waking days are getting more dreamlike, while my actual night dreams remain roughly the same. So, perhaps I have it just backward, a la Gertrude Stein might put it, "Before I wake up in my dreams, my waking life becomes more dream-like."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Making Dharma Sense

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a52b0c66-af8c-406c-a122-bab072ddbc8e_1024x1024.jpeg

According to what I read, Buddhism has more extant literature than any other religion by an order of magnitude, which is saying a lot. I used to joke to myself that this is true because the monks drink so much tea (caffeine).

The history of dharma includes so many instructions, volumes of what need to be understood, much less experienced, and even less realized, that I am full up. By itself, 'only reading' is too much for me to take in and digest.

I find that what I need are words that cut through the conceptuality and put me in touch with the ground or root of what all these dharma words point at and try to get to.

No sooner does one pith dharma phrase or teaching punch a hole in my Samsara and let in some light, than a thousand conceptual quotes and phrases are sucked into that hole and clog it up. Too often I end up with more clogs than much of anything else.

And Samsara itself is like one of those self-healing innertubes, that when punctured, heal themselves. Unless I can cut to the chase and punch a hole through Samsara, again and again, any daylight I might see soon clouds over, that is, unless I can invoke the non-duality in one of the non-meditation practices like the Vipassana in Mahamudra of Dzogchen.

And so, instead of endless conceptuality and verbal understanding, I stick to what are called the essential or pith dharma teachings, very succinct and cutting quotes that are more like poems or koans than texts. For me, they cut through.

Anyway, all thought leads to action, or fails to mean anything. It is far easier to leave off on the reading and take action instead.

Experiencing dharma in the flesh is worth 1,000 books, and from that grounding experience, if we are persistent, can come a trickle of realization. At least, I have to work the dharma words to make sense.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Visionary

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9f870587-0fd5-4300-854b-9a4c08816690_1593x2048.jpeg

The endless kaleidoscope of the changing patterns in the solar system are most effective if we view the heliocentric chart, and this because heliocentrically, with the Sun as the center, all the planets are bound gravitationally in their orbits, while the traditional geocentric astrology chart, while of course very useful, is in simple terms a snapshot from Earth of that same heliocentric solar system. The helio is the mother chart, the geo chart the child.

I include the helio chart for today, November 2, 2025, laid out on the 360-wheel of the ecliptic so that we can see more easily the angles that connect the planets, one-to-another, to form the ever-changing patterns in the center of this chart.

Back in the early 1970s, when I first studied this and learned to program the helio chart, doing thousands of helio chart, I came up with 60 different (and interpretable) patterns that I called "Star*Types." While these patterns were sometimes dimly apparent in the geocentric chart (Earth centered), they are more fully clear and present in the Helio (Sun centered) chart.

Keep in mind that around 500 years ago, Copernicus pointed out that everything does not revolve around us, the Earth, but rather that the Earth in fact revolves around us. And that was when or perhaps the reason that one group of astronomer/astrologers embraced the helio chart and moving forward through time used two charts, geo and helio, which they still do.

On the other hand, the remaining group, those who refused to credit, much less use, the heliocentric view of ourselves, marched forward with a single chart, the traditional geocentric natal chart. Even today, modern astrologers don't have never embraced as a whole, much less learned to use, the helio chart. I believe this was mistaken on the part of astrologers and can be remedied by the empowerment of the helio point of view IN ADDITION to the traditional geocentric view.

These 60 types represent the archetypes or tribes that, as I came to know them, detail the dharma as to how each of us function in this world, the archetypes or tribes we belong to. I first published this in the 1976 Circle

Bks/AFA calendar that my brother Stephen and I published for 40 years. I include 38 of these archetypes, which are what I could fit on the calendar cover for that year.

The archetype or pattern that is present today in the heavens is #2, often called 'The Kite'. I will give you a brief interpretation as I interpret it. I'm sure other astrologers can add to this.

The Kite archetype is made up entirely up of a Grand Trine (3 120-degree aspects) and two Sextiles (60 degree) aspects working together. Yes, there are other aspects too, including some participating Squares (90-degree) aspects, but no T-Square or Grand Cross.

The tip of the Kite (on the right) is the planet Venus, and on the left we have the planet Saturn moving to conjunct the planet Neptune, about 1-degree and 5-minutes of arc from exact.

Neptune in the history of astrology stands for letting-go and the dissolution of the Ego, thus the subconscious (non-duality) and dreams. Also, divine inspiration and spiritual enlightenment, compassion, and in particular musicians, poets, and visionaries.

Let's not forget that Neptune (Poseidon) was the Roman god of the sea, thus the formless depths of the sea. Just as Neptune indicates loss of the Ego and letting go, traditionally it also represents loss in general.

And Saturn has the agency here. It is moving to conjunct Neptune.

Saturn is the outer most visible planet

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 (29.4 years heliocentrically), we each gradually come to grips with the rules, laws, and limitations of Saturn.

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 or guru) 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 is also the walls that make homes possible.

For an in-depth interpretation of Saturn, please see my free book “Astrology of the Heart: Astro-Shamanism” with an introduction by Steven Forrest, page 61.

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Astrology-of-the-Heart%202022%20V4.pdf>

And so, here is a brief look at what is going on astrologically today, November 2, 2025.

The somewhat even distribution of the planets that has held true for weeks now, still exists. What this does is limit our sense of urgency, call it drive or angst if you wish. It kind of holds us static to a marked degree, which is something we are not used to. And in the middle of that stasis, with our eyes peeled, so to speak, as if held open with tooth picks, we are gifted with not only a Grand Trine, but with a Kite pattern archetype.

The Kite or archetype (Star*Type) has the gift of vision, of seeing the forest and the trees, as the old saying goes, these are (or can be) visionary times. As to what a “vision” is, we should be clear. A vision is not some picture in the sky that we see, but rather a time so intense that it imprints within our consciousness the very seed of itself, so that it kind of blocks or obscures our past, enough that when we think back, we will find ourselves at this imprint, this vision. These times are imprinting on us, much like LSD can imprint us.

Saturn is bringing form to the vision represented by Neptune. It is crystalizing and making real what up to now has been more ephemeral and perhaps unclear. And with Venus as the point of the spear, we can, perhaps for the first or at least for this time, appreciate or measure (Venus) what we see, what we are up against. We are getting the point or idea.

In my view and interpretation, this time (these days now) perhaps are days best set aside to observe our own consciousness, this vision or imprinting. As for Jupiter being left out of this pattern? Remember that in the ancient Sanskrit language, the word for Jupiter is ‘Guru’ or guide. And so, if we feel less guidance or direction right now, it does not surprise me.

That my friend is a brief interpretation of the astrology now.

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

Dharma Chart, Karma Chart

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/fad3e17a-1073-491b-974b-42b177967a65_2048x543.jpeg

It has been a long journey since I first became interested in things like astrology back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I don't know if history has always had such an exponential curve, but I do know that so much happened so fast in the 1960s that I cannot possibly tell someone who was not there (in words) how it was. This line from the poet Yeats comes close:

"Because the mountain grass,

Cannot but keep the form,

Where the mountain hare has lain."

Once the door of astrology was open to me, I burned through all the books on the subject and went from there straight into the mind itself. The mind is where all the treasures of the ages can always be found, a library that never grows old. When being asked, in all the world of astrology, what single concept is the most precious to me, it would have to be the discovery of what I call the "Dharma Chart."

The dharma for each one of us is simply the particular path to awakening (to finally "getting" it) that will work for us personally, our personal path. There are said to be 84,000 dharmas, so it is clear that one size does not fit all. When I asked my dharma teacher of thirty years about the value of astrology (which the Tibetan Buddhists all use), his answer was this:

"Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, a relative truth, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

In other words, astrology is a relative truth, which means that it is good for helping us to make progress in getting around (from here to there) on the periphery of the sphere of life, but it cannot take us to the center of that sphere. Only the dharma can do that. And by 'dharma' is meant our personal dharma path, the one that actually works for us, wakes us up.

Heaven knows I tried to mine the traditional astrological chart for my dharma path. All astrologers do. We each need to find the path to awakening in this

life. Nothing else is as important as knowing our particular dharma path, the key to how we can wake up and become aware – be realized.

I studied my natal astrology chart for years, trying to figure out the puzzle that is 'me'. I did not then know that there was another way of looking at my astrology, in fact, another complete chart that is a map of my particular dharma path. My discovery of the Dharma Chart was actually a double discovery, because at the very same moment I could read my dharma from a chart, I realized that the traditional chart I had been using all this time was a chart of my karma, and not my dharma. All this time I had been trying to read my dharma from my Karma Chart, from the traditional geocentric astrological chart.

Of course, the Dharma and Karma charts are related and, while trying to decipher one's dharma from looking at one's karma is not impossible, it is very, very difficult.

The number of astrologers who seriously know the Dharma Chart are few to none, IMO. And yet the Dharma Chart has been there, staring us in the face for over 500 years. Long ago, most astrologers just chose to ignore and not look at it.

The only folks who looked at the Dharma Chart centuries ago are what today we call astronomers, and even they ignored its spiritual aspects, and to me the spiritual path is the essence of life lived. Back then astronomers were astrologers, and astrologers were astronomers. But when the astronomer/astrologer Copernicus pointed out to the world that in fact everything does not revolve around us, around Earth (as we had liked to imagine), but in truth Earth revolves around the Sun, this was news that not everyone took in or accepted.

In that moment of discovery hundreds of years ago, we suddenly had two astrological charts, the traditional earth-centered chart that had been used for centuries and a new sun-centered chart that Copernicus had just pointed out.

However, rather than embracing that sun-centered (heliocentric) chart and using two charts, most astrologers turned away from it and simply ignored it. However, the astrologers who went on to become the astronomers of today embraced both the new heliocentric (sun-centered) chart AND the traditional geocentric (earth-centered) chart and continue to this day to use two charts. They were empowered by this new chart. And literally, as they say, the rest is history. Astronomy and Botany are the two oldest academic professions, so the astronomers must have done something right.

Mathematically it 'is' possible to derive the dharma (heliocentric) chart from the karma (geocentric) chart, because it is just another way of viewing the same planets and the same instant in time, only from a different angle or perspective. And of course that is what astrologers try to do. However, this is extremely difficult, like bending over backward, when it is so much easier just to read one's dharma or life path from the heliocentric natal chart, which is the natural Dharma Chart.

We are each entangled in the midst of our karma, our life, and the traditional astrological (geocentric) chart is a perfect map of that – personality and life circumstances. Yet the key to grasping and unraveling karma has always been the particular dharma path we are on. And your personal dharma path (key to awakening) is probably very different from my own. The heliocentric Dharma Chart is a map of our path to waking up, how we can awaken. I have shouted this from the rooftops for over fifty years, but this message has still to be heard. Let me try again:

The traditional geocentric astrology chart is nothing more (or less) than a snapshot of the solar system from the point of view of Earth, embedded deep within that system. It is one view or perspective of that larger system of planets around the Sun. Wouldn't you like to see a chart or map of the entire solar system (heliocentric) that we astrologers are so busy taking snapshots (geocentric charts) of? That is what I am talking about here.

When I first got into astrology, the idea of a "dharma" chart did not exist. Back then there were no home computers, and not even simple 4-function calculators. Every astrology chart was done laboriously by hand, using pencil, paper, books, and log tables, and few people could do it, but that is another story.

Studying my astrology chart in the early 1960s gave me an alternate way of looking at myself, call it a second opinion (and some relief) from the toxic psychological descriptions of that time, labels that were then all the rage, words like paranoid, manic/depressive, schizophrenic, etc. That was how we grew up thinking about ourselves, not at all helpful for a young person. Anyway... I soon identified with my astrology chart and inhaled its alternate description of who I was compared to the labels society had tried to pin on my generation.

I just assumed the standard geocentric astrology chart of me that we all know was a map of my spirituality (or whatever we can agree to call it), when instead it was a map of my karma, the circumstances and personality in which I found myself living. Valuable? Of course, but it was nowhere near an

overview, much less a map of how I might awaken and take advantage of my life. It did not clearly show a path, and I needed a path.

Back then I struggled to glean specs of spiritual truth from my natal chart, when just by looking at my own birth moment from another (more inclusive) perspective heliocentric), the path would have been clearer to see. When I finally discovered the Dharma Chart, it flipped me.

Keep in mind, as mentioned earlier, that back then there were no astrology programs. I was the first person in the world to program astrology on home computers AND make those programs available to my fellow astrologers on a regular basis. This was in 1977 and computers for home use were brand new.

According to an article done for Red Herring Magazine, the company I founded, Matrix Software, is the second oldest software company still on the Internet. The only older one is a little company called Microsoft. That should tell you something. This was then a wild frontier.

Anyway, as a programmer, I naturally found myself exploring and programming various astrological techniques, and one of these was heliocentric – sun- centered astrology. I knew nothing about it. For me it was one more technique to program and figure out how to interpret.

So, there I was, peering through the lens of my traditional natal chart (and training) at this novel heliocentric perspective of myself, trying to make sense of what I saw there. And the helio chart gave a very different take on me, on who I was, what I was capable of, and so forth.

Hmmmm, I thought to myself, this is really me. Without realizing it, I had fallen down the rabbit hole and was about to go through an earth-change in consciousness. Before I knew it, I was identifying more with my heliocentric chart than with the traditional geocentric natal chart I was used to. Wow!

Please think about this for a moment.

The traditional astrology chart had been my whole world, astrologically speaking, and I had just transferred my identification from that chart to another (in my opinion) more complete view of myself. In the helio chart I found the spirituality that I had always tried to intuit from my geocentric birth chart. Here indeed was a Dharma Chart.

And this “Dharma Chart” was the ‘me’ I had always felt I was inside but never had any confirmation of in my regular geo-chart. Before I knew it, I was inside the helio-chart full-time and looking out at (and through) my personality (traditional natal chart), rather than the reverse, where I had previously been - - an outsider looking in, looking inward. There I was, suddenly on the inside

looking out for the first time! It was empowering, to say the least, and it felt so natural. That's what I meant earlier when I said I "flipped" it.

I somehow transferred the seat of my consciousness to a deeper center and finally identified myself as a spiritual being, a traveler on a path to awakening. So, if anyone asks, is consciousness transference possible, I am here to tell you it is, because it happened to me. Looking through the prism of my heliocentric chart, everything fell into line. It was a superior view, an overview, which is what I most needed at the time.

And although (of course) I still use my Karma Chart (geocentric) every day, I have never gone back to that old natal-chart view of my spirituality, because it was "through a glass, darkly," to borrow a phrase. The heliocentric dharma chart is the natural way to view our spirituality, an inner self (dharma chart) looking from inside through the lens of our personality (karma chart) out at the world. All my life I had been an outsider trying to get in. I didn't know myself. The helio Dharma Chart introduced me to myself, and I am forever grateful.

And I found that my consciousness is seated, not only here on Earth, but also at the center of the Sun. Behind our personality and circumstances (geo chart) is a spiritual being and path (helio chart). Make sense?

These two charts, the Dharma Chart and the Karma Chart are just different views of the exact same moment in time, the same planets, etc. Of course, each view is intricately embedded in the other, if only we could unravel it, but there is no need. We have both charts to look at. I have to laugh (and I mean laugh) when I think of how many years I struggled to read my dharma path from the standard traditional geocentric natal chart. It was not designed for that.

I believe the psychologist Carl Jung would have called the Dharma Chart, our Archetype, the tribe we belong to. It takes two views or perspectives to triangulate, and in astrology it is possible to look at the planets and our birth moment from different perspectives or angles, from views other than the standard natal chart that has been used for the last millennium. In fact, without some differential for comparison, how is anything known?

One of my favorite jazz tunes, a song by Les McCann, is called (humorously enough), "Compared to What?"

With two (or more) perspectives, we can triangulate and get a three-dimensional view of something, in this case of our own essential nature. The dharma chart and the karma chart naturally complement one another

because they are simply two different views of the same planets at the same moment.

The Dharma Chart is a view of who we are on the inside, and the Karma Chart is a view of what we are up against on the outside and have to deal with and go through. In hierarchy, the dharma chart is the key to our karma, just as in Buddhism, dharma is the key to all karma. The helio is the mother chart, the geo the child.

It took me some forty and more years to reduce the complexity of the helio chart patterns to something communicable. I hope some of my fellow astrologers will accept the heliocentric empowerment, something we should have done some 500 years.

[I include a photo of the 'Heart Center Astrological Library', which I built with the help of our staff. Some years ago I donated to the University of Illinois as part of their collection. It has been totally catalogued. They came with huge moving trucks and took it away. I wanted all my archiving to be preserved and available to others.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Interest in Interest

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dba49ed1-0616-4854-81ca-c55bdd193540_1024x1024.jpeg

In the glacial pace of dharma realization, I seem to be avoiding effort as best I can. It's the old chestnut of jumping from one personal interest or hobby to another, checking each out, making sure everything is intact, and then, before I consciously know it, switching to another and doing the same. This is a bit new, particularly being aware of it at the same time as I'm following an interest instead of just following that interest.

It's the same as if every interest I have, all add up to the same thing, interest', meaning interest itself in all its forms is somewhat of a distraction, even if I take it up out of, well, interest'. What is interest?

Distractions are distractions, yet a distraction from what, a turning away from what? Perhaps, I'm just avoiding resting in the present moment, and letting go, leaping into space. Feast or famine, I'm full on or off, winking and blinking, like a remote star in the heavens.

The variable, the single variable here is awareness itself. I'm aware of what I've not been aware of before, or the degree of awareness is broader, more encapsulating. That's what is different. It's as if interest itself in all its forms is somewhat of a distraction, even if I take it up because of sincere 'interest'. It's a little schizoid, how each interest is the one and only. That's what I now am aware of.

Or it's like a worker bee taking care of each larva in the hive, cell by cell. That's close. The point in this analogy is the extreme care I lavish with each of my interests, independent of the others, as if each of them is the special one. And the kicker is that each interest, the interests in my life, is a finely tuned distraction, including the dharma itself.

My interest in dharma is not the dharma.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Some Days Are Just Like This

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a040f2d9-3b66-4188-9cfc-9b48c33bdbc1_1024x1024.jpeg

It was around 11 degrees above zero when I started out this morning at 6 AM to the local grocery store, about four miles, and on the way back I caught a full-blown flat, just barely limping home with a shredded tire. And on the way to the store, just after I left our driveway, my mind told me I should not be driving this far without a phone. I checked that box in my mind, and, on the return soon found myself crawling along, trying to get back home. A flat tire.

On top of that, I have had an email screw-up for days, so I was stuck on the phone for an hour a second time trying to clear that. Not possible for the next 24-72 hours. That's my day so far. I'm waiting for AAA to come and fix my tire. And it's only 8:30 AM.

Later. The tire is fixed. It took two separate jacks to lift the car up because the car was on an incline. The car shifted suddenly and blew one jack out. We had to carefully reconstruct. Of course, there is snow all around. We got through it, and I took the shredded tire to be repaired. Some days are like that. Of course, in response some dharma reflections reflect on this day. They kind of went like this.

Being in a hurry will not bring realization any sooner; quite the contrary. I freeze frame, focus, and rest in that. In the well of the present moment, everything is once again possible.

Let's not 'do' anything. Allow whatever it is to fold back in upon itself, recursively.

Sorry I have to say the following: I have collected so many tens of thousands of books over the years, but I just can't stand to read books anymore. I recently got by mail one big fat book, with information that I need. I opened it up and it was all text. No lists, graphs, or arrangement of text to make it readable. Just 482 pages of dense text, with one diagram, that itself was useless.

Sorry folks, but that dog will no longer hunt.

I kind of need to read that book because it is about longevity. LOL. I'll be dead before I can read all that. I just put it aside, then gave it to Margaret in case she has it in her to read it. I don't.

I still read dharma texts, and even then, just what are called pith texts, the shorter the better. I have a problem with words if they are not succinct. I don't mean lots of words. I know I write many words here, yet I try to make them cut through the verbosity and get down to what they mean or point to.

The antidote, the remedy for this modern society is grounding our thoughts and ideas in experience and feelings, in the Hara or gut. As I look through what I see being written or posted online, the only prose I can credit is that which seeks to ground out conceptuality in the reality of experience, in what we feel and experience.

As a 'coda', there is this.

I'm kind of boxed-in by fate, at least today, the CMEs, the flat tire, the messed-up emails, etc. As mentioned, it's one of those days.

Whatever befalls me has to be handled exactly, like for example, anything else. No sloppy moves will help, no quick fix. Careful, detailed, without effort does it demand. Nothing different, nothing else.

Getting through a day hour by hour and minute by minute. It's not that I can't rush, but that nothing can be rushed and still work out. That's the whole idea, the process itself, the means is the end. As mentioned: no sloppy fixes.

I can go round and round as much as I want, but I will always end up right back here in the midst of the effect of a solar-flare CME day. Ha!

Rolling over, getting along, going with the flow is just that. No sneaking up on or getting around it. Where I leave off with it is just where it is. No one is going to do it for me. It remains undone until I do it.

It's like the fat and the frying pan. Start from here and move forward or don't. And also, as mentioned, a sloppy or quick job doesn't do it, just does not work.

That's the most amazing thing!

Everything remains the same until I do something about it, or often it even gets worse. LOL.

The lesson is that the lesson 'IS'. That's the lesson.

As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it:

“See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair is, hair of the head, numbered.”

That’s like infinite, and it starts right here and right now!

It remains here unchanged until I change it.

That’s why the dharma says that we each must turn the wheel of our own dharma. Dharma is a do-it-yourself project. Dharma is so patient that it can wait forever until we do it, get around to turning the wheel of our own dharma one more round.

And so, take a pause, or better yet, stop pausing and get on with what obviously has to be done, turning the wheel of our dharma.

Even on a day like today, with wildfire buzzing around my head, I might as well take a deep breath and get on with turning that wheel. Incrementally, take steps forward, one foot in front of the other.

Trust me, some days are just like that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

Inner vs Outer

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5dde890e-7344-4774-9915-63dfc7395e92_1024x1024.jpeg

This is just a preliminary mention as to something I am thinking about, more of a shot across my own bow. How do I integrate in my mind the concept of cosmic cybernetics with the Vajrayana dharma I practice.

There has to be some overlap and of course I see a need to merge the two, so they at least reinforce one another, if possible.

With the dharma practice, after following a long curriculum of the dharma preliminaries for many decades, I have settled down into Mahamudra practice, which is a form of meditation, but it is called 'non-meditation'.

In Mahamudra, which is non-dualistic, we relax into the well of the present moment more and more, as we let go and become increasingly familiar with the true nature of the mind and how we can work it.

Of course, all this takes place on Earth, and the Earth is part of the solar system, the Local System of stars, which is part of the Milky Way Galaxy, the Super Galaxy, and ad infinitum.

In dharma practice, we are not concerned with the external framework outside, but rather we turn inward and rest in the mind within all this.

So, how do these two directions, inner and outer, reflect one another? That is the question. Do the twain ever meet and if so, how?

The external world, whether it is in this room I am in now, inside my house, city, state, country, Earth, solar system, Milky Way, etc. does not matter. It is all the external world and cosmos, what we can call appearances and the outside -- Samsara.

My dharma practice is exactly opposite of all of this, turned toward the inside of all that is outside. We can call this the inside or a path to enlightenment or eventual Nirvana.

I see the dharma as getting deeper into the inside and the cosmos, no matter how vast, is all a construct and part of what we call Samsara.

As to where these two meet, I imagine they meet the way all Samsara meets our mind, with Samsara being complete distraction and misdirection, and in our transforming Samsara into Nirvana.

I don't see a problem between these two, but I wonder if any of you reading this have some suggestions or comments.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Dharma Boot Camp

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 18, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0c54cd01-e6e6-4008-9428-723c12d4faa7_1613x2048.jpeg

It's all so much an endless mandala offering, this life we are living. Of all the dharma practices I have done, my favorite, meaning the one that went by in a flash, was the mandala offering. I did over 100,000 of them, and when asked by my rinpoche to repeat the practice, I did that, another 100,000. I will never forget the offering prayer for mandala practice.

"I anoint the earth with fragrant water, scatter flowers, and adorn it with Mt. Meru, the four continents, and the Sun and the Moon. Imagining this a Buddha field, I offer it so that all beings may enjoy this pure realm."

If we do enough mandala offerings, everything seems like an offering, an endless offering.

The mandala offering practice is one of five practices of 100,000 repetitions each that make up what is called 'The Extraordinary Preliminaries' (Ngondro), a kind of dharma boot camp that helps make us more flexible and prepares us for the various deity practices and then the non-dual practices like Dzogchen and Mahamudra. It's not something just to get through and on to the more advanced practices, as I found out for myself.

In the mandala practice, we take a smooth copper plate (6-inches in diameter) in our left hand, and with our right hand we take a handful of rice (and jewels) and make 7 small piles of rice on the copper plate in a certain order and recite the lines I quoted earlier, and then with the palm of our right hand and with a circular motion, wipe the rice piles of the copper mandala plate and back into a cloth on our lap.

When I finished my Ngondro and asked Rinpoche what I should do next, he responded "Do you want to know what I would do next if I were you?" I said of course, Rinpoche, and he said, "Do another Ngondro." Both Margaret and I did just that.

When I first learned what Ngondro was about, I said to myself. I will NEVER do that, not ever. However, when I found out that I was not competent enough to guide myself. My practice was like a patchwork quilt. I was able to fill in by myself a number to the quilt squares, but there were many more that I did

not know how to fill in. Humbled by that, I came back around and was willing to undertake the full Ngondro and I did it. And then I went on to do it twice. LOL. That's what we get when we try to hurry through something trying to reach whatever is beyond it.

Eventually, I got in line and did exactly what I was told and stopped trying to buck or get around the practice. Rinpoche tamed me, feral as I was.

“Oh, what a tangled web we weave...”

The Ngondro consists of five practices, (1) 100,000 prayers of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma (teachings), and sangha (community), (2) 100,000 full length prostrations on the ground with arms outstretched, (3) reciting 100,000 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, (4) 100,000 mandala offerings, and (5) 100,000 practices of guru yoga. And then did it all over again.

[A mandala plate and the mandala mudra]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

Occupied

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 18, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c2fc8ff2-3d9a-442e-9953-bcdfcf87bacc_1024x1024.jpeg

It took me most of my life to come around to realize that busy is as busy does, and that my own interest in 'interest' itself was misplaced.

I was proud of my many interests and how I focused in and could double down on them, concentrating, and undistracted from anything else.

As mentioned, it took until late in life for me to realize that by narrowing the focus to my interests, I was ignoring most of anything else.

It was then that it occurred to me that boredom, those times when I was not busy, were not holes in my life to ignore, but rather these gaps were portals beyond the confines of Samsara itself, moments of opportunity and not something to be avoided or dreaded.

I began to investigate those few times of boredom that I encountered. What actually were these? What did they hide or portend?

And what I found was that these boring times were opportunities when I was not fixated and wrapped in my own busyness or interests, and somewhat rare at that.

They were times of rest from constant fixation on whatever I was interested in.

Embracing boredom instead of doing everything to avoid being bored was refreshing, exhilarating, and something I knew next to nothing about.

The takeaway was that all my busyness and dedicated interest was something to let go of and not continue to continue with, except perhaps in moderation.

And over time I came to view my interest more as a warning or ignorance on my part, rather than something to be proud of and celebrate. Busyness was a sign of my allegiance to Samsara.

And so, I ratcheted my busyness back and I realized that whole shtick of interest was something I needed to let go of. And so, I am working on that.

Of course, I continue with those things I love to do, only with awareness and the caveat that I am narrowing my view, not expanding it. Something perhaps to dip into rather than to dwell in as I had done for all these years. Let me put all this another way:

INTO THE BOREDOM If I look around for a place to go and find rest in this life, I come up with a bunch of 'been there, done that' memories and there is not much rest in any of them. Perhaps this is why the great meditators dig deep and go where no one else goes, inward or somewhere. But where and how, I don't know and won't know unless I go there myself. I've been looking at this for a long while, kind of hovering on the brink. And for me, as mentioned, it's a question of not knowing where to go and how to get there; My guess is that's where deep meditation can be found.

For one, the rest I'm looking for is not in the past or the future; tried both of those, and so that leaves the present moment, the ever-present moment. How do we rest in the split second between the future and the past, that infinitesimally short micro-second. And if we do, what's there to do there? Actually, we can't 'do' anything because the effort to do that clouds the present moment. This leaves us the sole option of allowing ourselves to rest in this moment, in the pure awareness that can be found here and now, by resting in the present moment. Yet, resting in the present can be challenging because I don't know just how to do that and how it differs from just the boredom of having no entertainment at all, which few of us are used to or like. It seems to me that I am addicted to being busily entertained just about all the time. Samsara runs a tight ship. And I find that there is a fine line between boredom, being bored, and just nothing at all but confronting the awareness behind boredom, and so the approach here is a delicate balance, a kind of tippy-toe or tightrope act between the two, boredom and the awareness I believe is behind it. In other words, I must thread the needle, and the needle here is very fine. It's easy to get off-balance, miss the point entirely, and end up once again in the familiar boredom. Start over. Or another way to put this is that there is an open door, but one that is very hard to find and enable, at least for me. Boredom has been the guardian on the threshold all my life and getting past or through it is not all that easy. And my own avoidance of sheer boredom turns me back from that doorway every time. Yet at the door of boredom I stand, trying to investigate it. I know this is the path forward. Therefore, I have found that I have to have a very gentle approach, learn to open up the boredom a little at a time, and then rest in that widening gap without slipping into the boredom end of things and being bored as I have fought against all my life. Given time, practice, patience, and gentle pushing, the boredom gives way to reveal the awareness behind it, and

we can rest there. I am doing it. In other words, at least for me, boredom is like a ring pass-not, one of many that keep me pent up in Samsara because it is too painful to confront it head on – that boredom I avoid and have always avoided. Because of this, Samsara remains like a closed book, with no obvious doors or windows, and no easy way out or through. Otherwise, we all would have been out of Samsara years and lifetimes ago. Yet here I hover at the edge. In summary, searching for and opening the hidden gaps or windows in Samsara takes time and a certain daring on my part. Forcing things won't help but letting go and relaxing can enable access to the true nature of the mind. What first appears as boredom can gradually give way to an opening or gap into a pure awareness and that awareness does not seem to be a part of Samsara, as I understand it, because it is non-dual. The secret here is that I have to actually go there and experience it for myself. No amount of thinking, speculating, or expectation about it will help. In fact, the secret of dharma (at least for me) is to not think or intellectualize, but instead to go and directly experience the mind for myself, look and search through it physically, viscerally, delving with my hands and feet into the nature of the mind, even if I first don't know what I am doing. It's the old Shakspearian "To Be or Not to Be," the only way to stretch or exercise the mind and by that gain actual experience, and by continuing to experience whatever we can until by sorting itself out, we become familiar with the mind and its nature -- how it works.

In Dharma training, that is the imperative.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Denying the Will

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ab7c473e-cb36-45f7-8341-1619bbcd6701_1024x1024.jpeg

I make a lot of typos when I write because I am submerged for the moment, brief as it is, and then I reflect on it. When immersed, I am beyond thoughts, blown out, only to return with meaning in hand a moment later. Immersion, reflection, immersion, reflection, etc. Recursively.

All I know is that I had to work for this. My initial, meaning first, experience of insight meditation was startling and profound, unlike anything I had ever experienced before. It was like a window or porthole out of Samsara and into what is called non-duality, a full immersion, the ground of realization.

And this happened out in nature at dawn as I was crawling around on my belly in the wet morning dew with my camera and lens shooting macro photography as the sun came up.

It this came following a month or so of very rough times, when I was laid off (with many others) as a senior consultant for NBC on astrology (Astrology.com). Having no way of providing for my family not only knocked me off my 'high horse' but plunged me into the depths of depression. Hard times.

And it popped me right out of the groove I had been in for many decades and I remained there. My point in relaying this is that I believe that Insight Meditation would not have taken place had I not been thrown off course by the loss of my job and left to founder in the depths of my own mind, deeper than usual.

The subsequent arising of Insight Meditation overshot or leapfrogged all of the dharma I had accumulated for decades and decades and put me all that way back into my past to when I was a young boy completely surrounded by Mother Nature and loving it. I would have bet money that I would have landed in the dharma, but that's where I reached for comfort, what was for me ultimately most familiar. That set the stage, IMO.

One moment I was crawling through the grass, peering through the lens of a camera at tiny insects, plants, and critter. One moment I was looking through

the lens at an object, just as the sun rose, and the next moment I was one (fully immersed) with the 'Seeing' itself.

Of course, that brilliant moment passed, yet not before penetrating or punctuating the duality of my subject and object existence and I become one in the moment with everything.

Of course, in my life I had moments of unity or oneness before, yet nothing like what I had just experienced. I had popped a balloon that was never unpopped after that. Samsara, this vicious dualistic cycle of ups and downs in which I had always been living, had been punctured, broken through and at least a portal had been opened that never closed again.

And I found that if I relaxed enough I could repeat that moment of insight again, and also recursively, again and again, and have the same non-dual (but momentary) insight beyond Samsara.

However, I could only do this in the early, early morning out there in nature as the morning sun came up, and only when I looked through a camera lens at the tiny world of macro photography. When I went back home after photographing, my mind was just quite ordinary again.

Needless to say, every sunrise for over six months (if it was not raining or something) found me out there in the weeds with my camera and not just looking through a macro lens at small or macro worlds, but immersed beyond the reach of Samsara's dualistic world I had up to then only known.

As mentioned, when I returned home I could not do that. My mind was just ordinary or normal as it had always been.

I could not remember the last time I had watched the Sun come up, and here I was watching the Sun come up every morning for over six months straight. Think on that for a moment.

Finally in late November, the oncoming winter drove me (and my camera) inside and made my Insight Meditation impossible back home. Not knowing what to do, I turned a little upstairs bedroom into a photography studio and tried to bring potted plants from the local grocery store into the studio and photograph them in hopes of repeating my early-morning insight of the recent summer.

This was very difficult indeed. No matter how I tried, my mind would not budge from its 'ordinariness'. Yet I did not give up because how could I. Once known, Insight Meditation, was by then an essential ingredient in my life. living without it was, well, not exactly living.

And very, very gradually my mind began to move, day by day, and week by week, it slowly opened until I was able to reestablish Insight Meditation, degree by degree.

I was familiar with doing dharma practice for many decades, working daily at that, yet what I was now doing, if it was meditation, was unlike any meditation I knew. This was like ‘physical’, visceral, and involving whatever willpower I could muster trying to move my focus from the ordinary into the extraordinary.

That was not a linear progression, but how to turn a linear progression into a non-linear progression, when all I had to go on was my vivid experience throughout the summer, up at dawn, out there in the meadows.

I repeat: as for will power, I could not as much as lift or move my little finger one iota, although I tried constantly because I would not envision life without the full immersion of Insight Meditation.

Well, the solution to this problem did not revolve around effort. None of my efforts to do this paid off, not even a little. In fact, it was just the reverse. I had to completely cease and desist with effort and do just the opposite, make no effort. I had to learn to completely let go, which for me was much more difficult than making effort. I could do that, make efforts.

You can’t shape the shapeless, so to speak. Letting go was something I knew very little about. So how do we make an effort to not make an effort? That was the question.

This took me more than a year to work through, finding out again and again that effort or will was a non-starter. I had to relax and as I was able to do so, the indicator that something was happening began to appear.

At this point, I had the look-through-the-lens at plants and nature working again, yet what I really needed was to move this Insight Meditation from photography to writing things like I am writing here. And that took about a year and a quarter, working on it pretty much full time. I was trying not to try, to NOT make effort and to have the same immersive experience with writing that I had with photography.

I can’t express, nor would words do it justice, how hard I worked or how hard I ‘not-worked’, to transfer the Insight Meditation from photography to writing. I did not work, did not make effort, , and then very gradually it worked. I was amazed when it worked, and so very, very grateful!

I had never asked or tried for anything beyond what I have described above... to move my Insight Meditation from photography to writing. I don't need anything else.

Which brings me back to where I started. I make a lot of typos when I write because I am totally immersed for the moment, brief yes, before I reflect on it. I am beyond thoughts, blown out, only to return with meaning in hand a moment later. Immersion, reflection, immersion, reflection, etc.

And when I type, it is like I am writing a "sounds like" interpretation from what I experience when immersed, and then when reflected (duality again) I see I wrote something, but something with a lot of misplaced words or typos. So be it. I am more than satisfied that this works.

And last but not least, practicing dharma involved for me 'The Common Preliminaries', 'The Extraordinary Preliminaries', 'Lojong Practice', and the 'Special Preliminaries', and then the Pointing-Out Instructions as to the nature of the mind, which is called Recognition. Once 'Recognition' (non-duality) takes place, there is no need for the Preliminaries once you recognize how to work the mind. You are busy working the mind, because you know how to work it. That is actual meditation.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

"I Like to Watch TV

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4e9f735a-32e8-4ddb-add4-54e5efcaf5ee_960x1383.jpeg

For a little comic relief, what do I do with my time, now that I am thoroughly retired. I know that many of you read books. I don't read books anymore, if by that you mean fiction. I have read fiction. I have also read non-fiction, like reading almost all of the Loeb Classics, and there are hundreds of them. I was mostly interested in the Latin and Greek publications.

I have read almost all of the philosopher Hegel, and many others, much of European poetry, novels, and the like. My point is that I am, so to speak, at this point read out.

I don't even read much non-fiction any longer. What I do read is dharma teachings, but even there I restrict my reading to what are called the pith teachings, kind of the essential teachings, and even then, mostly relating to the non-meditation classics like Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

If I don't read, what do I do?

Well, I write these blogs and essays on Facebook, Medium, Substack, and BlueSky. Over the years I have written about 6400 essays, all of which I have stored as Word files and as PDFs. So, I do spend a lot of time writing.

Other than that, I do listen to music. I know classical music (especially Bach) very well, although I listen to less of it these years. And I know jazz, blues, rock, and world music. I like blues, hard blues at that, and jazz, what is called Soul Jazz (Original Funk), especially Hammond B3 trios. I like bar-walking sax, the rougher and funkier the better.

Which leaves movies and films. I founded the AllMovie.com, one to the two largest film databases, so I know a lot about movies, not so much academically speaking, but more like the Peter Seller movie., the man 'Chace' in "Being There," and the quote "I like to watch TV." I too like to watch TV.

I like to watch films and always have since I was introduced to all the Disney cartoons back when I was a kid.

In the evening, I tend to watch movies, especially streaming series. I do this and measure them more by time rather than particular named film or series,

although of course I try to find the best I can, but that is tough, since I have already seen a lot of them.

I am good for about an hour or two of movies in the evening, but a keen movie watcher I no longer am. I used to be riveted to the flickering screen, but these years movies have become more of a multi-tasking event. I watch them relax, and sort out the events of the day, and I often fall asleep during movies or go in and out as to being awake.

I believe that watching the screen is the closest most Americans come to meditating, and I'm not making a joke. Being able to fix our gaze on a moving screen is IMO little different than wearing some yoga beads on our wrist and using them to distract our monkey mind while we relax. Movies do that for me.

Am I a connoisseur of film? Perhaps I was years back, yet I could care less about that today. Watching a good (or even a bad) film is my mental exercise of choice, and I have a great imagination, so I can make something out of nothing.

Lately, I have become less enamored with what is on TV, so I am beginning to watch movies I have seen before if they are classics, and I have a large collection of movies on DVD and Blue Ray. I find that my memory is not as good as it used to be, so I can watch a film I have seen before and find that I have forgotten a lot about it, one of the benefits of growing older.

As for dharma meditation, well, I do that most of the day in various ways, which we could discuss, so I am not lacking there.

In good weather I like to walk outside in nature. And I tend to have fits of fixing things around the house and property, just as I have fits of not wanting to do anything at all.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Training the Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e045b131-5c6d-44a3-adc2-04f53d7ba7a4_1024x1024.jpeg

There is something that I believe I can make clear or at least clearer. It has to do with what dharma practice is all about. If you can understand it, and make use of it, this could be an impetus as to how (and why) you might approach it sooner than later.

Dharma practice comes, in essence, in two major parts, what are called “The Preliminaries” (dualistic) and “Non-Meditation (non-dualistic).

The preliminaries include these practices:

‘The Common Preliminaries’, ‘The Extraordinary Preliminaries’ (Ngondro), ‘Lojong practice’, and the ‘Special Preliminaries’, usually followed by various ‘Deity Practices, and then a real leap via what are called the ‘Pointing-Out Instructions’ as to the nature of the mind, which is called ‘Recognition’. The Preliminaries are all dualistic (subject and object), while the ‘Non-Meditation’ practices are non-dualistic, and completely immersive.

When Recognition (non-duality) is finally realized and takes place, there is no further need for the preliminaries once we recognize the actual nature of the mind and how to work it . Once we are familiar with the nature of the mind and how it works, from that point onward we are busy working the mind. No more need for the preliminary practices.

The function of all the preliminaries is just that, preliminary dharma training, like the Ngondro, which is a kind of dharma boot camp, helping us to get in shape to undertake the pointing-out instructions and hopefully receive them. And the Ngondro is not for the weak of heart.

When I first heard about Ngondro, I was sure it was a throwback, something from the Middle Ages, and there was no way I was about to do 100,000 of this and a 100,000 of that, for starters. However, after a few years I found myself foundering under my own guidance in dharma practice, subject to my half-baked tutelage. It was then that I found myself willing to undertake the Ngondro, getting the permission to begin it, and empowered with the reading instructions, and all that.

If we want to eventually tackle the non-dual practices, the non-meditation practices like Mahamudra and Dzogchen, we are going to have to get in mental, physical, and emotional shape, which is what Ngongo and the other preliminaries require. It is no different than physical exercise and getting in shape, only here we are working with the mind.

For some reason, we Americans believe that our mind, just as it comes out of the box is good to go. None of the Asian people believe that. The mind admits and even requires at least as vigorous training as our body.

I ended up doing the Ngondro twice, and after that doing a number of deity practices, and finally, thanks to my Tibetan lama, my root guru, I was introduced and became familiar with the actual nature of the mind, which is called 'Recognition.' No

There are no words that can express what that preliminary training I once afraid even to contemplate it has meant to me.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 22, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c3f4af99-9405-459f-95ef-3b366b979908_2048x1536.jpeg

It's a little before 6:00 AM when I head out to the local grocery store, some four miles away along country roads. I go early because there a few people and I still wear a covid mask in public places. Covid is still quite active here in west Michigan.

It's dark and I have to drive slowly because of the deer. They are always already up and crossing the roads. They are not very smart about roads and tend to do just what they should not do. And deer are a curious bunch. Often, they just stand there along the road and stare at you. And they run in a bunch. I watch out for the little ones that lag behind and appear in front of my car suddenly.

I go slow, although often another car is behind me wishing for me to speed up and then it comes roaring by, oblivious of the deer. Anyway...

The above is about all the news. I am moving slowly this morning, sore, probably because I carried too much stuff around yesterday. Do I have ideas I want to write about today? I don't, because that is not how it works. How it works comes from Bodhicitta, meaning a constant, seemingly endless, sense of urgency to do what I can to share the dharma. It's always there. And when I pick up a pen, so to speak, out comes the dharma.

Sure, I try to spice it up and write about this and that, but as they say around these parts, the fact of business is that dharma is on my mind and how to share it with those that might be ready to hear about it. I imagine I am not all that different from the Jehovah's Witness that come banging on our door, only I am only putting it out there.

The Jehovah's Witness don't come around anymore. I used to invite them in, but made them agree to give me equal time, and they don't like that. And they used to love to run and get their big preacher and bring him back, but that didn't work either. Now, that is in the past. I don't see them as of late.

What's the point? Well, the point is that there is no point, and perhaps that's why folks don't get it. You can't get a point that is not there.

Then, at about 9 AM today, this mammoth truck with an ungodly extender pulled into our driveway and began unloading tons of shingles to the top of our roofs. I include a photo.

Monday will see a complete re-roofing job done by a crack Mexican team of roofers, and we will have (I hope) no more leaks. I went up to the last outdoor farmer's market for the summer at 9 AM today, that market a bow to Thanksgiving. Nothing much I want there. Christmas wreaths and doodads.

And now it's only around 10 AM. Who knows what else today will bring!

[Photo of the shingles by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Astrological Empowerment

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1f7c7ce3-a215-4d65-846f-78c769af073c_2048x1976.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/76bce5c7-283e-40c4-a64a-ea04397ce44e_2048x1976.jpeg

[Here is one for my many astrological friends. I am working outside today, getting ready to mulch all the leaves that have fallen and use them in the garden. Those leaves are precious.]

Because I have actually studied the heliocentric natal chart for almost 60 years, astrologers think I am that ‘heliocentric’ guy out there. The truth is not that I am just heliocentric but rather that I use both heliocentric and the traditional geocentric natal charts, plus Local Space (Azimuth and Altitude), and other techniques that you may never have heard of.

I believe in triangulation, meaning using several converging charts and of our birth moment to get more of a three-dimensional view. Just as we use our two eyes to triangulate our vision and sense depth, I find using two natal charts, geo and helio, does the same thing. They are different views of the same birth moment in time. That depth is so helpful!

It’s not because I want to be different or exotic, but because I want to always get to know my own birth charts in every way I can, and it has paid off.

After all, what today passes for astrologers, some 500 years ago, astrologers refused to accept what the astronomer/astrologer Copernicus pointed out to the world, that everything does NOT revolve around us, the Earth, and those of us who live here. Astrologers are no different today. They never have accepted or taken the empowerment of the Sun.

Folks, it’s not ALL about us. The solar system and even the Milky Way Galaxy, where we are embedded in one of its spiral arms, and very far out along that arm at that, are all part of one vast process.

