

Spirit Grooves Archive

Miscellaneous Writings — Book Two

Articles 101–200

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.)

I Get Help!	6
What Patience Dictates	8
Beyond the Spin Factor	11
Folk Music Hero	13
Rounding the Curve	18
Hands On	20
Out and About	22
Hearing Cannot Be Heard,The Finder Never found	24
Heart Song	27
Two In One: Inclusion	28
Solar Engulphment	31
Getting Where I Want to Go	32
Finishing Up	34
The Great Divide is a Reflection	35
Failing Successfully	37
Organized Religion	39
Spiritual Physics	40
Garden Considerations	41
Gardening for the Soul	43
Elvis Never Left the Building	45
In the Moment	46
Rest Now	47
How the Self is Consumed	48
A Moveable Feast	49
Showy Orchid	50
Strawberries Forever	51
On Second Thought...	52
Tangled Up in Now	54

Heat Wave	56
Treading Water	58
Un-Reify -- Non-Reification	60
Happy Independence Day	63
Family Weekend	64
Ann Arbor Art Fair Coming	65
It Came to Pass...	66
Better Than 1000 Words	68
Adventures with Hasselblad	69
"And It's Hot Out Too!"	75
An Internal Landslide: Wait for the Smoke to Clear	76
Siddhas and Siddis	78
Groundhog Day	80
Scratching the Itch	81
The Now Legendary Hasselblad XCD 21mm F/3.5	83
"I Want To Be In that Number"	86
A Tribute to the Hoxeyville Music Festival	88
Touch Me If You Are!	90
Spacewalk	92
Garden-All	94
Let It Go, Let It Go, Let It Go	95
Two Photographic Tales	97
Learning to Fail Succesfully	100
Michigan Music: A Welspring	102
Common Sense	104
Work with the Problem at Hand	105
Heat, the Last Hurrah	106
Shear Winds	108
Let's Get Physical	110
Peter Grams: Master Craftsman	112
Nam-Tö-Se (Perfection of Generosity)	114
Knock On Wood...	116

Blow Out the Candle	117
Night-Blooming Cereus.....	119
Take Note, Own it, Drop It	120
Toothpast and the Tuber.....	122
Toothpaste and the Tube	124
The Earthwork Harvest Gathering.....	126
Celbrating the Rising of the Sun	128
The Razor's Edge	130
The Point to Life.....	133
May Erlewine: East-Coast Tour	135
FORTHCOMING BOOK ON CONCERT POSTER ARTIST GARY GRIMSHAW	136
The Strongest Solar Flare Yet	138
Down the Drain.....	140
Looking at Flares from Both Sides.....	143
Solar Flares: Immediate Response	145
Still Movement	147
Here We Are.....	149
Hobby Horse	150
The Hasselblad Experience.....	153
Rush Hour.....	161
These Days	163
À La Carte.....	165
We Can't Changes What We Don't Accept	167
The Eye of the Flame	168
REAL ESTATE : 3-Card Monte.....	170
The Speed of Light	172
America Be Vigilant	174
Work the Problem	175
The Bodily Divide.....	178
Minding My Own Business.....	180
Round Robin	181
MAY ERLEWINE IN COLORADO: THREE TUNES	183

The Worm Turns ... 184

Rain Dance: Birth of Alternative Culture 186

Eating for Life 188

Kanji or Porridge 191

Nothing Doing 192

Happy Thanksgiving! 193

The Exercise Room 194

The Afflictions 196

I Get Help!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/72f2216b-69c7-4fa0-96f2-06ad46cf7ca7_1365x2048.jpeg

To my surprise, out of the blue came a Norwegian programmer, photographer, and entrepreneur to my rescue. Trond W. Andersen, like myself is an entrepreneur, a skilled photographer, and also a programmer. Sounds familiar.

Anderson has been following my blog on Facebook from time to time and can see I need help with the huge photography task I am knee-deep in and has offered to help me build some programming tools.

Although I'm a programmer, I have not had any programming system on my computer for some years now. Trond knows the programming language 'Python' and uses it with the help of ChatGPT.

We are going to install Python on my computer and Anderson will build some tools to help me wade through some million computer photos I have and drill down to the best of what I have to donate to the Ann Arbor Public Library system, so that these photos can be available and free to all comers for the foreseeable future.

We had our first Zoom conference on the project this morning. Andersson is a professional photographer, providing a select group of international clientele with precise photographs of jewelry, precious jewels and gemstones.

He first found some of my posts in photography forums, if I understand him correctly, and has been reading some of my articles on lenses and photography.

Anderson has volunteered his service to help me master this photo project I am in the middle of, designing tools to make my work easier.

I am also interested in further Zoom calls for Anderson to talk about lenses and I am interested in the kind of lighting techniques needed to shield the photography of jewelry from unwanted highlights.

I'm used to donating my materials to others, but was delighted to find someone offering to lend me a hand on this photo project and help get it done.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

What Patience Dictates

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 20, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/54026de9-584c-443f-9656-30f71fb8cc1d_1024x1024.jpeg

I can offer a brief update as to where I'm at this moment. Definitely, I'm in the bowels of the beast so to speak. I will start with what I have done.

I have gathered many, perhaps even most, photos, provided I point out I have not gone deep into the past, where back then my idea of photography was producing top-quality nature photos for field guides. I still have to look at that.

And when I say 'gather' I mean like with a sieve, and I'm sure lots of good images splash out and will need to be searched out when time permits.

I have over 80 large hard drives, most are half a terabyte or larger in size. These need to be looked at and through but this will take an incredible amount of time.

I do have a large notebook full of the directory-contents of these drives, yet right now I am full up and then some.

In these last days, I gathered, as they say, the low-hanging fruit, which amounted to roughly 30,000 photos.

These are very large files, some of them 300 MB a file. And the problem became how do I take 30,000 files and organize them? And how do I want them organized?

Ultimately, I want there to be maybe 70 or so small collections available to online users, for example a group of Cyclamen photos, a group of Gerbera photos, and so on.

Yet, they were shot in hundreds and hundreds of photo-shoots taken all those years, and the most data I have on each photo is what lenses made this or that shot, and for the very early ones, I don't even have that.

So, the first task was to assemble all these photos, just gathering the results day by day for many years. Since I do a lot of stacking focus, this requires for each finished photo up to 200 or more individual frames. These are put away and no longer used.

Taking these resulting individual TIF files, each one very large, and gathering them all into a single place, which I did, I soon found that my computer, even though it is powerful, could not easily move around 30,000 large TIF files. It slowed to a crawl and then stopped allowing me to rate, label, or keyword these files.

To combat this, I had to break up the 30,000 large files into 10 directories each with a bunch of the photos. And further, I then had to create proxies, files in lower resolution and also no longer TIF files, but now the conventional JPG, each about 2048 pixels in size when many of the newer photos were 11,656 pixels on the long size.

I also received valuable help from expert photographer and friend Lloyd Chabers, for which I am appreciative.

And so, once I was working with these smaller proxy files, it was easier (but still a mess) to dig through, but more possible.

Now, I had to go through all these photos and remove the duplicates and rate them. That took many days.

Next I had to give each photo a label, the name of the group this photo belonged to, like....Tulip, Calla Lilly, Night Blooming Cereus, etc. I finished that this morning.

Next and most recently I have sorted all the keyworded photos by their category/label and then grabbed the whole category of photos and copied it to a directory where they belong, like put the Iris with the Iris directory, and so forth.

Next and now, I have to go through all of these directories, some 76 of them, and within each category rate the best photos, photos which will go online, and mark those that will not, but still are good photos.

This will take me some time to do; I don't know how long, yet I have to get my patience ready for what will be a bit of an ordeal.

Meanwhile, my out of the blue a fellow photographer and entrepreneur Trond W. Andersen from Oslo, Norway offered to help me and is busy building some code that will do two main things. It will take each chosen photo and rework its filename to include it's original number, the kind of lens used to take it, and the plant (or other) category... all in one single line. And this data will become part of the metadata online.

We are installing the program language “Python” on my machine and will use ChatGPT and Anderson to do some of the heavy computer lifting. I will learn what I need to do as well.

The finished file name will also be transferred to the original large file. Then, using that file name, link the proxy file to the original very large .TIFF file so that the two sets of files are linked. We don’t want to move around the huge files, but just be able to fetch them when we need them.

I am sure there are other tasks that will come up, but that’s the gist of it.

That’s what I am doing.

Another train running is the arrival of 50 cubic feet, divided between organic topsoil and compost, with no animal matter and lots of worm castings. Thanks to Chris Denison of ‘Country Roots’ who brought that soils, it is now evenly distributed in four (of our eight) raised beds, each done in Hügelskultur style.

More about this soon, as I prepare to sow seeds and get something going. Right now, onward with this photo project.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Beyond the Spin Factor

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

April 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3115e22b-5767-4e6a-a3c1-4a28e550effe_1024x1024.webp

Memory deep down can surface. Not memories, but ‘memory’ itself.
Churning. The “widening gyre” of the Yeats poem, incapsulating ever more of
our attention. Distracting.

More and more we are caught up in the spin of things.

Painstakingly, like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, we carefully pick apart
where we are stuck and try to free ourselves.

Like the Gene McDaniels jazz tune, and its refrain “Trying to make it real,
compared to what?” That’s it, compared to what?

Dodging the spin factor or trying to.

Everything’s cycling, spinning. And we’re caught up right in the middle of it.

Trying to extract ourselves as best we can from the spin factor, we miss the
point. There is nothing else. Wield the spin or be torn apart by it. Use it or lose
it.

The spin is nothing other than change itself changing. Otherwise, everything
would be the same. And it’s not.

All there is only the merry-go-round called ‘Samsara’.

We can’t extract ourselves because there is nothing there and no one to
extract. I wrote this poem some 60 years ago for Parmenides and his truth
“Being alone is.”

PARMENIDES

Each to each the sorrow tells:

Find another.

Alone is borne the pain,

Alone the sorrow,

Alone the joy,

Today's tomorrow.

It's like searching for substance in an hourglass of sand. Time runs through our fingers.

Winter turns into spring.

And we turn with the turning,

With the spin. No choice.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Folk Music Hero

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/aade37f6-7da0-4be4-a6ef-83b5bc38e193_1024x931.jpeg

I'm from back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, at least as far as folk music, because that was the time of a folk revival. And right about then all of us younger folk were in the same boat, that of reviving folk music. And I'm talking about all of us except the old folks.

Joan Baez and I will sit in the Michigan Union drinking coffee, just the two of us. Or Bob Dylan and I sat in the Michigan Union having coffee and talking. Joan Baez was also a little bit 'Joan Baez, but Dylan was still just like the rest of us. Or Dylan and I were hitchhiking from NYC to Boston, just standing by the side of around along with our friend Perry Lederman, the legendary Travis-style picker.

We were reviving folks songs, not yet writing them. And another player back then in those Ann Arbor days was Marc Silber, another one of us, who became a famous instrument maker and repairman. He was right there too, and I want to talk about Marc Silber here in this article. And I will tell you the story of the most recent times I have seen Silber.

Those of you too young to be there don't know what you were missing, and probably neither did we, although we heard on sight. I don't want to be rude, yet I have to say that there is no way you know what the music we heard back then, even you have the records from back then. We were not the same back then because the times back then were not the same.

In fact, none of the young folk guitar players know how it was back then. The closest I have come to hearing what was happening then around here in Michigan, is Ann Arbor's Chris Buhalis. He has heard it. I can tell be some of it is in him.

Yet, the only one I know of who never lost it is Marc Silber, who like me was back there with us back then, old that we are today.

So, some of you might like this story of a few years ago I will relate to you now. Here it is....

This is a memorable event that happened to me, as mentioned, back in 2015, so I might as well tell you the whole story, if you have time. And the news

today is the arrival of a new folk music album by Marc Silber that is superb. Here are my notes from a few years ago.

“... I had just returned from a trip to Birmingham, near Detroit, actually to see an old friend, someone I have not seen since 1960, some 55 years or so. His name is Marc Silber and, in my book, he is a real live folk-music hero.

I was on the road by 5 AM because I was hoping to get to Ann Arbor in time to see my granddaughter Emma, who goes to daycare a little after 8 AM. But back-to-back traffic on U.S. 23, just south of Brighton, Michigan, brought the cars to a crawl and several dead stops. As it was, I made it Emma’s house, where my daughter Anne lives with her partner Michael Lee, with barely five minutes to spare. Then her mom, Emma, and I drove across town to take her to daycare. Once there, a strange thing happened.

We were standing just outside the door to the center and we noticed a tiny, tiny, very faint rain falling just on us. It did not seem to fall elsewhere and the street did not get wet. We could barely feel it, more like a mist than anything else. Then we looked up and a tiny rainbow appeared just over our heads. It did not arch the sky or anything like that, but was more like the middle of a rainbow, without the ends. It was kind of a magic moment.

Then I had brunch with Emma’s mom, took a nap at their house, and was off to Birmingham, Michigan, just north of Detroit where “songster” Marc Silber was giving a rare house concert, the first he has played in Michigan since 1960. A few special folks were there.

Marc and I go back to the late 1950s and to Ann Arbor, where we both belonged to the then just-forming University of Michigan Folklore Society. Silber was part of a small group of people that I knew, including the legendary guitar finger-picking virtuoso Perry Lederman, and a young Bob Dylan who came through Ann Arbor infrequently. We all hung out.

One of the first things Silber and I talked about was how Perry Lederman was the greatest finger-picker either of us had seen, from back then until now. He could run rings around Chet Atkins, and was ever so tastefully at that. Lederman was also a great buyer and seller of guitars, particular old Martin Guitars. Lederman and I travelled together back in 1961 and he inspired both Silber and me. Marc Silber went on to become an expert in the repair and maintenance of rare guitars. Silber has a personal collection (like a museum) of over 300 rare instruments.

But what is the rarest thing of all, and this is why I drove 200 miles, was Silber’s gift of music. I believe that most of my readers know I am strongly connected to music, and started out in folk-music in the later 1950s. I also

founded the All-Music Guide, still the largest collection of discographies, biographies, tracks, and everything else musical on the planet. Although my main interest eventually became the great African-American blues players, I was very much present back in the days of the folk-music revival of those early times. I travelled with a young Bob Dylan; we also hitchhiked together in 1961, and all of that.

Anyway, what got me on the road (on what turned out to be a 90-degree day) along the highways of Detroit was Marc Silber. He was such an important figure back in the folk scene, and he was giving a concert. What was his music back in Michigan like after 55 years? I had to see.

I was not disappointed. In fact my mind was totally blown by what I heard. I have heard a lot of folk music in the last 50 or so years, but nothing as pure and unadulterated as what Silber laid down yesterday. He did what I have never seen done until now. Using his own arrangements, but fueled by his very deep respect for the music, I heard guitar renderings that were, to my ears, perfect, ever so subtle, and absolutely so true to the tradition. It was never even this good back in the day!

Silber is a just a perfect fingerpicker, with the lightest touch, the most delicate chords, just impeccable playing, and all of this right before my ears. He added nothing that shouldn't be there to the music, and took nothing away that should not be taken away. It was perfect. I never expected to hear anything this good again. Not ever!

Silber has kept a low profile, and was very humble for someone who knows many, many rich and famous musicians on a one-to-one basis. He never brought his connections up, unless we just kind of stumbled into them while conversing.

Silber has repaired and preserved many rare instruments, but more important that instruments, he has flawlessly preserved the folk music of the times I remember, and even restored it to something more pristine that I can recall. Each tune, for me, was like perfectly transparent and clear.

In the last 50 or so years I have heard every kind of re-enactment, attempt to present, bastardization, etc. our folk heritage, almost never without too-much ego added on where it should not be, etc.

But yesterday, I heard none of that, only music when, as Silber played it, came rushing back to me. He played to most exquisite Blind Lemon Jefferson tunes, or Rev. Gary Davis, and the others right-on-down-the-line. It was mesmerizing.

Later, I worked on bringing Marc Silber to Michigan one fall to play for the hundreds of musicians that come to the Harvest Gathering put on by Seth Bernard. Silber should meet them, and they should hear him. They have never heard anything like this.

And here is his new album of some of his finest music and where to get a copy.

“From the Heart of Greenwich Village: Roots of American Music.”

<https://acousticdisc.com/product/marc-silber-from-the-heart-of-greenwich-village-download/>

This album was recorded with Marc Silber (guitar, vocals), Vassar Clements (fiddle), and David Grisman (mandolin). What a trio!

And here is a little blurb I wrote for Marc to use.

ABOUT MARC SILBER

I started out with the folk-music revival back in the later 1950s and early 1960s, and I have been around the block a bit on this scene. I met songster Marc Silber over 55 years ago, when we both knew a young Bob Dylan, and we all traveled around together.

I had not heard Silber play since back in the day, so I was amazed when at a recent house concert, he rendered song after song from those early folk days, flawlessly, humbly, and profoundly! I know of no modern player, aside from Marc Silber, (none!) who has mastered finger-picking so elegantly, with such incredible taste, and with no trace of ego. That’s the way it and we sounded like back then.

Silber has taken the old traditional folk tunes into the 21st Century and has so perfectly arranged them, that their original meaning and tonality are rendered as if new, without anything being added on or taken away. The music lives again! This is what music revival is supposed to be like.

Where perhaps other players have worked to be better known as performers, Marc Silber (to my ears) has worked just as hard to honor the purity of the music itself, rather than the performer. This is an astounding achievement, one that is very, very rare in these times. This IS the way it was and how we were influenced back then, and influence I’m afraid that few if any have kept that in mind. Here it is.

Michael Erlewine, Founder of the All-Music Guide

EMAIL

Rounding the Curve

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6edb5c11-d485-4815-aca3-bad521598080_1810x1329.jpeg

Coming out of the tunnel, effectively, I have gathered all the main photo images that will appear online, selected and keyworded them as to what kind of flower or plant they are. I am busy copying all this to a 22 TB hard drive which will take a day or two in itself.

I've got a Zoom meeting scheduled with my Norwegian friend Trond W. Anderson tomorrow to hammer out the details of renaming all these files to contain clear information and to place some data of each photo file into metadata for future use.

I spent much of the night identifying plants, flowers, and critters so every image (almost) is identified. For example, if you want to look at 'Cyclamen', you will have 231 (out of 534) photos of Cyclamen to choose from, each hopefully available in several sizes.

I did not just find you the best one or two photos of Cyclamen, but gave you hundreds to choose from, so you can find that image you want to use on your laptop, to tell a story, illustrate something or other, or just to look at.

You can ignore all the rest of the Cyclamen images. Not all flowers get such extended treatment, yet a lot of them do, like Iris, Tulips, Echinacea, Echevaria, Daisys, Gerbera, Hibiscus, Dahlia, and many others. They are all available to you free at no charge, except to sell them. And if you publish them, please credit the photographer.

Anyway, I am finishing this up these days. I am all prepared. Coming up we will painstakingly slowly transform, as mentioned, all the photography filenames to include more information and fill up the metadata fields as we can.

When that is complete, we will generate one or more complete sets of data at different hi-res photo resolutions, ready for online computer implementation.

And in the future, I will be able to add to the accumulating database. And that's about the size of it.

Now, I can get myself ready for spring cleaning, window washing, and take down the storm doors and put in the screens.

And I will proceed to take photos once again and start compiling and cleaning up the winter mess I made.

The outside is warming up and the forest paths now are like soft carpets instead of frozen slabs. I can go outside for a length of time and breathe.

[Screen grab of 534 images of Cyclamen, most of which will be online.]

EMAIL

Hands On

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/01c66e83-f2ad-47bc-956f-f0bb49250ac7_2048x2009.jpeg

It's already early Friday morning at 2 AM and it's the time, once a week, that I do a detailed cleaning, this week it's of the kitchen and dining area. Margaret and I trade off, so I do the kitchen every other week. Yep, in those wee hours. I dust, vacuum, and mop the kitchen floor, plus scour all the surfaces, refrigerator, microwave, stove, and all of this in detail. It takes a couple of hours of concentrated work on my part to get through it. That and I do one of our bathrooms, where I clean the surfaces, scour the toilet, etc. and mop the floor. Now it's 3:30 AM and I just finished my exercise I do each day, the rowing machine and weight bench.

Now all I have to do is take a shower and brush my teeth, but I am waiting on that just to be delinquent for a while, or even catch a few more winks before dressing for the day.

Yesterday, thanks to the help of my Norwegian friend Trond Anderson, who generated the output from my database of images, I went through some 8000 image records trying to figure out, where I had notes, what lens I used for that shot, and expand my acronym or shorthand into the full description. That had to be done line by line, so that took much of my day, but it's finished, and it will be handy for the few that can use that data to improve their own photography.

I don't want to say much about the current politics because I am disgusted and a little down at heart about what's going on these days. I am grateful that congress finally got some backbone and is contributing to the global situation in Ukraine and elsewhere, but feel it is disgraceful that the Supreme Court is so biased.

Sad. And I don't like the way those who are trying to remove the separation between church and state, which the writers of the constitution carefully thought out. Our nation is a melting pot, not a mono-color. And we are many religions, not just one.

[Graphic by me expressing my idea of 'Hands On.']

EMAIL

Out and About

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/db8c9f1c-9405-4baa-a155-01068679682b_1261x2048.jpeg

Margaret and I are trying out something new. She likes to go for a drive and plans out a route, all back roads, just to do that. Yesterday, I road along with my camera and we stopped many times when there was something I wanted a photo of. It worked out great.

The 'Cowslips' or Marsh Marigolds were out and dignifying the marshes as you can see, a sure sign of spring.

Michigan is widely flat because it was scraped clear, and now is dotted with lakes, over 11,000 of them, and innumerable wetlands. Spring is very much reflected in all that water and the growth it provides. Turtles are back on the logs and frogs splish-splashing away when I show up.

After using the Nikon camera system for decades, it feels as comfortable as an old shoe. My new Hasselblad X2D system is getting there, feeling more and more natural.

And the two camera systems (Nikon and Hasselblad) are quite different in what they are good for, but so is my iPhone.

I don't find myself focus stacking much with the Hasselblad, perhaps because it is already so incredibly in focus. It lens itself, at least in my work, to single shots and those shots are composed as well, taking my time. No hurry up.

As to who are they for, these Hasselblad composures, I mean why would you want to see them? Probably for the same reasons I like to see them, the composition, granularity, and especially for that Hasselblad color system.