And that universe apparently is trying to know itself by peering through our eyes from within our bodies. And, if you can stand the thought, our consciousness, body and eyes are not some alien, foreign being or whatever,

but nothing more or less than our very nature knowing itself. We seem to be just too masochistic to realize this. We need to own our solar heritage.

In other words, WE ourselves are the intelligent life we keep looking outside for with larger and larger telescopes, when it makes just as much sense to use microscopes or meditation to look inward instead of outward. There is no difference. It is as the Greek philosopher Parmenides said "Being Alone Is." There are not two, but only one whole universe. We are just afraid to relax and let go.

And my interest in seeing and studying my heliocentric natal chart, along with my traditional geocentric chart (Karma Chart) is not only to see what the circumstances of life and my karma is (geocentric chart), but to also know who, what kind of entity, tribe, and archetype (helio or Dharma chart) belongs to me. Who or what am I representing in this life.

And so, my case with my fellow astrologers is very simple. It is time, in fact long overdue, that astrologers embrace the helio chart and become empowered in it, just as today's astronomers did 500 years ago.

As Thumper said in the Disney film "Bambi," "Wake Up, Wake Up, Friend Owl!"

If we just compare the livelihood of modern astronomers with the livelihood of modern astrologers, there is a huge discrepancy between the two. Why is that?

Astrologers are blessed with never giving up their spiritual life, all these centuries, yet I believe we could have a rich spiritual life and also embrace the truth that everything does NOT revolve around us as Copernicus pointed out.

Astrology is nothing more than cultural astronomy, what astronomy means. As for modern astronomers, we might ask them why they abandoned spirituality and inner knowledge, although I believe astronomers are starting to come around. We astrologers need to do the same, understand that astrology is cultural astronomy.

Astrologers have a rich spiritual life and are more open to what is embedded spiritually within our mind, IMO. However, many astrologers struggle to support themselves! We need to do something about that.

Back in the early 1970s, as I discovered for myself the portent and content of heliocentric astrology, I defined for my own use 60 different major archetypes or chart patterns formed by the planets around the Sun using simple Ptolemaic aspects, which are clearly present in the following free book (below), along with my attempts to deduce their meanings. Give it a try.

It only took me a few months, after years of only having the traditional geocentric natal chart, to transmigrate my identification from the geocentric natal chart (Karma Chart) to the heliocentric natal chart (Dharma Chart). And I never looked back and continue to use two natal charts (geo and helio) in my work.

The Helio is, of course, the mother chart (the fiducial) and the Geo is the child. Like the traditional “Mother and Child Reunion,” the Mother Luminosity is the heliocentric and the Child Luminosity is the geocentric.

Here is a free book. Check out your heliocentric natal chart and see if you identify with it.

“Dharma Chart, Karma Chart: Astrological Empowerment in the 21 st Century”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf>

Get to know your tribe and archetype (helio chart) and then talk with me about it.

[Sixty Helio Archetypes, astrological patterns, one for men and another for women.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

Insight Meditation

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8623ec39-ec8e-4ef8-bd21-56939ab52878_2048x2048.jpeg

The Ven Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche wrote:

“A mistake we can make is to think that the meditation of Mahamudra is simply a state in which thought is absent.

“The meditator might discover the intermediate space between the dissolution of one thought and the arising of a new thought and think that resting in this space is the meditation of Mahamudra.

“In that state there is no awareness of anything and no real quality of mindfulness or knowing. That, however, is not genuine meditation.

“The essential characteristic of vipassana is clear, definite, certain knowing of the mind’s way of being. If that definite knowing is lacking, so is vipassana.

“In vipassana we know that the mind is empty and that this emptiness is not a lifeless one. It is an emptiness in which it is suitable to know, to see, to perceive, to feel. If we have not discovered that emptiness, we have not found Mahamudra vipassana.”

End of quote

This is a clear and concise description of the particular kind of Vipassana Insight Meditation) as used in Mahamudra, which instead of being called meditation is rather a form of non-meditation because it is non-dual, meaning there is no subject and object. We are fully immersed, which does not mean we are not in the mix but that we are fully in the mix, just not as an observer. It’s full swim on our part.

As for keeping the mind steady, I no longer even think about it. It’s steady or at least as steady as I am. Not a problem. I trust in it. I no longer need to keep the mind steady; it’s keeping me steady.

Life is also funky at times. Once we are introduced to the nature of the mind and become familiar with the mind, we are good to go, meaning we are already going.

I'm in the driver's seat, even if it is an old jalopy. It's working, meaning I am able to work in and with my mind. I'm familiar enough with it.

And if that's as far as I get in this life, it's all I need in order to get around. That may be all you need as well.

There is no perfection, and even if there is, it is already perfect or whatever it can be.

Don't bother worrying; that can't help.

[Photo by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Turning the Wheel of the Dharma

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7e3ebc7a-7a41-4574-897d-cd58f817a43d_1024x1024.jpeg

I don't have any robes or titles to protect or defend. I am just a regular guy who has spent some sixty+ years studying and practicing dharma because it made sense to me. I was raised Catholic, but at heart my church has always been Mother Nature.

I am grateful for the dharma teachings I have received, and for the Tibetan lamas who taught me, especially my Root Guru the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, and the four Heart Sons of the 16 th Karmapa, and Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. And of course, I personally met the 16 th Karmapa (Rangjung Ripe Dorje) and the 17 th Karmapa (Ogyen Trinley Dorje) and received their blessing. I took my family to meet the 17 th Karmapa at his ancestral monastery in Tibet at 15,000 feet and spent several days there.

Perhaps, for me, the hardest part, what I was least prepared for, is that when it comes to dharma, we have to do it all ourselves. Not that we don't have support from the teachings and our dharma teachers but where the rubber meets the road is that ultimately it is up to each of us.

Only we can turn the wheel of our own dharma, and if we don't turn it, it does not get turned. No one can turn it for us. Apparently, as my root dharma teacher pointed out very clearly, in all the time there has been, apparently through infinite rebirths and lifetimes, until this present moment, we never got it. We are still not enlightened. And obviously, we are not alone in this.

In dharma, unlike many other religions (like Christianity), where the concept of original sin says we once were pure but have fallen from that and are trying to be saved, to salvage our lives, and get back to that purity.

The dharma teachings say that from forever we never knew, not even once a long time ago, and we still don't know now how to extract ourselves from Samsara, this vicious cycle of ups and downs we all find ourselves in. It's not like we somehow sinned and have fallen back, but according to the dharma we just never knew, not ever. And still don't!

So, when I mention turning the wheel of our own dharma, it is easier to understand that we never knew, still don't know, and have little to no idea of

how to turn the wheel of dharma for ourselves and eventually be enlightened, whatever and however that is done.

And so, like limbering up muscles that we have NEVER used, doing something on our own behalf, like turning the wheel of our own dharma is foreign to us.

This is why we have what is called the Extraordinary Preliminaries (Ngondro) with all of its arduous mental and physical calisthenics that have to be undertaken... by us. This exercise makes us flexible and pliable enough to learn to turn the wheel of the dharma and stop waiting for someone else to do this for us. That will never happen unless we do it because the dharma is a do-it-yourself project. We each individually have to do it.

I found it difficult to realize that I had to do it alone. I was waiting around for someone to help me do it. There are others to instruct us and encourage us, but when it comes right down to where the rubber meets the road, we must each turn that dharma wheel, meaning we have to finally develop enough awareness and confidence to turn that wheel, each of us individually.

And most of us do not know how to do this even if we wanted to, so taking directions from masters who know how this is done is to be encouraged. If we think we can do it all ourselves, which for a while I used to believe, that is a fool's errand. The best advice I ever took was to get expert dharma help and I did. Of course, we each have to do it all ourselves, but we can be shown how by experts.

Great dharma teachers help us to help ourselves.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Astrology and Treasure Finders

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f56b2c77-4c87-4ed5-a844-402689578cd4_690x960.jpeg

With astrology, there is a lot of minutiae to get lost in, which is part of why astrology is so popular with folks. Yet, in my opinion much of astrology is like knitting or crocheting an endless scarf or a blanket, all that activity is kind of single layered. It's more difficult to cut through and unearth fresh new material, instead being content with adding on to the previous quilt with yet another patch. This is true of many things.

Cutting through the history and unearthing entire new techniques is rare and difficult as well. As my dharma teacher of 36 years, the Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche said to me, and all the Tibetans carry an astrological calendar with them.

"Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

Dharma is how we chop or cut through anything, and it is indigenous to our mind. I'd like to blog on this for a few blogs

Another area worth exploring is the difference in trying to extract meaning, knowledge, wisdom, or anything new from something that is already in the past. It's like squeezing oranges for juice that have already been squeezed.

It's the same with trying to rob the cradle of the future, asking for things that stand up or out before their time, which leaves us to consider the deep well of the present moment.

Obviously, the present moment is where everything comes, not only words and ideas but also all actions and what happens. So, just where is that or how do we reap from the present moment, if not from the past or the future? That is worth knowing.

Well, the Tibetans have a whole tradition for this and it's call discovering or finding 'terma' and those who do and can are called 'tertöns', about which this has been said:

"When the real mind terma opens, you do not 'find' anything. You simply stop looking away from what has always been there. The yellow scrolls and dakini

letters are just the rigpa recognising its own face. After that, every breath you take is terma.”

That is why the greatest mind-tertöns (Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Dilgo Khyentse, Dudjom Rinpoche) eventually said:

“In the end, all sentient beings are tertöns — they have simply forgotten where they hid the treasure.”

I have had my own brush with terma, which I will try to explain something about in the following blogs.

As an astrologer for many decades, I was more than a little enthused in 2004 to hear that Rinpoche was taking us to the one spot on Earth where astrology is said to have originated, a very sacred place in China called Wu-Tai Shan. At the time Margaret and I were traveling with our teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, along with a group of his 3- year-retreat lamas, and some other students like us. Also traveling with our group was the 9th Lodro Nyima Rinpoche from Thrangu Monastery in Tibet. We were on our way to spend a week at Wu-Tai Shan. I am not clear whether Rinpoche himself had always wanted to visit there or if he just wanted to make sure his students get that chance. Since he does not speak English (and what little spoken Tibetan I know is restricted to reading sadhanas), I never got that question answered. At any rate, let me tell you something about Wu-Tai Shan, a group of five (flat-topped) mountain peaks located southeast of Beijing that reach up to about 11,000 feet, just shy of where I begin to react to altitude negatively, so that was good. Anyway, I already had been sick enough in Tibet a few weeks earlier. The five mountains are arranged with four in a square, with the fifth and tallest in the center, like a number-five die. Each of the five peaks is said to be inhabited by a different emanation of the bodhisattva Manjushri, and each peak is a field of activity where a particular Buddha or bodhisattva (connected to Manjushri) manifests his or her kind particular influence. Unlike other pure realms such as Amitabha Buddha’s pure land “Dewachen,” Manjushri’s realms are said to be right here on earth, located at particular geographic locations such as Wu-Tai Shan. In other words, you and I can walk around in them right now here on Earth. Mt. Wu-Tai Shan, also known in Chinese as “Clear and Cool Mountain,” is one of the four great sacred mountains in China, and said to be the most popular. These five mountains at Wu-Tai Shan follow the symmetry of the five Buddha families, with Amitabha to the West, Ratnasambhava to the South, Aksobhya to the East, Ammoghasiddhi to the North, and Vairocana in the middle. Wu-Tai Shan has been very important to Tibet as well as China, and the great Indian adept Padampa Sange spent 12 years at Wu-Tai Shan practicing. Tibetan lamas have

made it a point to visit Wu-Tai Shan for centuries. In addition, the great Tibetan hero Tangton Gyalpo, the “Iron Bridge Man,” also visited Wu-Tai Shan where he gave a reading transmission of the “Litany of the Names of Manjushri” to monks there and stayed on for eight months during which time the five forms of Manjushri appeared to him in a series of visions. The whole Wu-Tai Shan area is considered mystical and sacred, not just by the Chinese, but by many Asian religions, particularly Buddhists. For some reason it is also recognized by almost all the world’s religions as a sacred spot. Scattered throughout Wu-Tai Shan are a great many monasteries of all faiths, including not only Tibetan Buddhist gompas, but Christian monasteries too. This area is religiously very cosmopolitan, a central meeting for Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese spirituality – a sacred space. It is traditional for those on a pilgrimage to Wu-Tai Shan to climb to the very peak of each of the five mountains and perform various prayers and pujas (rituals). The ideal blessing is to visit all five mountains in a single day, something we managed to do. Wu-Tai Shan is said to be where the bodhisattva Manjushri, the emanation of discriminating intelligence (and also the bodhisattva connected to divination and astrology) is said to have first emanated on Earth. Manjushri appeared there as a youth, a young adult, bright and shining like the Sun. From the top of his head poured forth the 84,000 teachings on astrology and they were all given to mankind, who loved, treasured, and used them. This is said to be the introduction of astrology to this planet. In fact, the world’s people so loved the astrology that they neglected some of the more basic dharma practices in favor of doing astrology. My teacher had told me years before (when I asked him about astrology) that astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root itself. The root dharma practice is essential to make the limbs grow and function.

Manjushri was concerned that mankind was abandoning dharma practice and spending more and more time on secondary issues (again: the limbs, not the root), and so he withdrew all the astrology teachings so that mankind might better see the root practices of the dharma itself. The world of humans was very sad to lose their astrology and one of the greatest of Tibetan saints Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) saw this happening and felt compassion for all humanity in this regard. Guru Rinpoche knew well that astrology is what is called a relative truth, while the dharma itself was an absolute truth, but he also knew that mankind often depends upon relative truths in order to reach the absolute truth. A relative truth is a path or method to get from here to there in our progress, while an absolute truth is motionless, stateless, and non-changing, having neither beginning nor end. It just is. An example of an absolute truth would be to know the true nature of the mind, while a relative truth might be practicing methods that prepare us to know the true nature of

the mind. Astrology is one of the relative truths; it gets us from here to there, spiritually. It is samsaric. Guru Rinpoche then approached Manjushri and pleaded the case for humans, asking Manjushri to please return the astrology to us. In the end, Manjushri was persuaded and he gave astrology back, but with a caveat. Instead of giving it all back as he had previously, he hid the various teachings in places where we could find it over time, kind of like time-release capsules. Some teachings he actually hid by placing scrolls under rocks and in caves. Other teachings he hid deep within the mind itself (mind terma), so that at prescribed times in the future someone would find this or that particular teaching. These hidden teachings are called 'terma' and those who find them are called 'tertöns.' The Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is the most famous for their tertöns. I believe I mentioned that during my Tibet trip I got sick, but I didn't tell you that on top of that I got a bit ornery as well, just over little things like food, etc. For example, here in the states we think of Chinese food as egg rolls, Chow Mein, Lo Mein, and so forth. I am good with that. There is no such thing in China.

The American take on Chinese food is not what the Chinese themselves eat. They don't serve egg rolls, Lo Mein, or Chow Mein. Instead, everything seems to be coated in oil (and often very bad oils – bad to the taste and health) and served up. I soon got very sick of all that oil and was grumpy on top of that or partly because of that. Everything was coated with oil until I felt suffocated by it. And to my amazement, plain rice was almost never served. You had to order it specially. Imagine! Anyway, you get the idea. Little things like food can mean a lot. During our stay in the Wu-Tai Shan area, we did many practices and visited many holy places. For one, we visited all five of the mountains that make up the Mt. Wu-Tai Shan complex, traveling to the very peak of each to offer prayers and other ritual practices. Moreover, as tradition dictates, we did all five peaks in a single day, which is saying something because each one is literally a 'trip'. Many of the roads were little more than trails on the side of a mountain, but on the top of each peak was an area for practice, either a stupa or some other building or shrine. Many of the peaks were cloud covered, so we literally were up there walking around in the clouds. But despite my illness and despite my grumpiness part of the time, the Wu-Tai Shan Mountains somehow still managed to affect me. After we left China and returned home, the most amazing things began to happen to me astrologically. All kinds of astrology began to occur to me, both western and eastern. Perhaps it was due to having traveled to that consecrated area, an area sacred to astrology and astrologers. I can't say for sure, but I went into renaissance mode astrologically and proceeded to understand and write out a whole lot of new astrology, most of which ended up in one book or another. It also precipitated what has been a lifelong love of astrology that was already

deep in me out and into a dozen or more books. Bam! They just came out, like a baby at a birth. I can say that not only did I burn through a lot of veils covering western astrology but also burned through whatever obstacles or resistance I had to Chinese astrology and began to see what it was really about and to study it more deeply. And it is so beautiful. All kinds of spontaneous insights and mini visions took place. As an astrologer, I have no explanation for this, other than my visit to the sacred Mt. Wu-Tai Shan somehow linked me up with the astrological sources and, regardless of my grumpiness, blessed me. I know I didn't deserve it, but it happened anyway. So, there you have a little history of our trip to Mt. Wu-Tai Shan in China. There are other stories, and I will try to get to them as I can.

[Photo by me of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche at Mt. Wu-Shan in Chian.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Terma, Some Background

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/60376e3d-a579-4026-bea9-4db3d2732419_2048x2048.jpeg

Terma (Tibetan: གཏེར་མ, Wylie: gter ma) is a unique and profound tradition in Tibetan Buddhism, particularly within the Nyingma school, referring to spiritual treasures—texts, teachings, rituals, sacred objects, or relics—that were concealed by great masters, most famously Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, during the 8th–9th centuries.

These terma (treasures) were hidden in physical places (rocks, lakes, temples, or even the sky), in the minds of disciples, or in the nature of reality itself, with the intention that they would be discovered later, at a time when the teachings would be most needed and the world ripe for their revelation.

The discoverers, called tertöns (གཏེར་སྟེན, treasure revealers), are considered reincarnations of Padmasambhava's original disciples and are prophesied to unearth these terma through visionary experiences, dreams, or direct perception.

Famous examples include the Bardo Thödol (Tibetan Book of the Dead) revealed by Karma Lingpa and the Dzogchen cycles of Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa. Terma thus serves as a living, timely renewal of the Buddha's teachings, adapting ancient wisdom to new eras while preserving an unbroken lineage of revelation.

There are places on Earth where the 'terma stream' is still quite alive and active, and here are the main ones I am aware of. As fate would have it, I personally spent time at three of these five places. I wonder how that came to be, but it did. And they are:

MT. WU-TAI SHAN

As mentioned in yesterday's blog, Mt. Wu-Tai Shan, five mountains in the form of a number 5 die, especially the central and northern terraces. I spent time, about a week, there in 2004, reaching the summit of all five of the mountains and offering puja in a single day.

CRYSTAL CAVE

Another very special place I did pilgrimage to was Shel-Drak, the Crystal Cave of Guru Rinpoche. I went there and climbed Shel-Drak, with my wife Margaret and my daughter May Erlewine. It is so isolated that even our Tibetan guide and translator had never attempted that in his life. That is another story I will try to recount in another blog.

PARO TAKTSANG in BHUTAAN -- As for Paro Taktsang in Bhutan), I never went there.

SAMYE MONASTERY (CHIM-PUK)

The oldest Tibetan monastery in Tibet, Samye Monastery and the Guru Rinpoche caves high above it (Chim-puk) I climbed with my daughter Anne Erlewine in 1997. I also will try to post this account.

TSARI -- Tsari, Sikkim's Tashiding and hidden lands I also have never been too, although I have been to Sikkim.

The above-mentioned places are said to still have open "terma doors" that can trigger any mind-terma ripening in us. As mentioned, I have been to three of these places, and I can attest to this.

As for 'terma', hidden dharma treasures, the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism is the center of terma and tertöns. In Tibetan Buddhism, especially within the Nyingma school, terma (གཏེན་མ་, "hidden treasure") refers to teachings or sacred objects that Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) and other great masters concealed — physically in rocks, lakes, or temples, or energetically in the minds of future disciples — to be discovered later when the time is right and the world needs them.

Those who discover these hidden teachings are called tertöns (གཏེན་སྟོན་, "treasure revealers"). They're considered incarnations of Padmasambhava's original 25 or 108 major disciples, and their revelations are regarded as authentic continuations of the lineage, even though they might appear centuries after the original master's time. There are two main types of terma:

Earth Terma (Sa Gter): physically hidden objects or texts.

Mind Terma (Sgongs Gter): teachings that arise directly in the tertön's mind, often in symbolic dakini script that they then are able to decode.

Some of the most famous tertöns include:

Nyangrel Nyima Özer (12th Century)

Guru Chöwang (13th century)

Rigdzin Gödem (1337–1408)

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (19 th Century)

Chokgyur Lingpa (1829-1870)

And in the 20th century, Dudjom Rinpoche and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (both considered tertöns in their own right)

In 2004 I spent some time in Tibet meeting the great tertön Tsikey Chokgyur Lingpa Rinpoche. This took place in Jekundo in Kham, Tibet, not far from Thrangu Monastery. Here is a photo I took (or one our group took) from the afternoon we spent with this tertön.

Mount Wu-Tai (Wu-tai Shan) in China’s Shanxi province contains Five Sacred Buddhist Mountains, known for its five flat-topped peaks, Wu-Tai Shan is considered the abode of the Bodhisattva Manjushri.

The name “Wu-Tai Shan” literally translates to “Five Terrace Mountains,” and the mountain is famous for its numerous ancient Buddhist temples and monasteries, as well as its natural beauty, including lush green summers and snow-covered winters. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The North Peak (Yèdòu Fēng), “Peak of Flourishing Leaves” is the highest at 3,061 m (10,043 ft) and is usually considered the “king” of the five. It is said that this North peak was where first Mañjuśrī appeared.

In the Tibetan, Chinese, and broader East Asian traditions, Wu-Tai Shan is universally accepted as the earthly residence of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the embodiment of transcendent wisdom. Many visions and miracles of Mañjuśrī appearing in the form of a youth riding a blue lion, wandering monks, or even as ordinary pilgrims, have been recorded there for over a thousand years.

Wu-Tai Shan is one of the physical places on the planet most strongly associated with that living current of revelation, exactly like how Mount Kailash is linked with Chakrasamvara/Demchok and Padmasambhava’s Copper-Colored Mountain is linked with the Guru Rinpoche practices.

In short, for anyone interested in the living, visionary side of Vajrayana (or East Asian Buddhism in general), Wu-Tai Shan isn’t just a historical site; it’s still regarded as an active “wisdom antenna” on the planet.

If special interest to me, Wu-Tai Shan is where astrology first entered our world system, and the 84,000 astrological terma were first emitted from the top of the head of a youthful Mañjuśrī. This tradition is a specific Nyingma-terma lineage revelation story.

It is not found in mainstream Chinese or Gelug/Kagyu/Sakya sources about Wu-tai Shan, but it is accepted as authentic within certain Nyingma cycles, especially those connected with the Northern Terma (Jangter) lineage and the revelations of Rigdzin Gökyi Demtruchen (Rigdzin Gödem, 1337–1409) and later tertöns.

When Padmasambhava was subduing Tibet and the Himalayas in the 8th–9th century, it is written that he emanated countless times as Mañjuśrī (in his youthful, orange-colored form called Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta or Jampalyang Gzhon-nur Gyurpa).

As mentioned, on the central peak of Wu-Tai Shan (the Northern Terrace), Padmasambhava appeared in the form of this youthful Mañjuśrī. From the uṣṇīṣa (the crown protuberance on the top of the Bodhisattva's head), he emitted 84,000 rays of light.

Each ray contained one complete cycle of astrological teachings (Tib. rtsis), including elemental astrology, divination, medical astrology, and the famous Kālacakra-based “Tibetan Royal Astrology” (Kar-Tsi) and the older “Chinese-derived” elemental calculation systems (Jung-Tsi).

These 84,000 astrological terma were not all meant for immediate revelation. Most were concealed:

Some as earth terma in the rocks and lakes of Wu-Tai Shan itself.

Some as mind terma in the minds of future tertöns.

Some were absorbed into the famous Mañjuśrī statue that speaks or into the atmosphere of the five peaks of Wu-Tai Shan.

The primary tertön who opened this “Wu-Tai Shan astrological terma gate” was Rigdzin Gödem (1337–1409), the discoverer of the Northern Terma (Jangter) tradition.

He physically went on pilgrimage to Wu-Tai Shan (a very dangerous journey in the 14th century), had visions of a youthful Mañjuśrī on the peaks, and received/transcribed a large number of astrological terma texts that are still used today, especially:

The Vimala Astrological Cycle (Dri-med rtsis skor)

Various “Mañjuśrī Elemental Calculations”

The famous Gongkar Kālacakra Astrology that later fed into the Gelug and government systems

The Fifth Dalai Lama (who was extremely devoted to Wu-Tai Shan) received pure-vision astrological teachings there.

Sangye Lingpa, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and some contemporary Nyingma lamas have also extracted or renewed parts of the “84,000” from Wu-Tai Shan in dream or visionary form.

Finding ‘mind terma’ (Gong Ter) — especially the very deep, “ancient-yet-new” astrological treasures that are said to have been hidden in the alayavijnana (ālaya kun gzhi, the Storehouse Consciousness) by Padmasambhava or Mañjuśrī is done entirely in the present moment, by turning the attention 180 degrees back into the nature of mind itself.

So, in the present moment, the “discovery” of deep astrological terma is not archaeological and not intellectual. It is an act of recognizing the already-present wisdom display of rigpa, seeded there 1,200 years ago by Padmasambhava/Mañjuśrī, and now ripening exactly when the world’s karma needs it. The ālaya (Storehouse Consciousness) of the tertön becomes the new “Wu-Tai Shan peak” from which the rays emerge again.

The moment the tertön sees the swirling dakini letters, they immediately understand the meaning, exactly like suddenly remembering a dream in perfect detail.

I know nothing of this as far as Dakini letters, yet I know about it from actually discovering astrological terma, perhaps because I actually did pilgrimage to three of the main active terma sites that exist and they affected me.

You don’t have to take my word, I have the results in astrological techniques I have brought to the world, including Local Space, Heliocentric Archetypes, Burn Rate interpretation, Interface (heliocentric planetary nodes), not to mention being the first to program astrology on home computers and offer to my fellow astrologers, and other techniques.

One cannot just decide to become a tertön. According to the teachings, the seed was placed in our ālaya in a former life by Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, or one of the great wisdom dākinīs. What we can do is ripen that seed as fast as possible and remove every possible obstacle so that, if we are destined, the vision will open naturally — sometimes in this very life. The traditional mantra of Mañjuśrī is:

OM, AH RA, PA TSA, NA DHI...DHI, DHI, DHI, DHI, DHI, DHI...

Some traditional advice from the tertöns include:

“Stop trying to become a tertön. Just become inseparable from Padmasambhava. When that happens, if a terma is supposed to come out for the sake of beings, it will appear by itself — you will not have a choice in the matter.”

“So, the real “method” is total surrender to the Guru and the rigpa state, lifetime after lifetime, until the seal cracks open of its own accord.”

“Great transformation of mind.” The tertön’s realisation permanently jumps to a new level. They now carry the terma as living transmission; anyone who hears them teach it receives the same blessing Padmasambhava gave 1,200 years ago.”

I have had a number of experiences related to discovering astrological terma. I just naturally sense or intuit when something more is there than meets the eye, in particular as regards inner directions. I feel it coming to the surface, just as a bone or tooth fragment or a thorn will work itself to the surface and eventually come out. I sense it coming and I help to work it to the surface where I can actually feel, see, and define it. This takes time, often a long time.

It is embedded in my mind, yet I can’t ignore it. And when it eventually materializes, it resolves itself and emerges fully blown, complete, not as I imagined it, but as it is.

And it is a catalyst, meaning it causes me to change commensurate with its meaning or message. It is born and somehow, I midwife it into objective reality.

Yet, the process of emergence is gradual, formative in the true sense of the word, again not as I imagined it, but rather as it is. These terma are seminal, and can take years to emerge and be realized.

I have shared these astrological terma with my fellow astrologers. Techniques like Local Space, for example, were easily recognized and put to use by my fellow astrologers, but more subtle techniques like Interface (Heliocentric Planetary Nodes), or heliocentric archetypes (StarTypes), and others are still being incubated. Probably I won’t live to see their relevance to modern astrology, but it is there. I’ve had to learn patience.

[Photo of the great tertön Tsikey Chokgyur Lingpa Rinpoche that I visited in 2004.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

A Victim of Our Choices

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/36e18531-dd66-418e-b7fa-8505e44fcd5_2228x591.jpeg

I am noticing how whatever I do ripens over time. I'm not saying it metastasizes, yet it seems its importance (or lack thereof) grows ever more obvious. Of course, some things just pass away and are forgotten. We forget what we find difficult or unmeaningful to remember. In this blog I am talking about the stuff that goes on and is paid forward.

It could be as simple as the choices we make. What could be a snap decision today becomes a choice we made tomorrow. For example:

In our family, we chose to have home births for two of our kids. We also chose to home-school two of our kids, and to not have a babysitter for some 21 years. That kind of thing. Those were choices that had consequences. Even making no choice is a choice.

In my own life, I chose to not like school and to never graduate from high school but just get out in the world and live. I chose to teach myself almost everything and to spend perhaps an inordinate amount of time out in Mother Nature. You get the idea. We each have our choices that we have made.

I find that these choices shape us and can gather importance over time as well. They can mean something to us. Each choice at the time may seem obvious, but the combined collection of all our choices may make us later on an interesting person or perhaps a person of interest.

Our personality and what we call our 'Self' is pretty much the sum total of our attachments or decisions, certainly what poets have called that 'terrible crystal'.

And the dharma teachings tell us that what we call the Self is laid aside at death and not propelled into the future by our karma. Yet, our karma, good and bad, is paid forward to take rebirth, but not with our name or likeness stamped on it, except karmically.

Yes, we are a victim of our own choices. No doubt about it.

I made a lot of choices that were, to say the least, not popular back when I made them, like not finishing high school. Forget about college prep. That act

alone closed a lot of doors to me. My high school friends actually said, "Michael, we will see you at the car wash." Yet I persevered.

Lucky for me, I found a partner who went with me on all this, and she is an incredible mother and friend. Yes, we walk the thin line between acceptance by society and rejection.

As a kid, my inner mantra was that I not be wasted in this life, but rather 'used up' by life in a meaningful manner. And I did not want to work at a job I did not love. It took me quite a while to find a way to make a living that I actually liked and was interested in.

Most things I have done as an entrepreneur were jobs no one else wanted or would do, like catalogue and organize all recorded music or all recorded film, or all concert music posters or create a large library of all astrology books I could get my hands on.

Looking back from now, these kind of jobs may seem kind of cool, until you had to actually do them. I actually did them because I cared about keeping music alive, music that seemed to be being lost as vinyl turned into cassettes, and then into CDs, and now into downloads. Music was slipping through the cracks, and I did not like that.

The above jobs, my dear friends, are enormously tedious, each and every one, yet as mentioned, I had to find jobs that others were not willing to do, although anyone could have done them.

In truth, we have a lot of jobs in our society that no one wants to do, but some people will do them for one reason or another. Those folks and I have something in common.

I get a lot of 'Thank You' notes for my archiving of popular culture (music, film, concert posters, astrology, etc.), yet have met almost no fellow archivists of the same material. There is nothing romantic about documenting recorded music, film, etc. What kept me at it is my natural tendency to organize and curate what I love. I just love popular music, film, and related material. I did not want to see it lost in the shuffle

The image shown here is my collection of astrology books and magazines. There is also about 40 feet of vinyl as well. This entire collection is now in the University of Illinois at Champagne (all catalogued) . My collection of Rock n' Roll poster images and measurements is at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan and at the NFP Haight Street Art Center in San Francisco and at ClassicPosters.com.

My collection of Asian art is now at the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art (500 pieces) in New York City. My collection of music CDs is now at the Michigan State University, some 800,000 CDs, some of my collection of reptiles and amphibians is at the University of Michigan, and many of my writing are at the Ann Arbor Public Library. Of course, SpiritGrooves.net has hundreds of free books I have published.

And I do have a collection of more than a million nature photographs that are being curated and will be available free at the Ann Arbor Public Library, online, for all to have and use.

[My astrological library.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Crystal Cave of Guru Rinpoche -- A Story

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 1, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ff6ed35c-0c91-4574-8038-f60750ab3914_2049x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e11244c8-1743-4dec-ad50-797425eff487_2048x2050.jpeg

One pilgrimage spot that everyone tried to talk me out of going to is the legendary Crystal Cave (Shel Drak) of Guru Rinpoche, on Crystal Mountain, a key pilgrimage site for Tibetans—in particular for those of the Nyingma Lineage.

This site is said to represent Guru Rinpoche's Buddha attributes. After all, this was Guru Rinpoche's first meditation cave in Tibet. It was here that he bound the demons and the Bön influences under oath. Many terma were hidden and later revealed here—to practitioners such as Orgyen Lingpa and to others as well. I felt I had to go there.

Both of the experienced Tibetan trekkers I knew said it was too hard and that neither of them had ever been there themselves. Even the local guide who lived right there had never been, and he suggested that anything I had read implying it was doable had probably not been written by someone who actually knew how difficult the journey was.

My will to reach the Crystal Cave was not as strong after hearing this — my resolution wavered.

But then, we visited Traduk Temple in the Yarlung Valley, some 7 kilometers South of Tsetang. As we wandered through this beautiful gumpa, we came across a room which had a striking gold statue of Guru Rinpoche within. I remember reading that the original statue of Guru Rinpoche had been removed for safekeeping from the Crystal Cave and placed in a nearby monastery. This had to be it, and, as the monk at the temple soon explained, so it was.

Guru Rinpoche Statue

It was perhaps the most inspiring image of Guru Rinpoche I had ever seen. And right next to it was an image of Guru Rinpoche's consort, Yeshe Tsogyal

and it was incredibly lovely. Seeing these two rupas (statues) rekindled my will to visit the cave to where it had once been. I again resolved to reach Shel-Drak. Something inside of me just had to go to the Guru Rinpoche cave at Crystal Mountain.

I informed my guide I was going, even if I had to hire a separate vehicle and go by myself. Resigned, our guide turned his attention to helping us figure how to do it.

One thing I did know is that we would have to start out early, as it would be an all-day hike. Most of our party elected not to even attempt the journey, preferring to stay in the Tsetang area, where our driver would shuttle them from gumpa to gumpa.

Those of us who would attempt to reach Shel-Drak included myself, my wife Margaret, our 15-year-old daughter May, and our Tibetan guide.

As for directions, all we knew was that we would have to drive to the Tsechu Bumpa, a well-known stupa in the village of Kato, on outskirts of Tsetang, and try and find a local guide there, perhaps hiring a tractor to carry us part of the way.

Now the Tibetan (or Chinese) tractor is not the beast we all know by that name here in the U.S. What they mean by a tractor in Tibet is more what we would call a large Rototiller, a small 2-wheel, 2-cycle engine that can plow a field and, in Tibet, pull a cart. These tractors fill the streets and side roads of Tibet, pulling carts filled with vegetables, brush, and more often—people.

Our driver found the Tsechu Bumpa Stupa, one of the three main stupas in the Yarlung Valley area, whereupon we began to knock on doors. We located one man with a tractor; however, since it was the harvest time, he had already agreed to work elsewhere that day.

Things did not look so good. But then he suggested there might be one fellow, a newcomer to the area, who might be free. Knocking at his house, we aroused his fierce dog and brought his wife to the door. He was still asleep, but she would wake him.

After some time, he came out, rubbing his eyes. Our guide gave him the pitch. I cannot understand Tibetan, but I could see by the way he was shaking his head that things were not going the way we had hoped. I told our guide to up the ante until he could not afford to refuse.

This tactic worked; he agreed to take us, and our own driver left us standing in the road, waiting for this tractor man to get his machine. Although a building nearby seemed, from the outside, to be a garage, when the man opened what

we thought was a garage door, it actually opened into a courtyard (with no roof) where the tractor was kept.

Then there was the starting of the tractor and the fact that the cart (where we would ride) was filled with water, which had to be drained. That done, we climbed into the cart, sitting on empty feed bags and blankets that his wife had brought out just as we had been about to get our butts wet.

She tucked a small bottle of butter-tea and some tsampa under the driver's seat (his lunch) and off we were, although at what seemed to be a snail's pace.

The idea was to ride the tractor as far up the mountain as it would go, saving our legs for the really hard part. As it turned out, there really wasn't any road to where we were going. None.

Instead, we followed the dry bed of a stream uphill, moving very slowly toward the mountains. After a mile or so, it became difficult for the tractor to pull us on, due to the soft mud: we all had to get out and push. Pretty soon, we were spending more time pushing than riding and it became apparent we could go no farther.

So, we left the tractor, and the driver, who would wait for us, perhaps for the whole day. I have no pictures from the first part of the trip because we were shrouded in a mist, and then in clouds. I can tell you that it was tough going though, even from the start, as in all uphill and steep at the same time.

Our first goal was to climb to the small village of Sekhang Zhirka, which was perched on a ridge, and call that our base camp, from which we would push on up the mountain to the Crystal Cave—a hard 3-hour climb.

Yet reaching the village of Sekhang Zhirka was a long haul from the valley floor, perhaps 5 kilometers and always going up, up, up.

Even though I don't generally use caffeine, I had mental images of arriving there and having a nice warm cup of butter-tea, knowing that the long climb would burn off any of the bad side effects of the caffeine. At last, we reached the village, which was more like a bunch of houses strung together—but there was no tea.

Everyone had abandoned the town to move back down to the valley for the winter. By this time, we were breathing pretty hard. After a good sit, we got up and moved on.

From here on out, it got really steep, something I thought it already had been. It is hard to describe, but in many cases we were just scrambling up steep

slopes of boulders or discovering that what was called the path was just a wide staircase of strewn rock and boulders.

My so-called (by me, earlier that morning) light day pack soon began to feel very heavy indeed. My wife and I kind of dropped behind, while our daughter and the guide went on ahead. After a while, the two of us just gave up any pretense of being tough and began to sit down whenever we needed to — which was all the time! At the worst, we were resting every 20 or 30 feet, and I mean taking off our pack, sitting down, and resting.

What can I say? I am getting old, etc., but it was tough. Our guide met a local man who was up on the mountainside looking for lost yaks, hoping to drive them back down for the coming winter. He and the guide went on ahead, but our daughter May quickly passed them, leaving us all in the dust.

One of the guys had taken Margaret's pack, to make it easier for her. We were walking in the clouds or at least were surrounded by them. After a time, we climbed above the mist and clouds and began to be able to see more of the mountains around us. We were essentially walking up the spine of a great wide ridge on the side of a mountain, with a deep canyon across from us. Aside from all the heavy breathing, this place was gorgeous.

Lumo Durtrö Naga Cemetery

From the little I had read, the next place we would arrive at would be Lumo Durtrö, a female naga cemetery, dedicated to Tamdrin, the horse-headed deity. This was a place of

traditional Tibetan sky burial, where the bodies are cut up with sharp tools and fed to the vultures. The place was not, however, readily forthcoming.

We climbed and climbed and climbed. Somewhere along in here we met an old man, with skin like leather, coming down from the mountain; he motioned for us to come close and took what looked like a piece of quartz crystal from his pack.

Beginning to hack away at it, he eventually handed each of us a small piece—it was rock candy, sugar. We thanked him and moved on. Those small pieces of sugar, something I would never normally eat, turned out to be just the thing—that little bit of energy meant a lot at that point.

On we went, and after a very long time our guide pointed through the mist to a distant stupa high on the mountain. Groan. That was the place we should have reached an hour ago, and it was just a stepping stone on our journey. Panting and struggling, we moved on.

One of the strangest experiences in this kind of climbing is that, sooner or later, you do reach those far-off glimpsed places. It just takes time—and suffering. We finally reached the sky burial place, and, sure enough, there were human bones and meat cutting tools scattered around. A wrist and hand were lying under a small bush. And clothes were everywhere.

Apparently, it is the custom to scatter the clothes of the deceased nearby. The place looked like a Good-Will store after a hurricane. This stupa, however, was just a way station for us. We did kora (circumambulating around the stupa) and looked to see if there were any more human remains (fascinating), and then marched on.

Walking in the Clouds

After a very long time, the trail began to even out some, and there were even sections offering almost—but not quite—level walking, and short sections, at that. Margaret offered to help carry my pack, and we took turns with that for a while.

We began to have glimpses of a monastery across a canyon that, believe it or not, our guide informed us we would have to get to. It seemed so far away from where we were now! By this time, we were high up, and our yak herder was beginning to find some of his yaks, but they were always on the other side of the canyon from him. He had a sling and was very adept at winging rocks across the canyon to land near the yaks. They hit with a pinging sound, but the yaks did not pay too much attention.

Meanwhile, I couldn't even look around me half the time—I was breathing so hard. It was all I could do to look at the ground in front of me and put one foot in front of the other.

Above Shel-Drak Monastery

Just before we reached Shel-Drak Monastery—dedicated to the famous Nyingma tertön, Sangye Lingpa—the path turned into what was almost a rock staircase. We scrambled up this staircase and into a wide courtyard. The monastery had a single large door in front, but it was closed, and the monastery looked for all the world as if it were abandoned. “What to do?” I asked our guide. “Try opening the large door,” he said, and, sure enough, it swung open.

We pushed inside and collapsed on a porch in a sunny inner courtyard. There we had lunch and butter-tea. Lunch was only hard-boiled eggs, some bread, and a few cookies, but it tasted like ambrosia after that long hike. We were so tired. As it turned out, this gompa marked the end of any “easy” ascent. From

here on up, it was almost straight up—rock stairs. The good news is that this last stretch involved less than an hour of climbing before, if all went well, we should reach the cave.

Starting out, we crossed a small natural rock bridge above a rushing stream. This was the Terchu, or ‘Rediscovered Water’, a spring sacred to Guru Rinpoche. From here, the way was indeed steep, with sheer drops on one side and a rock face going straight up on the other. The building and the cave high above us seemed far away, protruding out from the mountain side. We climbed on, with both Margaret and me plopping down often to rest.

We stared out over the valley or dared to look down the steep drop. As we hiked, we began to come across bright strings tied to objects hanging from the rocks. Many pilgrims had been here before us, and they must have taken this very same path, as there was no other. I imagined perhaps Khenpo Rinpoche (not to mention Guru Rinpoche) had once climbed on these very same rocks.

Inside Guru Rinpoche’s Cave

Exhausted but exhilarated (and proud of ourselves), we finally made it to the top and entered a small level area next to the two-story building that houses the Crystal Cave (Shel-Drak Drubphuk) and a small gumpa and shrine. From here there was an incredible view of the entire Yarlung Valley far below.

Next, we climbed some steep ladder-like steps to our left and entered a tiny room, which contained a few more steps to an even tinier place, the cave itself. The cave was almost full, with three other pilgrims plus a monk from the monastery below.

They were in the midst of doing a Guru Rinpoche puja, complete with tsok, the ritual feast offering. There was just enough room for the four of us to wedge inside. Here was the cave, with rough walls, containing a tiny shrine on which was a statue of Guru Rinpoche, with butter lamps before it. We brought with us a photo of the young Karmapa we had just taken, which the attending monk happily put at once in the center of the shrine.

When the puja ended, the monk handed around pieces of tsok torma to everyone; then the pilgrims (and the monk) withdrew from this small cave room. At this point, we were able to do our prostrations and whatever other practices we felt like offering. It was special to be there, and each of us asked for Guru Rinpoche’s blessing in our own way.

Looking Out from the Cave

Afterward, we visited the small gumpa next to the cave and the excellent shrine there. We looked out over the entire Yarlung Valley, knowing we had

come all the way up from the very bottom. This valley, which stretched out far below us, is said to be the place from which the entire Tibetan civilization arose. It was indeed vast and beautiful -- 'awesome' would be a better word. I could not imagine how in the wide world we would ever get from where we were now (so high at the top) back to the plain below. It just seemed physically impossible.

But back down we went, and it only took something over two hours (and, for me, a bunch of blisters) to reach the abandoned village. My shoes could not take the constant pressure of the bracing needed for the downhill climb, and my toes suffered. I could feel it happening, but there was nothing I could do about it -- down and down we went, mile after mile.

The hike had been some 1300 feet above the Stupa, where we started. Our tractor was still waiting, and we rattled back down the riverbed and into town, arriving just as the rains rolled in from the mountains. After some tea at the tractor driver's home, during which the rains slowed, we climbed back into the tractor and were driven to and through Tsetang, to the amusement of everyone who saw us.

Perhaps they had never seen westerners ride (as Tibetans do all the time) in the back of a tractor before. It was a slow cross-town ride through sporadic rain and lots of huge puddles.

Once back, I took a hot bath, changed my clothes, and went down to one of those meals you just inhale. Beyond exhaustion, I was almost euphoric at having actually made, despite obstacles, the climb to the Crystal Cave on Crystal Mountain, and also at having made an aspiration to Guru Rinpoche, and on his home turf.

[Photos by me or Margaret.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

An Offering

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/24bce561-5b4b-40ed-8f39-12fcdfa4f7af_2048x1697.jpeg

By Michael Erlewine

Whatever we love, at least what we most care about, or are interested in, is what we curate and protect. Whatever it is, it either is or comes close enough to be considered a mandala, in this case our mandala.

There are probably other words or terms to describe this, but the closest I can come here is the concept and word mandala, an offering, our offering. I can't communicate how important this concept is in our life, how very vital.

Whatever it is, no matter how rough or crude it is at this point in time, it is our offering, for us as pure as it gets. It's what we place on the alter of time to offer, what we are offering.

Just as a beaver will bring sticks to build a lodge, making it ever more secure, birds build nests, and caterpillars cocoons, so do we improve whatever we intend to offer as a mandala. The hour's heartbreak that conceals all that we have not hated.

It's the busyness that we do that is the purest, and to us the most sacred. This is our offering, our best intent. We all do this. We all have something that is sacred to us at that at least amounts to our interest.

To me, this is a beautiful and profound reflection. To take the traditional Tibetan Buddhist concept of a mandala (an intricate, symmetrical offering of the entire universe, built with colored sand and then deliberately destroyed to symbolize impermanence) and turned it inward in a very human, very universal way.

What I am describing is essentially this:

Every person, whether they know it or not, is quietly, persistently constructing their own mandala with their life. Not out of sand, but out of time, attention, love, and effort.

The collector who dusts his shelves of rare books or vinyl.

The parent who perfects the packed lunch or the bedtime ritual.

The programmer who refactors one more line of code “just because it feels cleaner.”

The gardener who weeds at dawn,

The teenager curating the perfect playlist or Instagram grid.

All of us are doing the same thing the monk does when he places a single grain of colored sand with tweezers for nine hours a day: They are saying, without words, “This matters. This is my offering.”

We would be absolutely right that it feels sacred, even when the object itself looks trivial or “rough or crude” from the outside. The sacredness isn’t in the polish of the final product; it’s in the quality of attention, the repeated return, the refusal to let it degrade entirely, to complete it. That repeated return is a kind of prayer we offer.

There’s also something quietly heartbreaking in it, because most of these personal mandalas (our bodies, our relationships, our little collections, our half-finished novels, our gardens, our reputations) will also be dissolved in the end. Time sweeps them away just as the monks sweep the sand of a mandala into a river. However, the act of building them anyway is the purest gesture we have. It’s devotion without a guarantee of permanence.

It’s what we offer, something most people feel but rarely articulate: that little sphere that we keep tending is our unconscious altar. And tending it is how ordinary humans do what monks and artists and saints have always done, turn this fleeting life into offering.

“I anoint the earth with fragrant water, scatter flowers,

And adorn it with Mt. Meru, the four continents, and the Sun & Moon.

Imagining this a buddha field, I offer it so that all beings may enjoy this pure realm.”

[Photo by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

The Other Side of Sleep

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4d8050b6-f79f-44cb-b134-977924a5b95e_1024x1024.jpeg

I rearrange and rearrange, always improving the space I live and work in to make it have more room and efficiency.

I have worked in this tiny office for 45 years and I still have breakthroughs in terms of feng-shui and efficiency. And the point is that I appreciate and celebrate any breakthrough in this regard.

Each mandala that I work with grows cleaner and leaner, aerodynamics is the key. I'd like to see a book on the cybernetics of how we live and act.

Currently I am transforming my tiny photo studio that is upstairs in our house, changes perhaps no longer by leaps and bounds but incrementally, one shift at a time. I actually find it thrilling to see any space rearrange itself for the better.

Perhaps, this is just a byproduct of life lived. As a system programmer, the same thing happens. I continually would clean the code to make it smaller and more efficient. The concept of a kernel of code delights me.

I have studied Feng Shui for decades and must have 30 or more books on it and I wrote one book of my own.

Then on one of two visits to our center by His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche, who is an expert on feng shui, who walked with us through our own house. And by the time that tour was done, I was empowered by Rinpoche in feng shui. Through his presence I just suddenly got it. All those books did not hold a candle to what I learned from Rinpoche in those ten minutes. Aha! That's what feng shui is all about.

"Even I can do that" is the mantra of the dharma.

I marvel at the increased use and functionality that the more modern top-down window blinds make possible as to the use of light in a room. They are an elegant way to shape light.

And I like to write and take photographs, but often I don't have a topic for writing in mind or a subject for photography. Instead, I just have an urge to write or photograph, to be creative, and that urge finds me once again

peering into the wishing well of this present moment, surfing the waves of time.

I feel like creating and the clay or substance to create with I just take from the stream of time as it surfaces through the present moment and I shape that. You know, it doesn't really matter about the subject. It's more about the sense of urgency I feel to be creative, putting that urgency I feel back to sleep, satisfying it.

It's not clear to me where everything that "IS" comes from or why. I just know it comes from the present moment and can be kneaded or worked with just like a potter uses clay.

Some days find me sitting out along the edge of time, parsing the viscosity of time as it pulses along. It's like I used to do as a kid when I dangled my feet in a summer brook, and I muse.

What do the waters of life remember?

Will yesterday's shadows outrun tomorrow?

A door I never noticed closes softly behind the life I thought I was living. And I wake up laughing at a joke my dream is still telling on the other side of sleep.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Samye Monastery and Chim-Pik (Guru Rinpoche caves)

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d77df769-871b-4388-b3cb-0a325545d36e_2048x2028.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/005a1d36-3009-4247-a779-55e67051f150_2048x2048.jpeg

After we left Tsurphu Monastery, the ancestral home of the Karmapas, we returned to Lhasa, and then headed away from that city and toward Tsetan. The road from Lhasa to Tsetang (since it is also the road to the airport) is one of the best in Tibet, fully paved and complete with two lanes.

We drove out of Lhasa, knowing we would not be back again this trip. We had said our goodbyes. On the way back, we stopped once more at the lovely Tara shrine along the road—the Drolma Lhakang at Netang—and then continued on, this time driving right past the Gonghar airport and continuing on toward Tsetang, driving along the great Tsangpo River.

We stopped along the road right next to one of those great barley fields ready for harvest, and opened the hated hotel box lunches. About all we could eat of them were the hard-boiled eggs. After lunch, and on down the road—some 30 kilometers or so from Tsetang—we pulled off and just drove right down to the edge of the Tsangpo river. At this point, the Tsangpo must be almost a mile wide. Along the bank were several small barge-like boats—each maybe 30 feet long—and each having small diesel outboard engines on the back.

The Boat to Samye Monastery

We were on our way to Samye Chokor—said to be the first monastery built in Tibet, and unreachable by any highway. The only way to Samye was either overland with back-pack and horse, or by ferry, which is how we were traveling now.

The day was hot, and the Sun, here in the open, was fierce. We had to cross the Tsangpo, but we were ostensibly waiting for another vehicle — the one that was supposed to be bringing our cook, along with a car full of cooking supplies: where we were going, we needed our own cook.

Since I had no idea when this cook might arrive from Lhasa, I volunteered to pay the extra boat fee the cook would require, so that we could get started across right away. It was clear that few of us would be able to take the sun exposure sustained beforehand, during an unspecified waiting time on the open beach, as well as that the lengthy crossing was going to entail.

All of our gear was piled at the end of one of the boats.

Next ensued a long and hot argument between our guide (and driver) and the staff at the boat livery. It seems that the boat pilot had not yet had his lunch and (somehow) our guide had offended his pride. It was something about the simple meal of tsampa the pilot was about to have...he felt, perhaps, our guide was looking down his nose at him. It was the only argument I witnessed in Tibet, but it was a doozey, with shouting and shoving. We all stood by the boat, waiting to see if we would even have a boat pilot at all. We would.

Crossing the Tsangpo River

The trip across the river to the village of Surkar took more than one and a quarter hours, as the boat, not able to go just straight across, had to move slowly through a maze of sand bars.

After we were a certain distance out from the shore, we saw our cook arrive, and there was discussion on whether we should go back to get him. I said we should not—just too much exposure to the sun. On the far side, we could see other barges moored, and several large trucks waiting for us. The trip from Surkar to Samye, by truck, was some eight kilometers.

We piled our stuff in the back of a truck and climbed in ourselves, hanging on to the overhead frame that stretched over the truck bed. And hang on we did (for dear life!) while the truck lunged down the road and across the sand dunes, going as fast as the driver could push it. The older kids absolutely loved it, and the driver knew it. The rest of us just got numb knuckles while trying to keep from flying off the side.

Along this road are the Rignga Chortens, five small stupas that have been carved out of the solid rock of the mountainside. Painted white, they are visible even from the Gonghar road on the South side of the Tsangpo.

Samye Monastery Grounds

After the ride through the dunes, and passing through groves of trees, we got our first glimpse of the golden roofs of Samye. The monastery is laid out like a vast mandala, with the large Utse temple in the center. The entire perimeter consists of a great elliptical wall, more than a kilometer in circumference, on which are set 1008 small stupas.

There are four gates to the city, and these are located at 45-degree angles from the North-South/East-West axis. Destroyed by the Chinese, Samye's reconstruction has come far. Inside the perimeter wall are four very large stupas, all of which were, at the time, undergoing reconstruction.

The Utse temple, at the center of Samye, is impressive. Inside the outer walls of the temple is a large square circumambulatory area, filled with prayer wheels that surround the actual gumpa (shrine room). The walls along this prayer-wheel route are filled with exquisite murals featuring 35 Buddha images, some of which have been defaced by the Chinese.

Above this is a second floor containing the monks quarters, all of which face inward toward the main gumpa.

The main shrine hall area is very dark and filled with incredible statues. I was able to practice there one morning before the monks began their morning puja. I had monks all around, as usual, just watching me. One sat immediately in front of me, no more than a foot from my face. Although this was nerve-wracking, everyone was very friendly.

There were not many amenities at Samye. The best we could do was find one large room that had maybe 10 beds in it, lined up side by side. Everyone (ourselves and others) was in the same room. There is no way that I was going to sleep on those beds without a sleeping bag and a ground cloth.

There was no running water, and the open bathroom was not quite far enough away so that we could breathe free—there was no fresh air—or, if we opened the two small windows, we had a continual stream of smoke and bathroom smells.

The bathroom was one of those lovely Tibetan two-story open bathrooms, the ones that have some kind of shielding only up to your thighs. The idea is, you have to squat down if you don't want anyone to see you. No stand-up peeing, like guys are used to. Also, it was right on the edge of the building—in plain sight of anyone below. I am not complaining, just explaining.

Our cook arrived, with about a ton of gear, including huge sacks of flour, cans of cooking oil—way more than we could ever need. He set up shop in a room downstairs and he, his helper, and our guide, moved in there. They soon filled the room with both cooking and tobacco smoke. We found out right away that the food would be pretty bad, even though the cook tried to please.

My opinion of Samye is that it is a heavy place. I don't know if it was heavy just for me, or if it is the kind of place that puts everyone through a lot of changes. I have no way of knowing, but I can say that some tough stuff went

down there, stuff I have no intention of even going into here...perhaps it is because Samye is said to be Tibet's oldest monastery. We spent two quite difficult days at Samye Monastery. My son became sick, and my wife, at one point, had to take him out of there and all the way to Tsetang, to a hotel, where he could recover.

Main Gompa at Samye

I can remember rising one morning before dawn and going down to the main gompa, hoping to find a place to do my daily practice. It was drizzling rain. The front door to the shrine hall was still locked by chains. The outer cement floor, protected from the rain, was filled with dozens of dogs who had sought shelter there for the night. They slept tightly packed in this small space, all curled up.

In Tibet it is common for folks with a dog they no longer want to leave it at a monastery. I had no place to practice, so I shoed some of the dogs to the side and made a little place there on the cement floor. With a small flashlight, I did my practice, surrounded by yawning and scratching dogs. We shared the space.

CHIM-PUK

Another memorable story is our climb to Chimpuk—the Guru Rinpoche caves high above Samye Monastery. My wife had taken my son, Michael, who was not feeling well back to Tsetang, accompanied by our 15-year old daughter, May.

This left me, my 21-year old daughter Michael Anne at Samye. One of my goals for this trip was to visit some major Guru Rinpoche caves, and Chimpuk is near the top of the list for anyone wishing to do this.

My guide suggested that it might be too difficult, but when I did not acquiesce to his way of thinking, he set about finding us some horses to help get us through the plains and up the lower mountain slopes. This meant he had to travel to a village an hour away in search of mounts.

Sure enough, early in the morning there were three horses parked outside the building we were staying at. Tibetan horses are much smaller than the riding horses we are familiar with here in the states, but don't be fooled by their size. They are tough and nimble animals, used to carrying heavy loads. We mounted up and headed slowly through the back alleys of Samye. The alleys gave way to some farmland and soon we were crossing a wide but shallow river and heading out across a long plain toward the distant mountain slopes.

The horses moved at a slow pace, and the distance we traveled was measured by the time passed and by looking back at the ground covered. Each time we looked back, the glittering gold roofs of Samye were harder and harder to see...then they were gone altogether.

The plains gave way to hills and the path began to wind back and forth along canyon rims, high along the side of steep slopes. The horses were patient and sure-footed, if slow.

Soon we were among rushing streams and in high humidity, and there was much more mountainous vegetation. Thick carpets of bright green short grass and blossoming plants thrived here. In particular, there were the most varied and beautiful kinds of plants with thorns I have ever seen. These plants had long, sharp, brightly-colored thorns, and rich green leaves. It was a natural botanical garden, and, with the slow treading of the horses and the vivid landscapes, it was almost like an acid trip, or a vision out of a Carlos Casteneda novel. This was the end of the rainy season and everything was in bloom.

Higher and higher we went, with my horse, who was being a little difficult, often lagging behind the other two horses. The trail turned into a steep path, so steep the horses were actually climbing up the side of the mountain—I had to just hang on. These trails were really meant for human climbers or trekkers.

After a very long climb, we finally arrived at the Chimphuk Utse nunnery (ani gumpa), marking the point where we would have to leave the horses and begin climbing on foot.

With the horses tied up, we had a small lunch in what must have been a part of the nunnery kitchen. The only uncomfortable aspect was the fact that a Chinese guard, carrying a machine gun, was posted to the nunnery. He kept hanging around where we were. Apparently, there had been some trouble a few days before and the Chinese had decided to send someone in to protect—I am not sure whom.

Farther on, as we began climbing without the horses, a group of monks passed us, going down. We were told that there was an important Rinpoche in their group and that perhaps the guard was watching him or watching out for him. I do know that, with the appearance of the Rinpoche, the guard stopped trailing us.

Now we began to climb in earnest, with neither the guide nor my daughter having any real trouble. I lagged behind though, and just did the best I could. It was an endless switch-back trail, always going higher. Sometimes I had to sit

down and just rest, even though it was embarrassing to have my daughter peering down from above to see if her dad was alright.

Then the guide took my day pack, giving me more room to breathe and a lighter load. Finally, after what seemed too long of a climb for me, we arrived at some buildings where an old man and old woman were.

It was so steep getting to them that I literally had to crawl up and then collapse on the ledge where they sat. I could not tell if they were lay people or monks because they had on such a variety of different types and pieces of clothing.

My daughter, Anne, and Pemba, our guide, were already settled in when I reached the ledge outside the house. The elders brought us some butter-tea—and did it taste good!

It turned out that this man and woman were of the Karma Kagyu lineage. They were thrilled when I showed them the picture I had taken, less than a week before, of His Holiness, the 17 th Karmapa. I gave them each copy and they were very moved by this. It was fun to find people who cared so much about the same person as we did.

Soon, an older nun came along, and we all chatted. She offered to guide us up the trail and point out some of the sacred places: the footprints of Guru Rinpoche, special rocks, etc. This was a real help, as we got to see many small spots and grottoes we might otherwise have passed by.

After a time, she turned off, and we climbed on up toward the main cave. By this time, I was in a full sweat, and feeling pretty good because of the substance elimination that sweating brings.

At last, we reached the top and had arrived at the Drakmar Keutsang cave. This cave is said to be the 'Buddha-speech' place of Guru Rinpoche—the spot where he gave his first special teaching on the eight meditational deities called the Drubpa Kabgye.

A two-story building had been erected around the actual cave, which is toward the back of this structure. Aside from the many statues, we were shown the rock containing the impression of the body of the princess that Guru Rinpoche is said to have brought back from the dead, so that he could give her a special teaching.

The attending monk took a special lingam-shaped rock housed there (said to have come from the Shitavana charnel ground in India) and rubbed it across our backs—a healing tradition.

Later, on the outside terrace, we had butter-tea with the monk who oversees the place. He had been there for two years, summer and winter, practicing. I could only admire his courage and perseverance. We shared a chocolate bar and drank our tea (both forbidden items in my diet) in the bright sun of that high courtyard. It was great. Far, far below, was the plain we had climbed from, shimmering in the distance. We could not even see Samye from where we sat.

Our return trip—from the caves back to the nunnery—was much easier than going up had been. At the nunnery we distributed the rest of our food and provisions to the nuns and made our preparations for the descent to the plain.

The shrine room at the ani gumpa (nunnery) was very beautiful, and I lingered there a while. Then, I tried to switch horses for the trip down, because my first horse was too willful, but the new horse tried to buck me while on the edge of a steep trail. That was something! I went slinking back to my original horse and we went on, together, down the mountain.

The horses really took over on the way back, carefully selecting their placement of every hoof. Any prompting of the horse on my part was mostly ignored, as the horse actually climbed down the trail by himself. About all I could do was brace myself to keep from falling off—sit back, hang on—and enjoy the ride.

When we reached the plain, my horse went off on a side trail, which was actually the way back to his village; he refused all guidance and kicks from me. This ended up with me being on the other side of a small canyon from the other riders; however, after much urging and a few more kicks on my part, we did manage to join the others just before we all had to cross the wide shallow river.

The trip down was in the full Tibetan sunlight, and I ended up extending my shirt cuffs over the backs of my hands just to keep them from becoming scorched. It was hot! We re-crossed the small river with difficulty (my horse refusing to cross for a time) and wound our way, once again, through the back village streets.

The sun was going down when we arrived and we pretty much ate some food and went right to bed. I lay down on the bed with my clothes on—with the rest of my family gone to Tsetang, it was kind of strange being there in Samye—and I immediately fell asleep. My butt was sore for weeks afterward!

So, this wraps up my stories of visiting three of the five major terma (hidden mind treasures) sites said to be still active, active in the sense that just being there can awaken any inner terma dormant in our nature.

The arbiter of awareness is experience.

[Photos by me or family]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Compared to What?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/42ad4e2e-0f09-4aa9-80a9-85fc18be8623_637x520.jpeg

Down to 12 degrees above zero, last night. Sun shining this morning at a cool 14-degrees.

It's been my assumption all these years that everything is present that can be present. It's not like we are waiting for something other than our own awareness to catch on to what "IS." Of course that's what the dharma is all about, awareness.

Everything that is, is here now. It's a question of what parts are we aware of? And a lesson I seem never to learn is that the way dharma awareness is described in the sacred texts, pretty much always is not how I do or will ever experience it. By now, that, for me, is a given.

My experience, meaning my personal filter, the way I see life is exclusive to me. It is past time for me to give up comparing what I do experience to what the dharma books say should be my experience.

Instead, I need to give all that up and just pay attention to how I experience life as far as awareness goes and just start building from there on that.

It's 'my' acid trip, so to speak, and not anyone else's, even without acid.

Having little to no confidence in my own experience (and my view) is just a bad habit and perhaps why reading too much about how things should be stains and colors the actual experience I am having and have had.

Where it will lead me, I can't say, yet I should start assuming that my take on experience is not only where I should start, but the only place to start. All this constant comparison is just confusing.

Somewhere in my own experience and view is all the dharma there is, including the particular dharma I am aware of. I'm not veering off-course, as I fear, but just the opposite. I'm on course and just lack the confidence to trust myself, which is why I cling to the handrail of the written texts. Michael, don't compare!

I need to go it alone, trust my own experience and fashion my dharma experience from what I actually experience, warts and all.

The one thing that is constant is that what I AM experiencing is very familiar to me.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Our Sister Dharma Center

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/23cff6e3-acdc-441b-be30-aa1039347043_2041x2048.jpeg

“The Columbus KTC Library (Karma Thegsum Choling) thanks Michael and Margaret Erlewine of Heart Center KTC for their generous donation of precious Dharma books and recordings. With gratitude we dedicate “The Michael and Margaret Erlewine Archive of Tibetan Buddhism in their honor.z’

Feb 26, 2023

My daughter Anne was showing at an Art Fair in Columbus, OH and she stopped by to visit our sister dharma there, Columbus KTC (Karma Thegsum Chöling) and got a tour from Lama Kathy Wesley, a senior lama there. Anne was surprised to come across a library and archives donated by her parents, and read this little plaque.

“The Columbus KTC LibrraKarma Thegsum Choling) y thanks Michael and Margaret Erlewine of Heart Center KTC for their generous donation of precious Dharma books and recordings. With gratitude we dedicate “The Michael and Margaret Erlewine Archive of Tibetan Buddhism in their honor. Feb 26, 2023”

Some years ago, when the Columbus KTC burned down, it burned their library. So, Margaret and I sent them most of our dharma library as a donation. We had something like 50 boxes of books and dharma items that were shipped down to them on a special truck driven by my brother Thomas Erlewine and his wife Sue Erlewine.

We have another 20 or so boxes that will be donated in due time as we no longer need them. Anne was moved by the visit to the center.

[Photo by, I believe, Lama Kathy Wesley.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL

We Arrive in Kathmandu

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7fe70bcd-cede-4d86-8d1e-894c7dc4dbea_2043x2020.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3ce513da-3dcf-4d48-b032-8cfd377d53f9_2047x2032.jpeg

[This will be the last Nepal/Tibet story for a while, when we first arrived at Kathmandu, Nepal in 1997, the shock of entering a developing country at night was overwhelming.]

The flight from Hong Kong began to descend from the clouds into the beautiful Kathmandu valley, and thus we caught our first view of Nepal. In the approaching twilight, we could still see, clearly the rich terraced green of the endless rice paddies and the fields below. As we got lower, we saw whole towns, and then individual houses.

After deplaning and entering the airport, we walked along a path filled with blooming plants, the air alive with the sound of katydids and crickets. It was warm and smelled great. After almost 48 hours of traveling, we had arrived somewhere we actually wanted to be—at last.

It took what seemed like forever to fill out all the forms, pay airport taxes, examine our passports, receive a visa, get through customs, and exchange money. A note about money exchange: I spent far too long studying the various travel catalogues, trying to pick out a money purse or a secret money pouch—as they are sometimes called.

In the end, I took a wide variety: the money belt, the wide purse that straps around your midriff; the packet that hangs around your neck; and even the secret money pouch that hangs from your belt, inside your pants, etc. We had them all.

However, the one thing that none of these catalogs bother to tell you is that, in most of these countries (Nepal, India, China), even a small amount of money takes up a huge amount of space.

The problem is, almost no vendor is able to cash something as huge as the equivalent of twenty dollars, much less that of fifty or \$100. Perhaps a few of the largest hotels can, but never anywhere else.

Finding a place to exchange money is difficult, so when you do find a place, you need to exchange enough to last until you get to the next bank in a large city. Worse, any money you exchange has to be exchanged for about the lowest common denominator, since this is the only cash that the common people and the shops will even look at. It is not that they are not willing to—they just don't have the change!

So, the result is that you exchange, say, one thousand dollars, for huge packs of money that end up being somewhere between 4 to 5 inches thick. It is bad enough in Nepal and India, but in China they staple these packs of currency with an industrial stapler, and the staples cannot be removed by hand—you need pliers. So here we are, with all of these nifty secret money pouches, and a wad of money 7 inches thick. Go figure.

So, you fill up all the money pouches with about ten dollars worth of money and stuff the rest (most) of it, in your knapsack. Your money belts cling to you and you cling to the knapsack.

At any rate, with large rubber-band-bound packs of Nepalese currency jammed into my pockets (like Uncle Scrooge), we were ready to leave the protected area of the airport and venture out to where mobs of taxis and touts were waiting for us.

By now, it was quite dark. Originally, there was to be a car sent to meet us, from Thrangu monastery in Kathmandu, but now, since we were a day or so late (remember we had to drive back home for a night) there was little chance of people we did not know being able to track our belated progress through the various delays to this late arrival. Thus, the lot of us crept outside the terminal. I had my family stand back (behind the police lines), with our mountain of baggage, while I ventured forward and carefully surveyed what awaited us.

And it was indeed scary. On all sides, men rushed up and tried to seize any baggage a person might be carrying. Each person spoke in broken English, authoritatively asserting that only they could help you and see to your safety, and yet they were just what I was afraid of. How to choose from the array of cars outside, which taxi was trustworthy and which might drive you off to who-knows-where?

As I emerged from behind the police line, I could see a whole wall of people behind a fence across the road, beckoning to me. I was about the only

passenger coming out just then, but all of these people seemed to want my attention. And then, in the middle of those people, I saw a group of maroon-colored robes— Buddhist monks—who almost seemed to actually be waving at me —as if they knew who I was.

Could these be the monks we had hoped would come, or, in my tiredness, did I only want to believe this? But no, they kept pointing at me and beckoning. I wasn't dreaming. They did come! These were the monks from Thrangu Monastery, including their head monk, and they had been waiting for us for a very long time. It was too good to believe, but sure enough, there they were, and they had a Toyota Land Cruiser as well. Goodbye taxi hunt!

We moved towards them, and suddenly we almost had to fight to keep track of our luggage, as many hands from unwanted helpers appeared everywhere. The monks struggled to control the flow of our luggage, which sort of floated on a sea of arms toward the back of the vehicle. It was all confusing to us, and we slowly realized that most of these folks were not with the monks. Somehow, we got our mountain of bags into the Toyota and started to squeeze ourselves in also—not to mention the monks climbing in on top of that. The unwanted helpers, who had obviously been drinking, were now demanding money, but I had not had the foresight to have any small bills handy at that point. The monks were laughing. We were packed in! There were four of us, I believe, smashed into the front seat.

Much of me was hanging outside the window as we pulled away from the airport.

Words fail to describe that first night's ride from the airport to Kathmandu. I was about to get my first taste of a developing country. We were tired and somewhat disoriented. As mentioned, I was jammed (like never before) into the passenger side of a Toyota Land Cruiser.

Much of me, literally, was leaning and hanging out of the window, so everything along the streets was crystal clear to me. It was night, and there were no regular streetlights—only a few lights of any kind. It had been raining recently, and the road was filled with both small and very large puddles, many of which had to be driven around. Moreover, we were moving at what I felt was considerable speed, given the road conditions. The road was in bad shape.

Worse, there were all manner of things in the road, a totally new experience for me. Hurtling through the dark we would come upon cows just standing there, and packs of dogs everywhere. And people—people all over the roadway—walking, standing, alone, and in groups. The extreme poverty of

this city impressed itself on me along with all the other input. Beyond the road, people were everywhere in the dark, gathered in small groups, smoking, exchanging things, watching us, and getting out of our way.

It did not seem to me that the driver, leaning on the horn of the Land Cruiser, really gave anyone or any animal enough time to escape our forward motion. I kept looking for the main part of the city, or for any area of bright lights (civilization) to appear before us, but all I saw was the darkness of the streets, with brief glimpses here and there of what was happening around me.

The city I imagined existing never materialized and it began to sink into me that no such city actually existed—that we were in a very different kind of place than I had ever been in before or had even ever imagined.

I was numbed by the constant jolts of the car on the street as it lurched from side to side, hitting the potholes. It was a crazy ride, seemingly right out of a movie like *Blade Runner* or *Road Warrior*. It had a post-apocalyptic feel to it, like a bad acid trip. I knew I was very tired, but I was also very awake now, taking all this in.

The streets got narrower and narrower, until we were crawling through alleys having only inches of side-room to spare, and passing so close to people that their faces were right before my eyes. “What had I gotten us into?” I thought. Thousands of miles from anywhere, I knew, with no obvious place to get to—no city lights, no Holiday Inn. Just alleys and smells and dogs and darkness and... STOP.

We had arrived through the darkness at a large locked gate, which soon swung open, allowing us to drive into a kind of compound. We were at the Lotus Guest House—our hotel.

Piling out, we were greeted by two woman friends of ours who had arrived some days before. One of them was in tears to finally see us safely there. I was, at this point, quite numb from being tired and the vibrations of the truck. We were literally helped into our room, our luggage deposited with us and left alone.

Gecko lizards, holding onto the walls with their suction-cup toes, were outside our door catching insects. Dogs barked continuously in the distance. Our rooms were shabby, dirty, soiled, and used.

There were no towels, and the bedclothes made me certain I would use my sleeping bag. Any lighting was stark and minimal. The bathroom was a new experience entirely, with a showerhead that used the entire room as its stall—the water just draining out a corner of the room. We were all experiencing jet-

lag, shock, and culture shock at the same time. Yet, I was so glad we were here. This was Kathmandu!

The First Day in KTM

That night, sleep was all upside down. Keep in mind that our internal clock had just turned 180-degrees. Only two days before, at this time, it had been the middle of the day for us in Michigan, while now it was the middle of the night for us in Kathmandu.

Trying to sleep that first night was one of those never-quite-drifting-off affairs, not helped by the fact that the jet-lag we were experiencing was accompanied by strange smells and sounds. Just before dawn all of the surrounding monasteries (right next door!) began sounding gongs and chanting.

Sets of Tibetan horns rang out, some sounding like oboes and others deep bass and rumbling, and then—the dawn! It was eerie but beautiful listening to the sounds that first dawn in Kathmandu. I was so tired and yet so very awake.

But rest I could not. We had already accumulated real problems. Because we had been delayed for two days, we had lost the three-day safety zone we needed to apply for the visas for India and Sikkim. We also had almost lost the time we needed to get our Chinese group visa for Tibet, but this visa was soon taken care of by paying a bunch of extra money—we were to fly to Tibet the next day. Whether we would get to visit India when we returned was another matter, for the three-day waiting period for that visa application had vanished. Worse, this one remaining day we had in Nepal was a Nepalese strike day—something we would come to know only too well.

It seems that the government of Nepal was trying to create a value-added tax (VAT), something like they have in the United Kingdom and in many other countries. It was perceived as something that would be a real hardship for the people, and they had organized a series of national strikes in protest. On such strike days no motor traffic (cars, buses, etc.) is allowed, thus strangling business for that day. The penalty for violators is the stoning of the vehicle. The result was that we were stranded at our hotel area, unable to take any action on our Sikkimese visa. The embassy office was some 7 kilometers away.

As for our Tibetan visa, the tour guide had arranged for a courier to come by bicycle and pick up a rather large sum of cash we had to pay and then—through the streets of Kathmandu—deliver it. Trusting this much cash to an unknown carrier worried us; in the end, the main guy came to get the money himself, including the extra cash we had to pay the Chinese to do all of this at the last minute. I asked the man if he could help us get the Sikkimese visa, but

he just shrugged his shoulders—sorry, he could not help. If I could somehow get to the Indian Embassy, he suggested, at the center of downtown Kathmandu, something might still be done.

There was still time, but it would have to be done right away.

I was suffering from sleep deprivation, jet-lag, culture shock...and I had not yet had any breakfast; I was unwilling, however, to give up on visiting Sikkim, because Gyaltsap Rinpoche was there, a high lama I had always dreamed of meeting. I resolved to find a bicycle and go to the Indian embassy myself—that morning. My wife, who couldn't believe I would attempt such a trip, was too beat to come with me, but my 21-year old daughter, Michael Anne, was game. We would go, no matter what.

At first, no one seemed to even know where the Indian embassy was, much less be willing to accompany me there on a bicycle; I finally managed to find, though, a man about my own age who knew where it was. He said he would go with us.

As for bicycles, all we could find were some not-too-bad, old-style, one-speed American bikes: you know—the kind with foot brakes and one loop of chain. No ten-speeds! As for the man who would guide us, well, it turned out that what he really had in mind was for his young (perhaps 12-year old) son to accompany us on the trip, not himself. And so the three of us—with the young boy leading in a Mary Poppins sort of way—started out on that 7 kilometer trip through the streets of Kathmandu. We started from Boudinath (where we were) and traveled to a location near the Royal Palace—where the Indian Embassy was located.

One lucky thing was because of the strike there was no traffic, and so the normal dangers of Kathmandu were reduced to only the presence of military vehicles here and there and the odd car or truck that dared to break the strike—and, of course, there were still motorcycles and motor scooters.

On the downside, the streets were unbelievably potholed and rough, not to mention the ever-present dust. However, I did get an instant and close-up introduction to Kathmandu culture. I was so tired and zoned out that the whole thing was quite beautiful even if somewhat surreal—and so, through the streets we went.

Everywhere, there were people and animals, with shops crammed into any available space—one next to another. Often a shop was little more than an old bucket for a seat and one jar full of something or other (like hard candy)—this was the store—a single jar! And there was this sense that everyone was everyone else's customer, if that makes sense. Let me try that again.

It seemed to me that there were no store customers from outside the neighborhood, but that everyone was just kind of hanging out in each other's store—like one extended family. It was kind of like kids selling lemonade on the streets—gone mad.

We reached the embassy, and my body was almost vibrating on its own after the ride and from the exertion. We had the young boy look after our bikes while we went through the long procedure to apply for the visa. The process would take ten days, which is why we had to do it now—before we left for Tibet, so that the visas would be ready when we returned.

Forms and officials, more forms, and, of course, the waiting. At last, the head honcho explained to me how, really, it was impossible for me to get what I wanted, but that he, on the day that I returned (a Saturday = holiday), would interrupt his day off and come down to this office and, unofficially, complete our visas so that we could fly out the next morning.

He would do this for me, if, and only if, I could reach him before noon the day we returned from Tibet. With that news—fees already paid and forms filled—we headed back up the long road to Boudha, which was this time mostly uphill.

I did make it back, covered with dust and sweat, exhausted and hungry, but exhilarated. My butt was bruised and sore from that ride for many weeks after. Margaret was so proud of me and so amazed at my going. We then got to meet Ward Holmes (of the Tsurphu Foundation), and Gloria Jones, secretary of Thrangu Monastery, for a late lunch. Things were cool. I liked this Kathmandu place.

Just to complete this story, when we came back from Tibet, I was able to get in from the airport (through another strike zone), and phone the embassy official just barely before noon, arranging to meet in his office—which we did.

Taking a cab this time, we met, and he completed our visa for India and Sikkim. He never asked for any money, but I gave him a good sum anyway—for the idea was in the air. We ended up (when he found out I was an astrologer) discussing very abstract spiritual philosophy while we filled out the forms—it is something I believe every Indian, at least the Brahmins, are fully able to do. Here I am, literally slipping money under the table, and he is telling me about my soul's journey through time. That's India.

EMAIL

The Creative Urge

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/064e223a-18f8-4987-9538-f50a8b62276a_2048x1536.jpeg

Once again, that creative urge, the urge to create and I'm not yet clear about what form that should take. Perhaps this is what my first dharma teacher Andrew Gunn McIver meant when he said that if we live so long as to reach that third Saturn return, after sixty years of age, we become part of the creative force.

I have never known what that exactly meant, but regardless of the medium, I have an urge to create. This usually takes the form of photography, a theme to write, or something or other.

Yet increasingly I just have this state or mood to create, but, as mentioned, I often have not settled on a medium to work with to create. Odd feeling. All fired up but not engaged. What is that?

It brings with it this sense of wanting to engage and with that engagement to be creative or produce some result, yet I am just short of the rubber meeting the road.

So, I just sit here and sort of internally hum, as my inner machinery is short of engaging.

With this state and its sense of urgency, I am just out there treading water. Not wanting to push or provoke anything, or can't without cause or actual engagement, I feel like a gyroscope out for a spin in midair.

It's not a big deal, and it will pass, but this state of mind seems to pop up more and more frequently, which, as mentioned, perhaps this is what my first dharma teacher mentioned to me, but I have yet to place it in experience, unless this is that.

Walking around through the house I glanced out the window at the winter, fully present. The wind is whipping the prayer flags that we have around the property and the single flag or banner of the Karmapa on a pole some 20-feet high is waving.

It is cold, cold, cold, and has been for weeks. The snow is deep, and paths now shoveled have sides some 12 inches high or so.

I don't recall in my life winter coming in hard, cold, and deep so early in December. This is January or even February weather, but far too soon.

With the wind at 15 mph or so, it has a wind chill of -5 degrees out, not encouraging for taking a walk. A brisk walk it would be and need a balaclava with mouth mask to temper the cold air trying to get in.

Again, I look out from here inside the house and I am transported deep into January with all of its need for spring, and it's not even Christmas. It's a Michigan winter more like it used to be, when the snow was so deep that we had flags on sticks on our cars to signal to other drivers we were just around the corner.

And then, while I was sitting here musing, an angel showed up.

It was Margaret and she said "Why don't we have a cooking day." And I said, of course, so we have been busy trimming, chopping, and cooking Swiss chard, baking sweet potatoes, cooking lentils, and about to make a whole bunch of baked apples stuffed with raisins, my current favorite desert. So, it all worked out. I feel both creative and engaged.

[Photo of the baked apples. The empty spot on the left was where I ate one before even taking a photo.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Writing in Water

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/659675f1-ec02-41f1-8eb4-46fbd68a3459_1024x1024.jpeg

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche:

“There are three types of temporary experiences that might lead a meditator to think, “I’ve discovered something truly remarkable and profound. This is real meditation.” But these experiences are not the actual Mahamudra Vipassana.

First there is the temporary experience in which the mind has a very strong sense of bliss and rests in that blissful state.

Second is the temporary experience of emptiness; the meditator may be free from thoughts of the past, present, and future and rest in that absence of thought.

Third there is the temporary experience of luminous appearance, in which the mind seems so fully in possession of its extraordinary abilities that the meditator thinks, “I can see everything now. I can see things that are far away and I can see inside completely and clearly.”

These experiences are very seductive, but something vital is missing—the definite knowing of the mind’s way of being, which is the fundamental characteristic of Vipassana.

In Tibetan that definitive knowing is said to be “the mind that has seen its own face” or “the mind that has cut its own root.”

End of quote

“Mind without a focal point is Mahāmudra,” just as with Photography I became skillful in and known for what is called ‘focus stacking’, getting everything in a photo in focus so there is no focal point. That liberates us to look around the photo with no subliminal guidance as with a single point of view.

It’s like writing your name in water or tracing a bird’s flight across the open sky. Or using my own ‘speak’, wincing and squinting the eyes until we let go and let them open, relaxing, as it is.

Given to me by my dharma teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, my Bodhisattva name is "Sempa Chönyi Rangdrol."

Sempa = Bodhisattva

Chönyi = True nature of the Mind/Reality

Rangdrol = Self-liberation

Self-liberating Dharmata

Self-liberating Nature of the Mind

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL Michael@Erlewine.net Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

SpiritGrooves.net.

Free Videos: YouTube.com/channel/UC3cL8v4fkupc9IRtugPkkWQ

MAIN BLOG: <https://www.facebook.com/MichaelErlewine>

<https://medium.com/@MichaelErlewine/>

<http://michaelerlewine.com>

As Bodhicitta is so precious,

May those without it now create it,

May those who have it not destroy it,

And may it ever grow and flourish.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

"Much Ado About Nothing"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/42bef41f-0aae-40a4-9fac-3e821a6eb288_2048x1978.jpeg

[This one is for those interested in astrology and are ready to move on from where we have been for the hundred years or so.

In our heliocentric natal chart, we all have the same nine planets each taking up a single degree. That leaves 351 empty degrees of the zodiac we also have, each of these degrees devoid of planets.

Then, if we study the kaleidoscopic patterns the endless movement of the nine planets provide, we begin to get the picture, the morphing of whole-chart aspect patterns that I call StarTypes.

I have pointed out before that the even distribution of the planets, into a nonagon, octagon, septagon, sextile, pentagon, square, and trine, heliocentrically, any even balanced polygon indicated a stable mind, dependable, one that can be counted on. And aside from the balanced polygons, there are many, many other possibilities or patterns, what I call StarTypes.

In addition, as mentioned, of equal importance is the size and shape of empty space in the natal chart, space void of any planets, that which we don't know and don't have, literally what we want or lack are profound.

We become what we want or lack, meaning we turn toward it or are fascinated and drawn to what we subconsciously feel or sense as missing or 'not there' for us.

The more void or empty zodiac degrees we have that are bunched together in one large section or gap determines how much urgency, angst, and concern drives us. This is heliocentric of course, since helio planets are bound to the Sun by gravity. And these large empty spaces are absent of planets.

No, their absence is not a black hole, but what we want or lack, beckon or call to us like the allure of sirens in ancient Greek mythology. We can't help but turn toward, hear their song and try to become them.

We all have the same 360 degrees of zodiac experience and the same nine planets, but the kaleidoscopic aspect patterns the planets form affect us, in particular also what we don't have and we sense their absence.

The dharma indications from this view are many.

PRESENT BY ABSENCE

Again, let me reiterate that in my 50 years or so of using this StarType technique on a daily basis, it became clear early on that this technique worked best on the helio chart because with that chart each planet is tied to the Sun by gravity in its orbit.

And we quickly see by comparing the traditional geocentric natal patterns to the patterns in the heliocentric natal chart, that the helio chart is the fiducial, meaning the 'Mother' chart and the geo chart is the "Child" chart. It was even clear to me when I first programmed astrology, where we first calculate the helio chart positions and only then coordinate-transform those positions into the geocentric chart. That is how astronomers do this.

Now it remains for me to say something about how these different chart types fit together when we have something like a close friendship, a marriage, or any relationship. This to me is the most compelling and fascinating part of this technique.

"StarTypes: Life-Path Partners"

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/StarTypes.pdf>

"Dharma Chart, Karma Chart: Astrological Empowerment in the 21 st Century"

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf>

I have whole books on this topic (above links), which are free and should be studied to get you empowered in this technique, but I will just say something here to kind of get you started. Yet, for real engagement, you will have to transmigrate your own mind and current identification with the geocentric natal chart to the mother chart, the heliocentric natal chart. In other words, we have yet to meet our mother chart.

I had to do that myself, and it was empowering. Meaning, after a couple of months of getting to know my helio chart, I realized that this is my main natal chart, who I am, and that the traditional geocentric natal chart is a secondary chart, more of the karma and circumstances I have to go through. Looking in the mirror, I am my helio chart. For reasons I still don't understand, some 500

years ago when Copernicus pointed out to the world that everything does not revolve around. In fact, the Earth revolves around the sun.

In the early 1970s I discovered this for myself and interpreted the heliocentric natal chart to the point where I flipped and completely identified with the helio chart as to who I am and why I am here.

I call the helio the chart of our Dharma or 'truth', our archetype or tribe, and I call the traditional geocentric natal chart our Karma Chart, a chart of the circumstances and karma we will have to work with and through in this life.

Those of us who explore this for yourselves will have to find out if you too will have a similar experience. It changed my life.

Suddenly I had two charts or views of myself. Just as we have two eyes to see depth-of-field. Two astrology charts allow us to triangulate and see ourselves in a kind of three-dimensional space. Both charts are necessary. And in this technique, we study whole-chart planetary patterns. I call them StarTypes. They show us the tribe or archetype we belong to.

The following discussion is based on heliocentric aspect patterns since with those patterns (the planets) are connected to the Sun by gravity, while the geocentric chart is a snapshot of the helio chart as seen from Earth.

As astrologers, we are used to comparing planets, aspects, etc. but not so much whole-chart aspect patterns. Here we are looking at these whole-chart patterns, using Ptolemaic aspects, 0, 60, 90, 120, 180 degrees. If we link aspects using the helio chart, from one planet to the next we end up with whole chart patterns, which I call Startypes.

When we do the charts for a relationship between two folks, whether it is a marriage, friendship, parent-child, or what-have you, we are contrasting two different (or similar) StarType chart patterns with one another. How do they fit together or not fit together. I will try to give you at least a feel for these patterns.

What used to be called the "Easy Aspects," the Trines (120-degrees) and Sextiles (60-degree) aspects, especially when these aspects link around the natal chart to form Grand Trines, Baskets, as well as Trapezoids, etc., and when there are no T-Squares (Opposition with a third planet 90-degrees) or Grand Crosses (four planets in the form of a Square).

These in my experience are mental or conceptual patterns or StarTypes, as I call them, all sextiles and trines, and NO T-Cross or Grand Cross. If you have such a pattern in your helio chart, this in relationships I call 'THE LOVER' type (green lines). These are mental types, folks looking from the outside in. They

see and tend to care for the other types. They pick up the socks of their partner.

The opposite of this when, again in the helio chart, there is the presence of T-Squares (Opposition with a third planet 90-degrees) or Grand Crosses (four planets in the form of a Square and little to no green lines (Sextiles and Trines), this is called, in relationships the 'LOVED ONE' type (Red lines). Single Squares (90-degree aspects) don't count. Only if they are either a T-Square or a Grand Cross are they useful.

And in a helio chart if there are both "The Lover" (green lines) and "The Loved One" (red and green lines, actual patterns) present in the same chart, in relationships, this is called the "INDEPENDENT" type (both red and green lines in the same chart).

These three relationship types make up the majority of relationships. For example, in my natal helio chart I have only the green lines, and thus belong to "The Lover" type, which means I tend to take care and dote on others. I have no T-Squares or Grand Crosses in my helio natal chart.

In relationships "Opposites Attract, and Sames Repel" is the age-old rule.

The green-line charts, that of 'The Lover' are using their minds to get through life, they are often managers, organizing, manipulating as a vocation. In a relationship, they care for their partners, always working from the outside in. they are critical.

And the Red-line charts, that of the 'Loved One' are just the opposite. They do best in the center of a group, being loved and cared for. They are looking from the inside out. They are warm and fuzzy, loveable.

And, as mentioned, the third type, which I call the "Independent" have both green-line patterns AND red-line patterns and they are pretty self complete, meaning they don't need others or partners as much. They are self absorbed.

And there is one last type which is called "Multi-Relational," where the planets are confined to in a tight group, wither withing 120-degrees or even 104-degrees. I will explain more about the multi-relationship charts in the following.

Here is an astrological technique and concept that IMO has not been explored well enough by astrologers, the distribution of the nine planets, heliocentrically, gravitationally around the Sun.

I find that the distribution of the nine planets can be evenly distributed or lopsided, and the balance or lack thereof is meaningful and can be interpreted.

I have experimented with this concept for many decades. I find this only works heliocentrically, where the planets are bound to their center, the Sun, gravitationally. Sure, we can try to work it geocentrically, but you can't trust it. Sometimes it makes sense and at other times it does not, so for this information I find it just easier to work heliocentrically, where it works every time.