No doubt, there is a kind of attitude toward Hasselblad shooters, that they arrogant, perhaps because these cameras cost a lot. Or is it because you find them in the fashion and product-photography industries, and they are not used (much) for sports.

Or they are a natural fit for landscape photography and their images can be found in National Geographics.

My only concern is how good are these Hasselblad as cameras, and I find that, indeed, they are very good, especially for the kind of photography mentioned above.

EMAIL

Hearing Cannot Be Heard, The Finder Never found

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/52412f05-5337-47d5-a275-7ca3575b6ae7_1024x1024.webp

I'd like to look at the concept of the point of no return.

The point of no return is the point where we can go no farther in a linear direction because there is no farther out there. Life is not a straight line, but rather the point of no return is the point where we naturally do an about face, turn around, and head back where we came from.

The point of no return is the point where we stop getting any 'return' out of our direction. That well runs dry.

Life is not a linear line stretching ever into the future. Instead, life is a circle or cycle that ends up back where we began. This requires some understanding.

As mentioned, the point of no return is where we turn and return, because beyond that point there is no more, only the advent of our return. We are more than halfway there and from there on are on the way back to the beginning of a circle or cycle, much like the Full Moon is halfway around the lunar cycle.

At the point of no return, we are fully extended to the exclusion of anything else, other than what is. No monitor or observer. That has evaporated. Complete nonduality. Full immersion. We have come all the way there just for that full immersion or extension.

In other words, we have to go all out (invest) before we can get anything back, some return, or come out of it.

And, as mentioned, 'all in' means complete absorption in immersion and awareness that this is so. Yet not awareness of 'anything', but rather pure awareness itself, awareness of awareness of awareness, like a hall of mirrors.

We are talking here about the 'Metaphysical', and we can't have the metaphysical without the physical. We can't get anything out of it unless we put something into it. We know how to get a rabbit out of the hat, but how did the rabbit get into the hat in the first place.

It is unfortunate that we keep looking to see when there is nothing to see and no one to see it. We are not at a distance. We are the subject and the object, or rather there is neither and none.

There is nothing we can say because there is nothing to be said. That is called “entering the silence.” It is choiceless.

Thus, the point of no return is the point where we turn the corner and begin to return out of whence, we came. In other words, the point of no return is when we cross the halfway point in a cycle and begin to return to the starting point, in the lunar cycle the starting point would be the New Moon. The Full Moon is the point where we begin to return back toward the New Moon.

In living life, and here is the message, the point of no return is when we reach the point that is the Prime of Life and begin to withdraw from the body. As a youth we look up to the Prime of Life, and as an elder we look back. There is only the presentation in our prime. This is it.

When everything that was ‘in’ is out, that’s when we reach the point of no more return and what’s ‘out’ begins to go back in. The tide turns.

It’s a stuck record to keep looking for what is not there. We are never going to find it, because there is nothing to be found, like this poem I wrote:

TIME OUT

In the middle of time,
Without a thought,
It comes,
(Not at life’s end),
Like the tide coming in.
I had planned,
To get away from it all.
Too late,
Now,
For retreat;
Distance is close,
Far is now near.

Motions are going,
Every which way,
Striking me dumb.
I'll speak while I can.
The rest I am seeking,
Overtook me;
It's already here!
And it's:
Precious,
Precious:
Stillness in chaos,
Silence in sound.
[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]
EMAIL

Heart Song

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4e50a8ee-98f4-4ab6-9bcd-c6d58cb0b079_1024x1024.webp

Duality functions as a differential, and with practice that differential becomes finer and finer until it vanishes, leaving everything just as it is. How will I fare with no clues, no distance or view 'of', thanks to the diminishing duality, but instead left with just sheer experience. No training wheels.

Hands-on is what remains. What about reflections and reflectors?

Concatenating reduction is lost or ground out in the present moment, with any differences sanded away.

Reflections, like sequined scales from a fish, a hall of tiny mirrors, are jettisoned, leaving me wobbly without the assurance of infinite reflection. Duality can only take us so far.

It's like backing into the future by looking in the rear-view mirror.

Our dependence on duality's endless reflection to guide us, what photographers call 'chimping', is like scaffolding on a building, and eventually will be abandoned, leaving us feeling present all and only by ourselves. No support but reality.

Everything converges on the present moment.

Gradually, duality is sacrificed in favor of non-duality until it vanishes in the resolution of realization.

The duality of words can but describe description, yet their very enunciation and pronunciation sing a song of consonants and vowels despite themselves, a music to the ears and heart, with a message all their own.

Listen to the heart sing.

It's like the sound of ice breaking up on a frozen lake in the spring or the call of the humpback whale.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Two In One: Inclusion

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8877d86a-86ac-4f49-840c-98c8d6d2f174_1024x1024.jpeg

The funny thing about real change, when we find ourselves changing, is that we don't see it coming because its 'change' from our status quo and we are doing our best to keep that together as it is. And change is a 'stranger' that we haven't known yet. And it's happening right then in real time.

Anyway, the first thing I see when I sense change happening, but when perhaps it is still just a thread, or the even the tip of a thread, barely visible, is that if I pull on it, if I invoke this change, then the status quo where I now am (and have been for who knows how long) unravels or begins to. It morphs.

And at some point, with change there is no going back to the way we were, because 'it is we' who are changing and no longer 'are' or remember just what or how we were. Inner change can be unsettling if not downright scary.

And of course, ultimately, this oncoming change is often just what I need, and there is no choice anyway, but like one of those sponge dolls that expand when it finds water, that thread of change mushrooms or manifests beyond expectation or our ability to control it. Again: it is we, the subject, that is changing, so the very ground beneath our feet is shifting.

Now, I ask how does current sense of change this affect my photography?

I've had by now (since 1956) such training in composing photos that it's all I know about photography. And this change happening right now is the perfect ground in which to break those rules (with their accrued discipline) that can be confining, and I do.

The traditional photograph is totally dualistic. It has a photographer over here looking at and taking a photo of the subject, the object of the photo. Dualism, per se.

However, I am discovering that a more complete or perfect photo can also have no dualism to it. How's that?

For me, the 'perfect' photo has got to have a bit of the wizard- behind-the-curtain in it. The perfect photo is not dualistic as are traditional photos, you

know, with the classical subject and object, but those two can also be all together one, subject and object combined -- the whole enchilada.

I see that all (or most) of my photography up until now has been, well, dualistic, the photographer is the subject and kind of an imperialist and all that, very dignified and always at some distance, standing outside.

What was (and is) missing in traditional photography all this while is the merging of the two (subject and object) into nonduality, the actuality that true existence requires, where the photographer is not just a bystander but also a part of the picture. Let the outside in and the inside out. How can this be done photographically?

This is probably done best with a wide-angle lens, a lens wide enough to allow context to seep in around the edges and not have just some subject in the center that is the object. My guess is that the 100 MP sensor of the Hasselblad X2D, because of its large sensor, supports cropping as much into the frame as we might want.

And this is further enhanced, as mentioned, by my search for a lens wide enough to require we do something about all that extra and perhaps empty space on the periphery.

Put those two together (100 MP sensors and wide-angle lens) and we have a recipe for questioning the actual validity and endurance of the traditional standard dualistic photo.

And this perfect storm led me to the insight that everywhere else in my life, duality is something I do my best to reduce it to non-duality, to full immersion on my part. In other words, I want to 'be' in that number when the saints come marching in, and not left out. Inclusion is the great panacea.

Is this not the same with photography, which has historically been very dualistic, with a photographer on one side and what is photographed on the other, subject and object?

I have been involved in stacking focus, frame by frame, for decades, which means taking many frames or images of an object, each a little closer than the last, and compiling them into a photo that has to plane of reference and no point of reference. Every point is in focus or at least as much as we want it in focus.

To appreciate this article, please understand that in traditional photography every photo has a plane of reference and a single point of reference. Our eyes are led to this reference point and the plane of reference, a perfect example of duality. We have little choice.

Without realizing it, stacking focus, removes the single point of view all traditional photographs have (and their plane of reference), and replaces it with no particular single point and no plane. In a stacked image, where everything can be in focus, the eye is not led or guided and we free to look around and pick whatever point of view we wish. Our eye is not being led to a single point in the photograph but is free to roam.

So, as I was a bit of a pioneer in focus stacking, at least an early advocate, without knowing it I was already removing duality from my photographs by stacking focus. Only it took me this long to clearly see that this is what I was doing.

Of course, I had been studying non-dual meditation for decades and working to immerse my meditation in the non-duality of the immediate present.

And then suddenly, of late, I'm having this same insight into photography itself, the desire to remove the photographer from what is photographed, not by excluding, but by inclusion, by including him or her. It's all one.

Whatever was previously subconscious or subliminal in all this, like Atlantis arising from the sea, at least for me, has come into conscious view. I see it.

And it flashes on me that I already do this with my style of writing, which always personalizes what I write, tells a story when I can, and makes the unfamiliar more familiar, an introduction. Inclusion.

So, how is that to be done? As I see it, this is done by simply adding context to what is being photographed, a bit like reality TV, where the 'behind the scenes' scenes are included in the production, making everything more familiar.

And that explains, at least to me, my urgency to find wide enough lenses for the Hasselblad X2D camera in which to create a story and provide context that immerses the viewer, draws them in to the reality of the photo.

Sorry about so many words, yet hopefully a few of you may appreciate what I am pointing out here and discuss this with me.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Solar Engulphment

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4fd09133-f0db-44c5-a634-08ca82d2a3a2_1024x1024.webp

I've not been writing all this solar stuff up of late, but I have to make an exception here because of the severity of the event.

We are in the midst of the largest flurry of extreme solar flares in about 20 years, with an X.5.8 Class solar flare at 9:23 PM Friday night May 10, 2024. We have had a series of X-Class or thereabouts in the last day or so and a bevy of Corona Mass Ejections (CME) are heading toward Earth, with the first hitting recently and the rest perhaps "cannibalizing" each other and piling up one atop the other... to hit over this weekend.

And it's all about change and the rate of change, outstripping our normal amount of sunlight with a concatenating deluge of solar radiation, which translates to what we call change or the urge and push for change. We are beyond the usual "I have a headache" or "I need to lie down" and each of us are coping with and negotiating this onrush of change in our lives, either surfing the solar tides or being pushed around by them.

No advice here other than hang onto your hats and hang loose and bend with the solar wind, so to speak. Not a time of snap judgements or decisions, lest we end up on a train to nowhere we want to go. Temper the urge or if you can surf it ride, the wave of discovery to new worlds.

I can feel the energy inside pulsing and doing my best to be reasonable and not get carried away by the solar influx, which means make snap decisions that I will regret and have to walk back later.

Bon Voyage Everyone!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Getting Where I Want to Go

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a003a50b-1f7f-48c8-afbc-3bc0cded4d60_2048x1536.jpeg

I'm talking here about where I want to go with photography. I'm getting my new Hasselblad camera system tuned to where I can produce what I want to see, what I see through my eyes and in the moment. And also capturing the vibe I feel in that moment. It's real.

Perhaps it's a little thing to blog about, but to me it is somewhat of a big deal because it is a steppingstone from where I can go from here. I have locked it in, meaning I have made it real, actual, and existent in this world we all live in. I can count on this technique being just what it is and that it is repeatable.