Let's talk about the astrological planetary patterns like "Within- a-Trine, where all nine planets are within an area of 120 degrees or even tighter. I show an example chart where all nine planets are within 108 degrees.

Perhaps we subconsciously sense or respond to having the planets gravitationally pull at the Sun from different directions and create different patterns. I can't tell you exactly what the cause is, but I can attest that it works because I have tried it on many thousands of charts for over 50 years.

If seeing is believing, I suggest you try this concept on your own helio natal chart.

Heliocentrically, all the planets gathered together within about 108 to 120 degrees, means all the rest of a chart, some 240-degrees or more is nothing but empty space, a void. If we operate under the rule that "We do what we have to do," meaning those planets in a tight bunch, and all the rest of the chart is empty, so "We become what we want or lack" means we try to fill that empty space, and that instills us with a certain urgency or angst. Call it drive or worry.

If we can see that, the question becomes what kind of partner would be attractive to such a chart.

And so, this kind of chart, which is all trines and sextiles and never has an opposition around which a T-Square could be formed, is endlessly trying to gain experience in all those empty degrees of the zodiac.

It moves me to realize that this type of chart, the "Within-a-Trine" heliocentrically means that this tribe or archetype is going to react to almost any partner type, the common "Lover" type, the "Loved One" type, and even the "Independent" type.

Everything is grist for their mill, so to speak. What they seek is pure experience of any type, because there is so much, so many degrees of the zodiac which they have to get to know having no planets in those degrees.

So, could we say they love ‘everyone’ and just can’t get enough experience. So, perhaps settling for one partner regardless of type is not enough, not because they are selfish but because they thirst for experience from all those zodiac degrees they don’t have.

The takeaway for me is that this compact StarType, all planets withing a trine (120 degrees or less) have more trouble finding a partner because it is as if one partner cannot fill the void they feel inside, and so throughout their life they love (and need to meet) many people, of all types, not necessarily romantically, but just to gather experience from all the directions that are void or lacking planets in their chart.

We all have some sense of urgency or angst, yet to have some 240 degrees of the zodiac (or more) empty of representation is another order of magnitude.

There is something about the absence of whole-chart patterns that somehow balance out the solar system. In other words, with that much open and unoccupied zodiac space, no one partner can fill it all or give us experience. So, there is an urgency to fill in the gaps, and with such an enormous gap as 240 degrees or so, it’s going to take a lot of experience from almost all directions to satisfy our want or lack of it.

And so, I am just drawing your attention to the four types of relationships (in general) which I have understood are there, “The Lover,” the “Loved One,” “Independent,” and “Multi-Relationships.”

I realize from talking with many of you that this is hard to register conceptually without getting a feel and sense of it in actual experience. I have mentioned two free books above so give it a try. And ask me questions.

[Graphic of StarType #36, “Multi-Relational,” “Within-a-Trine”, and link to look at your own helio chart]

Free Helio Chart

https://www.astrologyland.com/free_chart_wheel/YourFreeChart.aspx

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

EMAIL Michael@Erlewine.net Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

SpiritGrooves.net.

Free Videos: [YouTube.com/channel/UC3cL8v4fkupc9IRtugPkkWQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3cL8v4fkupc9IRtugPkkWQ)

MAIN BLOG: <https://www.facebook.com/MichaelErlewine>

<https://medium.com/@MichaelErlewine/>

<http://michaelerlewine.com>

As Bodhicitta is so precious,

May those without it now create it,

May those who have it not destroy it,

And may it ever grow and flourish.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Well of the Present Moment

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/adcab8fb-baa9-44db-bb5e-47168c74a9e8_1024x1024.jpeg

With astrology, there is a lot of minutiae to get lost in, which is part of why astrology is so popular with folks. Yet, in my opinion much of astrology is like knitting or crocheting an endless scarf or a blanket, all that activity is kind of single layered. It's more difficult to cut through and unearth fresh new material, instead being content with adding on to the previous quilt with yet another patch. This is true of many things.

Cutting through history and unearthing entire new techniques is rare and difficult as well. As my dharma teacher of 36 years, the Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche said to me, and all the Tibetans carry an astrological calendar with them.

"Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

Dharma is how we chop or cut through anything, and it is indigenous to our mind. It clears out the cobwebs.

Astrology is what is called a 'relative' truth', meaning astrology is useful in this saṃsāric life we all are living to guide or help us be as comfortable as possible, yet astrology does not point beyond this life. When we pass into the bardos after death astrology is not our guide. Our own karma is the guide.

Another area worth exploring is the difference in trying to extract meaning, knowledge, wisdom, or anything new from something that is already in the past. It's like squeezing oranges for juice that have already been squeezed.

It's the same with trying to rob the cradle of the future, asking for things that stand up or out before their time, which leaves us to consider the deep well of the present moment.

Obviously, the present moment is where everything comes, not only words and ideas but also all actions and what happens. So, just where is that or how do we reap from the present moment, if not from the past or the future? That is worth knowing.

Well, the Tibetans have a whole tradition for this and it's call discovering or finding 'terma' and those who do and can are called 'tertöns', about which this has been said:

"When the real mind terma opens, you do not 'find' anything. You simply stop looking away from what has always been there. The yellow scrolls and dakini letters are just the rigpa recognizing its own face. After that, every breath you take is terma."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL Michael@Erlewine.net Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links: SpiritGrooves.net.

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish.

By Michael Erlewine

With astrology, there is a lot of minutiae to get lost in, which is part of why astrology is so popular with folks. Yet, in my opinion much of astrology is like knitting or crocheting an endless scarf or a blanket, all that activity is kind of single layered. It's more difficult to cut through and unearth fresh new material, instead being content with adding on to the previous quilt with yet another patch. This is true of many things.

Cutting through history and unearthing entire new techniques is rare and difficult as well. As my dharma teacher of 36 years, the Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche said to me, and all the Tibetans carry an astrological calendar with them.

"Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

Dharma is how we chop or cut through anything, and it is indigenous to our mind. It clears out the cobwebs.

Astrology is what is called a 'relative' truth', meaning astrology is useful in this samsaric life we all are living to guide or help us be as comfortable as possible,

yet astrology does not point beyond this life. When we pass into the bardos after death astrology is not our guide. Our own karma is the guide.

Another area worth exploring is the difference in trying to extract meaning, knowledge, wisdom, or anything new from something that is already in the past. It's like squeezing oranges for juice that have already been squeezed.

It's the same with trying to rob the cradle of the future, asking for things that stand up or out before their time, which leaves us to consider the deep well of the present moment.

Obviously, the present moment is where everything comes, not only words and ideas but also all actions and what happens. So, just where is that or how do we reap from the present moment, if not from the past or the future? That is worth knowing.

Well, the Tibetans have a whole tradition for this and it's call discovering or finding 'terma' and those who do and can are called 'tertöns', about which this has been said:

"When the real mind terma opens, you do not 'find' anything. You simply stop looking away from what has always been there. The yellow scrolls and dakini letters are just the rigpa recognizing its own face. After that, every breath you take is terma."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Cybernetics of Samsara

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/36f416c6-798e-4255-ab30-db805f3123f8_1024x1024.jpeg

Samsara is like a large political corporation, complete with non-disclosure papers to be signed. Even in Samsara, much of what passes for dharma is sponsored by Samsara and is just another way to keep us involved.

And Samsara's city limits don't stop at dharma. The rules or laws of Samsara, and its cybernetics, use our own greed and attachment, to bind us by way of our thirst for entertainment, busyness, and ignorance.

In dharma terms, Samsara can be modeled as a self-regulating cybernetic feedback system with these core components:

Set point : The reified ego, meaning the illusion of a permanent, independent Self.

Sensor/error signal : Fundamental ignorance (*avidya*), which misperceives empty, luminous mind as solid dualities.

Controller : Kleshas (attachment, aversion) and habitual patterns, which generate karmic "control actions" (intentional thoughts, words, deeds).

Actuator/output : Experiences in the six realms — pleasurable or painful phenomena arising via the twelve links of dependent origination.

And the Feedback Loop includes :

Positive feedback amplifies confusion: Craving and grasping reinforce ignorance, escalating suffering and rebirth.

Negative feedback stabilizes the illusion: Temporary pleasures or avoidances maintain the ego's "equilibrium."

The system is closed and self-perpetuating: outputs (experiences) continuously feeds back as new inputs, sustaining the cycle indefinitely.

Liberation (Mahamudra realization) :

Direct recognition of mind's true nature interrupts the feedback loop at its root — bypassing the controller. No error signal arises; appearances self-liberate without reinforcing delusion.

Samsara collapses into nirvana: same phenomena, different mode of operation. Take away the attachments and clinging and Nirvana remains.

The Cybernetics of Samsara (A Modern Systems Analogy)

“Cybernetics” (the study of control, feedback, and self-regulating systems

Modern dharma interpreters analogize samsara to a cybernetic system —a self-perpetuating feedback loop that maintains its own continuity through reinforcement mechanisms as mentioned.

In other words, Samsara functions like a closed-loop control system with the “set point” being our continuous reification of a solid Self (ego) enforced by dualistic perception.

This continuing ignorance acts as the primary error signal, triggering habitual responses (karmic formations) that arise producing outputs (experiences in the six realms).

In addition, these outputs feedback as inputs, reinforcing ignorance and kleshas, thus creating positive feedback loops that amplify confusion and suffering, or negative feedback that stabilize habitual patterns (e.g., addiction to fleeting pleasures).

The Self (ego) operates as a cybernetic regulator, constantly adjusting to sustain the illusion of a permanent self-other divide, much like a thermostat maintaining temperature through ongoing corrections or a gyroscope maintains its balance.

Our own habitual grasping and aversion provide the “control signals,” ensuring the system (samsara) resists disruption.

In Mahamudra practice, liberation from Samsara involves “interrupting the feedback loop” through direct recognition of the mind’s nature, thus bypassing the feedback mechanism altogether.

This shifts the system from confused proliferation (Samsara) to self-liberation (Nirvana), where arising appearances no longer reinforce delusion.

WHAT TO DO

This cybernetic lens highlights samsara’s mechanical, habitual nature, aligning with Vajrayana emphasis on breaking patterns through meditation and guru guidance.

In other words, traditional teachings prioritize direct experience over conceptual models. One of the main remedy practices for Samsaric entrapment is Chöd.

Chöd (Tibetan: གཅོད, gcod , pronounced “chö”) literally means “to cut” or “cutting through.” It is an advanced Vajrayana practice in Tibetan Buddhism, quite prominent in the Karma Kagyu lineage (among others), designed to cut through ego-clinging —the root of samsara—at its core.

Developed by the great female yogini Machig Labdrön (1055–1149), a pivotal figure revered across Tibetan schools, Chöd integrates Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) teachings on emptiness with compassionate action.

Chöd directly severs:

- Attachment to the self (ego-clinging).
-
- Fear, hope, dualism, and the “four demons” (māras):
-
- obscurations, afflictions, death, and divine pride.
-
- Self-cherishing by transforming negativity into wisdom and compassion.

As mentioned, in the cybernetic analogy of samsara (from our prior discussion), Chöd acts as a radical system interrupt.

It sacrifices the ego—“set point” itself—disrupting the feedback loops of ignorance, craving, and grasping, allowing direct realization of mind’s empty-luminous nature.

Chöd Practice

Traditionally performed in fearful places (e.g., charnel grounds) to confront fear head-on, the practitioner:

- Visualizes transforming into a wisdom deity (often Vajrayogini or Machig herself).
-
- “Chops up” and offers their own body as a lavish feast (ganachakra) to demons, gods, spirits, and beings—symbolizing ultimate generosity without attachment.

.

· Uses melodic chanting with ritual instruments:

.

· Damaru (skull drum), bell, and Kangling (thighbone trumpet) to invoke and pacify forces.

This vivid, “fierce” method generates profound insight into emptiness and boundless compassion, purifying karmic obscurations and realizing that Samsara and Nirvana are not separate.

Chöd remains a living tradition, requiring empowerment and guidance from a qualified teacher.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Visiting Tibet's Golden Child

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 22, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/03513e0c-07d4-49ac-adec-ef05f75514f4_2034x2029.jpeg

In 1997, at the request of my dharma teacher, in one month's notice, Margaret and I dropped everything and took our family on a pilgrimage to Tibet to see the 17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje, the young Tibetan lama that the Eddie Murphy movie "The Golden Child" is said to be patterned after.

Like the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa is the head of one of the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. At that time, the Karmapa was 12-years old, but his incarnation goes back seventeen generations. In fact, the Karmapa Lineage was the first of Tibet's reincarnated lamas. The current Karmapa is the 17th, while the current Dalai Lama is the 14th.

"Our Pilgrimage to Tibet"

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

I had no real idea how this trip would affect me. Above is the free e-book for our entire trip, yet here I will pick up the story from the point where we actually arrived at the Karmapa's ancestral home, Tsurphu Monastery in the Tolung Valley, deep in the mountains of Tibet at some 15,000 feet in altitude.

There I sat, with my wife, two of my daughters, and my son in a little room waiting to see the Karmapa. We were about to spend three days there as the Karmapa's guest. We came with all kinds of letters of introduction from our lineage.

Apparently, every day at 1 PM the Karmapa has a public reception, where a procession of visitors file up, offer a white scarf, and get his blessing. We wanted to do that too but were told to wait and that he would see us privately.

As mentioned, we had come with letters of introduction from a number of high lamas. It seemed that from the moment we arrived, all the monks there knew we were our teacher Khenpo Karthar's students. We could see them whispering. We belonged to Khenpo Rinpoche and they seemed to know exactly who that was, all the way to Tibet.

The Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche was chosen by the 16 th Karmapa (Rangjung Rigpe Dorje 1924-1981) to come to North America and act as his representative.

Anyway, the time ticked away on the slow track as we waited with anticipation to see the Karmapa. I had last seen His Holiness in 1974, but in his previous incarnation as the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, Rigpe Dorje, and I felt like I had been in endless touch with him through the lineage all this time. Like the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa is the spiritual leader of an entire lineage of Tibetan monks and nuns, a lineage most famous for its yogis and meditators.

Until one month before, we had little hope of ever seeing the Karmapa, since it was very uncertain when or if the Chinese would ever let him leave Tibet. He was essentially a prisoner in his own monastery. And now, here we were at his ancestral home, about to meet him in person.

[Note: The young Karmapa secretly escaped to India from Tibet in December of 1999]

At last, the summons came. The Karmapa would see us now. So off we went in single file toward his interview room, some two stories up from where we were. And I was right in the middle of the worst of my altitude sickness, still sick and getting sicker. I don't do well at high altitudes, slipping into bronchitis, having to go on antibiotics, and all of that. I was not well.

As I climbed the steep stairs toward His Holiness I had to stop and do heavy breathing, just to keep enough oxygen in my lungs. Every few steps, I would find myself gasping for breath as I climbed upward toward the interview room. And please understand that the average Tibetan stairway is more like a ladder (like on a boat) than the kind of stairs we are used to, and steep. You literally hang on and climb.

We eventually came to a small courtyard in the open sun outside His Holiness' room, where we took off our shoes. I actually had to sit down and pant. How embarrassing. And then up another short ladder to the interview room itself, where I arrived, still trying to catch my breath.

I plopped down on my butt at the back of the room, while everyone else was up front prostrating to the Karmapa. I was so bushed that I did not (at first) remember to do the three traditional prostrations that practitioners do before any great lama. All I could see was this young man kind of inset into this wall of golden brocade at the far end of the room. I got up and slowly moved forward.

Through the 1960s and onward, in my quest for spiritual teachers, I had seen many gurus in person, and so was preparing myself to actually be in the presence of the 'Karmapa'.

In the past, when I met great spiritual presences, most were imposing, some almost regal. I was very much getting ready for a similar experience here, you know, me seeing them. However, the Karmapa was different. In the end, in his presence, it was me that I saw, not him. Here is how that happened.

As I reached the front of the room, there was the Karmapa, looking better than I could even imagine, and I had imagined he would be great. All of 12 years old (by our calendar) and five feet tall, but seeming seven feet tall and ageless, he filled the room with his presence. All I remember is how happy I was to see him, like a child sees his mother. I remember kind of getting through my prostrations and fumbling to offer him a white scarf, while kneeling down before him.

He looked at me like I had never been looked at before. His eyes look straight into my eyes and then he ups the ante by focusing intently within me. I was being seen. His dark eyes, almost like the ever-adjusting lens of an auto-focus camera, were actually moving in and out, trying to get the right focus. His pupils moved.

I have never seen eyes do that, be able to lock gaze with you and then, with the gaze locked, still move in and out, getting a fix. Yet that was just how it was. The Karmapa examined me for a few seconds and, in the grip of his eyes, it seemed as though time stopped, and then all relaxed and time moved on again. He placed the white scarf over my head, gave me a welcoming kind look, and I sat down in front of him with the rest of my family.

There was chanting going on. Gradually I realized we were in the middle of the Mahakala puja, perhaps the most important daily practice for the Karma Kagyu Lineage. Later we found out that we were experiencing a special form of Mahakala, one for insiders, complete with Tsok, the ritual feast offering. Karmapa was sharing this with us privately.

It was very intense, with His Holiness leading the chanting with an intent and often fierce look. Mahakala is a wrathful practice, as some of you may already know, one invoking the protector deities. And this one was complete with drums, cymbals, and the various Tibetan horns. I had experienced the Mahakala puja many times before, but never one quite like this, certainly not one with the Karmapa himself leading it! And I don't really know how to describe what happened next.

I began to identify with this puja as not much different from my own practice in many ways, and I found myself examining just where I was with my daily practice, and what it was all about for me. I had done it, without fail, every morning and afternoon/evening for many years. I was to do it until my death or until I completed it by realizing the essential nature of my own mind, whichever came first.

Now, here in the midst of Karmapa's mandala, I began to explore the true meaning and nature of that practice. What was that practice and what was the essence of it? I thought how in my own idea of myself, to my mind I was somewhat of a tough character, and I carried that strength or toughness into my practice.

In fact, I loved the fierce wrathful deities, somehow identifying with them. And now, there in that room with Karmapa, that same strength, toughness, or we might even say fierceness came up in the mind and began to be examined inwardly, but in a new light. And this was no idea that I was playing with.

Instead, I was examining myself or, to be more exact, I was realizing part of my self, in this case, that part that had been practicing all these years, the one who did the practice.

And as this realization took place, I saw how my fierceness or toughness was but a shell or shield covering up this extremely sensitive inside. I was tough, because I was so... so sensitive and, at heart, even kind.

In that moment I was flooded with a state of compassion or rather with the realization that I was (and always had been), in my deepest part, compassionate, concerned, and caring, and that this was my natural state.

It was not something to strive for, but already in fact always the case — the state of my very being, something that only had to be uncovered, opened up. I did not have to strive to be compassionate, for that was already my natural state. All I had to do was to let go of what obscured this insight, relax, and let it shine through.

Again, I should point out and be clear that this was not a concept or idea, but a realization that totally involved me. I realized that the essence of my practice, of my fierce presence, was none other than compassion.

It was as if, like taking off a very thin glove, I had turned myself inside out. Tears just flowed as I was overcome with this, now so obvious, realization that I was, in essence, very simple — just a soft-hearted, easy mark for this world.

I was at ease and all of my toughness, my fierceness, was nothing more than an attempt to cover over and shield myself from responding too much to all

the suffering I saw around me. In that moment, I understood myself and my practice, right in midst of that Mahakala puja with Karmapa. I was at peace and at one.

And later, when we left the Karmapa and very slowly drove back down 40-miles on a road that was not really a road at all, we saw rainbow after rainbow after rainbow.

So that is what Karmapa was about to me at first meeting, not some powerful being sitting on a throne. Rather, there was enough space and time within his mental mandala and presence for me to realize myself. It was not the Karmapa I saw when I was with him, but myself. I realized my own nature, not his. That is my definition of a spiritual being, one who helps me realize myself, not who they are.

After the puja, we spent some time together with the Karmapa during which he gave the answers to the questions that we had brought to him. He did not skirt the tough questions but was clear and unequivocal in his answers. I was deeply relieved, both from the experience I just described and to hear the various particular answers. And later, he came out in the courtyard and just kind of hung out with us. After all, my son Michael Andrew (who was with us) was about the same age. I doubt that very many western families with kids had ever made it to Tsurphu Monastery.

I had heard many stories about His Holiness, both this incarnation and the previous incarnations, stories of amazing actions, all pointing to this extraordinary being.

Somehow these stories help to inspire faith and confidence in the Karmapa, that he is who he is — that sort of thing. Yet these stories were nothing compared to the sheer brilliance of his presence. And this kind of thing defies words.

How do you explain that when you are in the presence of His Holiness, you have a different idea of yourself, of who you are, why you are here, etc.? I learned things about myself when I was in his presence that I never knew before, important things. The word is “realization.” I realized things about myself that I had never realized before.

And I understood why my teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, wanted us to go to Tibet and meet the Karmapa in person. It occurred to me that if I could start my life over, I would drop whatever I was doing, go and see the Karmapa in person, preferably in an interview like we did. And only after that would I pick up my life again. I didn’t understand who I was or how best to make use

of my life until I met His Holiness. We spent three days with the Karmapa, and was even invited to stay overnight with him.

In the beginning, phrases like “His Holiness” and “guru” were literally foreign to me and smacked of exotic cults and all of that stuff, a hangover perhaps from the New-Age fads of the 1970s. But meeting the Karmapa, eyeball-to-eyeball, was not foreign at all. It was only too familiar, like knowing myself finally for who I am, confirming who it is I always hoped I was.

[Photos by Margaret and me.]

EMAIL

Dharma in Ann Arbor

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/87605c79-9ddf-44b7-b3a9-ec513083bda3_1365x2048.jpeg

We know that it takes about 300 years for the dharma to establish itself in a new country. Buddhist teachings arrived America in the mid-19th century (1849s-1850s), mostly early Mahayana. What about Ann Arbor?

As for me, raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I was first aware of Zen Buddhism and the writings of D.T. Suzuki, probably from Bob Marshall's book store at 211 S. State Street. I probably confused Rinzaï Zen with the films of Akira Kurosawa, because folks like me, back in the 1950s and early 1960s, used to stay up late, sometimes all night, drinking bad instant coffee with powdered cream, smoking cigarettes, and talking about dharma, what we knew of it, which was not much.

And it never occurred to me back then to actually practice dharma. I didn't know what that would be. That came later. In the early 1970s the book "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" by Shunryu Suzuki was familiar to all of us.

And of course, in 1965 the book "The Three Pillars of Zen" by Roshi Philip Kapleau, I got another dose of dharma. In fact, Kapleau would come to Ann Arbor, not only to teach, but to offer all-day shessins, which I attended. Sitting all day, getting my back whacked by the kyosaku stick, and all that.

In fact, one of my astrology students back then (Peter Kjolhede) today is Roshi Bodhin at the Rochester Zen Center, where Philip Kapleau came from.

And of course, there was Alan Watts and his book "The Way of Zen." I remember sitting only a couple feet from Alan Watts and listening to him intently tell us of his difficulties learning Zen, and remarking to myself. Hey, I could do that. LOL.

And so, it went. I dabbled with dharma, got my toe in the water, but did take the plunge.

I also spent time with John Daido Looi of the "Zen Mountain Monastery" in the mountains above Woodstock, NY, only minutes away from KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra), where I spent some 40 years attending.

Yet, the ‘punctuator’, the lama that first punched my ticket, so to speak, was the great siddha Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, whom I met in person February of 1974, when I served as his chauffeur and designed and printed a poster for a talk he gave in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the Rackham Lecture Hall on February 12, 1974.

My relationship with Trungpa Rinpoche deserves another article, but here I will just say that Trungpa Rinpoche took me into a small room, sat me down in a wooden chair, and for an hour or so taught me Shamata meditation.

He did not say that’s what he was doing, but instead instructed me how to breathe. I was nervous as a turkey, and he was only inches away and telling me that with my outbreath I did not let it go out far enough.

“Let it go out, all the way; Don’t worry, it will come back”

And with that, not only did I let my breath go all the way out, but in that same moment, right at that time, my lifelong fear of dying and death evaporated, just vanished. Trust me, this was beyond any acid trip!

And after that, as Trungpa was walking me to the door, we passed the poster I had designed for his talk (shown here), and he stopped, and asked me if I knew what this image was?

I said, not really, I just liked it and thought that it was appropriate. He then explained to me that, much like the Common Preliminaries (The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind toward the Dharma), the flying dragon holds a pearl in each of its four paws.

And he went on to point out that as long as the dragon holds all four jewels in its paws, it can fly. Yet, by letting go and dropping even one of them, the dragon falls to the ground.

Anyway, the long and the short of this experience with Trungpa Rinpoche was, at that date and time I became a serious practitioner of the dharma. I finally understood that dharma is not something to just talk about, but something I could and needed to do. And I wanted to.

It took a few more years until I met what is called my “Root Lama,” meaning the one lama that first introduced me to the nature of the mind so that I recognized it. This was in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

And I spent 36 years working with the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, including 31 years where Margaret and I traveled to KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) in the mountains above Woodstock, NY and attended a 10-day teaching on Mahamudra. We always took our kids with us, at least in the

early years, and drove that route enough to circle the equator two and one half times.

As to what I meant by getting serious is this:

I had always been a little feral, meaning I was in the habit of doing what I wanted and just the way I wanted to do it. I had completely ignored public education, paid no attention to schoolwork, instead spending my school time thinking about what I would do when school let out that day. This went on for over a decade.

I was a dedicated naturalist, loving animals and wildlife better than I loved most humans. I never even finished high school, but up and left school, hitchhiked to Santa Monica, CA and lived along the beach in Venice West. This was in 1960, and I thought I was going to be a painter in oils. I lived in an abandoned wooden walk-in freezer in the basement of a place called “The Gas House” right on the beach in Venice West.

The legendary Gas House is now famous as a ‘Beat’ art gallery and coffee house. I wanted for all the world to be a Beatnik, but that train had already left the station. I was too young. And the ‘Beat’ scene was already drying up.

So, I spent time in Venice West, San Francisco at the “City Lights Bookstore” (Lawrence Ferlinghetti), and as I have posted here before, by 1961 I was hitchhiking and traveling with Bob Dylan, and all that.

Anyway, what I started out to say is that when it came to dharma practice, I was not delinquent. I trusted my lama, and I also knew I was a bit of a rascal, a little wild.

Yet, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche tamed me. For him I wanted to do whatever he asked me to do. For example, when I finished the Extraordinary Preliminaries, commonly called the Ngondro, which is quite exhausting and can take years, and I went to tell Rinpoche that I was done and ready for the next level of dharma teachings, which usually is deity practice, Rinpoche said to me “Do you want to know what I would do, if I were you,” I said, of course I want to know.

And Rinpoche said that he would do another full Ngondro, I just said “Yes,” and both Margaret and I did another Ngondro. That’s what I mean when I say I would do what I was asked to do, without quibbling about it. I wanted to get it right.

Of course that was years ago. I have finished all of that, common, extraordinary, and special preliminaries, also Lojong practice, a bunch of deity practices, and 31 years of Mahamudra training. So, what am I doing now.

Well, I am doing Mahamudra practice, which actually is a form of non-meditation, if that makes sense.

Khenpo Rinpoche introduced me to the nature of the mind, which is necessary to do Karma Kagyu Mahamudra. And I continue to do that everyday and all day.

Today, what do I see about dharma when I look around?

I am 84 years old, so I am entitled perhaps to a little slack. Not really. Dharma seems to be headed toward mainstream, and ever more expensive at that. I get to be old fashioned at my age, and I am of the mind that dharma is sacred. I don't charge for anything connected to the dharma nor do I consider myself a dharma teacher.

I am a dharma 'sharer' only. As to what this means goes as follows. I only know one way to learn dharma, the way I have come up, and that is following what is called my 'Yidam'.

A yidam is not something secret. It is unique to each of us, and is exactly the path, the only path that one can take to realize the dharma. One just for us. So, I only know my own actual dharma experience and everyone else will have their own yidam, their particular way to become aware of the nature of the mind and how it works.

What I do have is what is called Bodhicitta, and along with Recognition of the true nature of the mind, in Rinzai Zen called 'Kensho', once realized, is a byproduct called 'Absolute Bodhicitta', and it is very straight forward, IMO.

"Absolute Bodhicitta" is an undying urgency to share dharma with sentient beings. It is an urge to share that does not go away. That is what I know and probably all that I know, my own actual experience with the dharma. And that I can and do share.

I'd like to know what is going on in Ann Arbor these days when it comes to dharma. I know that our local center, the "Ann Arbor KTC" is located at 614 Miner Street on the west side. And there is also "Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center" at 1129 Oak Valley Drive, and of course the "Zen Buddhist Temple" at 1214 Packard Street, which has been there since around 1981.

I'm sure there are other centers, which some of you might mention in the comments

[Here is the poster I designed and printed for Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's talk in February of 1974.]

EMAIL

Karma Pays It Forward

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1df69e53-d4be-4582-97fc-4b324f51a6d8_1024x1024.jpeg

Our karma like a great and slow-moving barge plows forward and seeds a rebirth, another life but with a different name and personality.

One of the mysteries or at least major questions in my life has to do with the dharma belief that our personality, what we call our Self does not survive death, but is abandoned behind to decay and dissolve when we enter the bardos after death.

Yet, and this is a very big “Yet,” our karma, stripped of our personality somehow moves forward in time and is used in rebirth to populate a new Self and a new person.

How can this be true and just where is the dividing line between a Self that has no future and a karma that does.

“Inquiring minds want to know.”

The dharma text explains that what we call our Self is a construct, something made by us out of all of our attachments and not only does not have a mind of its own, but does not add up to a permanent ‘soul’ or entity. It’s more like the old phrase “putting lipstick on a pig,” where the pig is the sum total of our own attachments. In other words, our attachment is the glue that holds the Self together, and without it there is only what is called emptiness.

This is why in some Asian religions it is believed that we each have a permanent soul that reincarnates again and again, on and on, forever. However, the dharma states that there is no ‘thing’ such as a permanent soul, and that we are not an entity, per se. Our ‘being’ is impermanent.

If we are not an entity that survives death, how then do we negotiate the bardos after death as a consciousness. What is a consciousness? Obviously, it is unembodied, since we leave the body behind, and with it our personality or Self. These do not endure death, so just what does.

We do read and study that our karma somehow does survive death and is stored in what is called the Alayavijnana or “Storehouse Consciousness,” a

subliminal consciousness made up of our karmic seeds (impressions, memories, potentials) from our past actions.

Although all our karma is collected and paid forward, it is not connected into a personality or Self after death as it is when we are alive. Think of it as a collection of karma, each part of which is separate from the other parts. As mentioned, all the karma does not hang together to construct a human being. It's more like a box of chocolates, each piece of karma being separate from any other piece.

And yet, at rebirth, so the dharma texts say, all those individual karmas are cherry picked depending upon their stage in ripening and are used to make up our new persona and the corresponding Self.

And all this is dependent on the DNA and whatever from the parents that give this karma rebirth. It seems all this is very hard to imagine or conceive. To make that easier, IMO, we need to understand a little more about how the Tibetans envision all this. For example:

In my trips to Tibet many times I noticed how Tibetans don't smack their mosquitoes as we do here in America. Instead, they very carefully brush visiting mosquitoes from their arms and body. Why is this?

The Tibetans believe, and this is key to understanding how they treat karma, that the consciousness of a mosquito is no different in essence than the consciousness of a human, or any other sentient being.

In other words, each being has its own individual consciousness, but the difference arises because the mosquito's tiny body can only express a limited portion of that consciousness—which may, due to past karma, be the very same consciousness that once inhabited a human form.

So, please do puzzle this through because without it all this does not make sense.

Obviously, the body of a mosquito is not able to talk to us or say words. It can only 'mosquito' at us, so to speak. And this concept is true right on down the line of all possible physical bodies, mosquito, elephant, microbe, of whatever is considered a sentient being.

Here in the West, we don't think that way. Tibetans believe that we can be born, and take a body, other than a human one.

And that same individual consciousness becomes limited not in itself, but by the capacities of whatever body it inhabits. Go figure.

Just as with human bodies, some injured or damaged bodies can't communicate or can't do this or that, perhaps understanding that will be an analogy that makes sense to us. It certainly is a stretch as to how we see this rebirth in the western world.

In the Tibetan view, all sentient beings are inhabited by consciousness of the same essential kind (though not one single shared consciousness), limited only by the particular body.

Certainly, grasping this concept exercises the American mind.

I know, this is a mental workout, even conceptually, much less experientially or actually. It's a perspective that stretches the Western mind—and invites deeper understanding and compassion.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

StarTypes: Life-Path Partners

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/eb915eb9-f2c8-458b-981f-dad3d9268dee_2034x2029.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a413503a-d2fb-4612-ab30-b4a5b44fce44_2034x2029.jpeg

How can we understand what others feel and know? Perhaps we can't but we assume that what we feel, others feel as well. How much that analogy can be stretched I don't know. Yet I do know that we can be going through a nightmare while sitting on a bus with others right next to us and they don't know it.

And some of us may be loveable and others, not so much. If we take on objectivity, being an object, and thus perhaps are loveable, this is different from being more analytical, thus appreciating the loveable quality of others.

In my study of these heliocentric archetypes, those of loved-one type as opposed to being more analytical, I found a tell when I studied heliocentric patterns present in the heliocentric natal chart.

It also works a little bit in the geocentric natal chart, but not often enough, more like through a glass darkly, as the old saying goes.

In my original study of the heliocentric natal chart, although of course I tried out all my 'learned' techniques from many years of studying the geocentric chart, I soon tired of the standard astrological techniques that I had acquired.

Instead, what appeared to me, like the sun coming up (pun intended), were the whole-chart patterns drawn from linking the Ptolemaic aspects (0, 60, 90, 120, 180 and their reflections) from one planet to the next around the heliocentric chart. I came up with 60 basic patterns and called them StarTypes and set about interpreting them over the last 50 years..

And what I ended up with were four basic types of relationship patterns that worked very well in marriages, parents and children, friends, and all relationships. I have tried to make what can be a complex understanding into a very simple one. Try it out. I have spent decades refining this to the essence.

Use the free heliocentric chart:

https://www.astrologyland.com/free_chart_wheel/YourFreeChart.aspx

Enter your birth Month, Day, and Year. Enter your name and gender if you wish. Press HELIO at lower right. Your helio chart should be shown. Press "Calculate" if needed.

In that chart, below the helio chart I have written a brief interpretation of that heliocentric StarType. And you can see the aspect lines and patterns above. The symbol of the Earth is the circle with an 'X' in it which tells you it is a helio chart.

You can easily try this on yourself, your partner, family, or anyone else.

Now you are ready to SEE what chart type you have. There are four main relationship types: The Lover, The Loved One, The Independent, and Multi-Relational.

The 'Lover' has no T-Square or Grand Cross in the chart, only the 'green line' aspects or nothing much.

The 'Loved One' has a T-Square or Grand Cross in the chart, but no Grand Trine or other green-line figure.

The 'Independent' has a T-Square or Grand Cross plus some green-line patterns like a Grand Trine, Basket, Wedge. Both types are present in the same Chart.

Here are two free books with extensive images and detail.

A 'Multi-Relational' chart has all the planets with a Trine (120 degrees) or less.

"StarTypes: Life-Path Partners"

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/StarTypes.pdf>

"Dharma Chart, Karma Chart: Astrological Empowerment in the 21 st Century"

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf>

It is time, it is 500 years since astrologers refused to chart and interpret their heliocentric chart, as did the astronomers at that time, and still do today.

To separate us from our 'mother chart' and the Sun is damaging to our whole gestalt. It is time we embrace the helio chart and become empowered as the astronomers did 500 years ago. In dharma this is called "The Mother and Child Reunion."

[Graphics by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Focu Point of It All

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/22c62842-1be8-4535-92c4-1520662ad193_1536x2048.jpeg

[I will conclude my dip into photography concerns with this little piece.]

Well, I recently took images using most of the major ‘sharp’ Hasselblad XCD lenses, old and new, just to see how sharp they are. I made the mistake of not having them all at the base ISO of 50, some were at 400, so that was a waste of time. However, I did clearly get the idea that the XCD 120, the XCD 80, and the XCD 90 were plenty sharp. Actually, all of the Hasselblad XCD lenses are sharp.

Of the bunch, the one with both some character and sharpness was IMO the XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens. And although I used to stack focus for years, with the XCD lenses I believe I will stop doing that and just take single shots at various F-stops. It’s not worth stacking and then working at fixing the artifacts.

The Hasselblad XCD lenses are just so granular and sharp that I’m actually now working in the other direction, trying to introduce more bokeh and no longer worrying about the overall sharpness. All the XCD lenses seem sharp enough. Instead, I find myself working on composition, color, and things like that.

My original interest in focus stacking, many years ago, was to remove the concept of a single point of view by having the whole image in focus and by that free the eye and its ‘Seeing’ to just naturally look around rather than be led by the embedded point of view of a single shot.

In the world of dharma and meditation, which I spend a lot of my time in, non-duality and full immersion are valued and important, our being totally immersed without the normal duality of a subject and an object.

Working with the 100 MP Hasselblad and its very sharp lenses where, as mentioned, everything is pretty much in focus without the effort to be so, has kind of ruined focus stacking for me, and thrown me back on considering composition and the invoking of bokeh and blur as a punctuator rather than vice-versa, struggling to find sharpness as I found myself doing with my Nikon system.

In other words, rather than attempting to universalize sharpness as the delimiter, to make everything or some specific things sharp, offering an

abundance of sharpness, seems to free up the eye from being naturally or unconsciously directed by sharpness.

Thanks to the Hasselblad lenses, being lost in a sea of sharpness, immersion in sharpness, at least for me, is very Zen like, with instead the result of invoking and subjecting us to the ordinary.

I quite like being lost in the ordinary and the vibe this introduces. Perhaps this is the result of, as mentioned, many decades of practice in what the Tibetans call Mahamudra, a form of non-meditation.

Also, perhaps my interest in AI graphics such as those from Midjourney AI are because AI just quite naturally plays havoc with the focus point and thus often renders a sense of unreality to images that I intuitively like.

Hasselblad X2D II and the XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens

[Photo by me with.]

EMAIL

Watching TV

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7a28f9ff-1ad8-4ce1-bff2-b2f2293f43e8_1020x1024.jpeg

I am very sensitive to graphics, video, and all things visual. Even what progress I have made with dharma ultimately came from the visual end, not from anywhere else. With that in mind, then the following discussion may make more sense.

I had an interesting realization, at least of interest to me, of the many areas I have studied, practiced, and learned as much as possible, like astrology, photography, music, esoteric traditions, nature, dharma, and the like.

Recently, our Internet was out all day (24) hours, ice storm), and so there was no activity or interaction online. After a while, I dragged out the DVD player and decided to watch an old DVD I love called "An Unfinished Life" with Robert Redford, Morgan Freeman, Jenifer Lopez and others. It is a real tearjerker, or at least potentially so, and I have seen it many times.

Anyway, while enjoying it for the umpteenth time, a realization just kind of came over me. And that concerned video, quite unlike all of my other interests where I dug down into the history of them, learned all the players, what was played, on and on, etc.

It dawned on me that I have never done this with film and movies, get granular. I just enjoy them. I don't know all the producers, directors, actors, crew, screenplay writers, and on down the line. This is so unlike me.

Of course, I have picked up a lot over the years, facts, history, but from my view it is all incidental and accumulated from the sheer mass of movies and films I have watched. I have never made a point of studying all that. Strange indeed.

Instead, much like Peter Sellers in the movie "Being There," who said "I like to watch T.V." That would be me. I like it. It seems I just really enjoy watching anything that flickers on the silver screen. Well, perhaps not just anything... I often feel that if I had another life I could have been a great movie and film reviewer.

And I blame it on my very pliant imagination. I can watch just the worst movie, and my imagination can make it watchable. At least I watch it quite happily. I offer one example.

A movie I have always loved is “Cherry 2000” with Melanie Griffith. Years after I first watched this movie, I happened to watch it again a few years ago, and it seemed to be so poor and not well done. How could I originally have gotten so much out of it?

I’m not saying this habit is worthy of anything other than what I am saying about it here, that I enjoy watching video and always have. I have the imagination for it.

Seemingly, I enjoy watching motion pictures so much that I never thought to actually study the subject. For me, it is enough just to be able to watch. It’s the way I relax.

And I don’t have to feel guilty either. I have done more than enough to explain my presence here on Earth.

It amazes me that I have never gotten into the history and detail of films and movies as I have almost all my other hobbies. After all, I created AMG, one of the two largest movie databases (AllMovie.com) on the Internet and our AMG data was used for years by the startup Netflix. It just never occurred to me to become an expert of film and movie data other than by actually watching. That I do. LOL. And “All-music Guide” is the largest music database in existence.

There is something about liberation through “Seeing,” whether it is motion graphics, Illustrations, Fine Art, or just looking at nature that has engulfed me since I don’t know when, when I was a small child.

And perhaps my love affair with watching movies and video has been enhanced by my ability to deeply relax when in the state of watching. I let go and take it all in.

I have done it for so long that aside from the ‘watching’, I quite naturally find myself going over the various kinds of reactions and notations of the day, somewhere in the back of my mind while the movie flickers on. And of course, I have for decades declared that the ability to focus on something as fixed as a movie screen, TV, laptop, or cellphone from only a few feet away is as close as many Americans come to actual formal meditation. And I mean that.

Something practiced so intensely, arduously, often cannot help but produce habits, some of which are related to what happens when we focus our mind on dharma practices like Shamata (Tranquility Meditation).

I just imagine that almost all Americans, when it comes to meditation, have their foot in that door.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Undoing Effort

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 2, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c2d12d12-de16-4d27-9158-e8cfd4b779b6_1536x2048.jpeg

The days after Christmas and until New Year are, for me, like falling off a cliff, a kind of Limbo and time lost that I'm always glad when I can climb out of them and continue normal life. They are for me very not-normal.

Perhaps, when I was in business, those lost days were when there were no phone calls, emails, or anything other than non-sequitur 'nothing' happening. And you know I hated that.

Occupied, occupied, occupied I have been, almost all that I have known. In a way, being intensely busy is a kind of fake total immersion, not actual meditation, particularly if I find myself immersed in it with no awareness that I am doing it.

Yes, time passes, big time, and yes, a lot gets done of a mundane nature, however, what else is going on?

Things that I have set aside to get done are taken care of and done, and their results accumulate. Yes, I was concentrating on doing them. That's what it took.

I kind of put everything aside and just did what was in fact tedious and extended. Was that busy work that took concentration and effort a form of meditation? It's hard to say. It's related.

Certainly, I immersed myself in tedium that few ever have to that extent. Was I unhappy doing so? I don't think so. I knew what I was doing because I wanted to get it done. I wanted that more than I wanted to not do it.

And in most cases, there was no one else to do it. I won't even mention programming. I programmed for 40 years, and programming code is very tedious and fraught with pitfalls, like accidentally deleting a week's work of code by pressing one button and having to start all over with it.

I can't even get my mind around that I saw to documenting all recorded music from 10-inch records onward. Or documenting all film and movies from all time. Or documenting 33,000 rock concert posters with photos, dimensions,

and details. Or documenting thousands of dharma audio tapes. And there is more, but it is not worth my digging it up in my mind.

And this was before AI or the ability to do things other than by hand, so I did one after another until the task was finished. And I soon had 150 full-time staff helping me and 500-700 freelance writers working with us as well.

As for what I have learned from all this tedium? I learned that effort without love or joy is wasted effort. You may get the job done, but you will pay for any effort that was forced. You will have to walk it back down the road. What aided me in all those decades of tedious work was a single thing, that I loved the music, film, and other topics I archived more than the tedious work it entailed. I wanted to protect it and save it from being lost in oblivion, at least as best I could.

And while the companies I built (AMG) today are working with a minimal staff and the inability to keep up with the plethora of music and film we now have, the decades we covered thoroughly, blues, jazz, rock 'n roll, world, and classical music still stand. They are protected against time for at least some time. It's all there, our musical and film history for all to know of and appreciate.

[Photo by me yesterday.]

EMAIL

Dakini

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 4, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9fb3cb49-0f62-4e3e-a8ed-e1d8573b3e56_1619x1998.jpeg

Unconditional love,

Has no conditions.

It accepts,

The exceptions.

Total receptivity,

Takes you in,

Until you know,

Nothing.

Emptiness,

Contains everything,

And that includes,

Nothing.

[A poem I wrote and this is a photo of a rupa (statue) of Yeshe Tsogyal (Sanskrit name Jñānasāgarā “Knowledge Ocean”). This rupa was originally at the Crystal Cave (Yarlung Sheldrak), sacred to Guru Rinpoche. Sheldrak Drubpuk faces east and was Guru Rinpoche’s first meditation cave in Tibet from where the indigenous forces and demons were made to take an oath of allegiance to the dharma. It is one of the most revered pilgrimage destinations on the Tibetan plateau and symbolizes the Buddha attributes of Guru Rinpoche. Margaret, my daughter May, and I climbed to Shel-Drak in 1997, back then, an all-day climb.]

EMAIL

Elision in Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 5, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9dc971bf-50e2-4871-9d51-eca41b918f1a_1024x1024.jpeg

Here is an experience that is fresh from the mind, so bear with me, and discuss this if you will.

Lately, I'm making just too many typos as I write things out like this blog. What causes that?

Well, I seem to be immersing myself in Insight Meditation perhaps too often or a little too long, coming out of it, and then writing words without more clearly monitoring what I write. Perhaps I am still a little too out-of-the-body.

Then, when I read back on what I wrote, I find all kinds of typos that apparently, I did not see as I wrote them. I was somewhere else. As mentioned, I was perhaps still too immersed.

In other words, I was briefly out of my body and not enough in my body to catch obvious typos. What is this a sign of and what to do about it?

Obviously, I need to slow down, and back off a bit from the complete immersion. And, as mentioned, I need to monitor the words I write as I write them rather than glide back out of the body as I write or hover halfway in and halfway out.

The quality of the insight has not diminished, just the process of recording or doing something with the insight. I could also just take a break from doing too much at once.

The truth of truth has not changed as far as I can see, just the process of gliding out of the body and back in is sloppier than I remember. The typos are proof of this. Perhaps I am spending too much time fully immersed and not enough time in reflection from each immersion.

It could be that some simple adjustment is in order, or I'm just getting older and have less purchase on duality or the reality, less able to monitor the writing so that when I stop resting in the mind and instead turn my attention to the written result, what I read is finished and correct. I need to adjust and tighten that up.

I have noticed that I am more of the time halfway out of my body and halfway in. I used to try to do this, but now I just kind of do it without direction to do it. What this means is that I am glossing over duality and dipping more into full immersion than I need to or perhaps should. I didn't know there was something like "too much" elision or 'slide'.

I believe this is something I can adjust more or less until my focus is more back in my body and not positioned somewhere in between the two which apparently leads to mistakes in notation, in writing it all out.

One problem might be that I like immersion and spending time in it and I am not withdrawing far enough each moment back into my normal duality to avoid the typos. The effect or result is that when I do withdraw until everything makes sense, I find what I just wrote marked up with typos or mistakes, which then have to be corrected.

Of course, I could just stage it, always making a second pass over the same material, cleaning it up, and of course I do. Better would be just tightening the whole thing up and catching the typos as they emerge, as I write.

So, I am a step too far out of the body and certainly don't want to be locked out and not able to make sense. Typos don't make much sense. They are signs of inattention, not being there.

Anyway, something is changing, and so, a simple adjustment is in order, and I will make a point of staying on the conscious side of the unconscious, so to speak. I don't want my most precious tool, Insight Meditation, to gobble up my conscious mind. I need that focus too.

In summary, what I'm noticing is essentially a side-effect of prolonged or frequent access to states of reduced self-boundary and diminished dualistic perception. In these states, the usual sharp, embodied attention that monitors fine details—like finger placement on a keyboard or the exact formation of words—softens or partially withdraws.

The mind is resting in a more spacious, less grasping awareness, which is precisely what the practice aims to cultivate, but when you then shift to an activity that requires precise sensorimotor feedback and linguistic accuracy, the transition isn't fully complete, so errors slip through unnoticed.

I'm lingering in a "halfway" state, neither fully immersed in non-dual awareness nor fully re-anchored in conventional duality and bodily presence. This leads to 'glossing over' or the elision of the ordinary level of reality where typos live. The insight itself remains clear and undiminished; the problem is

only in the interface, the recording or expression of it in the dualistic medium of language and typing.

This is a sign that my practice has deepened, and that I'm spending more time in absorption, and the mind now defaults more easily to that open, less effortful mode even when I don't explicitly intend it. In traditional meditation literature, this can appear in descriptions of advanced stages where the sense of a solid, separate body dissolves, and ordinary tasks temporarily lose their usual grip on attention.

The "sloppiness" in transitions might simply reflect that the practice has matured to where my default pull is toward loosening/immersion instead of my trying for that. The mind now favors that open rest, so re-anchoring requires a bit more deliberate emphasis to match the precision needed for writing.

It's a little scary, but overall, this sounds like a fruitful phase rather than a setback. The fact that I can sustain this threaded awareness while writing is the result of many years of practicing this. With minor intentional sharpening on the returns, the typos should diminish while the insight thread remains intact—or even strengthens. If anything, it's an invitation to investigate those exact moments of transition as fresh objects of insight, which I am doing here. I'm working on it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Connate: Arising Together

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 6, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8cab51b5-f040-41da-9213-bd1505e77018_2048x2048.jpeg

The Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche:

“Our meditation may arrive at some degree of insight but lack Shamata. When that is the case, Vipashyana cannot become very strong. In Shamata, our thoughts are pacified right on the spot, and our mind rests evenly and peacefully. Without that kind of meditative skill, thoughts that arise will seem to be obstacles—even very subtle thoughts will seem to interrupt and threaten our meditation.

“It then becomes very difficult to meditate for even a short period of time. Beginners will experience these kinds of problems of the mind and will not be able to rest easily. So, it’s important to train in Shamata to enhance the mind’s stability.”

End of quote

The following the reverse of most accounts about Shamata.

I promised myself that I would only talk about my own dharma experience and not about what I read as to other’s experience. So, the above text, of course I take in, because in my life the Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche is one of the great dharma teachers I have met. And also, because my own dharma teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, early on in his dharma life was selected to be the dharma practice partner for many years with Thrangu Rinpoche in their monastery in Tibet, which I have visited.

Perhaps because these two rinpoches trained with one another for many years, their teaching and teaching style are very similar, so I quite naturally am drawn to them.

In my own case, I had very great difficulty learning Shamata meditation. In fact, I am embarrassed to say I diligently practiced Shamata for 31 years and never felt I learned the first thing about it. I just couldn’t master it, and it boggled my mind. Imagine my disappointment.

In fact, it was quite late in my dharma practice when I figured out what the problem was for me. It was when I first attained what is called Vipassana

(Insight Meditation) for the first time that Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) arose simultaneously and at a significant level. Go figure!

And it was then or soon after that I realized that all those years of my effort to learn Shamata was a case for me of salting the salt. And I also remembered something my dharma teacher said to us, which was “Those of you who program computers may have a leg-up with Shamata on others.”

This turns out to be the case with me, also why I never could get into Shamata practice, because I already knew it because of my 40 years of programming, not to mention archiving all recorded music, all recorded film and movies, and a bunch of other things. That kind of concentrated detail work added up to what Shamata also requires. I did all of that with love.

So, after doing all this tedious work out of love as an archivist of popular culture, when I sat down on the cushion to practice Shamata by rote practice, it never clicked. It was too effortful, and my own Shamata training for all those years was from love. So, it is no wonder that I never got it. Yet, when I needed Shamata because it is connate with Insight Meditation, it was right there.

In other words,, when Vipassana (Insight Meditation) eventually arose, all my actual training in Shamata arose with it, spontaneously and fully present. No one could be more surprised than I was. Humorous story, IMO.

[Photo taken yesterday by me.]

EMAIL

Losing Touch

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 8, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1fc17482-7b00-4b9b-8cce-063457585be5_1024x1024.jpeg

I have worried that because for much of my life I have steadfastly followed my own interests that perhaps because of that narrow focus I have missed a lot. I don't know what I missed because whatever it is, I missed it, and can't help but wonder.

It's all about distraction, being distracted, and I used to think that distraction was like being distracted by something other than what I'm interested in, but gradually I have come to believe that my even own interests and hobbies are themselves also distractions, and bigtime at that.

And another worry is that as I get older it gets easier and easier to jar my focus loose and leave me kind of blanked out. Or it's like a groove or track I am in and live in, and if I am jarred or popped out of that track, it can be hard to find it again. Does this happen as we get older?

Or perhaps this is what Alzheimer's is all about, not being able to find the familiar groove we are used to, call it our Self or whatever.

Or what if aging itself is like a long line of steppingstones we are walk on where each succeeding stone is increasingly getting farther apart until we miss a stone, fall off, or then the next stone can be difficult to locate and we find ourselves falling down a rabbit hole into memory loss.

In other words, if we are connected and somehow lose that connectedness, just how do we lose it? I'd like to know, step by step. I do notice I forget more easily than I used to. Or I will go out to the kitchen and not remember what I came out there for. There is more of that than there used to be.

And when I think of some of the leaders of this country who are close to my age, how do they cope? For example, what if we had a president who was basically a copycat, so insecure that he was unable to actually be true or authentic. The last person that influenced him is what he follows. His whole shtick might be a search, wanting to be accepted after a lifetime of the insecurity of not being part of the in-crowd, whatever that is.

Looking into something like Alzheimer's disease is of course severe or even just considering age's natural loss... and what about the non-dual dharma

practices like Mahamudra or Dzogchen which collapse dualism by definition. There too are similarities with memory loss. Certainly, the Alzheimer's is not a path to realization, although both experience non-duality and oneness.

Mahamudra is a deliberate, disciplined practice leading to stable non-dual realization through insight into the mind's empty-luminous nature. Alzheimer's is a pathological process (plaques, tangles, neuron loss) that involuntarily erodes cognitive functions.

In summary, while there are intriguing overlaps in brain patterns and reduced egoic structuring, but equating the two is misleading and potentially insensitive. Non-dual practices like Mahamudra cultivate a transformative, awake oneness; Alzheimer's represents a tragic disconnection and loss. Some Buddhist teachers note that advanced practitioners seem to navigate dementia with more grace due to prior insight, but the disease itself is not a path to realization.

Where are you at, and any suggestions?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

KOR-WA: Running in Circles

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 9, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b997afaf-a414-45bf-acb1-394c66a1cef3_1024x1024.jpeg

Let's talk about samsara and distractions, samsara being nothing but our distractions. And, indeed, I am struggling to balance what interests me, like photography, etc., from all the mundane distractions I have. Those hobby interests are themselves distractions. I did not realize that until this last bunch of years. For instance, as a hobby and my being an amateur with photography by choice, it is easy for me to get immersed and lost in photography projects. Yet being 'lost in them' is not the same as the immersion of Mahamudra, which is a non-meditation form of meditation.

How this immersion in interests and hobbies relates to the non-duality of non-meditation practices like Mahamudra and Dzogchen, that is what I am considering and looking into here. How do they differ? Consider this:

If we have been wrapped up and lost in samsara forever up until now, as the dharma texts offer, lifetime after lifetime, and eon after eon, and in all that time we have never yet been enlightened, just how attached are we to this habit of samsara, and the answer would be: permanently attached unless we can do something about it.

What comes to mind after much consideration is that since we have NEVER known otherwise, the continual distractions of samsara are all that we have ever known, not only in this lifetime, but apparently forever in any consciousness we have.

And so, even our serious flirtation with the dharma is grist for samsara's mill and as the etymology of samara provides, we just go round and round and round. Even in dharma we would need something like 'Chöd' practice or Insight Meditation (vipassana) to cut through our attachments enough to make a difference. The word samsara comes from a Sanskrit root meaning 'wandering through' or 'passing through'. We are the wanderers.

Saṃsāra is the term for the endless cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth in Indian religions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. It represents the worldly existence characterized by suffering (duḥkha), impermanence, and bondage to karma, from which the ultimate spiritual goal is liberation (mokṣa in Hinduism/Jainism, nirvāṇa in Buddhism).

As mentioned, in Tibetan the meaning of the word samsara 'Khor-Ba', is pronounced 'Khor-Wa' which refers to cyclic existence, 'going round and round and round, circling and cycling, and 'that which revolves', pictured in Tibetan liturgy as the 'Wheel of Life' or circumambulation. Tibetans distinguish 'Khor Wa' (samsara or cyclic existence) from the intentional act of circumambulation or 'Kora'.

Reading about samsara and thinking about it is not the same as vividly experiencing it, much less realizing what it is and how much we are embedded within it. Apparently, we can't begin to do that, not even a little.

We are so much the product of samsara that even an in-depth course in dharma is still perhaps just words and conceptualization. In other words, we cannot or so it seems rise to the occasion of liberating ourselves from samsara or even peeking out.

When the referent of a reference is itself also a reference, we get a circle or cycle like samsara, something without an end or a beginning. We can't unthread it because there is no end or thread to grasp to unravel it. And no beginning. It's that simple or complex.

And so, when I entangle my personal interests along with other distractions and find no end to that thread because it is a cycle, here I go round and round in a 'Catch-22'.

Without solving the above conundrum, we have no solution. And that, IMO, is where each of us sits in the equation of life. We are damned if we do and damned if we don't. That is Samsara personified.

Like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks I played as a kid, until I remove, one by one, each of the sticks, I will never reveal the 'nothing' that remains. And 'nothing' is not something we can grasp, but rather somewhere to be embedded and immersed in, a rabbit-hole we have to fall into, lock, stock, and barrel, plus still be aware.

It is the awareness of what we do, whatever we do, that is the key.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Wisdom Insight

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 10, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f94bd665-d92a-48ff-ac4d-4c7d50c291a2_1024x1024.jpeg

For me, my writing essays like this is grist for the mill of meditation, or more correctly, non-meditation, much like worry-beads or working a mala, is a meditative coasting along the razor's edge of immersion and nonduality. Does this make any sense?

In the busyness of the day, there is nowhere I like to go more than to what I call Insight Meditation, dipping into and out of nondualism, invoking immersion and then reflecting on it a moment later until the beads on the string of meditation fuse into a seamless stream of insight. This is Mahamudra practice.

Hovering on the edge of inspiration, bobbing for insight, and then putting its results to use a moment later is like adding fresh ink to a fountain pen and then writing out the words.

I worked hard to acquire that technique, about a year and a quarter of non-stop effort, poking and trying for pliability and NOT finding it, trying to move my Insight Meditation from photography to writing essays like this, and then slowly the two ends came together, and now my writing pen, so to speak, is full. So, what am I talking about here?

And throughout that early time after first invoking Insight Meditations, I was on my own. In a kind of perfect storm, and at one of the lowest points in my life because of losing a job, everything that happened helped me to get down from my high horse, wake up so to speak, and precipitated what can only be described, at least in my life, as a dharma insight or breakthrough. It took grounding me for that to happen. I did not go quietly.

In that time, I discovered for myself what is called Vipassana (Insight Meditation), one of the cornerstones of Mahamudra, the other being Shamata (Tranquility Meditation). This only happens for the first time, once. In the Karma Kagyu Lineage to which I belong, it is called 'Recognition' of the true nature of the mind. And it has to be pointed out to us by an authentic teacher because, apparently, we cannot do this by ourselves. That's what the pith dharma texts say, and it was true in my case.

And once 'Recognition' happens and is vetted by yourself and your teacher, because it is a realization and not just another experience, it is irreversible. There is no going back. The toothpaste cannot get itself back in the tube.

Anyway, when all this came down, when it happened, it took me a while to realize what exactly was taking place, and how best to use the Insight Meditation going forward. I spent over half a year outside each morning as the sun came up, experiencing the complete immersion of 'Seeing' seeing itself. I could only do this out in nature, and when I came back home each day my mind, much to my disappointment, was perfectly normal. I did this almost every day until winter drove me inside.

Now, the following is difficult to explain, but I will try. Breaking through, puncturing the dualistic veil which we are habituated to, is like punching or creating a hole in a wall, and then peeping through. Insight Meditation has to start somewhere, and it is not wide angle to start with.

In the beginning and for a long while after the initial breakthrough or puncture through, photography was the only avenue I had to look beyond duality, like a hole in the fabric of samsara I could look through it, but not extend myself and get through. I was still on the inside looking out through that hole.

That, my friends, took a long, long time and required constant effort on my part each day, to first take the "Seeing" home to my photography studio and have it work, and then, so much more difficult, to transfer that insight skill to writing blogs like this. Trying as hard as I could for a year, I could not even lift my little finger in making this happen. Our "Will" has nothing to do with this. Instead, it our ability to let go and relax.

This is as close to impossible as I have ever come. In fact, the last words my dharma teacher said to me before he passed on was to keep "extending and expanding" the 'Recognition' of the nature of the mind, so that instead of me keeping my practice, my practice is keeping me.

And what that meant to me was to continue to expand the hole or window I punctured in samsara to make it wider and wider until I could eventually pass through that hole, inverting the whole thing, so that I am on the other side of it all, or better yet, balanced on the borderline between duality and nonduality and servicing both sides. I have little idea how these words will mean or work for you reading this. It's really not a topic for words at all, this process I am pointing at.

And it's a constant process, turning everything inside out and back again. And while it started out by sitting on the meditation cushion for a number of

decades, sitting is no longer necessary, but still feels good, natural. Instead, more and more, everything I do or have to do in a day is grist for mill of non-meditation. The key is awareness of awareness, and not so much whether I am doing this, that, or the other thing. The “goodness” is the awareness not what is being done.

That describes poorly the process of invoking Insight Meditation, the door to Mahamudra. Unfortunately, this is my yidam, not yours, my process and it may not be anything like this for you. You will have to see for yourself but do look.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Shamata: Tranquility Meditation

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 11, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b93ca638-030e-4bff-ba9a-0e621992a77b_1024x1024.jpeg

Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) training is focusing in order to then let go. In that sense, we gain flexibility by tightening and untightening. Ultimately Shamata is about letting go, relaxing, and resting in focus, which may be an oxymoron. We have to first focus in order to relax and let go.

However, as I found out, there are many ways to learn Shamata other than by the book, meaning the book suggests focusing on a twig, a pebble, or a spot on the wall and holding that focus until we can relax into that focus.

We have to be able to hold that focus until it takes no effort to hold that focus, so 'trying' to hold a focus is just another way to say we have no Shamata. I should know, because I am an expert at not being able to relax in that approach to focusing.

In fact, I attempted to learn Shamata for about 31 years and was still not able to master it. What was I doing wrong, was my question? It had to be something. After such a long time of trying, it came to be something of a joke. Yet, then again, no joke.

In fact, it took me all the way until I learned Insight Meditation (Vipassana) until Shamata just naturally arose. Usually, in order to learn Insight Meditation, we first have a steady Shamata.

As an analogy, in order to thread a very fine needle, we first have to steady our hand (Shamata) so that then we can thread the needle (Vipassana).

And in my case, as mentioned, it was not until I actually broke through into Insight Meditation that I discovered Shamata, which spontaneously arose accompanying Vipassana, and fully blown at that. How the heck did that happen?

The answer is that because of my vocation I had learned Shamata decades ago, but just naturally and not on demand as when I was given Shamata instructions by my Shamata instructor. Huh?

As it turned out, all my years of computer programming, plus all my years of database and very detailed content aggregation, and the like, had trained me

in Shamata, but rather than by demand, I learned in the process of doing something I loved, all the fine work I joyfully did with data.

So, when it came to learning Shamata on the cushion, being told to do this or that, it seemed crude and joyless, for me there was no joy in that, and I never put two and two together, all those years. I could not make myself force Shamata.

Apparently, because of my very detailed work habits I could always do Shamata, but I had done it out of love rather than as a requirement. My Shamata was ready and able, just waiting for something that required it.

So, the takeaway here is to either love learning Shamata on the cushion, which I failed to do, or learn in some discipline that requires fine detail work that you, well, actually like to do.

For instance, if you can tie fishing flies, play chess, and perform other very detailed work, you probably have all the Shamata you need at the ready, the required ground or platform needed to launch Vipassana (Insight Meditation) successfully. What a shock!

There I was suddenly in Insight Meditation (Vipassana) and my Shamata was stable as a rock.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Doing and Done

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 12, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bb4a097a-9064-4e03-b4df-e9162f93ec62_1024x1024.jpeg

[A brief tour of stuff done.]

What's done is done. Back in the late 1950s, with our crew-cut haircuts, and normalized everything, something like Zen Buddhism looked pretty good to a nineteen-year-old American boy.

My early years were spent out on 101 W. Roseville Road, where my parents had a house built, the only one out there at the time. And with no neighboring kids to play with, I became a naturalist from early on and this stayed with me until I was in my middle teens, finally outdistanced a bit by my discovery of girls.

I did manage to do serious research projects with the University of Michigan grad students and donated a large collection of specimens to the university. My early training with Mother Nature too precedence over social or civil law, meaning I learned early-on from nature how the world worked, and never could get comfortable with social conventions. The upshot was that I was a little bit feral.

And I so disliked school and attempts to educate me that I never finished high school, but just left and hitchhiked to California, where I lived along the beach in Venice West, next to Santa Monica. I lived in the basement of the legendary Beat art gallery "The Gas House" in an abandoned wooden walk-in freezer where I fancied myself a painter in oils.

To me, Zen was exotic, with teakwood floors, shoji screens, tailored gardens, and Akira Kurosawa movies. As I have mentioned before, young folks my age stayed up until the wee hours of the morning, smoking Camel cigarettes, drinking terrible instant coffee with powered creamer, and talking about Ingmar Bergman movies, Existentialism, European novels and poetry, and Zen Buddhism. We listened all night to John Coltrane and albums like "My Favorite Things."

Back then it never occurred to me to actually practice dharma; it was enough just to talk about it. And of course, that scene all too soon morphed into the hippies right in the middle of the 1960s.

Before I knew it, I was spending a year (1964) on the Berkley, California campus, busing dishes at the Café Mediterranean, being assistant manager at Discount Records on Telegraph Ave, working at Lucas Books, and dropping acid. By that time the 1950s was old hat, a memory soon forgotten. When I came back from California, at the same time as the Grateful Dead started their band, in the summer of 1965, my brother and I started the Prime Movers Blues Band in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Before even that time (1961) I was traveling with Bob Dylan, hitchhiking with him, playing on stage with Jerry Garcia, and meeting and later (1967) opening for Cream at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco and in 1969 and 1970 recording (audio and video) of hundreds of Black blues artists at the landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. Here is an award-winning book I wrote the text for.

“Blues in Black and White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals”

https://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_3?crid=1EMJEGV4BP7HA&dib=eyJ2ljojMSJ9.YyaVxKSqnvleJU5zQlpVX8UieTIDUNK7IFX7Y4OqnpHXekibYICLwLcvA6Z5nja42e85x83GMUqxnftNON9_DqEt3ihh0oG0AY2rOQP9xddFmWikdizyuMHgMRmiY_92zUIK4NhMVRxxmdzfPUAczeAOW9OF7RDjQtF-jv-nvGmZupY_zXOWkWOghSVo1X1OkI2wOWtibNWMSnEHZxI2S5zU7r8UqMb9aWRN1WvBNf4.BrRyww42asy6v_CxwFuRBdRjt6MvDva03RCGzN6zxck&dib_tag=se&keywords=blues+in+black+and+white&qid=1768089292&sprex=blues+in+black+and+whit%2Caps%2C149&sr=8-3

Where was I going to go after all that?

The simple answer is farther into the dharma, hook, line, and sinker. I had no intention of climbing Mount Everest, but was all about travelling in Tibet on pilgrimage a couple of times. Yet, it was the inner and spiritual worlds I was drawn to from the early 1960s onward, and although I was fiddling with the dharma and all that is spiritual through the 1960s, I was locked into dharma by the mid-1970s, when I met Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche.

I can only describe myself as a phenomenologist, meaning I was not a transcendental idealist, but I feel I am an offshoot of the American Transcendentalists like Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott. That's my tribe.

I have always been interested in my own consciousness, if only because it was near at hand and made sense to me. And what that means is registering, looking at, and learning from my own experiences firsthand. Authenticity is the only guide for me, and if anything is authentic, it is the dharma or truth. In this changing world, when all else fails, the truth will remain; it will last until then.

When I met and served as the chauffeur for the Ven. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in early 1974 and also met the 16 th Karmapa (Rangjung Rigpe Dorje) in person in the summer of 1974, that was the glue that held it all together.

I also personally met the 14 th Dalai Lama and offered him a white scarf. And of course, in 1997 I met the 17 th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje in person, and even travelled (and took my family) to meet him at his ancestral monastery Tsurphu at some 15,000 feet. We spent three days at the invitation of His Holiness.

Of course, I should not forget that in 1971 I met and married Margaret, and by 1972 we were pregnant and I hung out my sign for astrology on the front porch at 1041 N. Main in Ann Arbor. Our first daughter was born early in 1973 and at the same time Margaret and I founded the Heart Center, and then I spiraled into a family life. With our first child coming, I had to find a trade other than playing music. I was already deep into astrology and Margaret and I were doing the astrology charts for my brother Stephen Erlewine's metaphysical bookstore (Ann Arbor's first) in 1968.

Yet my wings were not clipped and I revolutionized astrology in 1977 when I was the first to program astrology on home computers and give those programs to my fellow astrologers, which allowed them to calculate an astrological chart in a second, when before it took some 20 minutes or more, using look-up tables, Ephemerides, books of houses, time zones, and more.

Along the way I designed the logo for Eden Foods, and as an astrologer picked the first day they would open in 1969. Margaret and I studied the Macrobiotics of George Ohsawa, Michio & Aveline Kushi, and ate the miso of Noboru Muramoto.

Margaret and I went into the tropical plant business in 1971-1972, first by renovating some old greenhouses in Ewart, Michigan, spraying the inside my 1966 Dodge van with insulating foam and turning it from the Prime Movers Blues Band vehicle into "Erlewine Plants," delivering live plants within a 90 mile circuit. And in 1972, Margaret and I moved, along with our two English Bull Terriers (and puppies) down to Apopka, Floria, the green-plant capital of the U.S., where we ran 19,000 sq. ft. of glass – greenhouses.

We returned to Ann arbor, and I became very interested in moving astrology forward in time from where it was, and I developed astrological techniques based on astronomy that had never been properly understood, and I illustrated and gave them a story.

Some of my projects include, a 400-year Heliocentric ephemeris (1975), Local Space relocation technique (1976), Interface planetary nodes (1976), deep-space astrology (1976), accurate star maps for astrologers (1976), Burn Rate Retro Analysis, Phase Charts, heliocentric archetypes (1972), Karma and Dharma charts, the meaning of empty space, full-phase aspects, and other areas are examples.

On March 1 st of 1980, Margaret and I, along with our two kids and two dogs, packed up and moved to northern Michigan on a very cold day, where we settled in Big Rapids, Michigan, an old logging town on the banks of the mighty Muskegon River. This was where my parents lived, and eventually also my four younger brothers and their families. We needed a place rural enough to raise four kids, our three girls and one son. Big Rapids is only a mile or so from 900,000 acres of the Manistee National Forest.

My interest in astrology blossomed and my software company, Matrix Software, according to an article written about me for Red Herring Magazine, which reported that the only software company still on the Internet other than and older than ours was a little company called Microsoft. I had email in 1979, and with no high school diploma or college, I just had to hack it and hack it I did.

Over the years at our center, we have put on over 36 conferences and events right here in Big Rapids, where we still live today. Right next to our house is The Heart Center KTC (Karma Thegsum Chöling), where we have run a dharma center since the 1980s, and also worked closely with our mother monastery KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) located in the mountains above Woodstock, NY.

Working with the monastery from here in Big Rapids, we served to help produce collaterals and graphics for KTD, and for years we ran a mail-order bookstore for the monastery right here in Big Rapids until the monastery could handle it themselves, "KTD Dharma Goods." I was on many boards for KTD and Margaret, I, and the Chinese community raised the funds for Karme Ling, our three years retreat center. We both received all the empowerments for the three-year closed retreat, but worked with it from the outside, not by attending it.

I also worked (along with my close friend astrologer Charles A. Jayen) with the major astrological conferences (AFA, UAC, etc.) to put on A.C.T. (Astrological Conference on Techniques) which provided round-table discussions that formed a separate track at these conferences that ran from hour to hour, where groups of astrological experts met and discussed questions important

to astrologers. And aside from astrology, eventually there were two trains running, the second being music.

Because of my earlier devotion to music, when tape cassettes and vinyl began to transfer into CDs, I was upset about so many great recordings that were left behind or worse, were reissued with false advertising. For example.

“Little Richard,” one of my favorite rock ‘n roll singers, released “Little Richard’s Greatest Hits” on CD, it said, “All His Greatest Hits,” and yes they were his greatest hits, but recorded many years later when Little Richard was not sizzling hot as he was around 1957 when his original hits were recorded.

I fought back on this, and right in this very small office where I sit this morning typing this, I began to form what I called the “All-Music Guide.” And the music community “laughed when I sat down to play,” so to speak. They said there is a guy out in a tiny town in Michigan who says he is going to document and review all recorded music from 10-inch records on up. [laughter]

Their only trouble is that I did do that. And in the process, we took the mantle from these experts that told us what ‘they’ think we should buy, into something very different.

The All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com) only compared artists to their own work, and not to one another. In other words, if you wanted to hear an artist, we showed you what albums our freelance writers, who were experts, felt were the best and which were not. I eventually had 150 full-time employees and something like 500-700 freelance writers. We moved the whole company to Ann Arbor, where it took two floors of a large office building at Liberty Street and Fifth Avenue.

And it was not long before we also founded the All-Movie Guide (Allmovie.com) and All-Game Guide (no longer available). Today the All-Music Guide is by far the largest music site of albums, reviews, bios, tunes, etc. in the world. And the All-Movie Guide is one of the two largest film sites. I also founded ‘Classic Posters,’ the largest rock ‘n roll concert poster database, which is now at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, and at the Haight Street Art Center a non-profit in San Francisco.

My CD collection as part of AMG is not at Michigan State University, and now numbers (I am told) at 800,000 CDs.

So that generally is it, my life and what I have done with it. Of course, there were other projects that came along, like creating one of the largest astrological libraries in the world, now located at the University of Illinois in Champaign. I have a collection of thousands of cassette tapes of our dharma

teacher and others which are all now transformed into digital format, and a collection of 500 pen & ink dharma drawings by Sange Wangchug, a former monk who came here, lived at our center for years, and later became the Minister of Culture for Bhutan. These were donated to the Ruben Museum of Asian Art in NYC.

I also have a very large collection of photographs, originally over a million, but they are being trimmed down and soon to be placed in the Ann Arbor Public library, mostly nature photos and music festivals, and will be available free to anyone interested to download them.

And so, that's a rough idea what I, with the help of my teams, have done along the way. There are lots of other stuff, but that's a general account.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"I Am My Own Grandpa"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 13, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bf49903c-ba78-42c3-a109-ee315c568c1a_2048x2060.jpeg

I am certain that all of us, each and every one, has peculiarities, and I don't mean ticks, that stick with us through thick or thin. I know I do. And chief among these that I have to honor in my life has to do with grandpas, older men (and women) that provide guidance.

"I am my own grandpa," as the song goes. I never had a grandpa on either side of the family, and my father, loved as he was, never was able to talk to his five sons in any deeply personal way. It just never happened.

And although I didn't know 'what' I was missing, I felt I was missing something. And on top of that, being raised out in the countryside with no neighbors further compiled the problem.

In today's world, when I look around, mentors and therapy seem to be everywhere. Not just adults, but kids are in therapy and most everyone I know has one or more therapists. I don't and never have had anything like that that, not at all, and apparently my approach is to 'suck it up' when faced with internal problems.

Whether that is good, bad, or indifferent is not what I am getting at here. I am just seeing into what has been an unwritten theme in my life and talking about it for a moment.

Because apparently my father was private and unable to talk personally and in depth with any of his five sons. I had to seek out that kind of 'grandpa' wisdom on my own, and I did.

First of all, I found truth, beauty and guidance in Mother Nature, starting from when I was just a young boy living out on the edge of society in the countryside, and later I sought and found guidance from an elder, a traveling Rosicrucian initiator of western esoteric wisdom, and then in the hundreds of Black blues musicians that I interviewed and I finally found it in Tibetan rinpoches, and worked with one rinpoche in particular for 36 years.

What my father was unable to do, my mom did in spades. She was always there for her five sons and very much rose to the occasion. I had no sisters as

siblings, and feel surrounded by women, first by my mom, and later by my three daughters. I like women. I do have one son, whom I treasure as well.

I was never an athlete other than a little bit through swimming. I was good at it, won one award, and also trained and worked as a lifeguard in a summer camp. I love the water and the creatures of the water.

I won the biology award at my high school through producing a fairly elaborate study and slideshow of the marine fauna of the north shore of Boston, and went to MIT in that competition. I of course, since I hated school, I flunked that year and had to repeat the 10 th grade. Once again, nature and the natural was and has been my refuge throughout my life.

And the most amazing, to me stunning, fact of my life was when my decades long dharma practice came to a head, meaning I actually had a dharma breakthrough that altered the course of my life. I don't need to repeat that story here, because I have on this blog several times over the years.

The point I will repeat is that after many decades of deliberate dharma practice, during a very difficult time in my life, when I reached out for what could only be called 'refuge', instead of the meditation cushion that I assumed was my refuge place, I leapfrogged right past that cushion and found myself seeking solace in Mother Nature, going all the way back to when I was just a young boy and then a young man.

And because to me when the chips were down and the rubber met the road what was most familiar to me, what I trusted most in life. I had kind of forgotten this truth, yet when instinct in me took over in this troubled time, immediately I was back there in my past trusting Mother Nature. That just was the way it was. And so, I don't naturally have the buffer of therapy as so many do today in society and life. Nature has always been my refuge and teacher.

And as mentioned, lacking any grandpa energy, instead I sought out wise men (and some women) that I trusted to guide me. However, also as mentioned, because I trained early on in nature's rules and laws, unfortunately for me, I did not just naturally trust society's teachers and leaders. I did not.

I looked into the eyes of my elders, and as a young person, that was almost everyone of course, for signs of the command and savvy apparently I needed in order to trust others to guide me. If I did not see that flicker of savvy and life wisdom in their eyes, I did not want to take or learn from them, if only because I did not myself want become like I saw them to be.

I did had one teacher, it was in fourth grade, Mrs. Althouse, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania that I trusted to instruct me, and beyond that, there were none.

And my mother was artist and painter, and there was one friend of my mother who lived out in the country, and she was part of a group of artists that would meet.

And I would go with mom out to these meeting and just be in nature. Her name was Peggy Dodge, and she mentored me in nature. I can remember one time my diving into her pond and coming out with a large water snake (and they bite) holding in one hand the snake from biting me and swimming with the other hand.

As mentioned, 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. However, 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 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.

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 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 kid who was a nobody, 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 would have an interest in me at all. I had nothing going for me other than just being myself. But

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.

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 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.

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 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 leave 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, hitchhiking and traveling with an 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 Forrest Gump.

[Photo of Stanley Tennenbaum, contour drawings by me.]

EMAIL

Behind the Beyond

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 14, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2fc42297-596b-44cc-9897-9677643b6f29_1024x1024.jpeg

I love the image of “luge” or “Bobsled” where a team or a person runs, pushing the sled as hard as possible, then jumps on, tucks their head in, and coasts down the track. It’s the coasting or flow that I am pointing at.

Have you ever reached a point where you could just slide in life, slide on by? And what direction we slide makes no difference. They all feel the same. In other words, we have run out of directions to go. What is there to do then?

Perhaps nothing, yet how comfortable are we doing nothing? And what does that even mean?

NOTHING IS THE SAME

Doing nothing is the same as everything that we do means the same. It makes no difference. How do we live with that?

As Chuck Berry put it “No Particular Place to Go.”

Well, to me, when I feel like that, what I seem to do is slow down, and take each step not only more deliberately, but enunciating each move and action, because there is no place I’m going or going to get to. It’s very Zen, in my opinion.

In other words, the goal becomes the process itself rather than any state or destination I will get to other than whatever is at hand and in the moment. This sounds very dharmic to me.

Every second becomes grist for the mill and there is no hurry to get anywhere because the process itself has become the point of it all, where we are going.

Certainly, this slows us down because of ‘what’s the point’, and I just defined it. Perhaps this is dharmic or is this a new form of retirement. Where do we go from here?

We don’t ‘go’ or ‘get’ anywhere because we are already here and now. My guess is that we relax and get comfortable in the present moment and, as the Mahasiddha Tilopa said, don’t alter the present moment. Just rest in it.

If you have nowhere to go, you are already there, because the tip of the top is a level plane. As to what's behind the beyond, we have a torus, so nothing is lost. Or as William Blake said "Nothing of equal value is lost."

Of great interest to me is how does dharma as elucidated in the sacred scriptures occurs naturally in the world in general as you and I live it. In other words, we can't all be expert dharma practitioners (I wish), so how can we look inward at our life to see if we naturally are already doing, each in our own way, what the dharma textbooks profess.

The dharma existed before the historical Buddha in India and has to be everywhere in the world. It's not like the truth for us was ever not just as it is right now, and this from beginningless time. And so, IMO it's just a hop, skip, and a jump to realizing that the truth of dharma was and is always right there, meaning right here. Even the word 'Buddha' means awareness, so apparently all that we are missing is to develop the awareness of the truth, of what is.

In other words, I can't believe we are all completely unaware of the dharma, but rather we have not developed our awareness or perhaps even tried. What if we try? This is called 'dharma practice'.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Black Box

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 15, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/883062ce-ee7a-4c17-b0a7-0e39b8947fec_1024x1024.jpeg

The “Dharma’ is coming to the West” has been the refrain, yet it will take 300 years and we are about 100 years in, yet there are some special considerations that we might keep in mind.

Here in America (and the western hemisphere in general) we know all about using the mind. We are taught to use the mind as perhaps life’s greatest tool to appraise and get things done in the world. The list of what we can do with the mind is as endless as the mind itself. So, when it comes to taking advantage of the mind as our Swiss-Army-Knife, we are all up to speed here in the U.S.

However, where we fall short is knowing and becoming familiar with the nature as to what the mind is, which is part and parcel of knowing the mind itself. The mind for Americans is like a black box, something we use all day long as a means, a utility or tool, but never as an end in itself. We have never inquired as to what makes the mind tick, much less open that mysterious black box and looked inside. Heaven forbids we should go in there. And there is another point.

I don’t know how we got here, but somewhere along the line we here in the West collectively assumed that the mind, just as it comes out of the box, is good to go, in fact, flawless. Perhaps it is because babies are so perfect and new that we assume that the mind of each child, each one of us, is pristine. This is a simple mistake.

While it is true that a child is a clean slate as far as forming a personality or Self, yet the karma and innate-traces of each one of us, at least according to the dharma, have been a long-time coming and are hardly new. You might think we would have figured this out just because identical twins can be so different, etc. In other words, we each have a different pool of desire and karma from which we draw now and in the future. It is called the Alayavijnana or Storehouse Consciousness.

So, we have a mind that we don’t know, other than how to use it in the external world, and we somehow assume that each mind is a clean slate at birth, even though we have IQ tests and all of that to show our innate

differences. Therefore, we are in a kind of double-bind. Like all human beings, we need to know our own mind, and second, as a culture we don't know that we don't know. We assume we already know our mind. After all, it's OUR mind! Yes, and no.

It's no wonder that the Tibetans see the West as such a rich field of opportunity. As the 16th Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, once said when asked why the Tibetans came to America, "If there was a lake, the swans would go there." They see the U.S. as fertile ground for the dharma to thrive in, and so it is.

The bottom line here is, how do we take this black-box of a mind we have and turn it inward on itself and become more familiar with it? Like a spelunker, how do we go in there, torch in hand, and look around? It's like the paradox of an open mind, how open are we and, if not, how do we open the mind? If there are doors to the mind, just where are they? And lastly, where is our torch?

Yes, there are doors to the mind, but up to now we apparently prefer to keep them closed, perhaps imagining the mind as like the basement we hate to go into. There might be boogiemens down there. So, how DO we go into the mind? As for a torch, that would have to be our awareness, which most of us it seem to have neglected.

Of course, that is exactly what I blog about here, how to become familiar and realize the mind and, as the New Testament says, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way."

As the dharma teachings endlessly point out, the Sun of the mind is always shining, but the clouds of our impurities obscure it. So, all preliminary dharma practices are about removing the clouds so that we can see the Sun. It's like wearing dirty glasses and we don't know they're dirty because it is all we have ever known. It's that simple.

The doors of the mind are blocked by our own existing obscurations, which must be removed before we can see to know, much less realize, the nature of the mind. At least we should become familiar with the mind's nature. That's why the great majority of preliminary dharma practices are methods to purify and thin out our obscurations so that we can see through and beyond them. I'd like to discuss hereif anyone else is interested.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

When Spirit Matters

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 16, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f936aa5a-50cf-4cc9-8485-ec7e878a3fd2_693x959.jpeg

Just a breath away from waking up or dying is our situation.

All I know is that we can't go back to non-realization once we have realized something. This happens small but also large, such as life-changing realizations.

What keeps me going is knowing that realization waits for all of us but that it requires effort on our part. We have to do it ourselves and no one can do it for us. What does it take?

It takes continued effort on our part, and here is the rub. Often, we lack the confidence to do it because so up until now we have received nothing all that encouraging, so there is this Catch-22 to be negotiated. If results are what we are waiting for and in dharma practice results are slow to come, how do we keep going with no gas, so to speak. That's a good question.

In my case, I would not have gotten very far without an authentic dharma teacher. Why? Because you know I tried to do the whole dharma thing with no direct help. What I got out of it can only be likened to a patchwork quilt, something yes, but it would never keep me warm because all kinds of patches were just missing.

I did my best but that was not enough so, after trying, trying, and trying I realized I needed help and finally, late in the game, so to speak, agreed to do what dharma students in Tibet have done for 1,000 years, enter what is called "The Preliminaries" and take direction. And even this only happened because I found, kind of bumped into what became my root guru, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche.

How fortunate to have come across someone like Khenpo Rinpoche in the sea of life in which I found myself, although it was anything but an accident. In fact, believe it or not, Rinpoche first came to us in a dream. Here is the story:

It was in the fall of 1983 when I received a phone call from my old friend James Coats of Ann Arbor. He just called to say that I might want to come to Ann Arbor and see this Tibetan rinpoche (we used to go "guru" hopping together). However, at the time I was a businessman, and busy at that. I

thanked him, of course, for the invitation, but pointed out that this was a work day and that I no longer was meeting every new teacher that came to Ann Arbor. I wished him well and went about my work.

It was a couple of days later that I had the dream, very early in the morning, just before dawn. I dreamed I was driving to Ann Arbor to meet this radiant golden being, some kind of monk or lama... but resplendent, and then I woke up. I sat bolt upright in bed and tried to reach in my mind to recapture the dream, but too late. And as the dream vaporized, I suddenly felt a great sadness come over me, sadness that my life had become so work-oriented that magical moments or events of wonder no longer really interrupted my routine. All I could see was my life stretching on to a dead end.

The dream was better than my life right then, and I regretted that this was the case. I woke up my wife Margaret, who, amazingly enough, had a similar dream. We looked at one another and I decided that there was no way I was going to work today. Instead, we would drive to Ann Arbor and meet this “golden” being from our dreams that my friend told me was visiting Ann Arbor. By this time, it must have been around 7 AM. I dialed my friend James in Ann Arbor, although I knew he was a late sleeper usually. I said we were coming to meet the rinpoche. His answer was that we were too late. Rinpoche was leaving Ann Arbor for Columbus, Ohio at around 10 AM, and it is a three-hour drive to Ann Arbor.

My answer to that was that we are coming anyway. I just could not rejoin my normal life after the dream. The rinpoche would either still be there or have gone. Margaret and I grabbed our kids and, literally, with toothbrushes in hand, we jumped into the car and headed out. We bushed our teeth as we drove, and we drove as fast as we dared. When we finally got to Ann Arbor, James was down at the end of the long driveway, waiting to flag us in.

By luck, it turned out that the Rinpoche was still there. As we drove up the long driveway I spotted a young Tibetan man with long black hair out in the yard. My heart fell, because this was not the golden man in my dreams! I soon found out that this was Rinpoche’s translator, Ngodup Burkhar, who became a dear friend of our family. So, there we were, Margaret, I, and the kids waiting for Rinpoche in the living room. And then he walked in.

And here was, indeed, the radiant being from my dreams, and in living person. We connected at once and, although the visit was brief, when Rinpoche left on his road trip, Margaret and I were already transported into a transcendent state. And we went around in that state for days afterward, being kinder to others than perhaps we had ever been. Of course, we took this as a good sign.

And from that day onward, we were students of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. Later, he became my Root Guru, and all that. My kids grew up around and within his influence, his mandala. Of course, to me, he has been the perfect teacher. So, it becomes even more amazing when the Karmapa himself, singled our Rinpoche out as an “incomparable master... a powerful example of being learned, venerable, and good.” Indeed, that is just what he is!

We are so grateful for his presence in our lives. Margaret and I were with rinpoche for 36 years. He passed on in 2019 at 96 years old.

[This photo is one of many that we took at our center, the Heart Center KTC, here in Big Rapids, Michigan. This photo was part of a book we did of Khenpo Rinpoche doing mudras. Photo taken by Tom Erlewine. “Mudra” book project by Michael & Margaret Erlewine.]

EMAIL

Cycles, Circles, Centers, and Criculation

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 17, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5b3767d8-c543-42c6-9050-93763e98244a_2004x2048.jpeg

[Ok, a post on potatoes. But for something a little more challenging for us, try this.]

Like a hall of mirrors, one central idea emerging through recent cosmic research is the use and value of various astronomical coordinate systems (geocentric, heliocentric, galactic, supergalactic, etc.) as perhaps best representing the different levels of our consciousness and experience. The word 'center' can mean both the same and yet something different to various individuals.

The center about which our life appears to revolve is sacred to us in its ability to reveal or communicate to us the essence or identity of ourselves, what we most value. The center for each of us always refers inward to our essence and yet the center or lifeline of one individual may be a new car at one point in his life, a new wife, or a child at another point. At each point, however, that center is inviolate, although the outward form of what we take for our lifeline to the center may be constantly changing.

The different kinds of center may be conveniently expressed in the various coordinate systems of astronomy/astrology. The origin or center chosen should most correspond to the center of gravity, the "kind" of question or inquiry or level being considered. Thus, for a study of the personal differences and circumstances and the specific terms of our life, we traditionally use the Horizon Coordinate System to the Zodiac with its familiar M.C., Ascendant, houses, etc.

Studies of the general terms of mankind (mundane astrology) involve consideration from the center of the earth or geocentric astrology, thus Equatorial Right Ascension and declination. For a study of the motion and relation of the bodies in our solar system considered as a functioning whole, the Heliocentric Ecliptic System with the origin at the sun center would be appropriate.

In the helio coordinate system, we could examine the archetypes of life and consciousness, what I call the tribes in general questions traditionally referred to religion, perhaps more recently also considered by some as psychological.