How many weeks did it take me to accomplish this? Many and with the help and guidance from a friendly (and brilliant) photographer, Lloyd Chambers who pointed out to me (patiently) what I needed to know, even when I brushed the comments off and didn't pick up on them right away.

I usually get around to what is pointed out to me sooner or later. I feel like one of those street vendors trying to walk while covered with hanging pots and pans on my coat, banging away. I want to divest all that and take up on the good stuff, but it takes me a while to get my boat pointed in the right direction. I usually get there after a while.

You will think that a switch from my familiar Nikon system to the Hasselblad X2D would be a walk in the park, but that's hardly so. It's more than just a new camera, but a whole other take on the world of photography, at least for me.

However, with the Hasselblad X2D with its 100-pixel sensor, I find that I am forced beyond my comfort level, which has been closeup photography, and plunged into landscape photography with little warning.

I've never been that interested in shooting landscapes, yet the X2D has kind of forced me awake to landscape considerations because everything I look at with this medium-format camera is worth taking a picture of. No need to scout around for subject matter. Just about everything admits of beauty if photographed properly.

So, I am stuck in that boat... and loving it. You know I have read and watched everything about the Hasselblad X2D on the Internet, and studied each lens, whether I have it or not, in detail. And when all is said and done, and I've done it, the work of Lloyd Chambers stands out as precious. To my knowledge, from what I've found no one has done the detailed study and workup of modern cameras better than Chambers.

I know, much of that work is stuck behind a paywall, yet considering all the books I try to read and so on, it's worth every penny to me to get the guidance and advice that Chambers compiles. It's like a grand encyclopedia of photography and with this new Hasselblad system I have had to take myself to the woodshed and learn.

And I don't always take Chambers advice in the multitude of articles he has arrayed, yet sooner or later I find myself coming around to understanding the value of what he is pointing out in great detail. He has done the homework.

So, despite my predilection for closeup, I find myself becoming a landscape photographer and learning it. And it is not easy, but very subtle what is required for the landscape view.

I not only like what I'm learning about landscape work, but I'm loving it and becoming a convert. I'm already converted, yet just have to learn how to do it properly.

Here is a photo I took yesterday of the ferns coming up in our back yard. It's an early attempt but I find it very satisfying of an inner itch that I have for context and clarity.

This is the Hasselblad X2D with the XCD 21mm f/4 lens, two frames, but I could have done it with a single frame I believe.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Finishing Up

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/55e6340c-db23-48d2-91c0-70412a47a9ba_1634x2048.jpeg

This is not a 'whine' but a consideration. As I look around and particularly when I start to reach out to old friends, many of them are gone, passed on. What a strange feeling not to have some of my closest friends no longer on the planet or available to me. Who am I without them?

As mentioned, all the friends who have died and are no longer there, and I'm also aware of all the places there is no point in going to anymore, plus things I can physically no longer contemplate doing, and so on down the line. This sense of loss is a life change, a kind of death by a million little razor cuts.

Of course, I'm OK and pull myself together and rise above all that in a life still worth living, yet at the same time it's a life cut short not just by time itself, but by all that's no longer there or possible. And then there is Covid, the robber of life for we older folks who can't be in public.

What remains is not just that which is still possible, but all that which is moving forward past death and toward rebirth, minus the personality that we leave behind much like a snake sheds its skin.

So, there is this sense of distilling what remains as true of life, the nectar of experience stripped of what apparently is inessential. So, old age is not only about loss, what we no longer have or can do, but also the clarity that many crystals have when they naturally form.

In botanical culture, when flowers fade, this is called "finishing up," the remains of the day.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

The Great Divide is a Reflection

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 16, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/46c2255e-2f1b-4fe2-bea0-870a728f48ee_921x924.jpeg

I started the day out deciding to re-pot a succulent plant that is long overdue for a larger pot. It's still not re-potted. One thing led to another. I didn't have a larger pot and ended up going to our local Lowe's to get a couple clay pots. Things snowballed from there.

Before I knew it, I was redoing half the front yard that is garden. I was tired of that plot of ground being out-of-control for years now, and started out with some serious weed-whipping of grass and weeds that were about a foot high after the winter. Then I realized that I needed to turn this soil and grass under.

This then soon found me researching electric tiller/cultivators and monitoring the war between rototilling the weeds under and non-digging up the soil at all.

Leaving the soil be (not rototilling it) won the day and before I knew it, I was researching pavers (patio stones) and it was not long before I was back at lowes buying a dozen 12x12-inch cement pavers.

I almost forgot. There was also a run to the local farm and garden store to buy 3 bales of straw. Placing those straw bales in my car was a big mistake. They blew all over the place and there was like a mini-hurricane in the car. It took me an hour to try and clean up the car, and that only dented the surface. It will be a country-looking car for a long time.

Then I asked Margaret for help and we laid out the patio stones in the garden where they will approximately be, forming a path. It was then about 2 PM and right I am eating a bowl of cold cereal with oat milk and having a rest.

Then it's fixing a leaky faucet, and finally re-potting that plant I mentioned and bringing down (and filling) a very large clay pot (14-inch diameter) that will house perhaps a Dahlia, and also watering a bunch of stuff.

My three rows of turnips are up and doing fine.

I should mention that there were Two X-Class solar flares today, keeping the energy moving at the high pace it has been this last week. You get the idea. I should recap.

And with all this day whirling about me, there I am doing my best to make the most of it, trying to, with broad strokes, change the front garden by introducing the footpath of paver stones. That was a bold move.

And that's just one sign of my trying to cut through the fogginess of these times we live in by striking at the heart of whatever is out of control, in this case the front garden that has run amok for the last couple of years, with weeds crowding out the flowers.

I'm reversing that trend today by biting the bullet and putting a path of step-stones right through the middle of the garden, sending a message, at least in my mind, that that this one big mess of a garden is being broken up, the stone path divides it.

Tomorrow I will mulch the entire garden with straw and I have three bales to do that with. This plot of garden is the sunniest and warmest part of the property and I have my two giant pots of *Datura* already out there taking in all that light and flourishing.

To me, these times now are like slashing my way through the jungle of my life with a machete, a jungle obscured by the steady onset of extreme solar flares and their constant ejections toward Earth.

I'm doing my best to make sense out of what is chaotic and in turmoil, not just around here at home, but writ large in the world wars, the crazy trials, and the fierce politics of the moment.

I believe change starts at home and that's what I'm doing, trying to make sense and coherence out of my own situation, and at the same time holding on for dear life.

Do you realize how turbulent these times we live in now are?

The 'Great Divide' is but a reflection.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Failing Successfully

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8ee0f6ae-800c-4ede-884d-cad8a2eb0665_1024x1024.jpeg

Yesterday I put in the summer screens for all the doors, including their push-grills. What a difference having the doors open and air moving through the house again, feeling the slight breeze across the fine hairs of the neck. It's almost enough to make me want to go south to a warmer climate, yet my friends in Austin say they are trapped in a heat sink for much of the year. I don't like air-conditioning.

We can't win and apparently, it's not about winning or even breaking even. Where did we get the idea that we would eventually come out on top?

As the great economist Kenneth Boulding told me on spring day long ago as we sat in his office reading each other our poetry, "Michael, we must learn to fail successfully." That comment struck me like a hammer. Of course, failure physically, etc. is unavoidable, so we each must learn to fail successfully.

Life in this Samsara in which we find ourselves is cyclical. We rise from birth gradually to the prime of life, and from that point directly proceed to diminish and grow old, as this poem I wrote in the 1960s so clearly states.

"Ah,

Who could let such a bargain pass,

As this poor century will allow.

On coming in, I'm asked to leave,

And when asked to leave,

I bow."

Our need to celebrate the life we are passing through is great, imperative.

These 'rights of passage' belong to all of us, and they can be spoken of, shared, and celebrated in full.

An uncelebrated life is an oxymoron, IMO.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Organized Religion

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ad63c1aa-dc76-4a52-b075-f59504d5b42e_1024x1024.jpeg

The problem with organized religion is organizing it. IMO, its like herding ducks or cats, the more you try, the less it works.

As if we could organize what is so individual as spiritual experience, much less its realization. Sure, perhaps a rough cut is doable, but to obtain a smooth-running religious machine, perhaps not so much.

The obvious sense of privilege, not to mention the effects of what can be forced or dictated practice, cannot but cloud the mind and impede actual clarity. Before we can be of much help to others, we first have to sort ourselves out by ourselves. Others can help and suggest, but when it comes right down to it, we each have to enlighten ourselves.

What all this does is reduce me to silence, not that I am being silent at this moment.

Our spiritual life is organic, natural to us, and 100% familiar, once found. The problem, of course, is being aware of the familiar, what is so close to us we can't see it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Spiritual Physics

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2d674910-f403-4842-813e-4d144838a297_1559x2048.jpeg

Trusting our take on things, if only because it is just that, our particular take on things, our view of it all.

What if it does not exactly align with the official social view, whatever that is. What then? If it does not, it does not, yet look for the truth in it such as it is because it is our truth.

We naturally gravitate to our center of gravity, what we are attracted to and orbit around, and there is no reason to fight it.

If we look carefully, we will sense satisfaction or fulfillment taking place. It feels right and is by definition centering.

Given the opportunity, each of us will do what we 'want' or lack. Fill the emptiness inside. It's spiritual physics, IMO.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

[Photo by me of the Snowdrop Windflower, *Anemone sylvestris*.]

EMAIL

Garden Considerations

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1e7f4a79-1269-40b2-88cb-2256ff7ae50a_1954x2048.jpeg

Well, probably more than most of you want to know, but for those gardeners among us, here goes.

Well, one of my *Datura* plants, having been put outside, was attacked some days ago, probably by a deer, who ate one of the three plants and broke off the stem. The deer sometimes come into town in the early morning. Since the *Datura* is poisonous and at the very least a major hallucinogen, there must be one loopy deer out there somewhere looking to onlookers like its rabid.

I can't have that, so I moved the three *Datura* plants to the fenced-in backyard, which is not open to deer, although rabbits can still get in. There have been reports of a cougar (mountain lion) being caught on animal-cameras in the area. I'd have to see it to believe it and I don't want to see it.

I saw a mountain lion closeup in 1964 while walking my racing bike up a steep part of Grizzly Peak between the cities of Orinda and Berkeley, California. The big cat was only six feet away as I was cowering behind my bike. The cougar was crossing the road, step by step, not looking at me. Then, in the middle of the crossing it turned and looked right at me, then turned back, and continued to cross over. Needless to say, I will never forget that event.

Meanwhile, "Handy Mike" is emerging from the winter doldrums. I washed some 134 windows and then spent hours trying to find the right polish for our 10-foot Eames Herman-Miller conference table, which led nowhere. Finally found a plant-based polish and polished the table, wiped it down, and buffed it out.

And then there is the garden event. I have to protect the young plants and seedlings from becoming breakfast for the local deer and have been musing this one for some time.

I ordered some powder-coated wire frames that assemble as a cage in two of raised beds. They will keep out both deer and rabbits and are easily moved.

With three wire frames left over I built a little protection for my Datura plants and brought them from the protected side yard to the full sun of the left front yard.

I had tried to break up the front area by dividing it by putting in a path-walkway made up of 12x12-inch cement pavers. I then

covered the entire front area with straw to attempt to keep the weeds down.