In like manner, galactocentric and super galactocentric coordinates are appropriate for dynamical studies of the larger or more cosmic structure of our reality. For each of us, there are moments and even days when our awareness is truly of or in synch with cosmic dimensions.

In other words, there are different levels of truth or reality. What is essential as a kernel of truth to one person (their center) may appear to another as one example among many of a larger ordering or structure. When we each refer to the center around which we happen to revolve, we share the idea of centers and yet different ones among us revolve around or consider what is central or essential differently.

IMPORTANT: All references to different centers simply point out the lack of Identity or that these seemingly different levels or centers (in fact) form a continuum -- a continuing experience or identification, a process.

In other words: all of these larger systems such as the solar system, galaxy, supergalaxy, and so forth include us within their reaches like a mother holds a child within her womb. We are children and particular representatives of the Earth, but also of the solar system, of the galaxy and beyond. Their nature, identity, and self are Identical with our own. In fact, we have come through this "outer space" through all the time there is to 'BE HERE NOW' ourselves.

In other words, our consciousness continually circulates from more particular awareness to more "cosmic" awareness and back again, call in out-of-the-body experience or whatever. The exercise of various coordinate systems, like exercising our muscles, can serve to remind us that all reference to centers (in fact, all referral) indicates an attempt to achieve the circulation (circle or cycle) of identity, to RE-MEMBER or remind ourselves of who we already are and have always been. In other words:

'ALL DISCOVERY IS SELF-DISCOVERY' AND 'IDENTIFICATION IS CIRCULATION'

Cosmic events and structure are a very consistent and most stable reference frame through which to come to know ourselves. The use of these inclusive meta-coordinate systems is not the symbolic process some suggest, but the symbol in fact is real. We are not working with analogies or, if we are, the analogy is completed down to the specific example through which we discover the virtual process itself -- our life.

"God" is no beggar, creating a symbolically true but specifically disappointing creation such that we should have to "touch up" this creation or make the ends meet. The ends already meet! It is we who will change first our attitude and then our approach to this creation, which is what this article is about.

And these changes in attitude, this 'reorientation' in approach to what is unchanging or everlasting in life, represent the specific areas where the exercise and use of various coordinate systems of understanding our life become important to present day astrologers. To discover our own orientation and inclination -- that we are already perfect representatives of all space and all time, acting out in detail through our persons events of a so-called "cosmic" nature that occur in space at remote distance and times. We ARE at remote distances and times.

Supernovae and black holes are not simply some ever-distant cataclysmic events, but are part of our own everyday experience acted out in fact by persons within the galaxy of our own experience. The goal of our study and our inquiry into astrology is to re-present and re-veal the nature of ourselves and our intimate circulation and connection and identity in the Heart of the Sun, Heart of the Galaxy, Heart of the Supergalaxy, etc..

In a word: that all identification is circulation (a continuing, circle, or cycle), and all Inquiry, questioning and search can but end in the discovery of our self whether "writ small" in the corners of our personal struggle or "writ large" across the very heavens. Again: all self discovery, all Identification is re-discovery and simple CIRCULATION.

LOCAL ATTRACTION

As we look into the Sun during the course of a year and describe the qualities of those who are born in the various signs, we succeed in defining NOT the position of the Sun. but that of the Earth in relation to the Sun. This illustrates an important axiom:

All inquiry into greater centers does not reveal the nature of that center (in itself), but rather reveals our relationship with that center, and finally, this provides information about our self. We are reflected.

In other words: centers serve to mirror or reflect. Their nature is to reveal to us not their intrinsic nature, but our own. REVELATION is the sign of communication with greater centers or planes -- revelation not of some far-off distant entity or "God," but always of ourselves and the "God" in us. This is key.

In a discussion as to the qualities of the centers of the galaxy and super galaxy, we can understand that inquiry into the direction of the galaxy will serve to reveal the nature of our own Sun, while inquiry into the super galaxy will serve to reveal the nature of our galaxy, and so on. The idea presented here is that it is the nature of higher centers to reflect and respond to more particular or local centers. At this point another very significant Axiom emerges.

The experience of physical attraction (traction = to draw across or towards) or gravity is primarily a local phenomenon.

This might take some consideration to understand. For instance, we directly respond to the attraction we call gravity of the center of the earth. Our Earth responds to the center of the sun, the sun to the galaxy, and so forth. Yet as individuals we are not aware of the pull of the sun on the entire earth, or again:

ATTRACTION OR GRAVITY IS A SIGN OF A LOCAL PHENOMENON

This perhaps will make more sense in our practical affairs if we put it this way: A sign of our communication with higher or “vaster” centers (“Spirit” or “God”) is not a physical send of gravity (graveness) or attraction, but always an ENLIGHTENMENT, releasing, and accepting of the nature of the particular terms (terminals) of our own existence.

Knowledge of so-called inner planes exhibits itself to us through a process of reflection or mirroring of our self rather than through the presentation to us of something new, heavy, or somehow “other.”

In other words, higher centers (like ‘life’ teachers) mirror or reveal us, reflect our own self and do not exhibit a greater intrinsic attractiveness or gravity than we already have. In other words, inquiry into centers reveals to us our own essential sense of attractiveness. In fact, it is the nature of these higher centers to be non-material or non-physical, by definition. Our inquiry into this realm is limited only by our fear or reluctance to see our self in this mirror, and seeing through the back of the mirror has always been a sign of Initiation. Liberation.

To sum this section up, greater (more spiritual) centers mirror or reflect us, our own self and nature, revealing to us our essential identity as already a part and child of a larger whole, enlightening us of (or from) our “grave-ness” and the burden of an apparent loneliness or separation from that whole. “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.”

With this idea in mind, let us resume our investigation as to the nature of the galactic and supergalactic centers. We can expect the galactic center to exercise considerable greater physical attraction than that of the local super galactic center. In fact, one of the identifying features of the galactic center (GC) at work as revealed in chart analysis is a certain “macho” like quality, a sense of strength and power perhaps typified in the zeal and self-righteousness of certain extreme religious factions. Or more simply: the tendency in the qualities of Sagittarius and Capricorn of sternness and physical action or “power.”

Another way to put this is the great ability and power of the GC as represented (when strongly aspected) in the natal chart to move and attract others. We find this feature in the charts of great political and religious leaders who possess the power to move nations to action.

The Galactic Center (GC) figures in these charts in the traditional astrological ways -- by conjunctions and other aspects to the Galactic Center. We may contrast this "macho-like" quality found in the GC to the qualities that indicate the presence of super galactic center (SGC) in natal charts. Here we look at the traditional qualities of Virgo and Libra -- that of care, service, reflection, and love. Perhaps the best representative of the super galactic nature occurs in Eastern Buddhism in the idea of compassion and especially in the beloved figure of the Bodhisattva, a being who is literally devoted to the service of all life until ignorance vanishes in every one in complete identification of self as one with "God".

We do not find the SGC as physically powerful and moving (macho) as we do the GC. In the West, the traditional god figures are more fierce and full of the "fire and brimstone" approach than of the endless care and service as typified in some of the Eastern traditions, like Buddhism.

In fact, only in these times we are now living are the "servile" qualities associated with Virgo sun sign coming to be appreciated as a power in themselves. In other words, the SGC (Virgo/Libra) represents a non-material or essentially a passive power rather than the more active kind of power as seen in the Galactic Center Idea.

In the Bible it repeatedly says "This came to pass... that came to pass" -- the passive genius. Not active in the "doing of things" but rather active in the "undoing of things" that is: helping things to pass from this world. This is a non-material or spiritual task and genius equally to be valued along with the more active One-who-does-things or brings-things-to-be in this world. We may see these two Archetypes at work in the world, and they may be conveniently studied in their local representatives.. The galactic and super galactic centers and planes. Now for another consideration.

SO INCLINED

"As above, so below ... but after another manner," familiar as an occult maxim, might be the perfect description of what is involved in the various astrological coordinate systems and their transformations. It is easy to communicate the concept of "wheels within wheels" (larger systems containing within them smaller systems), and this has resulted in the popular

idea of the chakras or planes (planets) of our experience and self as an ascending hierarchy of levels, each inclusive of the preceding level.

What is not generally appreciated but becomes increasingly clear when we examine the actual structure of the various cosmic systems is not only the idea of larger systems embracing the smaller systems within them (levels), but that each larger system is also differently 'inclined' to the preceding one. It should be understood that aside from the often-tedious mathematics involved in coordinate transformations, there is an accompanying philosophical or psychological adjustment to be made, a shift in viewpoint, a change in the approach or attitude to the subject.

So, there is not only an expansion in perspective when we move to a larger coordinate system, but also a 'reordering' of our sense of direction. This is what makes it so difficult for an individual to see beyond his present dimension and get a feel for what is perhaps his or her inevitable future. There is a change of attitude or inclination involved.

There exists what are termed "event horizons" beyond which we cannot understand how life can go on. An example of some event horizons: puberty, marriage, childbirth. and death, to name a few of the classics. We cannot see beyond our present sphere into what our future might be like in these other dimensions because we cannot help but conceive of these events in terms of our present line (linear) of thought. To pass through these event horizons involves a change of inclination, perhaps total change. It is not a simple linear extension of the present onward. We do not watch our own change, for we are what is in fact in transition or change. It is we who are changing. That's a hard one to hang onto because we first have to let go.

The idea presented here should now be obvious: crossing of an event horizon also involves simple reorientation on our part, call it a change of approach or attitude. The new dimension or sphere we enter turns out after our adjustment or change to reveal our previous or past life in a new light.

We see our old behavior and opinions differently in our new approach to life. It is very difficult to communicate the difference to one who has not yet had that experience. The point here is that what has changed perhaps most is our **INCLINATION** or attitude. We are no longer 'inclined', do not want the same things we did want or want them in a different manner. We are no longer inclined such that we feel the way we used to. Our life now revolves around a different center than before -- a wife or child, for instance, and we have a different inclination.

Many of these principles are graphically revealed through the study and exercise of the various astrological coordinate systems. For instance, what appears in one system as isolated and singular entities that are apparently unconnected, when viewed in the perspective of another system, define the basic shape of the system itself. How often in our lives does some singularity appear as if other and a foreign entity, but later, when we have experienced several of this type as representatives of a kind at first unfamiliar, this same event becomes recognizable to us and loses its threatening quality. A system reveals itself.

I cannot recommend strongly enough the exercise of these various ways or systems for understanding our universe to astrologers practicing today. Let us examine briefly some of these larger systems and their systems and their Centers. For those of you interested in a more thorough description and catalog of of the various members of these systems see my book: "The Astrology of Space"

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/The-Astrology-of-Space.pdf>

COSMIC SYSTEMS AND THEIR CENTERS - A List

1. SOLAR SYSTEM Center: Sun

2. LOCAL SYSTEM (Gould's Belt) This is a group of some 10.8 stars of which the Sun is a member. The Local System, originally thought to be a minute galaxy embedded with the Milky Way, is considered to be an ellipsoid of 700x200 parsecs with the long axis parallel to the New Galactic Longitudes 160 deg/340 and located in Orion-Cygnus spiral arm. The centroid of the Local System is in Virgo at about 15deg25' with nodes to the Ecliptic at 10deg22' of Sagittarius (North node) and Gemini. The system is inclined to the ecliptic by about 66deg. Note - positions are of the Epoch 1950.0.

3. LOCAL GALAXY...The Milky Way. Estimated to contain 10 to the 11th stars, The Galaxy is a disc-like structure with a diameter of some 30,000 parsecs, a central ellipsoidal nucleus of about 4000 parsecs, and an average disc thickness of several hundred parsecs. The nodes and center (about 26-degree of Sagittarius) in relation to the ecliptic are given elsewhere. The Sun is located some 26,000 light-years from the Galactic Center.

4 LOCAL GROUP OF GALAXIES The local group includes about a score of member galaxies...the largest of which is the Andromeda Galaxy (M 31), our galaxy, and M-31 revolve around a common center of mass roughly in the direction of 27-degrees in the Sign Aries.

5 LOCAL SUPERGALAXY . Our Galaxy is part of a vast flattened super system of galaxies some 40 megaparsecs in diameter, with the center (at 13 degrees of Libra) in the great Virgo Cluster some 12-16 megaparsecs from our Sun.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Whole-Chart Aspect Patterns

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 18, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0d4bc23f-beca-4ed1-bb04-29b54d286f3d_3212x6200.jpeg

I'm going to discuss astrology aspects and orbs, something any astrologer knows, so here are some fine points we need to be aware of. And before I dive into that I want to take a moment so you will know what I do and have developed for the last 65 or so years of intensely studying astrology.

Of course, I use aspect and orbs, yet even more important than that, and 'that' is much of what astrology is about, to develop a sensitivity and feeling for what I call Whole-Chart Patterns, and I include a graphic of the sixty major whole-chart patterns I developed in the early 1970s.

Of course, you can continue to look for these patterns in the traditional geocentric natal chart, as astrologers have done for 500 years or so, yet I can assure these whole-chart patterns are much more meaningful if you look at them in your heliocentric natal chart, because with helio the nine planets are fixed or bound to the Sun by actual gravity.

I have learned to read these whole-chart helio patterns and I originally called them StarTypes, archetypes, or tribes. And for what I'm worth in your opinion, these archetype helio patterns can be read whole-cloth and have a 3-dimensional impact compared to any other method I have found, and as you know, I have pretty much programmed and tested all the major astrological techniques for many decades.

In other words, these bare bones of planetary aspects arrange themselves through time, much like a kaleidoscope, into what I call archetypes or whole-chart patterns. And for the last 50 or so years I have worked with these patterns and learned to read them, with great success.

If you are a student of astrology, then you know that for the last 500 years modern astrologers have not accepted the helio chart and instead have ignored what the astronomer/astrologer Copernicus pointed out to the world, the everything does NOT revolve around us. Astronomers did not ignore this fact, yet they left the astrological import of the heavens behind them.

In fact, the Earth revolves around the Sun, and not vice-versa. The Sun is the fiducial or mother and the Earth is child in this equation. If we like to think we

are spiritual and the Sun is just a ball of hot gas, we have another thought coming.

And according to my records, my company Matrix Software, served 42,000 astrologers over the last many decades. And I was the first astrologer to computerize astrology (1977) AND make those programs available to astrologers on home computers.

In fact, an article on me in Red Herring Magazine determined that our company, Matrix Software, was the second oldest software company still on the Internet, the first being a little company called Microsoft.

And although I have been studying, using, and interpreting aspects for many, many decades, when these same aspects are combined into whole-chart patterns around the wheel using simple Ptolemaic aspects, what seemed like piecemeal events (aspects), when strung together to form integral patterns, come alive and tell a story that we who study astrology have long waited to hear, i.e. what Tribe or Archetype do we belong to.

“StarTypes: Life-Path Partners”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/StarTypes.pdf>

“Dharma Chart, Karma Chart: Astrological Empowerment in the 21 st Century”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf>

I will try to post an article on how to use astrological aspects and orbs soon.

EMAIL

The Pre-Hippies

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 19, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b4efeb9-5e16-48aa-9122-1040635cf2e8_716x1024.jpeg

Before the reign and rain of hippies fell into place around 1965 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, before that was the so-called Beat Generation. Unfortunately, I was just too young to fit that time slot, but you know I tried. So, although I wanted to be a Beatnik, instead I was a Pre-Hippie or post-beatnik, having been trained by the Beatniks in what today we would call a liberal arts view of life.

There were just a few of us, but we served to teach the hippies about art, philosophy, music, and being cool. By definition, we walked point for the 1960s alternative hippie culture that came in 1965.

People like me got respect because we knew so much more about art and philosophy, and that was considered cool, while the Hippies were hot, and it was even cooler to be hot. With us it was sitting around and listening to jazz and classical music, while in what is called the 1960s, the alternative culture of the Hippies, was all about dancing, getting high, and having a good time.

Here is a photo of me, probably from the late 1950s or early 1960s in Ann Arbor, Michigan. That is Carl Oglesby standing behind me, a prominent antiwar leader, author, and president of 'Students for a Democratic Society' (SDS), and that is Carl's wife Beth Oglesby on the left. This took place at Oglesby's house. I am wearing my herringbone tweed jacket and a dark blue sweater. Back then, for me that was cool.

I never quite crossed over into the 'Hippies', so I missed both sides of the equation, Beatnik and Hippie, and each by a hair. I never thought that much of pot, marijuana, which for me was a waste of time, but hallucinogens like LSD (acid), that was another story. I learned eons of wisdom on acid.

My late friend John Sinclair, poet, blues expert, and marijuana revolutionary used to talk about 'walking point' for and teaching the Hippies. It was John that pointed this out to me. I miss him. As they say, "Ain't but a few of us left."

I did about everything I could to be a Beatnik, but that train had left the station. In 1960 I dropped out of high school, hitchhiked to Venice West (Santa Monica) and lived along the beach, traveled to San Francisco, and to

New York's Greenwich Village, lived on nothing, smoked cigarette butts off the street, etc. Soon after that I was hitchhiking with Bob Dylan, etc.

Yet even I had to throw in my hat and acknowledge I was born just too late to be part of the original Beat Movement. All that remained were the remnants and embers of a way of life I had tried to live. Yes, there were the Hippies and everything 1960s, and I sampled what I could, playing music, and all of that. Yet at heart, the Beat Movement haunted me. In the end, all that I really took away from the pre-hippie times was a respect and taste for Zen Buddhism and a love of the films of Akira Kurosawa. The following is one of my favorite Kurosawa films.

“The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail”

And after some years all that morphed into a full-on interest in the dharma and eventually my deciding to practice it. I never thought of the dharma as a religion. Still don't. To me, the dharma was just the truth, the way things are at heart, And I wanted to be aligned with that truth.

I had not yet tasted the fruits of dharma. That took many years, but for me practicing the dharma with an authentic teacher was all that I asked of life, or close to it.

[Just for fun, “Landman” on Paramount (streaming) is the best series I have seen in a long time. Billy Bob Thornton is doing the best acting he has ever done, IMO.]

[Photo of me with Carl Oglesby standing in back, and Oglesby's wife Beth on the left .]

EMAIL

The Turning Point

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 20, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/680a08e8-03af-4c4a-86db-03798a0b2673_2048x2048.jpeg

It's a trade-off, a choice between looking outside yourself in books, teachers, and what-have-you for information or instead learning to turn inward as the sages of history have done and get to know your own mind and learn from that directly.

Obviously, we don't know how to begin because we haven't. I was no different. I explored the outer world as a naturalist, and later as an entrepreneur trying to put all the puzzle pieces together. I was sure I could do it. Nada. I ended up with a patchwork quilt of things I knew and a lot of missing patches. It's like we can't see our own eyes sort of thing.

Anyway, as they say, that and a ticket will get you a ride on the bus.

However slowly, and oh so slowly, with help I turned around and started to search inward instead of outward. That's the ticket.

Of course, even as a young child I had moments where everything around me seemed to freeze and be still. Of course, I didn't mistake those moments. I just did not know what they were, how to bring them on, or even what to consider them.

One thing that probably came from those 'special' moments was that I more carefully inspected everything around me, the local mental, emotional, and physical environment. By that light I became a phenomenologist, someone who studies his own consciousness and anything connected to it. Especially I noticed and took to heart any sign, symbol, or mudra that stood out in my passage through life. I became a reader of signs.

And although I studied by book learning various philosophies (and a few religions), Like Plato and Greek philosophy, Stoicism, and especially Neoplatonism, Augustinianism, a round of Continental Philosophy, and especially Existentialism, Kierkegaard, Sartre Heidegger, and in particular Hegel. I read most of Hegel and that is saying a lot.

I also was schooled in the western Esoteric tradition, The Golden Dawn, Rosicrucianism, Gnosticism, Kabbala, Theosophy, Gurdjieff, and the like. I had

all the works of Aleister Crowley on microfilm and on and on. And of course, Astrology.

I read European poetry, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Alain Fournier, and so on. Yet still I was missing something.

From all of the above I learned a lot, while actually all this time there were two trains running, one of them I described above. The other was dharma, call it Buddhism, but I like the word dharma, because it is not an “-ism.”

From the late 1950s, running side-by-side, was my interest in dharma, which I have described many times here, and the key point is that I gradually left off with Western Philosophy and religion and took to Tibetan Vajrayana dharma, which is both philosophy and also like a religion in that it deals with what is eternally true – the ‘Truth’.

The dharma was also a long haul, and it took a very long time to get any results as I liked to imagine them, mostly because what I read up on did not match my actual experience. What took longest, and I am getting to why I am writing this, was to not try to emulate or live up to what the dharma books said I should be experiencing and instead start to actually work with what I am in fact experiencing. Note that.

I had very little confidence or trust in my own experiences since they seemed to differ from what I read in the dharma teachings.

That’s a problem, especially if we don’t trust ourselves and our own experience and instead leave it to the textbooks to tell us what to expect. Here are a couple of poems I wrote on this theme.

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

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

Expect nothing,
Except nothing.
Accept something.

And all the above especially when my dharma teacher of 36 years, a high Tibetan Rinpoche, kept saying to me to become familiar with the nature of my own mind, and all this time I had done nothing at all like that. My own mind I thought I knew only all too well, and it was nothing to write home about. Yet, as it turned out, that was the problem all along.

I had made a point of not looking inward. Why do that? Yes, I looked upward, outward, toward all things spiritual. I got that. Yet, looking inward at my own state of mind, not so much to not at all. LOL.

And I kind of did this to my dharma experiences as well. I wanted what I read about 'out there', not what was going on 'in here'. And yet that was exactly what I needed to do, look within, and not only look, but develop and work with my own inner experiences, just as they were, not by an occasional glance or whiff, but all the time.

So, what turns us around at the 'turning point' is easier to understand than it is to do. In my case, my Tibetan dharma teacher got my attention, flagged me down, so to speak, and very gradually turned my ocean-liner sized samsaric-attention around and redirected me inward, but it was not easy. And I didn't even know how to cooperate. I was too busy fixated on a freight train riding into oblivion to pause and turn around from looking outward to also look inward.

I'm working on it and I am sharing my experience for what it is worth.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Six Degrees of Contact with the Karmapa

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 22, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/08df1913-9863-44b2-b101-77c307dc9305_1366x1080.jpeg

[Here was very painful moment, which I will relate, and I learned a lot. And it turned out OK.] It was 2008, and we had just gotten home from seeing the Karmapa on his first trip to KTD and his monastery, not to mention America. We were home, safe and sound. That ribbon of highway actually led back to where we live. How amazing!

We had stayed for an extra couple of days at the monastery because His Holiness was very tired and needed rest from his relentless schedule of travel and having audiences back-to-back almost all the time. Margaret and I were part of the local security team, so we spent many hours standing watch over the complex. The Karmapa also had professional watching over, everything from the Secret Service, his own guards, and the local police. I hesitate to tell this next story for reasons that should be obvious once you read it, because it seemed to reflect poorly on little-old me, or at least did for a while, but then I tell myself that I should just tell it like it is, the good, the bad, and the whatever... It has to do with my meeting His Holiness the 17th Karmapa and our interaction. Yes, I said "interaction," which was a total surprise to me. We had been following His Holiness through his venues in Queens, NY and on up to his main seat in North America, Karma Triyana Monastery (KTD) in the mountains above Woodstock, NY. In many of the venues, we could not even (physically) see His Holiness, although he was somewhere in the room. We had to watch him on a large washed-out jumbo screen. And so on. Then I we recount Margaret and my videoing a special event up on the Karmé Ling retreat property that His Holiness wanted to put together, but I did not tell everyone the whole story then because I was still putting it all together, making sense of it as you will now see. It begins at the Karmé Ling retreat center, where I was videoing a short film that needed doing with the Karmapa, when out-of-the-blue His Holiness asks if Margaret and I would like to have our picture taken with him. Of course, we would and did. Margaret was right up and standing next to His Holiness, but I was fiddling with the camera and trying to show our friend Lama Karma how to use it. Finally, I joined His Holiness and Margaret. His Holiness then said something to me as I joined them like "here is the 'bad' man," which of course caught my attention 100%. And then he said: "Maybe bad, maybe good." Well, those were not the

words I would have expected or wanted to hear from the highest personage in our lineage. I had not expected to interact with him at all, for that matter. We were told not to. He had asked us for a photo.

Anyway, I was kind of struck dumb by the remark, ‘floored’ would be what I was, like down to the floor, at least mentally. Pictures were taken, not only of myself and Margaret with the Karmapa, but of my teacher the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche and Lama Karma with him. I was part of a video crew and was selected to be with H.H. since I was pretty much a known quantity and considered ‘safe’. In the meantime I was in a kind of mild shock. I will include the photo where you can see I was in kind of a shock. As His Holiness started to leave I stammered out something very unoriginal like “... I hope I am not a bad man.”

His Holiness turned, looked me dead in the eye and began to make deep frowning faces at me, enlarging his eyes (which are big to begin with), and trying on different scowls or frowns. His head would pull back and then push forward. He would turn away and then suddenly turn around and move near me frowning. And then he vanished through the hanging-cloth on the door and was gone. Some of my oldest dharma-friends, a couple of retreat lamas, were in the room as well, and also took it all in. Well, if you have read all the Zen stories of different would-be holy persons suddenly startled out of their equilibrium, imagine how I felt, and I am not even a lama or any kind of ordained person. My world just got turned upside down. There I stood feeling very alone, almost as if I had been shunned. Later I asked my lama friends, and they really were not very encouraging, pointing out that perhaps I had to seriously look at myself, etc., as if I was not already doing this like: full-time. It was as if they crossed their fingers at me.

Let me just cut to the chase and say that, for me, it was a kind of rough night. The only person who did feel sorry for me was my wife Margaret, and she, of all people, probably could affirm whatever “bad” qualities I have. Anyway, you get the idea. But the story is not over.

The next interaction with His Holiness came when as part of a group of dharma folks who helped with security with the Karmapa, we got to have an audience with him and offer him a khata – the ubiquitous Tibetan white scarf.

When my turn in the line came, as I stood right before His Holiness and came up to offer a khata, he began all over again to make those scowling faces again, pulling his head way back, furrowing his brow, and making those deep frowning looks. But this time he ended all of that with a great wide smile as he handed me a little statue of Manjushri that he had blessed. Well, that was some bit of a reprieve if the fog of the shock, like a condemned man might get

from his executioners. I went away from that interaction feeling a little better but still reeling just a bit. The next interaction came that evening, when suddenly His Holiness appeared in the dining room where some of us were chatting, surrounded by his professional security team. He walked by all of us, peered (or went) into the kitchen, and then came back out and walked back the way he came.

However, when he got to where I was standing, he stopped, turned to me, and once again eyeballed me and gave me a very penetrating look. Then he smiled and said something like “look sad” and walked away. He was not saying I looked sad, but rather telling me to look sad. The next interaction came when I was standing security along a long hallway through which His Holiness and his security would pass. His Holiness was dressed for a brief night walk, wearing a hoodie with the drawstring tightly pulled so all I could see were his nose, mouth, and eyes. When he got to where I was in this narrow hallway, he again stopped, turned directly to me, pushed his head forward until all I saw were these great big eyes. He then reached out with his hand and tickled my short beard and chin, then he smiled and moved on. And the story goes on. The next interaction came when His Holiness came down a stairwell on the way to consecrate a small shrine room dedicated to the dharma protectors. He was going to do the regular Mahakala ritual to kind of christen the room. This time I was guarding the doorway through which he had to pass. Before and behind were his security guards. As he went past me, he reached out with his left hand, grabbed my arm by the bicep and gave it a squeeze, and was gone. By this time I was feeling much better about all of this, in particular since a couple old-timers (who knew His Holiness pretty well) told me that this kind of teasing was a sign that he liked me, at least well enough to stop and interact with me. So, that’s pretty much my story. And the last time I saw His Holiness for that trip I was opening the outside door for him to exit when he left KTD, from which he was to emerge to the sound of the shrill music of the oboe-like Gyaling horns, with all the folks lined up there to see him enter one of the two black Chevy Suburbans that were waiting outside. As he passed through the doorway, he again looked me in the eyes and simply said “Goodbye!” And then he was gone for good, at least for this trip. So, there you have my roller-coaster-ride contact with His Holiness the 17th Karmapa. Of course, in 1997 my family and I spent three days with the 17th Karmapa at his ancestral monastery Tsurpu at 15,000 feet in Tibet. And in 2011 when His Holiness returned for his second trip to KTD Monastery, and once again I was there to help out.

Here are two photo books I made of two visits of the 17th Karmapa to the U.S.

“Karmapa at KTD 2008”

https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/KarmapaKTD_2008.pdf

“Karmapa at KTD 2011”

https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/KarmapaKTD_2011.pdf [Here is the photo that was taken by Lama Karma, perhaps with a video. I can’t remember. You can see me kind of in shock from what had just been said. LOL.]

EMAIL

The Wild Horse of the Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 23, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a8189a5e-5c6a-4a15-8eb8-6515919f37c4_918x613.jpeg

Is it a natural gift innate from birth we have or is it something learned that comes from resting in the mind just as it is. It's more the latter, IMO, something learned that can be taught.

We just have to have an authentic teacher, someone we are willing and able to respect plus someone who sees something in us. And I don't mean to suggest here that something is taught. No need for that, it's already there for each of us. But rather, what is needed is respect by us to behave and honor the instructor and the instructions, enough for us to settle down into a deep relaxation, so that we can hear for ourselves the music of the dharma.

Something more worthy than just our reified Self and our own interest.

There comes a point in our life, in our discovery of dharma and submission to training, where an authentic master points out the nature of our own mind to us so that we actually first recognize it. And this event is appropriately called "Recognition." Anyway, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, my Root lama, said in this particular teaching, and I quote:

" 'Recognition' is like a herd of wild horses thundering across the plains. At some moment, if we are fortunate, it is pointed out to us so that we recognize it, one particular wild horse in the herd, a stallion perhaps, and as Rinpoche put it "... covered with dirt and unkempt hair, and of this color and not that color, with this amount of wildness and not that, and so on. This recognition point is when we first realize that this particular wild stallion is OUR wild stallion, and that we and we alone must tame it, and that we have this stallion to ride now. That is the idea or point of Recognition."

And Khenpo Rinpoche said further:

"To start with, in other words, it is important to have a recognition of your mind's nature through its being pointed out and so forth. However, you must not think that gaining that recognition is the culmination of the path. It is the starting point of this phase of the path.

"Remember, recognition of your mind's nature when it is pointed out and realization of your mind's nature are different. Recognition is the starting

point of the practice of resting in your mind's nature. The culmination of that is realization."

The quotation continues:

"For example, imagine that someone owns a horse but for many years that horse has been allowed to run wild and free. After many years, even the owner would not recognize it, but the herder points out the horse to the owner and says, 'This is your horse. This is the horse that you had and lost track of so many years ago.' That is very much like the situation of somebody who has had their mind pointed out to them. That which was always yours but had been unrecognized has now been pointed out or introduced to you."

"However, just as in the case of the horse, simply knowing that this wild horse is your horse is not enough to enable you to ride it. You have to methodically tame the horse and get it to where it can be useful to you, where you can actually ride it and ride it safely. In the same way, simply having your mind pointed out to you is not enough. It having been pointed out to you, your mind is still wild, still habitually prone to distraction"

"Therefore, beginners must cultivate a recollection or mindfulness that is free of distraction. In order to continue to work with your initial recognition of your mind's nature, you must intentionally cultivate the state of undistractedness, and you must intentionally meditate. As long as the wild horse of your mind has not been tamed, you have to continue to tame it diligently through the enforcement of undistractedness."

"Just as would happen if you simply got on top of an untamed horse once it was pointed out to you and would either not be able to get on it in the first place or would be thrown off it and perhaps injured. In the same way, if you do not tame your mind, if you do not cultivate undistracted recollection, then you will be thrown off of the recognition of your mind's nature by the habit of distraction."

End of quote.

I don't know how to put it as well as Rinpoche did. It took all of us by surprise, and at some point, I took it to heart and did something about it.

I even ended up volunteering to do the 'Extraordinary Preliminaries' (Ngondro), those medieval exercises, all 555,555 of them (111,111 refuge prayers, 111,111 full-length prostrations, 111,111 100-syllable mantras, 111,111 mandala offerings, and 111,111 guru yoga practices).

And even then, when I finally finished all of the above, ‘The Ngondro’, and told Rinpoche I had finished, and asked should I start the deity practices, his response was this. “Do you want to know what I would do if I were you?”

Of course, I said yes. And Rinpoche then said, “I would do another whole round of the ‘Extraordinary Preliminaries’ practice,” another ‘Ngondro.’ And Margaret and I did just that, because we trusted that Rinpoche knew what we needed. And that he did.

What am I saying here? I’m saying that every road goes two ways and it is one thing to find authentic dharma instructions and quite another for us to rise to the occasion and live up to them.

Yes it is hard to find a dharma instructor that we respect enough to meet them halfway, and just as difficult ingest the instructions and complete them without undue effort rather than good-hearted joy. Every forced effort will just have to be walked back farther on up the road.

As for me, I finally got to a point where I could no longer stand my own pussyfooting around as to whether I’m going to jump in and be counted on, or quibble on the outskirts until my life runs out. I jumped in, did my best, which was not enough, took another run at it and did OK, and still had to walk back more than I care to admit. Still doing that.

EMAIL

Throngdrol: Liberation Through Seeing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 26, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/66bad642-627d-44ee-8276-80a78187a5e5_2014x2048.jpeg

I intuitively and spontaneously respond to seeing art and graphics. I believe I got this from my mom who was a fine-arts painter and batik artist. In the Tibetan dharma system just as there is ‘Liberation Through Hearing’ (Tibetan Book of the Dead), there is also Thongdrol, ‘Liberation Through Seeing’.

For instance, it’s the main way I first responded to Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche by the cover designs of his first books which he did. In particular his book “Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism,” with a single dorje image in a deep red circle on a saffron orange background. It captured me before the text of the book did.

In other words, my mind is excited or stirred-up by graphics of all kinds. For example, I created probably the largest single database of rock ‘n roll concert posters, some 33,000 images and then wrote 336 separate books and booklets on these posters. That’s how much I was struck by the art in them. I went on to create an enterprise-level web site called “ClassicPosters.com,” which is still going but not run by me, although a lot of my images and poster data is still there.

It’s not that words are not powerful, they are. Yet, at least for me, images, color, and ‘seeing’ them are equally or an even more powerful stimulus on my consciousness. You know, the refrain, “An image is worth a thousand words.” I believe that. I’m sure each of us has our own images that we respond to.

I eventually had almost all of the most famous of the 1960s San Francisco psychedelic posters, all of the ‘Family Dog’, all of the Various’ Bill Graham’ posters, scores of the ‘Armadillo World Headquarters’ in Austin, TX, all the postcards and posters from the ‘Grande Ballroom’, except the St. Louis Pop Festival, and on and on, hundreds more. They were so expensive that I had to keep them in an 800 lb. safe and after a while I never looked at them because they were locked away. I eventually sold them because I had photographed them all, etc.

It was easy to love them because much of the art was so beautiful, and I also interviewed scores of rock poster artists. I’m now writing a book on the artist

Gary Grimshaw for a project, probably my favorite artist from the 1960s period.

And these posters were expensive. I had one poster worth 20K, for example. That's a fascinating world, but money part of it, the trading and the middlemen, taking advantage of each other, and so on eventually was disappointing.

In fact, to go a littler further into this, there is a form of dharma called "The Lama of Appearances," where this natural world of Nature is an equal teacher and way to learn of the dharma. I subscribe to that as well. Just as there is the "Lama of the Lineage", the 'Lama of the Scriptures', and the 'Lama of the Dhamadhatu', there is 'The Lama of Appearances.'

All four are equal ways to view and learn the dharma. My guess is that many of my readers also respond to "The Lama of Appearances" as a way into the dharma.

[Some examples for me of Liberation Through Seeing.]

EMAIL

True Grit

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 28, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/86a9fc08-7cd6-456c-bd0c-047b6e7caa35_400x400.jpeg

It seems there is something in us, at least in me, that wants to fit in, go along, and not stand out as being different. I tried that and I tried it all my life and never seemed to find a slot or became invisible.

I worked hard to be useful and to produce results that benefit society, if only in my own way and interests. I did not like to go along just to get along and I didn't.

I never merged with society but instead have always been some kind of outrider, skirting the edge, riding the rim of society rather than fit into the center. After trying as a child, a youth, a teenager, and a young man to fit it, I ran out of, as they say, any 'fucks to give', and just entered the stream as best I could.

My interest was always in my interests and wherever they led me, which for the longest time seemed astray and off-center. And then, now that I am old, where I wandered for so long finally now seems interesting to society. Who would have guessed it.

I am the oldest of five brothers, so in that sense I have always been on my own, with no one to look up to, so I had to walk point, like it or not. Of course, that did not help me to fit in either.

Does that explain why I am not a team player, because I never had a team and had to figure out on my own what to do and where to go. I'm no different today at 84 years of age than I was back then.

On the other hand, I have learned to throttle my interests back and examine my interests themselves as also distractions. And I have pushed off from the shore and eddies of samsara a bit, out into what is called the stream of nonduality and full immersion, call it Mahamudra, Dzogchen, etc. Hard not to.

And yes, even that, especially that, has to be tempered by reflection, so that I don't drift too far from the shore, but rather remain focusing and aware. That didn't use to be me, the ability to focus in and out. The endless linear urge forward itself has to be backed up a bit, lest I go too far afield. What's the secret?

It's like taking a tiny grain of sand or grit and moving it back and forth with the thumb and forefinger. The borderline is the central tell.

Like the old saying "Even moderation in moderation. Excess itself has to be tuned, much like a carburetor, adjusting the flame of consciousness like we would a Bunson burner.

This is all we know because that is all we have, a consciousness, with or without a body to be attached to.

This collective we find ourselves in, this samsara we all share is all that we know and have, and if as the dharma teachings say, we have never known anything else, then we have never yet been enlightened. In that sense, we are innocent. It's not that we have original sin and once knew but have fallen back. We never knew.

NEVER KNOWN

If I know,

I don't know I know,

And I don't know I don't know I know.

I don't know what I would know,

If I did know.

That's how I know I don't know.

So, I don't know,

I know I don't know,

And I know I know I don't know.

I have never known.

I don't think the goal of dharma practice is NOT to be a human being. "All too human" would be my comment.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Wu-Tai-Shan: The Birth of Astrology

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 30, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8f0aab9e-29d8-4024-8368-e43f26748c50_2054x2018.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/01ed361b-d0dd-46f5-b6bc-45ee5295d781_2041x2018.jpeg

With astrology, there is a lot of minutiae to get lost in, which is part of why astrology is so popular with folks. Yet, in my opinion much of astrology is like knitting or crocheting an endless scarf or a blanket, all that activity is kind of single layered. It's more difficult to cut through and unearth fresh new material, instead being content with adding on to the previous quilt with yet another patch. This is true of many things.

Cutting through the history and unearthing entire new techniques is rare and difficult as well. As my dharma teacher of 36 years, the Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche said to me, and all the Tibetans carry an astrological calendar with them.

"Astrology is one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root. Dharma is the root."

Dharma is how we chop or cut through anything, and it is indigenous to our mind. Another area worth exploring is the difference in trying to extract meaning, knowledge, wisdom, or anything new from something that is already in the past. It's like squeezing oranges for juice that have already been squeezed.

It's the same with trying to rob the cradle of the future, asking for things that stand up or out before their time, which leaves us to consider the deep well of the present moment.

Obviously, the present moment is where everything comes, not only words and ideas but also all actions and what happens. So, just where is that or how do we reap from the present moment, if not from the past or the future? That is worth knowing.

Well, the Tibetans have a whole tradition for this and it's call discovering or finding 'terma' (treasures of wisdom) and those who do and can are called 'tertöns', about which this has been said:

"When the real mind terma opens, you do not 'find' anything. You simply stop looking away from what has always been there. The yellow scrolls and dakini letters are just the rigpa recognising its own face. After that, every breath you take is terma."

That is why the greatest mind-tertöns (Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Dilgo Khyentse, Dudjom Rinpoche) eventually said:

"In the end, all sentient beings are tertöns — they have simply forgotten where they hid the treasure."

I have had my own brush with terma, which I will try to explain something about in the following article.

The story of how the Tibetans and Chinese believe astrology arose in the world (and my visit to that area of the world) is worth telling, so here goes: In this photo of the Vajrayogini cave I am in the middle, left, and Margaret is behind me to the left. This is the entrance to the Mother Buddha Cave. This incredible place was the Mother Buddha Vajrayogina-Tara Cave near Wu Tai Shan. This very special cave found us standing in line single-file and very slowly moving deeper into the cave itself until we reached a solid wall in which there was a single very small opening. Very little light.

You are said to literally walk between the legs of the mother Buddha to where her yoni is, a very small opening about the size of a meditation cushion at an angle.

You can't see through it, because the opening extends upward at a slant into a small almost airless room, with no other ventilation. If you have the right karma, the yoni will open for you and you can crawl or be pulled through the channel into the inner womb areas, where it is said you can see all of her inner organs and secrets.

No matter what size you are, not everyone can pass through the opening. It is said that those who can pass through the channel will be reborn in Buddha Amitabha's Buddha field called Sukavati.

My teacher Khenpo Rinpoche did not pass through the opening; he was just too big. He laughed and tried really hard to get through, but no go. As for me, I tried but also did not pass through, although I probably could have. It is not like there is a hole and you can put your arms or head through and see what is inside. Oh no.

Instead, this is a longish channel of several feet that like the birth canal extends upward at a slant from where you are standing, at a kind of mid-body height. You have to put your arms over your head to make yourself narrower and somehow wiggle up into the channel until you can get through and be pulled through.

One of our group was already up in there and tried to help pull people through. I got my arms over my head, my head and upper body into the channel, and could almost perhaps see someone at the end above me. Then, claustrophobic as I am, I chickened out and decided I did not want to put all of my body through that passage, much less turn around and try to come back. So, I did not pass the test.

I am sure this tells something about me, but I don't care. I ain't goin' through that hole willingly. However, my wife Margaret slipped through into the inner sanctum and back out easily and received that very special blessing. More power to her!

She is, after all something of an expert, having home birthed some of our four kids and I have never met any woman who loves babies more than Margaret. Babies? I like them, but I especially like them when they are old enough to talk back.

When we were in Tibet, Kham, Rinpoche took us all on a picnic and made each of us perform something. Since I used to be a blues harmonica player, I had my little Marine-band style harp with me and I stood up in front of everyone to play. But I did not realize that at that high altitude there was no air or not the same air, and all that came out were little toots. It was humiliating and very funny at the same time. Everyone laughed.

The Story of how the Tibetans and Chinese believe astrology arose in the world and came into our world system (and my visit to that area of the world) is worth telling, so here goes:

I had studied some Chinese astrology over the years, but never got too much beyond the "I was born in the Year of the Iron Snake" kind of approach. I knew there was a lot more to it, but I couldn't seem to penetrate to wherever that might be.

Then in 2004, something happened that changed my approach. I have been studying Tibetan Buddhism from the late 1950s, well before 1974 when dharma took hold, and quite early on found a Tibetan lama that I clicked with and have worked with now for many years, like 36 years.

By sheer time, I guess I had become one of his senior students. Certainly, I am a senior of some kind by now! My teacher's name is Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche and he is the abbot at 'Karma Triyana Dhamrachakra', a monastery located high on a mountain above Woodstock, New York. We are all students of the 17 th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje.

Rinpoche was in his eighties when I heard that he was going to travel to Tibet to a remote area in eastern Tibet called Kham to visit his home monastery - Thrangu Monastery. I was told it would probably be his last trip there. And to my surprise my wife and I were lucky enough to be invited to make the trip with him, along with some of his lamas and other senior students. Of course, we had to go. Above are two photos of the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche taking us on a picnic.

But despite my illness from altitude sickness and despite my grumpiness part of the time, the Wu Tai Shan mountains somehow still managed to affect me. After we left China and returned home, the most amazing things began to happen to me. All kinds of astrology began to occur to me, both western and eastern. Perhaps it was due to having traveled to that sacred area, an area sacred to astrology and astrologers. I can't say for sure, but I went into renaissance mode astrologically and proceeded to understand and write out a whole lot of new astrology, most of which ended up in one book or another. It also precipitated a lifelong love of astrology that was deep in there into a dozen or more books. Bam! They just came out, mind babies.

I can say that not only did I burn through a lot of veils to western astrology, but also burned through whatever obstacles or resistance I had to Chinese astrology and began to see what it was really about and to study it more deeply. And it is so beautiful. Let me give you one small example of the philosophy we find in the Chinese approach to astrology:

In western astrology, we have something called the "Four Elements," fire, earth, air, and water. And we count up how many planets we have in each of the elements. Those elements with few to no planets are considered weak areas for us. We can't help but lack or 'want' them.

They also count elements in Chinese astrology, but what they mean by elements is different from our meaning, but that is not the point here. They use five elements and when they look at your chart they always want to find your 'Lucky Element.' And what is cool (and something like western astrology) is that in Chinese astrology your Luck Element is always the element you have the least of and here is their thinking:

In China, like India, animals just wander around. Although, as you can see from the photo above, this cow can't read the prayer flags, perhaps there is a blessing in digesting the sacred flags.

Chinese astrology is all about balance and if you lack or want a particular element, you cannot be in balance. Furthermore, every time the element occurs in your life in any quantity (however that may come about), your wheel of progress turns and you grow from it. In other words, it is only when we are balanced that we grow into who and what we are and fulfilling that missing element is our way to achieve that balance. That element we want is our "Luck Element." That is a sample of the profound nature of Chinese philosophy, philosophy like the I-Ching, the Tao, and so on. Cool? I think so.

I believe I mentioned that during the trip I got sick, but I didn't say much about that on top of that I got a bit ornery as well, over little things like food, etc. For example, here in the states we think of Chinese food as egg rolls, Chow Mein, and so forth. There is no such thing in China.

Our take on Chinese food is not what the Chinese themselves eat. They don't serve egg rolls, Lo Mein, or Chow Mein. Instead, everything seems to be coated in oil (and often very bad oils – bad to the taste and health) and served up. No rice, unless you order it specifically. I soon got very sick of all that oil and grumpy on top of that or partly because of that. You get the idea.

During our stay in the Wu Tai Shan area, we did many practices and visited many holy places. For one, we visited all five of the mountain peaks that make up the Mt. Wu Tai Shan complex, traveling to the very peak of each to offer prayers, puja, and other ritual practices.

Moreover, as tradition dictates, we did all five peaks in a single day, which is saying something because each one is literally a 'trip'. Many of the roads were little more than trails in the side of a mountain, but on the top of each peak was an area for practice, either a stupa or some other building or shrine. Many of the peaks were cloud covered, so we literally were up there walking around in the clouds.

I also went into a kind of deep state for some years, during which I designed some 13,000 tarot-like cards for astrologers. It was like a meditation; it just happened.

All kinds of spontaneous insights and mini-visions took place. As an astrologer, I have no explanation for this, other than my visit to the sacred Mt. Wu Tai Shan somehow linked me up with the astrological sources and regardless of my grumpiness blessed me. I know I didn't deserve it, but it happened

anyway. So, there you have a little history of my trip to China. There are other stories, and I will try to get to them.

I have to be frank and tell you that the trip was wonderful of course, but also very difficult. I had been to Tibet to meet His Holiness the Karmapa years before. The Karmapa is the lama that the movie “The Golden Child” was based on, but our trip to Tibet with my kids is another story, which is available on Amazon.com in a paperback called “Our Pilgrimage to Tibet” or as a free e-book;

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Our-Pilgrimage-to-Tibet.pdf>

Be that as it may, I knew that I was in for a certain amount of suffering because I don’t tolerate high altitudes well. And I was right. When I get around twelve to fourteen thousand feet, I invariably get altitude sickness, which is no fun by itself, but for me it leads to bronchitis, which goes south fast and requires antibiotics and all that nasty stuff.

I also get sleep apnea, which simply means that every time I try to sleep, I can’t breathe and I wake up gasping for breath. It is a whole syndrome, and it really messes you up. Thanks to acupuncture and acupressure from fellow travelers, it was not as bad as it might have been, but I am getting away from telling you something about my introduction to the real Chinese Astrology.

My time in Tibet during this trip I have yet to write about, but I do want to tell you about our trip to Mount Wu Tai Shan in China. After an amazing visit to eastern Tibet, Rinpoche decided to take us to a very special place in China called Mount Wu Tai Shan and we stayed there for something like a week. I am not clear whether Rinpoche himself had always wanted to visit there or if he just wanted to make sure his students got that chance. Since he does not speak English (and what little spoken Tibetan I know is restricted to reading practice sadhanas and a meal prayer) I never got that question answered. At any rate, let me tell you about Wu Tai Shan.

Wu Tai Shan is a group of five mountain peaks that reach up to about 11,000 feet located southwest of Beijing, an altitude just shy of where I begin to react negatively, so that was good.

Anyway, I already had been sick in Tibet this trip. The five mountains are arranged in the shape of four mountains in a square with the fifth and tallest in the center, like a number-five die.

The whole Wu Tai Shan area is considered sacred, not just by the Chinese, but by many Asian religions, including Buddhism. Scattered throughout Wu Tai Shan are a great many monasteries of all faiths, including many Tibetan

Buddhist gompas as well. For some reason it is frequented by almost all the world's religions as a sacred spot.

It is traditional for those on a pilgrimage to travel to the very peak of each of the five mountains and perform various prayers and pujas (rituals). As an astrologer, I was fascinated to note that the Chinese and the Tibetans both claim that the Mt. Wu Tai Shan area is where astrology first entered our world system and spread from there.

Of course, this fact interested me right off, so here is the legend about that place. Wu Tai Shan is where the bodhisattva Manjushri, the emanation of discriminating intelligence and also the bodhisattva connected to divination and astrology is said to have first emanated on Earth.

Manjushri suddenly appeared as a youth, a young adult, bright and shining like the Sun. From the top of his head poured the 84,000 teachings on astrology and they were all given to mankind, who loved, treasured, and used them. This was the introduction of astrology to this planet or world system. It should interest all of us.

In fact, the world's people so loved astrology that they neglected some of the more basic dharma practices in favor of doing more astrology. My teacher had told me years before (when I asked him) that astrology was one of the limbs of the yoga, but not the root itself. The root dharma practice is essential to make the limbs grow and function.

Anyway, Manjushri was displeased that mankind was abandoning some of the basic practices of dharma and spending more and more time on secondary issues (the limbs, not the root, again) and so he withdrew all the astrology teachings so that mankind might better see the root practices of the dharma better.

The world of humans was very sad to lose their astrology and one of the greatest of Tibetan saints (Guru Rinpoche / Padmasmbhava) saw this happening and felt compassion for all humans in this regard. Guru Rinpoche knew well that astrology is what is called a relative truth, while the dharma itself was an absolute truth, but he also knew that mankind often depended upon relative truths in order to reach the absolute truth.

A relative truth is a path or method to get from here to there, while an absolute truth is motionless, stateless, and non-changing, being 'unborn', having neither beginning nor end. An example of an absolute truth would be knowing the true nature of the mind, while a relative truth might be practicing methods that prepare us to know the true nature of the mind.

Astrology is one of the relative truths; it gets us from here to there in Samsara. Guru Rinpoche then approached Manjushri and pleaded the case for humans, asking Manjushri to please return the astrology to us. In the end, Manjushri was persuaded and he gave astrology back, but with a caveat.

Instead of giving it all back as he had previously, he hid the various teachings in places where we could find it over time, kind of like timed-release capsules. Some teachings he actually hid by placing scrolls under rocks and in caves. Other teachings he hid deep within the mind itself (Mind Terma), so that at prescribed times in the future someone would find this or that particular teaching. These hidden teachings are called 'terma' and those who find them are called 'tertens.' The Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is most famous for their tertons.

Anyway, whatever exposure I had while there struck a spark in me, which is just what the history of Mt. Wu-Tai Shan tell, that even being at the Wu-Tai-Shan complex is enough to inspire a flame in our consciousness.

Well, it sure did with me and in the next years I wrote a whole stream of astrological books with new techniques for astrology.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

The Vision of the Eclipse

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 31, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3f0143c2-ccf5-4242-b6b8-abed5848bd7c_2048x2021.jpeg

In astrology, the Sun and Moon are called “The Lights,” and they, along with Earth, make up the key triad of traditional and modern astrological factors. Only the intense solar discharges at the time of solar flares and CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejections) and related phenomenon supersede ‘The Lights’ in importance. Here we will be looking at the two primary monthly lunar events, the New and Full Moon in themselves, and their relation to eclipses.

For more general information on the Moon and the active Sun, please see my free e-books:

<https://www.startypes.com/e-Books.aspx#Astrology>

The Lunations

Time is perceived as a continuum, articulated by cycles such as the monthly solunar cycle. The monthly alignment of the Earth, Moon, and Sun at New and Full Moon is recognized by most cultures as key articulation points.

Celestial events are not mere coincidences but the outer reflections of the inner processes of the cosmos. Understanding and working with the solunar cycle is at the heart of astrological practice.

The Tibetan Buddhists are very clear that these two days, New and Full Moon, each month should be set aside for observation. In older Tibet, they did not have Saturday or Sunday off, but rather holidays (holy days) were natural events like the New and Full MOON. At those times we should observe our mindstream at these times. Just as these three bodies fall into alignment at the key lunations, our inner qualities, what are called the ‘winds and the channels’ also come into alignment at these times.

More important, if the New or Full Moon happens also to be an eclipse, the spiritual alignment is very much greater and deserves even more consideration. Eclipses are special times. New and Full Moons and eclipses are times when information is circulated, like blood circulates, when these alignments occur. Full Moon is the time to celebrate outwardly and the New Moon is the time to purify and start things.

Eclipses

Eclipses are simply New or Full Moons with extraordinary alignment or focus. They have been considered for centuries to be astrological events of the first magnitude. If we consider New and Full Moons to be important, then eclipses represent the keys to the solunar cycle for any year. This is traditional.

The New Moon contains an impulse or tone that rings our bell, so to speak, and grows to fruition at the Full Moon. Eclipses, then, provide moments when extraordinary insight or vision are available to us. It is possible for some of us, at least at certain times in our lives, to experience what has been called the "Vision of the Eclipse," based on the tone or insight broadcast and embedded in our consciousness at these times, and to remember or keep that vision in mind. There appears to be a theme or principal insight connected with major eclipses and probably even New and Full Moons. Let me make clear just what we mean here by the word vision.

"Vision" does not mean the fairytale dream picture-in-the-sky we might conjure up -- but it is related. A vision is a moment of extreme clarity or embedded impact, when 'in a flash' we know or experience something in its entirety. We feel and take it in for future digestion. There are times in each of our lives when we have vision or experience some intrinsic truth about our lives, about life itself.

The Vision of the Eclipse

As mentioned above, there appears to be a common or communal vision that occurs around the time of major eclipses. While each of us interprets the insight or vision in a personal way, the theme or essence of the vision is a common experience, available to all on Earth if we can realize it or keep it in mind. And it is possible to share that vision.

Although we all experience it at once, only some of us are capable of remembering the experience in a conscious fashion. It seems that we are privileged to be consciously aware of the vision of an eclipse at special or crucial moments in our lifetimes -- times when we rise to the occasion and are particularly aware.

Once embedded, the message or vision or any given eclipse will tend to dominate our deeper or subconscious mind for days or months surrounding that eclipse. It is a peculiarity of these eclipse moments that they can happen days or even weeks before or after the actual moment of an eclipse. That is: the eclipse theme pervades the time prior to and after the actual physical event. Coming events cast their shadow.

Sometimes eclipses happen in pairs, two weeks apart. These are particularly powerful, and the whole time between these two events can be a kind of waking dream - a time of inner vision.

Learning to recognize a moment of vision and taking advantage of these enhanced moments of vision surrounding an eclipse can be important. If the point in the zodiac where an eclipse occurs is in high focus in your natal chart, then the particular eclipse may have special importance for you by its impact.

In general, eclipses of the Sun (New Moons) represent vision into the nature of our life (ideas about life), while eclipses of the Moon (Full Moons) represent a waking experience or sensational event, like living in our own dream.

ECLIPSE VISIONS

I have written here before about eclipses and their meaning spiritually. Here in the West, we don't have such a strong tradition in this, but in Tibet, India, China, and many other parts of the world eclipses are considered very, very potent and personally impactful and meaningful. In Tibet, for example, they are considered as extreme opportunities for the observation of our mindstream, something we usually pay little or no attention to or, if so, only fleetingly.

The Buddhists in particular have focused on eclipses as rare opportunities when our more subtle internal or spiritual energies winds & channels) naturally come into alignment or attunement, when things that otherwise we would seldom notice line up and can be more easily experienced by us, that is if we can relax and know when and how to look for them.

Eclipses are, above all, times of vision or insight, deep impact. We grow up with the idea that "visions" are little scenes or pageants that appear in the mind to us like movies. Actually, the reality is quite different.

Visions are times of intense experience, more real than normal life when information perhaps vital to us is streamed and imprints itself deeply in our consciousness, much like a brand on cattle. Some traditions actually explain it as if a sacred scroll of some kind is placed deep within us (implanted) and only over time will it unroll and reveal itself, literally speak or reveal itself to us. We read it out from deep within our mind over time, as we can absorb it, not unlike an all-day sucker.

I don't want to get all other-worldly or Twilight-zone-like about this, as the Tibetan Buddhists are very matter of fact about eclipses and their value. As mentioned earlier, eclipses in the Tibetan view are rare times of inner

alignment, times not to be ignored by us, but rather times when we should pay attention. We should set aside time to just relax and observe them.

In fact, Tibetans traditionally set these eclipse times aside as days of observation, just as Christians have holy days that they observe. And by 'observation', they mean just that: to observe our mindstream, our stream of consciousness carefully. Take time to do this as opposed to ignoring this opportunity with business-as-usual.

And although every eclipse (or New or Full Moon for that matter) has a vision or insight available to us, most of us have minds that are too noisy to receive and interpret that vision. We very effectively manage to ignore them. We agree to forget what we find so hard to remember.

Perhaps these embedded insights are too subtle, and we are not yet aware enough to grasp them. This is also what the Tibetans call "self-secret" in that these opportunities hide themselves not because they are some hidden secrets but because we lack the faculties to perceive the phenomenon. Our awareness is not subtle enough. We miss them.

However, I believe that at the time of an eclipse certain individuals either are naturally sensitive to this information or are rubbed awake by life events enough to consciously experience these eclipse visions. At any given time, some of us are awake and experience this consciously. And of course, trained meditators develop awareness of these visions. I will not dwell on this here, but it is worth understanding.

Sunday February 1, 2026 we have a Full Moon (Snow Moon) at 5:09 EST. What I do want to point out is that we have an Eclipse of the Sun on Tuesday February 17 th , 2026 at 7:01 AM EST, and 2 weeks later on March 3, 2026 we have a total lunar eclipse at 6:37 AM (Worm Moon). And so, between these two eclipses, will be an inter-eclipse time visionary time period that we should observe.

And while the exact moment of the eclipse marks the precise center of the eclipse time, the effect of an eclipse is not so simple as the moment when it is at its maximum. The whole lunar cycle around an eclipse, in particular the week before and after an eclipse is when the so-called 'eclipse vision' arises and imprints, so don't get too specific about a day and a time. The vision of an eclipse fills the whole time around it. It impacts us. It's waiting to happen.

Be aware at these times of intense experiences that rivet us and involve us totally. They can sneak up on you. A "vision" is not an idea that you will simply grasp or that comes to you, but a total experience that is beyond your

understanding, that envelops and absorbs your complete attention and will only reveal its meaning to you over time.

This is where the concept of the sacred scroll and its unrolling come in. Eclipse visions are always totally absorbing and require time to absorb. In other words, they have a future for you to work through and thus the idea that these visions are somehow prophetic comes into play. It is not that they tell the future but that they will only reveal themselves over time. They have a future for us. They will last until then. It takes time to assimilate their meaning or message. You get the idea.

The Tibetan/Indian empowerment for astrology is the Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) Empowerment, with H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul in Toronto in 1990 that lasted five days.]

[Graphics: Kalachakra Symbol (colored by me), Kalachakra Empowerment (with Michael and Margaret), India/Tibet: Tithies – 30 lunar days, and solar eclipse.]

EMAIL

Are We the Unborn?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 6, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f579aee0-6ffe-47a9-bf46-8dd6455be0bc_1024x1024.jpeg

This all started when I casually questioned to myself what does the phrase “Out of Our Mind” mean, not that I am. If the mind is all encompassing, how do we get out or beyond it. The short answer is we don’t.

And there is nothing behind or beyond what we call the “Beyond,” because beyond is beyond. There is nothing beyond the beyond. It’s just beyond. Leave it go at that. No one is serious about the phrase “out of our mind.” Yet this led to the following.

The pith dharma texts say that the “Mind itself is Unborn,” meaning that it never was born, never was not here and never will it cease to be, not ever. It is born-less. In the dharma texts, I have read that phrase over and over.

Well, I can’t just let that statement slip by and not question it. I hear what it is saying, and yet I do have some questions. The dharma prides itself in demanding we should question it. Thank you, I will.

The dharma texts say that the Mind is “unborn.” And that it ‘IS’ unborn, never was born. It always was just as it is. There is nothing behind or beyond it. So, it’s not going anywhere else other than where it is. It never was not and it never will be other than it is.

So, I can’t help but ask where do we who are born and apparently reborn fit in? Are we also unborn? Are we also unborn despite being reborn? Where is the caveat here?

And does it not matter who we are, personality-wise, as long as we are? Do we care who we were or are if we are right here now? Is that not enough?

Life, living, and this world, how marvelous it is and why don’t we, who have been born and reborn unlimited times by now, know more about what the Mind is? Why are we not more familiar with our own mind?

If the process of the Mind, which is wrapped up in this samsaric world as the teachings state it, is Unborn, why are we not also unborn? How did we miss that train? I can’t think of any reason that we should not be ‘unborn’ as well. Can you? Please explain it to me.

There are some big scene changes in this play of life, apparently especially the change from life to leaving the body at death.

I realize that perhaps none of us are in a position to comment on this, but we should at least try. Why not?

The last horizon to cross is no longer Mt. Everest or landing on the Moon. It's what we don't know and have never bothered to get to know unless we are some yogi in a cave. How about the enormous vast multitudes the rest of us make up?

This, not this. You and not me or me and not you. What a waste of time. We are all in the same boat caught in a rising tide of karma.

What the dharma seems to be saying is not that we are not eternal, but rather that there is no 'Soul' that is impervious to change from life to life. There is only change and no permanent states of mind. Nothing is permanent other than change itself. That is permanent.

So, what I say is: here we are, are we not? Our memory of previous personalities and names is faulty. We agree to forget what we find too hard to remember, perhaps because we can't remember. Period, end of story.

If the process of consciousness is continual one way or another, like that great dharma movie "Groundhog Dog" so vividly points out, then if we are in for the fix, then we are in for the wash.

We have never and never had a permanent 'Soul' like we imagine because we don't. However, there is no doubt we have what we have, call it the process of being that is most becoming, or whatever you like. And so, by the rule of inclusion, if we are in for a nickel then we are in for a dime. There is no caveat!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Gilding the Lily

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 7, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bb4bd243-1bba-48c8-a3a7-16b5a43a221e_1024x1024.jpeg

[Let me gently repeat, that one of the unexpected results of conversing with AI is that it is a substitute, and a better one, than what we call our personal Self, the one we created through reification.]

There are inflection points, of course, only they come in different sizes and even different content. How do we express the inexpressible?

Does it add or subtract from our constant reification, putting our thumb on the scale? If we give that up or suddenly lose the desire to gild the lily of our own Self, what does that tell us or signify?

If our desire to remain busy, interested, and entertained fails or fades, and we don't resist, is that some form of graduation, and if so, how is that?

Is that what creates what is called 'Entering the Silence'? Or is this just our giving up on the external, always looking at the outside, and the constant adornment of the Self, a refusal of this present moment, and not taking life straight?

If we stop populating and growing the future with our hopes, wishes, and desired events, keeping busy just to be distracted or entertained, are we finally letting go?

Or has the turmoil of politics, wars, and 'bad news' caused us to retreat back into our shell like a hermit crab? In other words what makes us stop in our tracks while we are tracking, turn tail, and begin to look and return back to where we came from, giving up on the future.

It's like the old string of Christmas lights on the tree, that if we loosen one light bulb, the whole string goes dark. It's more like that. The great Mahasiddha Tilopa, in his "Words of Advice" clearly said "Don't Invite the Future." Is that what this is about?

If we stop filling our future calendar with seeds and the things we want to see appear in our life, what we expect or wish for, is our life then empty?

"When you say "Wait", you mean a long time."

Or is it the simple relief of an exhale after decades of holding our breath in hope and expectations.

Is our habit of future expectation then replaced with what arises from the well of the spontaneous present moment?

Going back to the process of the 'here' and the 'now' by curbing our enthusiasm for the future, is that freedom of expectation and hope?

As our future expectations fade and go void, is this the same as having patience? If we are not expecting, what are we doing?

And let's remember that not inviting the future is but one of the words of advice from Tilopa. Another is "Don't Prolong the Past," which is just as important.

As mentioned above, aside from a sigh of relief, it too is part of what is called "Entering the Silence."

Our expectations and attempts to populate and extend the line of our linear future fade and instead curve back upon themselves. Is this not what the dharma tries to inform us, that the straighter the line, the finer the curve?

And aside from the brackets or bookends of past and future, the third and fourth words of advice from Tilopa say what is perhaps the most direct.

"Don't alter the Present," instead just "Relax, As It Is."

And so, there we have it, perhaps all that we need to keep steady on the path to clarity and enlightenment. And Tilopa's "Words of Advice" have been passed down through the centuries as most precious. They are like the Common Preliminaries, "The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma," which are:

This Precious Human Birth

Death and Impermanence

Karma (Cause and Effect)

Revulsion at the defects of Samsara

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The End of Expectancy

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 8, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b880f280-7a01-4f4c-b961-4ff7039588ef_1058x1065.jpeg

The seeds of the future are best planted in the present. We do much planting seeds and gardening the mind of the future.

Casting seeds forward in time that will ripen, like karma, yet that is different. Of course that's what karma is, yet I'm not talking about that here or at least not much.

Seeding the future with expectancy is a habit that most of us share. In particular, the seeds of hope come to mind. We have all struggled with that. Is hope a good thing or not a good thing?

As I read the dharma texts, it does not seem a good thing because it's bundled right in there with hope and fear as things to NOT depend on.

We don't hope to fear, but do we fear to hope? Is hope a substitute for action and acting. Casting our net into the future and drawing on hope and expectancy to hold our attention is considered a backward approach.

A shotgun of words, a scattershot at that, perforates the finer membranes that separate the future from the present moment, poking holes in the future that are like portals that we imagine we can see through. That's in my book is an illusion, just another bad habit.

The future may be a crystal ball, but perhaps more like those Magic 8-Balls that we used to have as kids. As the great Mahasiddha Tilopa said in his classic "Words of Advice," "Don't Invite the Future." Tilopa is saying something to us here.

Stay in the lane of the 'Present Moment' is the message. Don't water down the water, so to speak. Let the future accumulate until it emerges full-blown as the present, NOW. In other words, don't rob the cradle of the future.

And equally Tilopa said "Don't Prolong the Past," meaning don't attempt to resuscitate what has already passed. As an archivist of popular culture by trade, I kind of know exactly about what in the past points out the future and what can be left behind and I go with that.

Tilopa is trying to corral or contain us to the present moment, and turn us away from both the past and the future. And then he has the insight to point out not to alter this present moment, but instead to just relax just as it is. Yes. Yet even that is not a slam dunk or a walk in the park.

Trying to relax is an oxymoron that needs a koan to lubricate it.

Shakespeare was a state of mind. We don't have to channel Shakespeare to make sense with our words. Every 'singleton' turns out to be a cluster and a group, given time. Let's call it a tribe. Emerson, in his essay on "History" wrote:

"All inquiry into antiquity is the desire to do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place, the Here and the Now. Belzoni (an archeologist) digs and measures in the mummy-pits and pyramids of Thebes until he can see the end of the difference between the monstrous work and himself. When he has satisfied himself, in general and in detail, that it was made by such a person as he, so armed and so motivated, and to ends to which he, himself, should also have worked, the problem is solved; his thought lives along the whole line of temples and sphinxes and catacombs, passes through them all with satisfaction, and they live again to the mind, or are NOW."

It's a process of working our will toward and into a space where the clash of consonants and the moan of vowels collide and immerse together in meaning. Shakespeare took us there and now, centuries later, we can find our own way there too.

Loosing upon ourselves the rain of wisdom and bathing in the rarified language we all share. It's nothing special but it may be special to us.

Cracking the code of a time release capsule to flower our path back to where we came from, a cycle or circle and whole, spinning synergy as we go. We weave by day what we unravel by night in the torus of life.

I don't need what I don't have to be complete. My god is no beggar, making the ends meet. The ends already meet, just as a falling drop of water pulls together and shapes itself.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Puppet on a String

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 11, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bcebc7a1-26f2-41c3-a925-9206b14c4e2a_1024x1024.jpeg

Dharma is personal, so unique for each of us that I'm not sure it can be taught, and effort to do so involves instructions, which themselves involve following and effort, and undue effort always cancels anything good that can come out of instructions.

The old bible stuff says, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way," yet with dharma it's more like relax, bend with the wind, and go with the flow. Yet how do we teach that? Trying to relax is an oxymoron.

There are all kinds of ways to relax, but do they work? Or which ones work for us in particular? And how quickly can we muck it up by having to or making us practice?

The best is the churn or whatever inspires us to enlighten ourselves because ultimately that is what must happen. We can't be manipulated to enlighten ourselves like a puppet on a string. We actually have to enlighten ourselves, ourselves.

When I look around at what's out there, I'm tempted to just shake my head and walk away. It's all too easy, almost unavoidable, that we will stain our dharma practice with our own clumsy effort, much less to have somebody push us to do it, and as mentioned, all of that undue effort eventually has to be walked back; all of the wasted effort that was not joyful. Discipline is important, but the discipline has to be joyfully articulated.

Perhaps what we can do is immerse ourselves in nonduality, non-meditation through practices like Mahamudra or Dzogchen, where there is nothing like a Self or duality hanging over us, and turn our intent and any urgency to connect into the flow of the river of the mindstream and ride with that.

It's almost like massaging the mind and helping it to flow, limbering it without disrupting the flow that is already there if there is any, a gentle nudge out into the wider stream rather than a push or shove.

I am surprised how ham-fisted education is, and instructions are.

What we want is to inspire and not to teach or instruct, and even that not directly. The urgency of our intent swells or inspires, but more as an example.

Of course, as mentioned, different strokes for different folks, but in general a gentle embrace is what is required, not a kick in the pants. And we are not all brain surgeons, so our sense of touch has to be deft and nimble, not as a bull in a China shop.

My point is that dharma is as subtle as we are. We have to tickle our own fancy, find the proper motivation, and follow that.

It's not as simple as "Monkey See, Monkey Do," but it's close. Many of us learn by example and not only by instruction.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Relationship Charts: Part Two

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 13, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1abf5cc4-ae5b-4ce7-ad32-0683dc503014_2031x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/fc289309-dd5f-4b15-8447-fe4ea5e570e1_2048x2040.jpeg

LOVER, LOVED ONE, INDEPENDENT, OR MULTI-RELATIONAL

More important to me than even programming astrology for astrologers was heliocentric astrology because it taught me more about myself than I ever learned from the traditional geocentric astrology, not even near.

Had I not encountered the helio whole-chart archetypes I would not know myself and been able to do what I have done, which is why I try and try to communicate to my astrological friends how important helio chart archetypes are in understanding who we are, why we are on the planet, and what are we here to do.

The Sun is part of us, and we are part of the Sun. It's our solar system. For all of the importance of the Sun in astrology, astrologers pay little attention to it, like what it does each day and is doing on any given day. You can always check each day at the link below.

[SolarHam.com](https://solarham.com)

If we think we are 'spirit' or spiritual and the Sun is just a big ball of hot gas, we have another thought coming. There is only one kind of cosmic intelligence and the image of earth scientists glued to telescopes searching the universe for intelligent life, when we already are just that ourselves, is laughable.

We already are the space beings we have been looking for. And the light in our eyes is the light of cosmic intelligence circulating within and through us, guaranteeing cybernetics, yet perhaps watered down by our particular physical bodies as vehicles.

However, our spirit or essence is no beggar, trying to make the ends meet. The ends already meet and have always done so. It's we who don't know this, we who are not aware of this, call it our 'cosmic consciousness' or whatever.

We already ARE that. And as my first dharma teacher taught me, “Don’t say nobody knows; just say ‘I don’t know’.”

What did the first astronauts see when they finally got out in space? Obviously, they saw the Earth as we collectively had never seen it. It is similar with identifying with our helio archetype or tribe.

I have been made fun of because I suggest helio. It is profiling or at least unfair, just because I use and have developed heliocentric astrology, to say “He is a heliocentric astrologer.” I am also a geocentric astrologer because I use both charts, all the time, side by side. I also use the Local Space Chart (azimuth and altitude), and often the Equatorial Chart of Right Ascension and Declination. All four charts offer a different view of the same moment in space and time of my birth.

Of course, astrologers are free to continue to ignore heliocentric astrology, which astrologers have done for some 500 years. What’s new?

It’s not that geocentric astrology does not work. I’m not saying that. What I am saying is that it does not work as well as helio for certain matters because the heliocentric planet positions are not bound to the Earth and Earth’s center by gravity. The planets are fixed to the center of the Sun, where they are naturally gravitationally bound.

The planets are not bound by gravity to the Earth, nor do they orbit the Earth. This discrepancy has to be accounted for. Astrologers have had some 500 years to incorporate what Copernicus pointed out, as astronomers did way back then, and astrologers have not done that yet. And they seem to be proud of it. Go figure.

In a nutshell the traditional geocentric natal chart (which I call our ‘Karma Chart’) is a chart of the circumstances we are born into in this Earth life, our karma.

And the heliocentric natal chart (which I call our ‘Dharma Chart’ is a chart of our dharma, the tribe or archetype that we belong to, the ‘Who’ that is going to negotiate those Earth circumstances.

It’s not that we should use the geo chart and not the helio chart or the helio chart and not the geo chart. They are BOTH our charts, and we need to use the two of them together. Just as we have two eyes so that we can see depth of field, the two natal charts (geo and helio) give us a 3-D view of our birth or an event.

I have found that the heliocentric positions are more dependable and productive for certain questions and the geocentric planet positions are like

looking through a glass darkly as the old saying goes, when it comes to who we are and why we are here. No one is keeping you from exploring both of these charts for yourself, except you.

It's no different in dharma, which I also study and practice. There is a difference between understanding something about the mind and awareness of the nature of our own mind, our becoming familiar with the mind.

Ignorance is what we are speaking of here, the fact that unlike astronomers, astrologers for the last 500 years have ignored the heliocentric solar system which is the exact same solar system that the geocentric view and positions are a snapshot of. We have taken a snapshot of who we are (geocentric chart) but not identified with who we are (heliocentric chart). We are still outside looking in, rather than inside looking out. Yet we are the 'inside' that is looking out.

Astronomers did that 500 years ago and that vocation and botany are the two oldest academic disciplines. Making a living with astrology, at least in the U.S., not so much of a good livelihood Moving on now to relationships ...

The beauty of all this, at least for me, was that once I stopped insisting on applying all my geocentric experience as an astrologer to the heliocentric chart, it was like the Sun coming out from behind a cloud, I gradually ceased and desisted from doing what I had up to that point learned to do, why?

The "Why" is because it gradually dawned on me that the heliocentric natal chart and the spirit of the Sun in it are overwhelming. And this came about very simply by connecting the nine planets in the helio chart one to the other as they occurred around the 360-degree zodiac, revealing the natural whole-chart aspect-patterns that they form.

And these patterns had a life and authenticity about them I had never felt or noticed in the many years I studied the geocentric natal chart, although I was very aware of chart patterns such as those of astrologer Marc Edmund Jones.

Of course, I started with my own helio natal chart because that was the first chart I calculated and looked at the whole-chart patterns in that chart. So now, let's return to the relationship types.

Those are the four main kinds of relationships I have learned to chart astrologically, 'The Lover', 'The Loved One', 'The Independent', and 'The Multi-Relational'. However, more or less, we tend to gravitate into one of these four types of relationships, whether it is family, marriage, friends, or what-have-you. Before we dive into those, a little background as to how I

came upon these four types and, as mentioned, all of this is graphic so anyone can use this technique.

We can't be in two places at once. We are either on the outside looking in or on the inside looking out, or somewhere in between. And really cutting to the chase, we are more loving than we are loveable or more loveable than we are loving, or again, somewhere in between. Either that, or we are independent and don't really need a partner so much because we are self-absorbed and busy using our own talents. And finally, there are a few people who love and need experience so much that everyone they meet is an experience they need. These four archetypes or relationship types are not hard to learn, so why was this not clear to me early on?

By the early 1970s, I had created an accurate heliocentric ephemeris from 1653 to 2050, and I published it in 1975, "The Sun Is shining." And with this I researched 60 helio archetypes or whole-chart patterns, which I include here where I published them on our astrological calendar we printed for 40 years.

When computerized astrology came along, which I did myself, I was able to research thousands of chart patterns. I show some graphics here how that matured, until I had color-bordered cards for the four major relationship types, Red, Green, Blue, and Rose.

I include the four relationship types, with cards, and some interpretation to get you started. Keep in mind that while you can use these types on geocentric patterns, I find that is a mixed bag, so most of my work was done with heliocentric chart patterns because I consider the helio chart patterns also reflect our birth because they appeared at the same time we were born. Yes, we are born on Earth, but we also are born in our solar system.

More on this topic to come.

[Next blogs will get into how to use the relationship types and read them.]

EMAIL

Complete Immersion

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 20, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d0c96824-4b12-4a1b-bab1-51e188d8e8e5_2048x1365.jpeg

Oh, those with a prominent Neptune! I have it exactly conjunct the Midheaven and the North Node of the Moon. And in my helio chart I have Neptune Conjunct Venus as one leg of a Grand Trine of six planets. So, I am Neptune equipped for this life.

Neptune for me is complete immersion, like music and spiritual attunement, and like “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.” My dharma practice for many decades has been Mahamudra, which is nondual, and called non-meditation, again all about Neptune.

I almost forgot, Neptune is sometimes about letting go or even loss, and in my life, I have lost millions of dollars in one fell swoop. I hope this checks that box.

And dreams too. My lifetime motto and mantra, which I came up with, is “For Spirit Must Be Made to Matter.” We have to ground or root our dreams in experience and on top of that then be aware of what we are doing. It all goes around and around and comes out here.

For sure, I walk the edge and borderline of what makes sense, just north of what is called nonsense. That’s where I most live. It’s a little rarified for me, and smacks of what the Greek philosopher Parmenides said: “Being Alone Is,” yet it is so refreshing.

I don’t cater to those who ignore astrology. I only had to prove it to myself and I have done that. I am fluent in that language. As to the Dharma, I wish. Dharma is the most difficult topic I have ever tackled, yet also the most useful and pertinent.

So, yes, I have Neptune prominent in my natal charts.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Flame of Becoming

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 20, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5ec699c4-186e-45d0-ac4b-a2c30bf57680_4088x4480.jpeg

If we have no permanent being like a permanent “Soul” that flits from life to life, what kind of being do we have?

I am intrigued by the old phrase “What a becoming dress she wears.” The use of the word ‘becoming’ is significant here. Is what we call ‘being’ only ‘becoming’? Have we ever “been”, or at best we just have been becoming.

Yes — that single word “becoming” in the old English idiom is a luminous little trapdoor straight into the heart of the dharma.

“What a becoming dress she wears” once meant: “How perfectly it fits her, how suitable it makes her appear.” The dress doesn’t add a new, permanent “her”; it simply allows a certain graceful appearance to arise for a moment. Exactly so with us.

No permanent “Soul,” no fixed “Being”

Buddhism (and the Karma Kagyu lineage in particular) is uncompromising: there is no eternal, unchanging soul or self that travels from life to life like a passenger changing trains.

That idea is called ātman in the Indian traditions the Buddha rejected. Instead, what we conventionally call “I” or “you” is a mindstream ‘rgyud’ in Tibetan — a causal continuum of momentary consciousnesses, each arising dependently on the previous one, propelled by karma, craving, and ignorance.

Think of it like a flame passing from one candle to the next. The second flame is not the first flame, yet it is not unrelated; the heat, the wick, the oxygen continue the process. There is continuity without common identity.

That is why the Buddha spoke of punabbhava — “re-becoming” — rather than reincarnation of a soul.

Punabbhava (Pāli; Sanskrit: punarbhava) literally means “re-becoming” or “renewed existence” . It is the Buddhist term for rebirth, referring to the continuation of the consciousness-process across lifetimes due to karma, ignorance, and craving, rather than the reincarnation of a permanent soul.

The Pali and Sanskrit term for the crucial link in dependent origination is simply bhava : ‘ becoming’ .

So, the kind of “being” we have is not a noun at all. It is a verb. A process. A becoming.

“Have we never ‘been,’ but are only becoming?”

Yes — and this is where the old phrase becomes a profound teaching.

In relative truth, we have never been a fixed, solid entity that then starts becoming. From the first moment of conception to this present breath, what appears as “Michael” is an ever-shifting assembly of the five skandhas — form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness — arising and ceasing 6,480,000 times per day (if the old Abhidharma count is right). Every “I” you have ever felt was already a becoming, perfectly suited to the conditions of that instant, like a becoming dress.

Milarepa sings this over and over with heart rendering directness:

“Beings are merely names — In actuality they don’t exist at all.

“Nonexistent, and yet they appear.

“The mistake results from ignorant action — Attached to illusion they are beings,

“Freed from illusion they are buddhas.”

And in another song on transiency:

“This human body is a bag of filth and dirt;

Never be proud of it...

When I look back at my body,

It is like a bubble on water —

It may last a moment, but it will surely burst.”

Milarepa is not being poetic for poetry’s sake. He is pointing: the moment you stop grasping for a permanent “be-er,” you see that the whole display is already becoming — vivid, functional, and empty.

Ultimate truth: beyond both “being” and “becoming”

Here the Kagyu pith instructions leap beyond even the beautiful process-view. When you rest in the unborn mind (as we’ve been exploring through

Milarepa), even “becoming” is seen as an appearance within the ground that itself never became anything.

The ground never “was,” never “is,” never “will be.” It is *skye ba med pa* — unborn, unceasing, uncompounded.

So, the final answer is not a paradox but a direct taste:

- Conventionally: You are not a being who sometimes becomes; you are the becoming itself — a luminous, karmically conditioned flow, perfectly “becoming” in each moment like the dress that flatters its wearer.

Conventionally: You are not a being who sometimes becomes; you are the becoming itself — a luminous, karmically conditioned flow, perfectly “becoming” in each moment like the dress that flatters its wearer.

- Ultimately: There is no “you” that ever needed to become or to be. The unborn mind is already complete, and every apparent birth, life, and death is its playful, empty display.

Ultimately: There is no “you” that ever needed to become or to be. The unborn mind is already complete, and every apparent birth, life, and death is its playful, empty display.

That is why Milarepa could sing while his only pot shattered:

“This clay pot so important, the whole of my wealth, becomes my lama in the moment it breaks, Teaching impermanence — how amazing!”

The broken pot, the becoming dress, the appearing “I” — all equally perfect teachers.

We are urged to rest for one moment in that recognition. No need to become anything more. The mind that notices this right here is already the unborn mind itself, wearing the perfect dress of this very instant. It’s unborn, but wearing the cloak of this present moment.

It’s like ice melting in the ocean.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Life is but a Dream"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 22, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ca0b287e-ab1a-443b-8423-d3c7c4ed3260_2073x2058.jpeg

At last, we are faced with the difference between AI and reality, when by definition AI is already a part of our reality, albeit perhaps a real mind bender. And yet the straighter the line, the finer the curve. Everything comes around. And now this.

I didn't have trouble with this concept back in the 1970s and I don't have difficulty now. Nothing that exists is unreal, including AI. I have seen on the photography forums the weeping and gnashing of teeth as photographs and AI renderings merge until, eventually, we will be unable to know the difference. That is written in stone.

We have been trying to make everything real or 'authentic' for as long as at least modern history, and just the opposite has come upon us. We are beginning to realize that reality itself is just a dream we are having and is as artificial as AI and always has been. We are now realizing this through the advent of AI.

And as mentioned, this is because the whole universe is already unreal, like a dream. The greatest wise men and women have pointed this out for millennia. We are now getting it.

So, what is actually happening here, not only with AI, but simultaneously everywhere as well, is that we as humanity are waking up from this dream of the 'real'. After so many years of pushing the future forward, it has come all the way round until it is pointing at itself. We begin to see that reality is a torus. M.C. Escher pointed this out, and it has proliferated.

Our attempt at authenticity, at making our dreams real, has flipped. Instead, almost against our will, we are realizing that reality itself is but a dream. That dog won't hunt, as they say.

The dharma teachings do not say that the mind is a million years old, or aeons old, or whatever. Instead, what they do say is that the mind is 'Unborn', meaning the mind had no birth and will have no end. It just is and we with it, such as we are. How are we?

It can't be that the mind is eternally unborn, yet we are real, impermanent, born, die, and are reborn, again and again and again, forever, which is how we have imagined it.

If the unborn mind itself is empty, as the pith teachings say, and all appearances that arise around us are said to be the emptiness itself appearing, then just how and where do we humans with our dream of authenticity fit in?

Are we not also a product or byproduct of this unborn mind? However unnatural or ephemeral we may seem, are we not also part and parcel of all this creation?

Or are we just something like a foreign object, a cloud in an otherwise empty sky? The difference between samsara and nirvana is said to be nothing more than removing our attachments and reifications. Take those away and we have Nirvana.

This insecurity of not being permanent, yet still almost being. This absence of never actually 'being' confounds us, confounds me.

IMO, what is happening now, in our times, is that we are discovering that 'reality' is not real, no matter how hard we try to make it so, and we are starting to let go and all it to right itself, to as this old song tells:

"Row, Row, Row your boat,

Gently down the stream.

Merrily, Merrily, Merrily.

Life is but a dream"

[Midjourney graphics and graphics prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Weaving Samsara

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 23, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d62128b4-c93c-4da6-b5fe-f5b79a506ee4_1024x1024.jpeg

In this samsaric world we find ourselves in, we weave it together as we live.
We dream a dam to hold back what we have.

Just about every thought, word, and deed has a hook or catch to it that binds us closer to the cloth of life we weave.

Everything we weave is or draws a reaction that further binds us tightly. As long as we invite a reaction, challenge the future and hook into it, drawing it closer to the present moment. I am, of course, reminded of the classic dharma words of the great Mahasiddha Tilopa, what are called his “Words of Advice.”

Don’t Prolong the Past

Don’t Invite the Future

Don’t Alter the Present,

Just Relax, As It Is.

Only, as I have learned repeatedly with pith dharma teachings such as these, they are modified every time by our individual karma into something familiar to us, in this case to me.

I can’t expect that great dharma phrases like the above by Tilopa, are going to happen word by word to me. That’s not the case.

Instead, be prepared, and look for something somewhat familiar, but tailored just to us. It may take some time, but eventually we will recognize what is familiar to us. Our own will come to us. We will know it because it will be familiar as if we always knew it anyway.

I mentioned above that samsara is maintained by no one but us. How efficient. We weave samsara by day, and let it unravel in the night, but overall, it is woven tighter and tighter, unless...

And by ‘unless’ I mean the essence of the words of advice listed above of Tilopa, but with our twist on it.

Every thought and emotion we have ties us tighter to our future in samsara, and it's as subtle as we are.

If our every thought of the past has a hook to provoke a response that reels us in tighter or if our expectations, hopes, and dreams call the future to us. It is easy to see the hook, if we will look.

Just monitor each thought you think, examine it for something expected in return or tying us to our past or inviting the future, we will understand what Tilopa wrote.

It's like a garment or shroud that we ourselves weave, a cocoon that for us is like a sepulture, a casket or cloak we wrap around us with the thread of our thoughts, hopes, and dreams. We each do this.

Apparently, we have done this forever, and so samsara embraces and wraps us tight and for us it is the only home we have ever known.

If even for a short time, perhaps a day or part of a day, we examine each thought we think, each wish or hope we have, a memory we love, etc., being careful to separate out the hook we embed, we can see in this exercise what it will take to unwrap samsara and be liberated. For example:

If I say something with some expectation of a response, that's the hook I am speaking of. Or if I treasure the past this or that, again there is a hook. We are like the silkworm caterpillar that ever spins a cocoon of silk that is ever so strong.

Since this goes on all day, and perhaps even in our dreams, we are wrapped in samsara but with no outward sources than our own activity, our attachments, hopes, and expectations.

Like all pith dharma practice, it's not a matter of a day, week, or year. Once practiced, it becomes seamless and melds into consciousness itself. The goal is to unweave samsara until only nirvana remains.

The goal is not even "to reach nirvana" as if it were a distant shore. The goal is to stop building the boat that keeps rowing away from the shore we're already standing on.

This is a key dharma teaching.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"What a Tangled Web We Weave"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 24, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1e1618b4-ff6d-4218-a520-c354dc2adebb_1024x1024.jpeg

The operative words here are “We Weave.” Most of our thoughts, comments, and readings are leading, meaning they further bind us to samsara. Samsara does not have to ensnare us. We do all that work ourselves.

It is our karma, our attachments, likes, dislikes, etc., most often in the form of our Self that keep samsara going.

Instead, we could take the Mahasidha Tilopa’s “Words of Advice” and just not prolong the past, further tie us to our own history, but instead drop it without reference. It’s a prison where we are our own jailers.

Or we could do the same with our references to the future, not expect, not hope, and not invite the future, but also just drop it without reference.

And the same goes for this present moment, not monkey with it, not try to change, alter, and react to it. Again, just leave it be as it is.

“Leaving things be” is easier said than done. It reminds me of one of our dogs, years ago, who would come home with some dead birds or whatever in its mouth and just stand there grinning, and I would have to say sternly “DROP IT!”

Even a brief experiment on our part with not further tying ourselves to the past, present, and future will show in stark detail how we unconsciously weave ourselves deeper into the loom of samsara each and every day. The hard point to grasp is that we have NEVER known anything else, no matter how many rebirths we may have had. We have always been a child of Samsara.

Instead, just leave all that as it is, with no help from us to further mix and complicate samsara. Yes, it takes some vigilance on our part to keep from furthering our ties to samsara, yet even a short session of checking this out will leave us some peace and prove this works..

And I also have to do this myself here in these articles, not further complicate the complications of not responding to your lack of response.

Perhaps this explains to me why I need to examine my own reactions; less they have unwanted effects of their own.

There is no point in appealing to others, asking anything of them, or criticizing them for not responding; all are entanglements that further samsara's grip on us, of course, me included.

Instead, it's like writing in the sky, a bird flying in the air, leaving no trace to cling to or grasp at. That's the ticket.

The problem with continuing and further complicating samsara is that any attachment whatsoever binds us rather than liberates.

Liberating contact requires no contact at all, no friction whatsoever.

In this sense, our lips are sealed and secret, with no sign, signature, or mudra.