And my next idea was to have 9-10 of my large (14-inch diameter) clay pots inset into the straw and grow plants there. I had this all laid out when I realized that since the plants in the pot were all perennials, that when winter came, their being in an exposed pot to the cold and wind was not to their advantage as surviving. Hmmm. This set me back for a moment.

I had to abandon the idea of large clay pots. Instead, I would put the plants directly in the ground, but I would surround each plant with some kind of collar to keep the weeds away and help to channel the moisture.

I looked at a lot of plant collars, but they were mostly all plastic, and I don't like the idea of putting plastic in the ground even if just as a cover. So, hmmm again.

I next decided that I could build small square frames out of cedar boards that would not easily rot in the ground and at any rate would not hurt the plants or ground.

I built myself ten cedar frames about 18-inch square and four inches high. I would place the plant in the ground and fill the surrounding area in the square collar with shaved cedar shavings. This would not harm the plant, help to keep the moisture in, drive away ants and the like, and look fine.

I'm in the process of doing that today if it does not rain.

EMAIL

Gardening for the Soul

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/681083ce-8549-4a5d-bb88-6a93cc9090a1_2048x1536.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/13478e89-cdb4-43b7-8caf-60bc558c31e_2048x1536.jpeg

Well, as to my gardening, I did do what I proposed to do and here are some resulting photos.

The task was to take an out-of-control 'weedy' front garden and civilize it enough so that we could appreciate it again.

I outlined my plan in a previous post but want to back that up with where I am with the project as of today. So, I do that with some photos.

The problem I had in years past is that I failed to keep the weeds down and they took over and eventually crowded out the flowers. I had a front garden bed of almost all Echinacea flowers, a lot of them, yet even they got crowded out by the weeds due to my own negligence in weeding. I like plants and to me there is no such thing as a weed, but there are aggressive plants that take over any place they can.

I wanted that not to happen again, so this time I built little cedar frames to give each flower a chance to grow and spread, and if the plants stabilize, I can remove the frame in seconds and let the plant compete with the weeds.

Yet, until then the cedar frame keeps the weeds at bay, and the shredded cedar within the frame keeps some bugs out and itself degrades and adds nourishment to the plant. And it protects moisture. I did not want to use a plastic frame.

As for what's planted in the frames, from near-to-far, on the left frame, Lupine, Dahlia, Hibiscus, California Poppy, and on the right, again from near-to-far, Nasturium, Lavendar, California Poppy, Echinacea, and Red Clover. In the far left upper corner is New England Aster, and to the right of that is Tansy.

In the far left is a clump of Tansy, in the fenced cage are two Datura plants. To the right in the corner is New England Aster, and to the right of that is more Tansy. IN the three cedar frames, from left to right: Lupine, Dahlia, and Hibiscus.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Elvis Never Left the Building

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 31, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/151e16e4-bbb5-4540-a1a6-42ab6f7cec33_1024x1024.jpeg

[Just a personal comment as to what's in the national news: "Even a blind squirrel finds a nut every once in a while."]

The Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche stated:

"The essential nature of mind is luminosity or clarity (Tib. Sel-Wa). We might interpret this to mean that the mind is like light; however, the Tibetan word has the meaning of "knowing" rather than light."

"The nature of mind is also peacefulness, which is to say that it is without thought and conception. This nature of mind is not produced, does not abide, and does not cease."

"If the mind were an actual thing, it would be produced, it would eventually cease, and in between these two moments, it would abide. But when we examine carefully, we find that this is not so. Therefore, we can say that the mind is not truly existent—the mind is empty."

What this means to me in practical terms, it's not just that appearances that arise are empty, it's that appearances themselves are the emptiness arising.

Not only has Elvis NOT left the building; Elvis was never quite in the building in the first place.

In other words, our 'being' is becoming. We have never actually 'been,' meaning we have no permanent existence as a person, yet do as unfulfilled desires and karma.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

In the Moment

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5553d623-1a9d-41cb-bb70-2976cbad84bb_1024x1024.jpeg

Finding that tip of a springboard into non-duality, recursively.

Again, again, and again we are there, iteratively.

There is nowhere else to be that I know.

There is no 'holy' place other than anywhere we are.

Nothing 'special' to do but whatever is at hand.

And for certain, no time other than now.

....

If there were a fountain, I would drink from it.

Rest Now

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 4, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f244e3c9-a3fd-4108-bf4f-192dd068b954_1024x1024.jpeg

What do we do next? What do we mean 'Next'?

What to do 'now' are the operative words.

"Now"" is also next, continuing now.

That's why it's called "The Eternal Now."

And "There is no time like the present" is for certain true.

We each have plenty of time, at least early on,

So, take all the time you need.

We all know the saying "Be Here Now."

That's good advice.

We don't have far to go to be present,

And as mentioned,

There is no time like the present, literally.

And nothing in particular to do but be here, present.

The great dharma saints say to "Rest in the Now."

There is no hurry.

And as Chuck Berry said,

"No Particular Place to Go."

So, "Rest now."

How the Self is Consumed

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3c30353a-1bd5-44d7-b4db-cf86730ff733_1024x1024.webp

The Ven. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche said:

“Mind is luminous emptiness, like the light of the sun and the moon.

“Without the slightest bias in it, the idea of a self is consumed.

“What is mind? It is luminosity and emptiness, luminosity and emptiness which are inseparable.

“To understand this, it helps to have an example, and there is no better example in the world than the light of the sun and the moon to illustrate luminosity and emptiness or the basic nature of the mind being clear light.

“Without the slightest bias in it” means that the sun and the moon will reflect in any sort of a vessel available, whether it’s a good vessel, a bad one, or somewhere in between. The light of the sun and the moon is not partial towards one as opposed to another.

“It will not be such that the light will reflect in a good vessel but not in a bad one. It reflects in all vessels equally. In the same way, the basic clear-light nature involves no personal bias in the sense that it is equally present in all beings without partiality.

“Because this is so, when one realizes Mahāmudrā, the fundamental nature of mind, the idea of self and clinging to self are consumed.”

Translated by Jim Scott

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Moveable Feast

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 8, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/95659b19-59e8-4140-b87d-f88fad3bbcc6_1024x1024.jpeg

In the whole world, the knee bone is connected to the leg bone is connected to the ... ad infinitum.

There is no end to relativity.

Meaning everything is equally existent and empty.

In the "Now," this present moment, nothing is featured more than the moment itself.

As they say, "No matter where you go, there you are."

We are already right here and now.

If that is realized, then there is no hurry to get anywhere because we are already here, wherever we are.

And there is nothing more 'special' to do than whatever we are already doing at the moment. It's what we 'have' to do.

And of course, there is no better time than the present moment. That goes without saying or you can say it again.

If the above points are realized, what's the hurry?

It's a moveable feast we have.

There is no distance too far, and none too near.

There is no hurry-up because, as mentioned, we are already there.

And there is no waiting because everything is happening right now.

Get familiar and in tune with that and we are good to go.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Showy Orchid

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/be040501-e432-4885-975f-c071ab622886_1286x2048.jpeg

Early morning, out to photograph, traveling to a secret microclimate where the Showy Orchids bloom every year. Been going there for decades, once a year around June 13 th .

It's been harder and harder to get to the micro-climate, as the small bridge that used to be there has been gone for some years, so this involves fording a small stream (but steep banks) while carrying photo equipment, camera, tripod, etc.

Well, I got across the stream and managed to get my tripod up the steep hill, only to find that the Showy Orchids have pretty much vanished in the year or so since I've been there. I found only two, side by side. The rest, usually dozens, are no longer there.

Of course, I took a few photos and then managed to scramble back across the creek and steep sides with all my gear. There were Forget-Me-Nots everywhere and other flowers and greens from a very wet microclimate.

[Photo today by me.]

EMAIL

Strawberries Forever

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/399120ea-1ed1-428d-bfa9-71bb1b7fb9e5_1536x1948.jpeg

We have visitors, Margaret's sister and our niece Rebecca here for a few days. This morning, we headed south out of our town of Big Rapids and into the area where a lot of Amish farms abound. We don't just go to any Amish farms, but to a few where they grow more organic. We were looking for strawberries, because Rebecca is going to make a strawberry shortcake to celebrate Father's Day and Margaret's birthday coming right up.

I, of course, got into a long discussion of a 38-year old Amish farmer who has three daughters, as do we. We talked about flowers, a topic he knows something about, and do I.

We talked Lupine, Johnny Jump Up, Lilies, and on down the line. Turns out he has 18 horses, which is mind-boggling to me. I know about caring for a couple of dogs, but eighteen horses!

Margaret, myself, and her sister Kendra just wash, sliced, mixed with some maple syrup, bagged, and froze a bunch of strawberries.

EMAIL

On Second Thought...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4ac35599-061d-424a-8292-815836c6fcb1_2048x1536.jpeg

How much do I trust my own insight and perception?

What happens when we bring to mind someone we know and have a sense of where things are at with them? Or we feel someone is in trouble. Perhaps we are thinking of someone and they are thinking of us.

I would not call it extra-sensory perception, because it does not take extra senses or whatever. I just would not discount that first moment, either, what the Ven. Chögyam Trungpa called “First Thought, Best Thought.”

It is what it is, and we are what we are.

At what point with that first thought does doubt as to veracity creep in?

To me this is a sampling technique, much like a hummingbird samples or drinks from a flower. It seems our mind is less polluted with other thoughts in that initial instant, that ‘First Thought’.

How might we react on the message or take away from that First Thought? Is it true as experienced or do we have a finger on the scale, and are we looking at our own bias and prejudice?

I believe that what I sense in that first instant is true, that first thought, but I may not yet trust my own ‘intuition’ or sensory insight in all this.

This initial insight is something we learn and hopefully become better at, trusting our own perceptions as they occur.

Again, for me it’s a sampling procedure, tasting of the mind and insight, and then accurately reflecting on that. Is that reflection true and pure?

I believe it is, but second thoughts, especially doubt and questioning on my part immediately cloud the issue like the black puff of ink coming from a frightened octopus. The darkening of a clear or lucid thought by doubt can be almost immediate.

So, it is very much “First Thought, Best Thought” and not, “on Second Thought...”

[Design by me as posted on our dharma center.]

EMAIL

Tangled Up in Now

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3d997843-3ba2-4607-a4a6-aa873b68dd71_1024x1024.jpeg

In the present moment, it's always the right time for immersion in it.

Whether we lean back toward the past or lean into the future, neither is sharp and clear. The present is as sharp and clear as it gets and much of that depends on me.

Given that we are all in the same boat, at this present moment, we are kind of involved in a meeting of minds, much like a universal Zoom event. We can look into the present moment at any time. This moment is something we all share in common.

However, most are using the present moment as a lens to look from inside out rather than as a lens from the outside looking in. Either way, it's a crystal ball.

The present moment is where we live all our lives every minute of the day and night. Every thought, word, and deed in history came out of the present moment. You would think there would be a college degree based on the present moment or something like that.

The closest we come to a degree in the present moment are some of the forms of meditation that enable us to rest deeply in the moment.

I don't know of any place other than this.

And we can drop into the present moment like a dewdrop slips into a tranquil pond. Nothing happening, as in 'Nothing is going on.' Nothing also goes on.

And being embraced by nothing, like an upturned leaf floating on a tranquil pond, arms outstretched toward the sky, we find rest.

There's no end to this present moment, and no beginning. It is everlasting, has no edges, and contains everything there is, comfortably.

No reason to do anything because there is no reason there whatsoever. And while that may sound unreasonable, it is. No reason and no reasoning. Just full immersion in non-duality.

As for the practice of Insight Meditation, like a carburetor, it requires the proper mixture of 'alone' and being with friends, full immersion and reflection, recursively.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Heat Wave

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 24, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bec67aef-41e9-49bd-bad2-a26eee3e45ed_1024x1024.jpeg

I call it a heat wave; this recent heat dome incapacitates me for more than minimal activity. I'm not good for much when the heat index reaches 90 degrees or so, depending on the humidity.

We don't have air conditioning and seldom need it, and Michigan weather (at least where we are) is fine without refrigeration. We don't even like air conditioning.

However, we have been caught in a heat dome for the last week or so. I had to get out my seersucker shirts and find some electrolytes and use them.

Finally, last night it rained and there were thunderstorms that broke up the heat dome. Had to close all our windows to keep the water out. Woke up and it was cool. I took a hot bath to get out that deep-down grime and then put on a flannel shirt, the first in a while.

However, in the night a deer (who come into town in the wee hours) ate one of the large leaves on one of our sunflowers, a leaf that poked through the fence in the garden. It's a constant struggle to keep the deer, rabbits, and what-not from eating the young plants.

With the weather cooler, Margaret and I decided on a ride this evening into the surrounding forests. We headed east, out of town, and then north along the great Muskegon River. Not many bridges, so you drive for quite some time until finding one.

It's summer already and the roadside vegetation is profuse, often narrowing the road for passage. Sometimes overhanging trees tunnel the road and it seems almost like twilight. We stopped to help a mid-sized Wood Turtle across a dirt road. Nice to see them again.

Michigan has upwards of 11,000 lakes and uncountable wetlands, so cattails along the road are everywhere. It's magic in the coming dusk. We have no high mountains, but lots of water. Michigan has 84% of all the fresh water in North America and 21% of all the world's fresh water.

We drove north for quite a while, taking it all in and relishing the absence of the heat. Eventually we wound our way back home, sorry to see this time end.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Treading Water

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/44b014d1-df33-48d7-8076-3f7e5709a3a8_1024x1024.jpeg

What is distraction? It breaks up any continuity, fragments the life stream, like a bad clutch, jerking our way along.

Distraction is not new to us and is the hallmark of Samsara. As mentioned, distraction tends to shut down any flow and the sense of continuity and wholeness. It seems I need non-distraction more or less continually to feel normal -- non-duality. The problem is how to get it.

It's not that we can just give up, as that is not possible, but more that (at least in my case) I find myself bogged down, and any sense of fluidity or getting anywhere contiguously is missing. That, to me, is distraction.

It appears that, somehow, I want to buck moving forward, instead turning away again and again from continuity because there is none. I'm stalled and stymied, almost like a form of protest.

Taking refuge in sleep or more sleep is not a workaround, but an avoidance of reality, almost a giving up, so that's not a solution.

Start and stop, start and stop, I'm bogged down by being bogged down.

Any sense of fluidity and continuity is lost and here I sit, tired even from sleep and yet unable to proceed smoothly or get anywhere meaningful. Why do I need meaning?

Perhaps it's just the extreme heat lately that fractures time and stalls me out, leaving me high and dry somewhere along the side of the road I was traveling. Of late, progress is like a mirage.

I don't even miss it until I don't have it, that sense of continuity, but then it's obvious that I'm going nowhere, not that there is anywhere to go. It's that simple. One can't get enough continuity -- non-duality. We find ourselves hung out to dry, so to speak, caught up in duality.

This illusion of progress or continuity. I don't want to sleep, and perhaps can't, and so in the middle of the night I walk out to the kitchen, time after time, thinking perhaps one bite of something or a piece of toast might help, only to return with nothing. No rest for the distracted. Rest is non-distraction.

I don't feel like sleeping, because I'm not 'THAT' kind of tired, but then I don't feel like staying up in this hobbled state of mind, either. Sleep is more of an escape, and yet at that point staying awake is painful.

Most often, after what can be a long while, I end up going back to sleep because it is the less painful solution, compared to staying up distractedly or trying to.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Un-Reify -- Non-Reification

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 30, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9c1157bc-e668-4429-8881-b49b6c648df9_1024x1024.jpeg

Reification in dharma talk is inescapable, the idea that we are forever gilding the lily, layering reality to make it more 'real' than it in fact is. How did we get this way and even more important, how do we reverse the process, un-reify the reified.

Non-reifying or un-reifying concepts, objects, or phenomena involves several strategies aimed at deconstructing the solid or overly tangible qualities that have been ascribed to them. This process can be applied in various fields such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, and everyday thinking. Here are some methods to achieve this:

1. CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS

Question Assumptions: Start to question the assumptions underlying the reified concepts. Ask why you consider it more real and what evidence supports or contradicts this (as in 'your') belief.

Deconstruct Narratives: Analyze the narratives and stories that have contributed to your own reification. Understand their origins and the interests they serve. Is it just puffing things up, in which case throttle it back, tone it down.

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

Historical Context: Place your reified concepts within their historical context. Understand how it has evolved over time and the factors that contributed to its current form. Why do you keep doing it?

Cultural Context: Consider the cultural factors that influence the perception of the concept. Different cultures may have different views on its reality.

3. RELATIONAL THINKING

Interconnectedness: Emphasize the interconnectedness of the reified concepts with other phenomena. Show how it is

dependent on and influenced by various factors, part of a process, reducing its isolated "reality."

Process Over Product: Focus on the processes and interactions rather than viewing the concept as a static, independent entity that you consider unique and imperative.

4. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Awareness: Be mindful of the language you use to describe the reified concepts. Avoid terms that solidify its reality and instead use language that highlights its fluid and constructed nature.

Metaphorical Thinking: Use metaphors and analogies to illustrate the constructed nature of the concept, helping you to see it as less tangible and more fluid.

5. PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENT

Reflective Practices: Engage in reflective practices such as journaling, mindfulness, or dialogue to become more aware of how reification happens in your own thinking. How do you fall into it?

Experiential Learning: Engage in activities or experiences that challenge the reified concepts. For example, direct interaction with diverse perspectives can reveal the complexity and constructed nature of social categories.

6. EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Teach Yourself Critical Skills: Educate yourself on critical thinking and analysis skills, helping them to identify and deconstruct reified concepts.

Interdisciplinary Learning: Promote interdisciplinary learning to show how different fields view and construct reality differently. How and why did you begin reification?

7. PHILOSOPHY INQUIRY

Phenomenology: Engage in phenomenological inquiry, focusing on your own lived experiences and subjective perceptions to understand how reification occurs.

Dialectical Thinking: Use dialectical methods(thesis and antithesis) to explore the contradictions and dynamic processes underlying the reified concept.

8. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Advocate for Change: Participate in social and political actions that challenge the structures and systems reinforcing reified concepts.

Community Building: Foster communities that encourage open dialogue and critical reflection on shared assumptions and beliefs.

By employing these strategies, it is possible to un-reify concepts, making them more fluid, dynamic, and interconnected rather than fixed and overly tangible. Look into the process, not the state of things.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Happy Independence Day

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 4, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0e6e0c60-0217-48c7-a91e-2998d940d2dc_2048x1365.jpeg

HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!

By Michael Erlewine

My tendency is to pick a forthcoming event, something I'm looking forward to, fixate on it, and to some degree stop monitoring the present moments before that event. I then basically sit and wait for the coming event to roll around. The waiting itself often becomes more important than the actual event, meaning the coming event had been reified to the point that it could never measure up to my imagination of what it should be.

Needless to say, this is not a good idea, or as the great Tilopa said "Don't invite the future."

I know that I should pin my hopes on the present, not the future, because that is where everything happens, in the Here and the Now.

Of course, talking about such things does not hold a candle to actually doing something about them.

And speaking of events my kids and many grandkids are the particular event I have in mind. They are coming today and will be there over much of the weekend.

[Photo of a plastic fence at the recent "Smiling Acres" festival I attended.]

EMAIL

Family Weekend

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/49c15be7-17eb-4d0d-b2c6-9a916ba21f13_2048x1884.jpeg

Last night we, the entire family, sat out under the stars and watched the fireworks. Battling mosquitoes in the dark, we sat in the damp grass as the sky grew dark and the fireworks display began. The little kids, a force in themselves, ran around in the dark like a team as they have all weekend. 'Wilber' my granddaughter Iris's dog stayed back at the house and took refuge from the explosions in the basement.

We've had a wonderful couple of days and celebrated with an epic family meal yesterday. We continue on today and have other events scheduled for tomorrow and the next day.

[Photo by me. Left to right: Back row – Michael Andrew, Micah Ling,

Middle Row – May, Anne, Iotis, Dana, Margaret, Michael

Front Row – Emma, Iris, Josephine

Dog: Wilber]

EMAIL

Ann Arbor Art Fair Coming

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 10, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e30e2ea2-2600-494e-bf97-a5bb609634b8_2048x1492.jpeg

A trip to Ann Arbor for the graduation of my granddaughter Molly Even (photos coming soon), also brought me to my daughter Anne's house, where she is working hard to prepare for the Ann Arbor Art Fair July 18, 19, and 20. Ann's booth of paintings is up near Hill Auditorium, somewhere near the fountain to the right of the auditorium.

Anne carries on the our family's presence at the Ann Arbor Art Fair, where my mother Phyllis Erlewine presented at the art fair for many years. Anne carries on mom's artistic talent and will have many paintings on display. If you are up that way during the art fair days, do stop by and check out her work.

I will have more paintings of our two-day trip soon for those interested.

[Photo of Anne Erlewine by me.]

EMAIL

It Came to Pass...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5da2a628-c25d-4400-a582-5c3dab6e8b62_1365x2048.jpeg

As I get older, and probably as 'we' get older, there are too many things vying for our attention for us to do anything else other than pay all that attention. Some days it seems that's all I do, play catchup.

Well, I have to limit this, and I'm not going to pay that kind of attention anymore! I've paid enough, paid my share.

I don't know if it is safe not to constantly pay attention and worry every little thing that whistles through time that I am aware of. And ignorance is bliss as they say and I'm not exactly ignorant either.

There is a marked difference between being aware and paying attention of the worrying kind.

At the same time, I don't have the energy or even the interest to pay attention and follow out everything that catches my eye or gets my attention and begs for worry. Been there, done that.

No more. I just have to say no.

Of course, I will remain aware of what is, what happens, and what takes place. However, I no longer intend to plan to worry or follow out each distraction by thinking it through or figuring it out. That train of thought goes nowhere.

Instead, I will simply note the distraction and rather than think about it further, own it as my own problem and then just drop it, leave it be, and mark it as noted.

The burgeoning number of distractions we as elders have and the fact that as we age, they increase almost exponentially, are not worth the effort to figure out or dwell on. Distractions are distractions; they don't lead anywhere. Distractions from what?

The answer is distractions from resting in the nature of the mind. Or, as I wrote some time ago:

"I can clearly see all that clouds this stream of consciousness is but a searching, is itself but a frowning, a looking to see, a pause, a hesitation that,

caught and unfurled in the eddies of time, finding nothing, becomes clear and, laughing, I leave it go clear and turn from a darkening or dimming of my mind to light.

And it came to pass, and I let it pass.”

{Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Better Than 1000 Words ...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 24, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0792b3df-47dd-4403-9359-cf39fe4fb53a_1536x2048.jpeg

[An early morning walk in the Michigan woods in a picture.]

For me, photography extends what can be done or said with words, along the line of “a picture is worth 1000 words.” Words wear out their meaning by failing to do anything but point at what they mean. Words and language are not themselves the meaning.

Images and photography are more immersive and take us beyond words, IMO. Images sign or serve as a signature of the mind itself.

Reaching across the great division of dualism in which we find ourselves to communicate a sense of our innate immersion in the nondual nature of the mind is imperative. Any dharma practitioner must cross that dualistic divide, deconstruct it, and reach full immersion in the actual nature of the mind. My point is that photos often come closer than words, in my experience. And music, is even more visceral.

Our Samsaric duality, once deconstructed and dissolved into nonduality is never forgotten and shatters the exclusivity of our duality habit. This exposes the mistake of assuming that duality is the control rather than just part of reality. It is not, and once we know this, balance and progress are possible.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Adventures with Hasselblad

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/50ca0afb-65c7-4789-8556-988f70e6b74e_2048x2048.jpeg

[This is a long one folks, so its not for everyone, but rather for those interested in photography and my trajectory in that field. Not my latest Hasselblad X2D image, but my very first one! It got my attention.]

Of course I have been aware of Hasselblad cameras for many decades, if only in passing, on occasion seeing them in the hands of fashion photographers and the like.

However, my introduction to Hasselblad and medium format started more as an inquiry than a certainty. I had previously tried out the medium-format Mamiya RZ67 and a series of Mamiya lenses, and while intrigued by some of its qualities, it failed to deflect me from my Nikon systems of many years. I saw little beauty in the RZ67 compared to the Nikons.

I did want to know, once and for all, what (if anything) I was missing by my not entering the medium format arena with full engagement. After a long time, I had to find out and took the plunge. I purchased the first mirrorless Hasselblad, the X1D, when it came out and a couple lenses. I didn't like it. It was just not ready for prime time, at least in my eyes. I did not keep it long. To me, it was half-baked.

Monetarily Hasselblad is a steep learning curve, and aside from the cost of the camera itself, the lenses are almost as costly as the camera, each one of them. When the X2D came out, I didn't jump on it, but put off by the hassle of my X1D experience, I waited about a year. I was watching it out of the corner of my eye.

When I finally understood through glowing reviews that Hasselblad with the X2D had really made some changes, I cleared the decks, gathered what funds I could, and jumped in.

I started out with just a lens or two, the XCD 120mm Macro (for my closeup work), followed by the XCD 45P and eventually, at the suggestion of Lloyd Chambers, the XCD 65mm lens. This was more lenses than I could afford.

Then, true to form, these three lenses were incrementally followed by my trying to figure out ways to get more XCD lenses that I felt I needed to support

my particular kind of photography. I had done the same with the Nikon Z lenses when I went mirrorless, told myself I would NOT buy any of the new Z lenses, but use all the old Nikon F-mount lenses I had around. And then went right ahead and bought most of the new Z lenses, at least the 'S' series because they are so darned good.

I did the same with the Hasselblad XCD lenses, found myself getting one after the other. Most were used copies, picked up at a bargain, at least relative to the cost of brand-new copies. Lucky for me there were not that many XCD lenses available that I wanted and even then, I had to sell a lot of lenses that I loved (but seldom used) to make my entry to the Hasselblad system. I did sell many Nikon lenses and am still doing that.

Of course, knowing that I am a bit of a worrier, my introduction was laced with checking, checking, checking to see if I was getting anything that I could not get with my Nikon system (currently, D850, Z7 II, and Z8), plus many lenses, and in recent years, moving aggressively to gather the newer Z lenses with an "S" on them. I also have both the 135mm Nikon Plena and the Nikon 58mm f/0.95 NOCT, etc.

Well, as it turned out, the Hasselblad, with its 100 megapixel sensor was clearly bringing me superior images, especially thanks to the Hasselblad Natural Color System, which is the most like how my eyes actually see color, but also in the degree of granularity, sharpness, and richness of microtones that Hasselblad lenses can have.

I have gone through a lengthy study of the XCD lenses, rather quickly finding which of these lenses work for me and which I would not pick up. I couldn't afford the new V series lenses and that turned out to be a good thing since it did not take lens expert Lloyd Chambers long to determine that the whole V series was, how to put it, of little value, and probably a big mistake by Hasselblad.

I have settled on keeping and using the 21mm, 30mm, 45Pmm, 45mm 3.5, 65mm, 120mm, and 135mm+TC.

In my work, the most used of all these lenses is the 21mm f/3.5 wide-angle, an absolute gem for me and for reasons I do not understand recently discontinued by Hasselblad and replaced with the V 25mm, which according to Lloyd Chambers is a dud. If you can find an XCD 21 WA lens, get it!

In the beginning, the XCD 120mm Macro was very important in my work, with the other lenses used as needed, but all mentioned are worth having IMO.

I've yet to afford the 80mm f/1.9, but perhaps will add that lens when funds are there.

As mentioned, I don't need or want the 28mm, 38mm, 55mm, and 90mm 'V' series'. I had the new 28mm Hasselblad but soon sold it.

Aside from the above comments, how do I like the Hasselblad X2D and XCD lenses?

I have also continued to work with and use my Nikon system. I cannot get the detail and richness of color with the Nikon system that I can with the Hasselblad X2D. Perhaps others can, yet I have been shooting 35mm cameras since 1956, so I have some experience.

I understand from detailed online reviews of the X2D camera and the XCD Hasselblad lenses that the X2D is not the Swiss Army Knife of cameras. It is by design somewhat of a minimalist camera. As a still photographer, I don't miss much of what is not available through the X2D, and what I do miss I am at peace with. Why is that?

That is because the richness of color and resolution, sharpness in detail, and microtones is more than worth doing without all the bells & whistles I am used to on my Nikon system. I don't miss all that because what I can't do without is just what the Hasselblad X2D provides in quantity – the natural color and granularity.

The Hasselblad XCD 135mm+teleconverter makes for a long and heavy lens. With the teleconverter attached, it is best used on a tripod. Without the teleconverter, it can be handheld, but I'm more comfortable with it on the tripod. There are plenty of lighter lenses for handheld work.

Since the XCD 135mm and the XCD 120mm are about the same length and both are very sharp lenses, I tend to use the 120mm (which also does closeup) for most work at that range, and keep the 1.7 teleconverter on the XCD 135mm for that extra reach. The XCD 135mm is also weather sealed, so for outdoor music concerts which I do a number of, the 135mm+1.7 tele works best.

I have read and re-read online, many dozens, and perhaps hundreds of reviews, comments, etc., on the Hasselblad X2D and its XCD lenses -- good, bad, and indifferent.

Finally, I've had to, as I should, just make up my own mind. I find that much easier than balancing all the opinions of others. So, here is my personal conclusion and quick look at of this Hasselblad X2D-system.

As mentioned, I have read the most granular, critical, and thoughtful analyses of the Hasselblad system. The lens expert who has most thoroughly looked at the Hasselblad system (XD1, XD2) and all the XCD lenses is Lloyd Chambers at Diglloyd.com. Very little escapes Chambers and he plays no favorites when it comes to critical examination.

That withstanding, as mentioned, it comes down to me, myself, and I. What do I feel about this Hasselblad X-system? I'm paying dearly for it.

I like it. I even love it and see no reason why I would need any other system for most of my work, especially since I have a pretty complete Nikon system to use when I need it, with all the good lenses. And the Hasselblad X2D has popped me out of my groove of focus-stacked nature photos, and turned me more on to photographing people and things. With the X2D it seems that anything is worth photographing. LOL. It's like a new set of eyes.

And I find that I'm not reaching for my Nikons lately, except if I want sports or speed-related tasks. The Hasselblad is slow, which my whole photo history has been, still-life and tripod work.

However, I must say that as long as I have enough light, the Hasselblad X2D does not need a tripod, but works almost perfectly hand-held and its image stabilization system is as good as any I have seen. It took me a while to believe and more to trust, but as far as I can tell, this is true.

When I first tried to use the X2D, I dragged a tripod around with me as I always have and snapped away. I soon found how heavy that was and there came a point where I removed the tripod and tried increasing the shutter speed and took photos the standard way.

To my surprise the photos came out perfect. Even at very low shutter speeds, the image stabilization is just that good. And so, unless I am balancing a very heavy (or telephoto) lens on a tripod, I don't use tripods with the Hasselblad.

I'm into landscape photos, but not as much as I am getting into people photos, and mood or vibe shots in general. I never did this with the Nikon system.

My background is in close-up photos of plants and flowers, in particular with focus stacking, but as mentioned the Hasselblad has pushed me beyond that, if only because it is so much fun to use on just about anything and view the results.

No camera that I have ever had is as inspiring as what the Hasselblad X2D brings out in me. It does the most for me. I have spent many years studying the best of the lenses that can be put on the Nikon system, F-mount and then

Z-mount. I have or have previously had almost any lens you could name, aside from the large telephotos, which I have not done much with, other than a couple telephotos like the Nikon Z 70-200 f.2.8 S and the Nikon Z 100-400 S lens. And of course, I had to find out about the Nikon 135mm Plena and the Nikon Noct 58mm f/0.95, and others.

What's the point of it all? For me, it is just bringing to life photographically the world as I see it in my mind.

Apparently, it takes a special sort of camera to get me to venture beyond my habit of flower, nature photos, and still-life in general. And although I first purchased the X1D and the X2D to hopefully perfect my history of closeup nature photography, it took almost zero time with the X2D to find me wanting to photograph, well, just about anything. I marveled at the results the X2D shows me.

For one, physically the X2D is beautifully sculptured and very minimalistic. I can see that. And the Hasselblad operating system is minimal, simple, easy-to-use, and intuitive. While many (or at least some) of the reviewers of the X2D cursed it for how little it had in terms of bells & whistles and how difficult it was to use, I do not find that true or at least was not bothered by what was missing in this camera.

Instead, I was knocked out by what the X2D did have that my other camera systems lacked, which was, in a word, that huge 100 megapixel sensor, the natural Hasselblad sense of color, and the detailed sharpness and microtones of many of the XCD lenses.

I was grateful for the 16-bit color (281 trillion colors), 15-stop dynamic range, and in particular the 5-Axis 7-stop stabilization. After years (and decades) of trying to make Nikon color look like reality (almost every image), the Hasselblad Natural Color Solution system was the closest to how my eyes naturally see color. What a useful surprise!

The X2D has a low natural ISO of 64, something I am used to (and demand) with my Nikon systems, a fast CFexpress Type B Card Slot, and a huge internal 1 TB of SSD memory. I hesitated to use the internal 1 TB of memory for fear of the difficulty of hooking it up, but when I finally did try it, it was as simple as a single USB 3.0 cable. It was easy.

The Electronic Viewfinder is fine and the rear touchscreen good enough as well.

I should say more about the 5-Axis 7-stop stabilization system, something I at first did not trust because to me it was 'unbelievable'. I assumed that this was some kind of advertising hype that would disappoint. It did not.

Once I tried the in-camera stabilization and found it really worked, I left my tripod at home unless I needed more stabilization and before I knew it I was taking serious photos with no tripod, just walking around and taking great photos. I never saw myself as a 'walk around' photographer until the Hasselblad X2D.

[Not my latest Hasselblad X2D image, but my very first one.]

EMAIL

"And It's Hot Out Too!"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/307c8d9a-7ab2-44c5-953e-d56b3d233dcf_1356x2048.jpeg

Who can tell me where that line came from? It is hot out here in Big Rapids and it finds me sitting by the window watching the breeze puffing the window shade out. That's about all I'm good for today.

Of course, I'm on antibiotics again, since I picked up a another tick from the woods or garden, and it blew up and I had to go to the hospital and get it verified and now it's 10 days of antibiotics again. The nurse reminded me that I did the same thing almost to the day one year ago.

This bite was not nice and ran down my arm with inflammation and only now, some days later, is starting to subside. And antibiotics always wipe out my intestinal flora and it takes about 5-6 months to rebuild that again. This time I'm working on it as I take the antibiotics, lots of probiotic yoghurt and flora pills that continually restart my stomach flora as the antibiotics neutralizes it.

I'm watching the Olympics as much as I can, and I can't believe how beautiful Rugby is. Never watched it carefully before. It is mostly brawn personified and is really a lovely game. And they wear no equipment to protect themselves because they are not allowed to beat themselves around the head. It's a rule.

I particularly like Antoine Dupont from France who just picks up the ball and runs right through anyone who stands in his way. Amazing. Also watching swimming, about the only sport I was ever any good at. And also surfing, an incredible sport, riding the water tubes.

That's about the size of it. I have been getting some oversized zucchini out of the garden and making baked zucchini with filling. Starting to get some cherry tomatoes.

Spiritually, I'm fine, still working on my shift of emphasis from words to images. I include an image here. It looks like another hot time. This is summer.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

An Internal Landslide: Wait for the Smoke to Clear

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 31, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d738c932-29eb-4db8-852f-b1e59cf5a2d1_2048x1110.jpeg

[Before I blog, just want to point out that we had the first sweet corn today. Big Rapids, Michigan, where we live, is surrounded by Amish farms from which we often get produce, in this case the first sweet corn of the season. We watched it being picked and know this particular farmer and his wife. It's as good as it looks and beats the often-mealy corn we find at the grocery store.]

I sense change in the air, not just a little change but some kind of inflection point has been reached, IMO.

Of course, from a solar flare perspective we are in a very active time of concatenating CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejections) that are piling up to the point of what only can be described as a shift in consciousness, something like an inner landslide or implosion. What it means I don't know and it's probably too soon to even hazard a guess, yet here we are right in the middle of it.

As to whether we should accept the impending change, I believe we have no choice. It's not a change happening 'to' us, but rather it is us that is changing. And how we turn out is anybody's guess, but I believe there is hope in the air perhaps along the lines of anything is better than what we have been experiencing recently in the world. I feel we can now also see signs of it in the presidential race; this same shift is affecting all that.

There are so many things happening that otherwise I would stop and think about, but right now I see no point in thinking at all. We are beyond simple thought or intellection and instead are knee-deep in a fluid situation that itself is changing. It's enough to hang on to our hats and see who we are and how it is with us after the smoke clears.

This is not a new experience, this change, but what is new each time is to discover that what is changing is our very Self (which we try to hold together). I'm not talking about the true nature of the mind that dharma student's work for, but rather the tenuous hold we have on what we call our Self and its role in life. When we ourselves start to change at the core, then there is no observing it because the so-called observer, the 'us' in us, is what is changing.

Nothing makes sense of late, at least the kind of 'sense' we are used to observing. This is a new time. And there is no observer here because, as mentioned, the observer is the crux of the change. That's why it's always new, time after time. Our hold on reality itself is morphing and changing, and we are forced to let go of that, so a 'wait and see attitude' is required.

Don't count your chickens or discount your chickens, because the whole enchilada is shifting and sliding around. Where it stops, nobody knows.

As mentioned, change is in the air and for some reason, I feel positive about it.

[Photo taken by me today.]

EMAIL

Siddhas and Siddhis

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d2e73416-0adb-48e0-96f2-ac8c38f9fd12_1024x1024.jpeg

What do those of us who have practiced dharma for years and decades have to say about siddhis? Remember Siddhas are perfected practitioners and Siddhis are the outward signs of that perfection. Siddhas may exhibit siddhis.

So, if I am such a good practitioner, where are my siddhis, the signs of my practice? I don't claim to have any or if I do, I can only think of one, which I will recount.

The signs of our practice (or lack thereof) are how we appear and are what siddhis or gifts demonstrate. I have been fortunate in finding in my life great teachers. That much I have going for me. As for siddhis, signs of dharma success, well, sorry folks, I can't say I have seen any, with one minor exception. As mentioned, there is one gift that I can't deny, and while not a big deal, it is very welcome as I see it, but not so much spiritual as it is practical.

As some of you may know, my background is in music, performing and studying music for a long time. Can I walk through walls or levitate, no I can't. LOL. Well, what can I do?

About the only thing that I have experienced that I have no explanation for is the following.

My early introduction to music, learning music was drums. Back then, as a kid I did not even have a set of drums. What I did have was a little wooden stand with a piece of linoleum tacked to its surface. It was all of 7 inches square, and on it I would practice paradiddles, drum rhythms. I was never even any good at it, yet I tried.

Now flash forward until my mid-twenties (1965) when my brother and I had started a band, the "Prime Movers Blues Band." I started out playing rhythm guitar and over time ended up as the lead singer and amplified harmonica player. This is what we sounded like.

This went on from 1965 until the early 1970s. Yet, back then, although I could play music, I never felt that I was in 'the pocket', and could find the heart of the beat and emphasize it. Yes, I could remain within the rhythmic confine of

the tunes, and not fall out, but was I in the pocket, and naturally resting there? No, I was not. And while only I perhaps felt this, being aware of what was not there was not encouraging, so to speak.

Now, jump again forward to just a few years ago. I am old and no longer really playing much music, but listen with clarity, I can and do.

Anyway, a few years ago, quite suddenly, when I listened to music, I suddenly found myself totally at the heart of the beat, in the groove or pocket. It literally made me want to dance. And even listening to music became suddenly enormously pleasurable. I was not ahead or behind the beat even by a millisecond. I was the beat. And being in that groove taught me how deep the beat is, endless.

It's like we go between the clock-ticking seconds of time to a kind of eternity itself, a sense of space that is profound. And, along with it, my sense of pitch also improved. It was like someone just suddenly adjusted my ability to hear and feel music until it was, for me anyway, perfect.

It's a rather small thing, but it was amazing to experience, and it has stayed with me. That is as close to a siddhi as I know. That was, for me, a siddhi, one that dovetailed into my natural interest in music.

Does that make me a Siddha? I don't think so, because it was not really a spiritual attainment, just a cosmic tune-up that probably resulted from my gradually purifying my senses enough so that this sensing of the beat snapped or fell into place.

Nevertheless, I am very grateful for its occurrence. It is a gift.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Groundhog Day

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 2, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d29bfe64-187a-4f8a-aa6a-405271097ab9_1024x1024.jpeg

As I make this transition from signaling by articulating with words (leaning on words) to instead invoking more visual images, in my case through photography, this is an ongoing process. In fact, it is endless. I could further up the ante by playing and singing music again, but I'm not ready to do that... probably. However dancing sounds good to me. I intend to do that.

These days, and of late, I have my Hasselblad photography in mind most all the time. What that means is that I am repeatedly bringing to mind and clarifying what is pristine and engaging about the Hasselblad X2D camera and its XCD lenses. I bring this to mind over and over and over. In other words, I hold it in mind.

Not sure what this process does, but this is how I do things, keep a concept in mind until I kind of grow into it or it into me. I see it more like a window or door I can pass through if I can incorporate it. And once visualized and incorporated, I then pass through it and merge with it. I become it and vice-versa. The secret?

How many beads are on a string like a mala or rosary? There is no end because it's a circle or cycle, so once that concept is grasped internally, there is no reason to be in a hurry or to doubt. Once it is internalized, that we have nothing but time to get it right, we can relax and get down to the business of doing things properly. It's like the movie "Groundhog Day."

As the great Mahasiddha Tilopa said, "Relax, As It Is." What I'm pointing at today is how do we relax enough to make that possible?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Scratching the Itch

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8b80b4c8-4cc4-4b28-8d27-a9bf3fa3e1f2_2048x2048.jpeg

With decades of focus stacking under my belt, and well-known for it, there was no reason why I don't continue this kind of work into the future. And then came the Hasselblad X2D camera and its lenses into my life. Stunning!

It did not take me long with the X2D for me to realize that I don't so much need focus stacking because with Hasselblad much more of the entire photograph frame is already in focus.

Now, it took me some time to prove this to myself, and to realize that it's not so much that I love the ardors of focus stacking. I discovered that it was not my passion for stacking focus, having things granularly in focus. And the Hasselblad X2D already does that to a marked degree. Everything is or can be pretty much in sharp focus. I went through a reorientation like an astronaut rotating in deep space. Before my eyes I got turned around.

It reminds me of the story of the tiny town of Flamingo at the extreme southern tip of the state of Florida. "Flamingo" was a seaport and was only accessible by boat. It is said that Flamingo has something like 33 types of salt-water mosquitoes, and they are fierce. I have been there.

We had to run from our car into a house while the mosquitoes attacked us. Also, the houses in Flamingo had an extra room, like a vestibule on the front of each house. It was called "The Mosquito Room." This room was where we brushed off the mosquitoes as we came into the house. Never heard of that before. Here in the marshlands of Michigan we also have mosquitoes, but not like that!

Anyway, back in the 1930s or so, the Army Core of Engineers built a road through the Everglade swamps down to Flamingo connecting it to the rest of upstate Florida. It is said that once the road was opened, immediately about half the population moved out of Flamingo toward places north. Why recount this?

I recount it because there is a similarity in my experience as the advent of the Hasselblad X2D camera into my life and the Flamingo story. As soon as I got my hands on the X2D, I lost my ingrained interest in stacking focus. I realized

clearly where my sympathies are, not with focus stacking, per se, but with more detailed photos produced by the X2D. Like falling off a log, suddenly I could separate the wheat from the chaff without even thinking about it. Focus stacking, kind of my hallmark in photography, more or less evaporated. And I am talking about many, many years of doing it. Not that I won't still do some focus stacking, just not first and center.

The Hasselblad X2D scratches an itch I have always had.

[Photo by me of my living room with the Hasselblad H2D.]

EMAIL

The Now Legendary Hasselblad XCD 21mm F/3.5

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 8, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bfd5d4b9-06dc-47f8-b7d1-56a5b55970d3_2048x2048.jpeg

This is not a technical review of this fascinating lens; there are a number of great XCD lenses out there and the XCD 21mm is perhaps my favorite. And this post is also about how I'm finding my way around the Hasselblad X2D, a camera still a little bit new to me. And I'm loving it. Each day I'm still finding something else about this camera that I did not know existed.

I've moved heaven and earth to sell what equipment I could to afford the camera and even more for the various lenses, which I bought used at that. The Hasselblad system is expensive!

I've tried out a number of the XCD lenses, including one of the new "V" series, the XCD 55mm f/2.5 lens.

After my look around the lenses available to me on the X2D (the 21mm, 30mm, 45mm, 45Pmm, 55mm V, 65mm, 120mm, and 135mm