Or, as Tilopa said: "Relax, as it is." And the key to that is Tilopa's advice "...to not alter the present." Don't put our finger on the scale, that we may be frictionless, karma free, and thus fall away from any further attachment to samsara.

That is what the pith dharma teachings say and do, Liberate!

Clean and frictionless.

Like the old Memphis Jug Band song "Sugar Pudding."

"Keep your fingers off it, and don't you dare touch it, because you know it don't belong to you."

Purification

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

In For a Nickel, In For a Dime

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 25, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/69e776d3-ee18-47e4-9ce0-a4dfdfdbf1b2_1024x1024.jpeg

William Blake: “How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five? --“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.”

The dharma teachings do not say that the mind is a million years old, or eons old, or whatever. Instead, what they do say is that the mind is ‘Unborn’, meaning the mind had no birth and will have no end. It just is and we with it, such as we are. Are we?

It can’t be that the mind is eternally unborn, yet we are impermanent, born, die, and reborn, again and again and again, forever. Or so it seems.

If the unborn mind itself is empty, as the pith dharma teachings say, and all appearances that arise around us are said to be the emptiness itself appearing, then just how and where do we humans and all this samsara fit in?

Are we not also a product or byproduct of this unborn mind? However unnatural or ephemeral we may seem, are we not also part and parcel of all this creation?

Or are we just something like a foreign object, a cloud in an otherwise empty sky? The difference between samsara and nirvana is said to be nothing more than removing our attachments and reifications. Take those away and we have Nirvana.

The insecurity of not being permanent, yet still being, or should I say ‘becoming’. This absence of never actually ‘being’ confounds us, confounds me.

Yet how can this be? We are not arguing if we are eternal, but in what form and if it has our initials?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Khenpo Gangshar Wangpo

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 27, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3356cd89-b338-473f-93c8-99914d649bf1_1200x1803.jpeg

The particular take on Mahamudra meditation that my dharma teacher taught a number of times was first presented in Tibet around 1958, just before the diaspora in Tibet, the Chinese invasion of that country that sent Tibetans fleeing their homeland. This resulted in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism all over the globe.

The particular person who first taught this special teaching was Khenpo Gangshar Wangpo, an abbot from eastern Tibet. My teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche was there, on the spot, and heard this teaching from Khenpo Gangshar himself just prior to his own escape from Tibet.

There is no space here to properly describe Mahamudra meditation or Khenpo Gangshar's particular take on it, but I will post a short teaching by Khenpo Gangshar below. It is available for those interested in a book entitled "Vivid Awareness" by the Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche from Shambala Publications.

Here I will just try to communicate to you how precious and singular this particular teaching is. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche told two personal stories that might help to bring this home to you. The first story is about how Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche gained confidence in Khenpo Gangshar.

Khenpo Gangshar appeared at Thrangu Monastery, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's monastery, and all the monks there were struck by his presence. It was clear that Khenpo Gangshar was teaching from a rarified mental space and that he was singularly dedicated to sharing his insights with everyone present, both monks and lay people.

Khenpo Gangshar could see that the Chinese were about to invade Tibet and that there was no time for gradual or progressive methods to learn this particular dharma practice. Instead, he presented a direct method for gaining awareness, knowing that everyone in Tibet might need it very soon. He cut to the chase.

I asked Khenpo Rinpoche how he gained confidence in Khenpo Gangshar at the time and he told this story. One of the things Khenpo Gangshar did was to

take one of his personal robes and cut it into many small pieces, offering a piece to every monk present in the monastery, over 400 of them. He went around presenting these patches of cloth to everyone without exception.

My teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche thought to himself that it was the dharma teachings of Khenpo Gangshar that were most valuable, not the bit of cloth. And sure enough, Khenpo Gangshar gave every monk in the monastery a piece of cloth except Khenpo Karthar. He was the sole exception. This struck Rinpoche.

Then Rinpoche thought that, well, having a piece of cloth from such a high teacher might make a wonderful memento to keep. As soon as he thought that, Khenpo Gangshar gave Rinpoche a piece of the cloth. This was one reason Rinpoche gained confidence in Khenpo Gangshar. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche stated that after Khenpo Gangshar's teaching at that time, all the monks present were visibly changed, having seemingly become more compassionate and gentle. And there is more.

The great teacher Chögyam Trungpa was also present for these teaching by Khenpo Gangshar and considered him his main teacher. He personally told this story to my teacher concerning Khenpo Gangshar:

Khenpo Gangshar had been invited by Trungpa Rinpoche to teach at his monastery Surmang Dutsi Til in Kham (eastern Tibet), which he did. At one point Khenpo Gangshar became very ill and died. As is the Tibetan custom with high lamas, Khenpo Gangshar died in meditation posture and was left sitting in that posture for several days before disposing of his body. Often high lamas show signs of warmth and continued presence for a number of days following their death and a kind of vigil is kept.

Chogyam Trungpa kept such a vigil with the body of Khenpo Gangshar for several days, separated only by a very thin cloth curtain. Every once in a while, Trungpa Rinpoche would peek behind the curtain to see if the body of Khenpo Gangshar had collapsed from the meditation posture or was still in it. As mentioned this went on for some days.

At some point Trungpa noticed that a puff of air somehow moved the curtain, so he peeked behind the curtain to see what had happened to the corpse. At that moment the eyes of Khenpo Gangshar suddenly opened and there he was staring out at Trungpa. Khenpo Gangshar had come back to life.

Of course this was amazing. When he had regained consciousness Khenpo Gangshar described that after death, while in the bardo, he had been visited by two great lamas, including Jamgon Kongtrul the Great, who had inspired him with this particular Mahamudra teaching and told him to return to life

and share it with certain monks and others who needed to hear it at this time. And so, he did.

When Khenpo Gangshar returned, he was ablaze with fervor to share this particular concise or direct method of realization with all he encountered. And that is how he happened to travel to Thrangu Monastery where Khenpo Karthar was living at the time. Khenpo Gangshar traveled and taught this special Mahamudra teaching widely throughout Kham in eastern Tibet just before the Chinese invasion.

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche then explained that after some years, Khenpo Gangshar stopped giving this particular teaching and once again became the person he was before he first died. He did not mention the special teaching any longer. That is the story and this from my memory, so I hope I have not missed anything essential. Why relate this?

I share this with my Facebook dharma readers just to point out how very, very special this particular teaching was to hear. It not only was absolutely concise, but it was direct to the point of being almost incendiary. It condensed an enormous amount of dharma training or teaching into very few words, words that struck at the heart of confusion and made clear what each of us could do or have to do to become more aware – to wake up.

I won't attempt to paraphrase the teaching itself, only to say I have never experienced a teaching like it and I believe that many present would probably agree with me. It makes me want to wake up out of whatever confusion I am tolerating and just be present. That is about all I can say for now. Here is a short teaching of Khenpo Gangshar back in the late 1950s.

A Way of Settling into the Realization of Mind's Essence

by Khenpo Gangshar Wangpo

Within: Awareness should be unbridled and free.

Without: There shouldn't be any grasping at appearances.

In the absence of outer and inner, all is utterly transparent — To be free of like and dislike: how wonderful!

Distraction is simply mind; as are like and dislike, hope and fear, good and bad, and clean and dirty — whenever you experience them adhere to cause and effect, be careful, and keep a low profile.

Don't be frivolous or vulgar, but be in harmony with those around you, letting all emotions and attitudes of like and dislike be purified in their own space.

Measure yourself against the various stages of the path; see if you can bear sufferings such as illness, being undermined, and despised. To be unable to do so is to be ordinary, a sign you have not completed the path.

As such, you should supplicate the guru and yidam deity, receive empowerment and mix the guru's wisdom with your mind. Then relax, without any grasping, into that expanse, and remain without the slightest effort in an experience of utter relaxation — free and loose.

From time to time, contemplate the karmic law of cause and effect; take the suffering of others upon yourself, and offer whatever comfort and virtue you may have to others.

In the practice of the giving and taking of happiness and suffering, difficulty isn't to be rejected, nor comfort sought. Simply relax. To be without ideas of good and bad, or hope and fear, enables you to be joyful in any company, to be cheerful wherever you may find yourself — surely this is what it means to be truly happy!

The more precisely you adhere to cause and effect, the more your selfishness and self-grasping will diminish, and the more your obsession with pleasure and pain or desire and hatred will decline as well. To be altogether free from the fear of death is a sign that your efforts at practice have been worthwhile.

Essentially then, at all times and in all situations, do not contrive with the mind, but allow it to settle naturally; knowing this means you will never be apart from the experience of the dhātu .

These are the insane ramblings of Gangshar Wangpo. May you and I become inseparable and be of benefit to all.

[Khenpo Gangshar on the left, Chögyam Trungpa on the right.]

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Casting Spring

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 28, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a2312aa2-ecb7-478b-9ae4-afa7314a13ea_2048x1962.jpeg

I am once again reaching toward spring, although practically speaking spring is still in the future. Even at the spring equinox here in northern Michigan is not quite spring. Yes, we can start to go out on the sunny days and walk again, but it pretty much takes until May before it really gets warm around here, and even then, it sometimes snows.

Why don't I just move south and live there. There are reasons. Number one is we need to stay around our kids and grandkids. Number two, I don't like the muddy water in the streams and creeks down south. Number three I don't like the overgrowth on the forest floors. Where we live now there is little overgrowth and the woods are empty of it, almost like a cathedral. I believe the deer keep the growth down. And the winters here are harsh and long. No spring breezes until spring.

And there are other reasons. Add them all up and that's why we live up here in Michigan. I'm always waiting for something. LOL. For me, waiting is a way of life.

Of course, I have interests, the chief of which is the dharma itself. It's hard for me to find a dharma corner I have not ground down to where the rubber meets the road.

And I can only go so far before any forward dharma movement grinds to a halt, and I am just inching forward, waiting months to measure results. And these results are kind of biannual, Taking perhaps six month or longer to show or measure.

And for me the results of dharma practice are more like shifts, jolts, or minor avalanches, letting go of what has to be let go of. Things fall away, like snow falling off the roof as spring comes. I can feel my insides shedding history and I experience the increased clarity that results.

And so, right about now each year I cast about for whatever I can feel or sense. I search for meaningful conversations here and elsewhere and identify with those of you out there in a similar situation.

Spring promises sunshine, warmth, flowers, and the return of wildlife to the ponds, lakes, and marshes. Let's see how long I can appreciate and hang onto summer before it just is hot and I lose touch with it wake up to find myself measuring the advent of Autumn. And we cycle around again.

[Photo by me, one of the few plants I have inside until the spring flowers appear.]

EMAIL

Rinpoche's Remarks on Michael's Stroke

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 5, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b5bbd394-ad18-4bf8-898b-e5a551217d28_620x790.jpeg

My introduction to what is called “Recognition” of the nature of the Mind took place years ago. I’d love to tell you about it, yet here I am more interested in sharing what happens to us AFTER we get a glimpse as to how the mind actually works.

In my case this was further clarified when I had my major stroke, because that elicited a response from my dharma teacher of 36 years. And here is what Rinpoche said to me through a translator. He spoke no English. We did all our practice in Tibetan, so here are his words:

“Rinpoche said that a stroke can cause someone to lose their clarity of mind, but because Michael has had the experience of the recognition of the mind’s nature, when you say the experience of the stroke wiped out his sense of his own identity, perhaps that is a good thing because that may be a step toward the actual realization of the nature of the mind.

“It will be best if he can continue to meditate in a way where there are no thoughts of any kind and rest his mind in that.

“Although he has this experience [stroke], which is good, he should not then hope to maintain it, in hopes and fears... He should not have that. Although it is good to maintain, not to hope that you always have it or to be concerned that it goes away.

“Just whatever it is, that’s what it is. And just be what it is. That’s fine.

“Given his state of mind, maybe it’s better for him not to be with a lot of people and talk too much. It’s better if he stays alone. That would be better for him and as far as him not remembering words, Rinpoche has not had a real stroke, so he does not know really what it is like. There could be a variety of reasons for that to happen.

“Rinpoche said he himself didn’t have a full-fledged stroke, but he had many tiny strokes, many times. From his 60s to 70s he said maybe he had ten times, ten strokes. Each time was different, sometimes very tiny, hardly noticeable. Sometimes he would feel that... one time he felt that the leg was numb for many hours and there was one time where, maybe more than once, there was

one time when he saw in front of his eyes two bright white balls, white light balls and they became smaller and smaller and smaller. And he was conscious all that time...but he wasn't able to do anything... he was like frozen there or something like that.

"And then the retreat cook came and said, "Rinpoche what's happening to you...what's happened?" He could hear the voice but could not respond and that kind of woke him up from that state. And he felt the light globes had already become very, very tiny and they then began to grow bigger and bigger again, and he regained full mobility again. All this time he was conscious.

"Stroke is a very strange thing. But afterwards Rinpoche went to the doctor and the doctor couldn't really find anything wrong with Rinpoche. Usually, a stroke occurs when the blood for the head is cut off, but that didn't happen to Rinpoche.

"And so, Rinpoche's advice for Michael is that it is best if he stays alone, and not socialize with too many people, talk too much and try to do his meditation as much as he can.

"Rinpoche says Michael has already recognized the nature of his mind, and it was a good recognition, not a shallow one. And so, if he can maintain that and enhance that. Rinpoche does not know if he has attained realization because there is a huge difference between Recognition and Realization, but to foster that recognition it is important to always try to rest his mind in its own natural state.

"And even when he is taking a sip of tea or things like that, from moment to moment, there are moments when he can actually make use of them and rest his mind, and so, train in this way.

End of Rinpoche's quote.

Once we have recognized the nature of the mind and how it works, there is nothing beyond that but to work it, work the mind ourselves much like we would learn to drive a car. It's not a big thing, but on the other hand, it is a big thing, because it has to take place and happen before we can proceed.

The operative language is to extend and expand the initial recognition of the mind's nature so that it includes everything and anything. In other words, it is non-dualistic by definition. We have to be all in, so to speak, completely immersed. And until we know that immersion, but don't know what that is.

In my own case, what is called our Yidam, that particular or unique path to our enlightenment we each have, is precipitated by 'Recognition', whenever that takes hold, as to the mind and how it works, which means from the moment

of recognition of the mind, we begin and can work the mind. That then becomes our dharma practice, working with our mind. It is called meditation, or better put, non-meditations, like Mahamudra or Dzogchen..

And from that moment onward, that is what we do until we achieve 'Realization' as to the nature of the mind that we recognized, which then begins the path to actual enlightenment, and that may be lifetimes from now.

Recognition of the mind's nature is not like the finale at the end of the fireworks, either. It's more like when a newborn baby finally latches on to their mom's breast for the first time. It is pure familiarity and so natural. That familiarity is what until that point we have been unfamiliar with.

And with it we suddenly know exactly what to do, something we have never know up until that very moment. We see how to use and work the mind and we set about working it from then on. That's all we have to do because suddenly we see that's what we HAVE to do.

And in all the many pith dharma texts I have studied they state that we need a guide to recognize the mind's nature, much like in those old figure-ground illustrations where someone points out to us what we have not seen. Here is a simple one to give you an idea, only in Recognition as to the nature of the Mind, it is much more difficult.

[Figure/Ground image.]

EMAIL

Seamless

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 11, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/11defb11-a614-462c-bdad-8ad40c73562e_1024x1024.jpeg

I am of the persuasion that 'meaning' is the sense a word or concept makes. If it does not make sense, actually reach our senses, then we call it 'nonsense'. I am looking at the borderline between the abstract conceptual, words that are not grounded in senses, and what we could call the 'authentic', where the rubber meets the road. It makes sense.

Our thoughts either make sense or they are nonsense.

My personal interests run into the Vajrayana Tibetan dharma, such practices as Mahamudra and Dzogchen, which are not meditations, but rather non-meditations because they are non-dual, requiring on our part full immersion with no subject and object, and then somehow our reflecting on that immersion.

What interests me in particular is the transition between full immersion like in Mahamudra or Dzogchen which are non-meditations, where we are all in, so to speak, and then coming out of full immersion and reflecting conceptually on that full-immersion, which is no longer happening at that point because we are once again back in duality. That alternation, like dipping into eternity, is for me key.

How long can we be fully immersed? Is it just for a moment and we come out of it and reflect, and go right back into immersion again, like beads on a string or a rosary or a mala, a process that in time becomes seamless, so we go in and out and in and out constantly, tempering our normal dualistic view with the full immersion of the non-dualistic view, thus shaping our entire continuum. We sample from eternity something we can use and need in this present moment.

I question the duration spent in non-duality. Did the yogi Milarepa go into a cave and stay in a non-dual state for minutes, hours, months, or years. If so how and why. If we don't reflect, we have no knowledge on our own non-duality, so, in my experience, with moments meaning only we may merge.

My dharma teacher of 36 years, a very high Tibetan rinpoche, said a complete session could be as long as it takes to lift a teacup to the lips and take a sip. How does that fit in? That's all that I know.

It seems to me, from my own experience, that the difference between these two modes, duality and non-duality, merges until the 'seamless' quality is equally dominant. We are dualistic and non-dualistic at the same time.

In our dharma practice, it is not about 'clock time' initially but rather about the quality of recognition. In other words, while not a trance, this process is like a dream that is forgotten upon waking. However, we often remember something.

Our excursions into resting the mind in non-duality for a moment and then reflecting on that excursion, done again and again and again, eventually become seamless. Each excursion or dip into the waters of non-duality, when we return or reflect, carries with it some whiff of memory or tone that modifies the conscious dualistic-mind somewhat, enough to make a real difference. I do this all the time, although it's like walking a tightrope or crest of a cliff.

These short glimpses or excursions accumulate like training waves to recognize they're inseparable from the ocean. We train our dualistic mind. Our thoughts arise and dissolve like waves on water — dual in appearance, non-dual in essence. Eventually samsara and nirvana are experienced as one, where "seamless" means there is no boundary between the two. They exist simultaneously.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Resting in the Nature

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 12, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/031ce846-c4b9-466f-a5b7-f3eb956a5758_1024x1024.jpeg

In the many years and decades of dharma training I have had, at the end of each session of dharma practice, it was requested that we rest for a moment in the nature of the mind. Of course, I had no idea what the nature of the mind was and even less how to rest in it.

Yet of course I would pause and abandon myself to a brief rest for a moment or two. Nothing seemed to happen that I can remember, and I even felt a little foolish doing something I did not understand.

Looking back, I can understand that no harm is done attempting to rest for a moment that way, and at the same time I can't say much good came of it either. It was too soon to receive actual instruction on the nature of the mind, which brings me to the question:

Is there some easy way to help that state of resting come about, to prime the pump, so to speak, and begin to learn to rest in the mind's nature other than be told to.

It's not like whack-a-mole, where anything popped up for me to focus on because as to the nature of the mind, there is nothing to focus on that is obvious, other than it's not-obvious.

And I ask, as to the nature of the mind, at least according to the many pith texts I have studied, is there not something that we can encounter without having it pointed out to us. And so, trying that moment of rest all those years without actual instruction or other preparation was not obviously helpful. It may have been helpful, yet I am not aware of it. And so, what can we do to prepare for 'Recognition', our recognizing the nature of the mind.

One obvious thought is to begin to ground our tendency to conceptualize and think, by grounding those thoughts in actual raw experience, like where the tire meets the road – life and living.

Searching the mind 'correctly' is more like physical exercise, calisthenics, than some kind of abstract thinking. The mind is visceral, malleable, and needs to be made pliant. It is kneadable, like kneading pizza dough.

In other words, the mind is like a block of stiff clay that has to be worked until it is workable, made malleable, until it is compliant, accommodating, and flexible.

Of course, I have searched through the dharma literature trying to find what lineages say that is helpful in our recognizing the mind's nature. I call it the mathematics of words and meaning. Here are some suggestions:

In guided sessions, a lama might use "pointing-out instructions" recursively: "Look at the looker," leading to a loop that collapses duality.

Recursion here analogizes how dualistic grasping creates endless loops (endless samsara), but nondual recognition "short-circuits" the loop, revealing it as baseless. It's like a recursive algorithm that terminates not by force but by recognizing there's no "bottom" to regress to—pure openness.

Teachers like Tilopa (in Mahamudra) or Longchenpa (in Dzogchen) describe this as "self-knowing wisdom" — a recursive loop where subject and object collapse. In other words, in recursion waves are continually thrown back into the sea.

These practices emphasize effortless, non-conceptual recognition of the mind's innate clarity and emptiness, without dualistic striving (hence "non-meditation" — no meditator separate from the meditation).

Here's how recursion relates, drawing from philosophical analogies rather than strict equivalences (since recursion is a formal tool, while these are experiential realizations):

Again: "non-meditation" means there is no meditator separate from the meditation. Let that be your guide.

Initially, we have to recognize our own mind enough so that we can work with it. Up to now we have never done this. We assume the mind, just as it comes out of the box, is good to go and we have always just gone with the flow and have been swept down the stream of samsara.

By now, like a palindrome, with enough practice we can read the logic of language forward and backward. I'm not talking about the conceptuality of the mind that is known as "understanding", as in understanding concepts mentally. We can all do that.

When we can read ordinary language forward and backward, we have reached the limit of language, and have been led to the edge of non-duality where with some prompting, duality naturally collapses and we eventually are

dunked into non-duality like the dunk tank at the county fair. Here is some dharma advice from great teachers.

Machig Labdrön: “Alert, alert, yet relax, relax. This is a crucial point for the view in meditation.”

Khamtrul Rinpoche: “Whatever thoughts of subject or object arise, simply recognize them. Without grasping, relax in that state of awareness.”

Lama Yeshe: “When you seek the I in that way, then you—the I that is being sought—and the seeker you, both are dissolved. Subject and object both dissolve. That is the experience.”

Milarepa: “He who realizes the nature of his own mind knows that the mind itself is wisdom-awareness, and no longer makes the mistake of searching for Buddha from other sources. In fact, Buddha cannot be found by searching, so contemplate your own mind.”

Ani Tenzin Palmo: “What is a thought? Who is the thinker?... Once we really begin to examine this, this is what changes our internal landscape... Turn that attention inside.”

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche: “Rest the mind naturally and in a relaxed way. Within that state of relaxation look nakedly and vividly at the mind... There is nothing in this that needs to be removed. There is nothing that needs to be added to this.”

Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso: “When one realizes this nature of mind that is the awareness and the expanse undifferentiable, then all conceptual fabrications are pacified.”

Lama Lodu Rinpoche: “The point is to remain in the absolute nature, where there is no such thing as a meditator, an object of meditation, or an act of meditating.”

Thich Nhat Hanh (influencing Mahamudra views): “There is nothing to do, nothing to realize, no program, no agenda... We already have everything we are looking for... Aimlessness and nirvana are one.”

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: “In the pure Dzogchen view, there is no such thing as a problem. When a thought or feeling or sensation arises it is left as it is... The practitioner does not relate to what arises as an object of a subject who must deal with it. It just is—and then it is not.”

That should give you something to meditate on.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Circus and the Sideshow

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 13, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b1591587-132e-402e-9791-9a0a033f67ba_6000x4000.jpeg

My first dharma teacher using a circus theme would often say to me:

“Michael, if you spend all your time in the sideshow, the main tent will be gone.” I never forget that.

Another walk this afternoon, with a high of 61 degrees F. The road we walked was filled with ruts that often were too muddy to walk through, so we had to tread along the edges. Meanwhile, back at home I am running all day copies of the Erlewine Astro Archive and sending them out to the various institutions --a terabyte of astrological data.

At the same time, we are starting to walk more often when the temperature will allow it and strengthen what we used to call our ‘zoo legs’ which with kids we had to do to get them ready for all day at the zoo, which they loved.

It is odd to come back home and not have a list of things that I have to do. Instead, it is more like things that need to be done around the house. I can do that.

And I’m not used to the empty space with nothing to do. I usually pack my day with busyness until there is not pinhole of light. I see how this will be a challenge, just resting for its own sake, my need to further let go. We can’t ‘try’ to rest.

And I challenge the role of meaning in my life. Devaluing the whole concept of ‘meaning’, instead of ramping it up or assuming that meaning means something in itself. De-entertainment instead of ramping up interests (and then being immersed in them) to further lose myself. De-escalation, scaling back, helping things to pass, rather than highlighting and pumping them up.

I get the philosophy; I just have to do it.

Entertainment as constant distraction from resting in the sheer emptiness of the mind is what I’m pointing at here.

Before I can rest in the nature of the mind, I first have to clear away all the debris I have accumulated around me in this life, although the dharma teaching say I have from many lifetimes. And that’s hard to do because I have

to learn as I go how to do this. It's also true that samsara is the only cover I know, and I am used to taking refuge in it. Samsara is the only home I have ever had. And we are all in that same boat.

Exposing myself to the bright light of the mind can be traumatic and even a glimpse blinds me and can send me scurrying back to the familiar shadows of samsara and my keeping busy and constantly entertained.

As mentioned, we all face this problem and there is no time like the present to make a start at divesting ourselves of what is mere entertainment, being busy for busyness sake, along with our accumulating interests, attachments, and dislikes.

Clear the slate.

Don't lean to the left or right, meaning do not accept the friction of clinging to the past or the friction of hoping and expecting the future. Equally, don't monkey with this present moment. Just relax, As It Is.

Easier said than done.

The major problem in doing all this is we don't know how and also that only we can do this. No one can do it for us, and it will sit there just as it always has until we get around to doing it. It could be eons.

The Dharma is a do-it-yourself project. All of the great yogis, gurus, dharma saints, over the centuries cannot but point out to us their suggestions as to what we can do to help ourselves, but they cannot help us directly because we each have to turn the wheel of our own dharma as we can and will. It waits on us.

Trying to coordinate this unending process is what dharma training is all about, at least in my experience.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Throwing Waves Back in the Ocean

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 14, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/90d6c05d-56ac-443b-b553-39726ba8a5f8_1024x1024.jpeg

I was with my dharma teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, the abbot of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, for 36 years until at 96 he passed on. Rinpoche never (or seldom) told anyone what to do.

I used to wonder why Rinpoche never had anything in particular that he wanted me to do. Yet he didn't, other than my dharma practice, of course.

Then one time when I was having my yearly interview, Rinpoche suddenly but casually moved his hand and showed how he was saying mantras and moving beads while he was talking to me, and simply said that I might find something like a wrist mala helpful. That's all he said.

Yet I always took anything Rinpoche said to heart almost like a command. I immediately made myself a small wrist mala and used it. I am still using it today, many years later.

And I find myself using it at the oddest times, with my hand in my pocket, moving from bead to bead, like standing in line at the grocery store, or when I am engaged in conversations here and there.

I find that moving the beads around on a wrist mala distracts me from whatever distraction I am in and clarifies the mind. The beads are moving, but by mind is clear and calm.

We all have the equivalent of what used to be called 'worry beads', something that we use to distract us from our own distractions.

However, in recent years, this has kind of changed. Today, instead of a wrist mala (which I still carry), the English language itself has become my chosen worry-beads, and language functions much like a rosary or what we dharma practitioners call a mala used to, but in this case I have a string of words instead of beads, words which I work, arrange and rearrange, into a seamless immersive stream of non-duality that like writing in the sky or writing on water, writes messages in the emptiness of the mind.

It's not that I try to write poems, but that I arrange and rearrange words until they naturally fall into place and don't require further alteration. I mix my words with the stuff of eternity, the mind itself.

This present moment, what we call 'NOW', itself is a deep well of awareness that is serviced by these endless arrangements and rearrangements of words until they point beyond distractions as well as meanings directly at the unborn mind... placing, placing, placing, again and again, an awareness of awareness itself, and by that, throw the waves of the mind back into the ocean.

When there is nothing left to do but housework, we know we are getting somewhere.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Alchemy of Reaction

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 17, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/97541495-98db-4f57-a209-f50a606ab8d1_1024x1024.jpeg

By Michael Erlewine

We are all too often the victims of our own words and intellectual concepts, trying to make sense and meaning out of understanding the abstract, what does not make enough sense.

For most, often “meaning” is a step beyond simply what we think, ‘understanding’, what words refer to as pointers. For many of us, it is all about meaning. We search for ‘meaning’, and it could even be said that we live for meaning, like “What’s the meaning of life” and thoughts like that.

And I believe what is not understood is that ‘meaning’ is viscous, it can have a shape and feeling and seems to satisfy only up to the point where it stalls out and leaves us grasping for completion, which is a simple mistake. There is no completion any more than there is an end to eternity or the unborn. Whatever we call this, life is an ongoing process.

In a flash, we are right back to the question of our being. Is our being becoming, and has it ever just been permanent, or what?

They say all roads lead to Rome, and in this case all thoughts eventually lead to full immersion, taking any duality (which is all we have, subject and object) and reducing it to the non-duality it actually is a part of. “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea,” as the poet wrote.

So much for parsing anything.

Everything has to be reduced to what contains or embraces it, the whole that contains all the parts. This is where “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea” comes in.

And this is why in the more advanced dharma-training, we are interested in non-meditation, in letting go rather than doing more of anything, helping things to pass rather than adding more on to our plate.

However, the process of unpacking what we have packed so tightly and for so long is not a walk in the park. It requires our complete attention, and it takes time, and a long while at that.

And as much as we may hate practicing, we have to find a way to accomplish this that does not require further effort, trying too hard, because undue effort stains our mindstream.

I have found such a way to do this. It is most efficient because it uses only our involuntary reactions to teach us. There are no wasted efforts and no need to set a special time aside for any spiritual practice. It is this simple:

Just be aware of your own reactions, especially when you are startled and find yourself knee-jerk reacting spontaneously. It could be the loud exhaust bang of a car, the telephone ringing, door slamming, what-have-you?

When you are aware that you have reacted, simply take note of your reaction, own it as your reaction no matter what or who caused it, and then drop it. Don't get on a train of thought and ride it all day.

For instance, someone says something that hurts our feelings. We react, and then we spend days trying to figure out what they meant by whatever they said. Don't do that. Just note it, own it, and drop it. Go on with your life.

And this also happens in a smaller way thousands of times a day with micro-reactions. You don't like the tie I am wearing, or the color of her skirt, and that is a micro-reaction. We do this all day long and we can also just stop doing that too.

If you do this for a while, monitor our reactions, and become increasingly aware of our own reactions, this is a very powerful dharma practice. Soon we will replace reacting with whatever appropriate response works for us.

The beauty is that this practice does not require a special time or a particular practice. It is fueled only by our own reactions, so we have already paid for the energy involved by involuntarily reacting. And we can do it all day and all night long and it adds up.

Given a few months of practicing this and you will learn to respond appropriately instead of involuntarily and have gotten a huge amount of energy back to do other things with. And best of all you will understand through actual experience how to begin to work with your mind.

I presented this technique to Rinpoche, my dharma teacher for 36 years, and our sangha. Rinpoche said that this reaction practice was a legitimate dharma practice. If you would like to read more about this practice, here is a free e-Book.

“Tong-Len: The Alchemy of Reaction”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Tong-len%20-%20Second%20Edition.pdf>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Inside Boredom

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 18, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cc51c6e6-c869-4089-a71f-bd148f283877_1024x1024.jpeg

Perhaps this is a little off the beaten path, but this is a thorn in my side, something ever on my mind that's got me whistling in the dark about my very busyness, always making sure that I am entertained by the exclusion of anything that detracts from my interests, for example, being interrupted by boredom. I steer clear of boredom if I can. Yet, that is changing.

Yet, what is behind the door of boredom that I so faithfully ignore or avoid it? Do you ever wonder?

It took me most of my life to come around to realize that busy is as busy does, and that my own interest in 'interest' itself was perhaps to a marked degree misplaced. That was a shock.

I was proud of my many interests and how I focused on and could double down on them, concentrating, and undistracted from anything else. As mentioned, it took until late in life for me to realize that by narrowing the focus to my interests, I was ignoring most of anything else.

It was then that it occurred to me that boredom, those times when I was not busy, were not holes in my life to ignore, but rather these gaps were portals beyond the confines of Samsara itself, moments of opportunity and not something to be avoided or dreaded.

I began to investigate those few times of boredom that I encountered. What actually were these? What did they hide or portend? And what I found was that these boring times were opportunities when I was NOT fixated and wrapped in my own busyness or interests, and they were somewhat rare at that.

They were times of rest from my constant fixation on whatever I am interested in.

Embracing boredom instead of doing everything to avoid being bored was refreshing, exhilarating, and something I knew next to nothing about.

The takeaway was that all my busyness and dedicated interest was something to let go of and not continue with, except perhaps in moderation. And over

time I came to view my interest more as a warning flag, ignorance on my part, rather than something to be proud of and celebrate. Busyness was a sign of my allegiance to Samsara.

And so, I ratcheted my busyness back and I realized that whole shtick of interest was something I needed to let go of. And so, I am working on that.

Of course, I continue with those things I love to do, only armed with awareness and the caveat that I am narrowing my view, not expanding it. Interest is perhaps to dip into rather than to dwell in as I had done for all these years. Let me put this another way:

INTO THE BOREDOM If I look around for a place to go and find rest in this life, I come up with a bunch of 'been there, done that' memories and there is not much rest in any of them. Perhaps this is why the great meditators dig deep and go where no one else goes, inward or somewhere. But where and how, I don't know and won't know unless I go there myself. I've been looking at this for a long while, kind of hovering on the brink. considering. And for me, as mentioned, it's a question of not knowing where to go and how to get there; As mentioned, my guess is that's where deeper meditation can be found.

For one, the rest I'm looking for is not in the past or the future; tried both of those, and so that leaves the present moment, the ever-present moment. How do we rest in the split second between the future and the past, that infinitesimally short micro-second. And if we do, what's there to do there? Actually, we can't 'do' anything because the effort to do itself clouds the present moment. This leaves us the sole option of allowing ourselves to rest this moment, in the pure awareness that can be found here and now, by taking rest in the present moment. Yet, resting in the present can be challenging because I don't know just how to do that and how it differs from just the boredom of having no entertainment at all, which few of us are used to or like. It seems to me that I am addicted to being busily entertained just about all the time. Samsara runs a tight ship. And I find that there is a fine line between boredom, being bored, and just nothing at all but confronting the awareness behind boredom, and so the approach here is a delicate balance, a kind of tippy-toe or tightrope act between the two, boredom and the awareness I believe is behind it. In other words, I must thread the needle, and the needle here is very fine. It's easy to get off-balance, miss the point entirely, and end up once again in the familiar boredom. Start over. Or another way to put this is that there is an open door, but one that is very hard to find and enable, at least for me. Boredom has been the guardian on the threshold all my life and getting past or through it is not all that easy. And my own avoidance of sheer boredom turns me back from that doorway every

time. Yet at the door of boredom I stand, trying to investigate it. I intuitively know this is the path forward. Therefore, I have found that I have to have a very gentle approach, learn to open up the boredom a little at a time, and then rest in that widening gap without slipping into the boredom end of things and being bored as I have fought against all my life. Given time, practice, patience, and gentle pushing, the boredom gives way to reveal the awareness behind it, and we can rest there. I am doing it. In other words, at least for me, boredom is like a ring pass-not, one of many that keep me pent up in Samsara because it is too painful to confront it head on — that boredom I avoid and have always avoided. Because of this, Samsara remains like a closed book, with no obvious doors or windows, and no easy way out or through. Otherwise, we all would have been out of Samsara years and lifetimes ago. Yet here I hover at the edge. In summary, searching for and opening the hidden gaps or windows in Samsara takes time and a certain daring on my part. Forcing things won't help but letting go and relaxing can enable access to the true nature of the mind. What first appears as boredom can gradually give way to an opening or gap into a pure awareness and that awareness does not seem to be a part of Samsara, as I understand it, because it is non-dual. And samsara is all about duality, me against the world. The secret here is that I have to actually go there and experience it for myself. No amount of thinking, speculating, or expectation about it will help. In fact, the secret of dharma (at least for me) is to not think or intellectualize, but instead to go and directly experience the mind for myself, look and search through it physically, viscerally, delving with my hands and feet into the nature of the mind, even if I first don't know what I am doing. It's the old Shakspearian "To Be or Not to Be," the only way to stretch or exercise the mind and by that gain actual experience, and by continuing to experience whatever we can until by sorting itself out, we become familiar with the mind and its nature — familiar with how it works.

In Dharma training, that is the imperative.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Appearances Appearing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 19, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8b12a310-c303-4e97-bea1-e9979d22b730_2034x2048.jpeg

The path of a bird flying across the evening sky leaves no trail or track, nor does writing our name in water. This whole idea of impermanence is always there. How can we live with that hanging over us? I have no idea, but apparently, we can. No choice.

It's the 'apparently' I am looking at here, what we call appearances. The pith dharma texts say that appearance, all appearances, are empty of permanent existence. Not only that, but all appearances are said to be the emptiness itself arising, the 'emptiness dancing' as some poets put it. Our own bodies included.

Apparently, appearances appear. Just look around. That's the dream we are engaged in and always have been. Real enough for me, but one that is hard to wake up from, because I haven't managed it yet, to wake up fully, not ever, in this life or, as the dharma states, in innumerable lifetimes up until now.

I hear those words, of course, but wake up I can't seem to. I shake my head, but I'm still right here in this dream we call life and not aware of much of anything beyond that.

Well, if I can't just snap my fingers and wake up, what can I do about this situation that 'apparently' I am not even aware of?

'Apparently', according to the dharma texts, it is samsara that I can't wake up from, this cyclical world of ups, downs, and arounds we are habituated to. That's a problem, the fact that I don't feel that uncomfortable in Samsara, so no escape is needed when seemingly nothing or little binds. Perhaps I have to let go of 'letting go'. Of course, just wait awhile and I could change my view.

Some say that Samsara is mind insisting on separation, duality.

Whatever the case, in dharma we keep polishing until nothing is left but the mirror's reflection, reflecting nothing.

We have to 'look' without eyes and 'know' without a knower.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Driving the Mind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 25, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ef962406-f4b4-4740-a37f-8e6baa20b434_2048x2048.jpeg

My Dharma teacher for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, said this:

“The point being made by the Buddha here is that you are never going to find this true nature of the mind unless you look for it. It is not enough to simply meditate. It is not enough to simply rest in a state of tranquility. You have to actually look at your mind to find its nature. You have to examine it, scrutinize it, and search.”

Unfortunately, it took me many years to understand, experience, and realize what Khenpo Rinpoche pointed out here.

Rinpoche did not mean “Think about it” or conceptually understand his words. Not even close. Vacuous conceptual understanding of words is what we do. We did this lifetimes ago according to the dharma teachings. ‘Understanding’ is always dualistic and from a distance, standing back, with subject and object.

Rinpoche meant dive-in and fully immerse in a gut-based search of our mind. Feel it out, knead the mind like we would pizza dough, experience it viciously and get to know it. The whole point is familiarity, becoming familiar (up, down, in, and out) with our own mind the same way we learn to drive a car, by experiencing it long enough until we can drive it. Same with the mind. We need to be in the driver’s seat, fully immersed, and working the mind.

You can’t drive a car without getting in it, immersed in it, and it is the same with working the mind. We can’t do it without full immersion. However, to do that means exercising the mind until we can drive it like we drive a car. Get in there and search around. Swim and thrash in it. We must make the mind pliable enough that we can work it from them on.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

One Instant at a Time

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 25, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0a7d4bd1-1ec5-4a48-8e5a-2d4d6310b3ee_1024x1024.jpeg

My Dharma teacher for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, said this:

“The idea of “an instant” and the idea of resting are not exclusive, because the instant does not mean only for one instant. It means one instant at a time. You must rest in the present instant or the present moment. If you do not rest in the present moment right now, then you are not going to be able to rest in a second moment or a third. However, once you rest in a single moment, then you can rest for a second moment or a third.”

The above seems simple enough, but trust me, that paragraph contains much of what each of us needs to know from experience. We are all waiting for that first moment when we rest in the nature of the mind and if you have any doubt, it is yet to happen.

And as Rinpoche points out, until that first moment of Insight Meditation, when you are resting in non-duality, you have no idea what that experience and its realization is about. You may ‘think’ you do, but you don’t. We think about a lot of things that we don’t know.

My first dharma teacher would say: “Don’t say nobody knows;” just say “I don’t know.”

As for Rinpoche’s mention of the present moment and a second and a third, this is important. Once you have attained Insight Meditation (Vipassana of the Mahamudra variety, that is a breakthrough. Having done that, you can do a second, a third, etc. time. You have the experience and you know how. And you will want to because that breakthrough is so unique and refreshing.

From that first moment onward, you will invoke Insight Meditation, again and again, alternating between immersion in nonduality for a moment, and reflecting on the immersion (duality) a moment later, over and over.

In time, this process becomes seamless, like a porthole into eternity. Is this enlightenment? No, but it is a path in that direction.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

One Taste

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 26, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ebd9a430-a75b-49da-9fbb-050a6b7e8872_1024x1024.jpeg

My Dharma teacher for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, said this:

“It would be better for you to increase the number of occasions – the number of times – you look at the mind, rather than try to stretch them out individually.”

Here is a key piece of advice from Rinpoche. As for resting in the nature of the mind for a second, five minutes, an hour, a day, or a month – not so likely. It’s not like that. You will be lucky to rest in the true nature of the mind for even a single moment. Try it.

Your mind will remain quite ordinary.

I am not talking about holding your breath, holding still for a second, letting go for a millisecond. Here Rinpoche is speaking about looking (and seeing) the true nature of the mind for the first time.

This only happens once and the lama who manages to point out the nature of the mind to us is called our Tsawai Lama or Root Guru, because it was through their instructions that we first saw the nature of the mind. And so, it is not just our resting in the nature of the mind like we watch a movie rest, but that first and initial Recognition on our part as to the nature of the mind and how it works. That only happens once.

We are talking about complete immersion in what is called Insight Meditation (Vipassana) to the exclusion of subject and object awareness for the first time. The recognition is unforgettable because it marks when we first grasp how the mind works and from that time forward, we begin to work it ourselves.

What’s hard for me to describe is how benign that initial ‘Recognition’ insight is. This is perhaps because by definition it is non-dual, meaning there is no subject and object involved.

The subject, like our Self, is completely immersed, so there is no thinking, no one to be attached and nothing to be attached to, because we are not ‘seeing’ anything. We are feeling and experiencing something we have never consciously experienced before. We are aware of the awareness itself for the

first time, AND it does not go away. More addictive than any drug could be, it is liberating.

Once recognized, the nature of the mind unfolds until what is called 'One Taste' prevails.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Words of Advice

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 27, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/309fd937-5e08-4fd2-9396-114e4c40152b_1024x1024.jpeg

My Dharma teacher for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, said this:

“By first recognizing your mind’s nature authentically and then cultivating that recognition through gradual and progressive familiarization, you will definitely achieve unsurpassable awakening. However, if you do not work with your initial recognition through gradual familiarization, by itself the mere recognition of your mind’s nature through it being pointed out and so forth will not lead to unsurpassable awakening. This is because, if you abandon it, it will dissipate. Samsaric habit will not be overcome and you will be no different from someone who never recognized it in the first place.”

There is a path that once undertaken has no end, not that this is not true whichever way we go, up or down. What I feel is not made clear is that with the recognition of the true nature of the mind comes the energy and insight to keep us going.

I can’t imagine doing anything other than expand and extend whatever original recognition I’ve had further and farther.

The nondual state of immersion in the immediate moment is so engaging, so striking and rewarding that doing otherwise makes no sense. The very last words my dharma teacher of 36 years said to me were to keep expanding and extending my recognition and familiarization of the nature of the mind.

When you achieve ‘Recognition’ you will know, it without a doubt. If you have doubts, you have not had it yet.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Falling Off My High Horse

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 28, 2026

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a4ddda54-6ab5-4027-bb14-139083a6a7e3_1024x1024.jpeg

My Dharma teacher for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, said this:

“As far as practicing this or working with this is concerned, it does not involve meditation on anything whatsoever. There is no object of meditation in the practice of Mahamudra because it is simply your mind becoming more familiar with itself, with its own nature. We use the term “practice Mahamudra” simply to refer to that.”

Why it is so difficult I can't say. However, apparently it is more difficult than threading the finest, finest needle. In fact, innumerable pith dharma teachings say that without an authentic guru to point it out to us, we will never be able to recognize that nature of our mind by ourselves. I'm not saying that. The pith texts say that.

In my own case, I was not able to experience this without the guidance of my lama and guru, try as I might. As they say, trying does not do it, doing does it. And there IS a transition involved.

I imagine that the transition is enabled differently by different ones of us, so there probably is no one rule that serves all. In fact, the whole event is a journey that also takes time, although perhaps for some it does not. In my case, that path was twofold.

The first step for me was having the nature of the mind pointed out to me by an authentic guru. I had that happen a number of times, but for some reason I was unable to grasp it.

This even involved one of the Heart Sons of the 16 th Karma, a very high Rinpoche, taking me into a room, sitting me on a chair and with his face only inches from my own, pointing out the nature of the mind. To my chagrin, and at the time shame, I just could not get it. I had finally to get up, and with my head hanging down, walk out of the room.

Then some years later, at a 10-day Mahamudra intensive, I again received the pointing out instructions from my own root guru, again I did not recognize the nature of my mind, yet I did understand what I had been doing wrong up to then.

And when I left that Mahamudra intensive and drove the 800 miles back home with my new understanding, I did three years of very intensive practice based around what I learned.

And after those years of special practice, thanks to a very upsetting series of events in my personal life that knocked me off of my high horse, and brought me down to the ground, I managed to punch a hole in the sky of my mind and slipped through. That was Recognition.

Yet it took years more practice before I was able to extend and expand my recognition to where I could do it at will. Like the song sung by the bluesman Freddie King "Tore Down."

"Well, I'm tore down I'm almost level with the ground.

"Well, I'm tore down I'm almost level with the ground.

"Well, I feel like this When my baby can't be found

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL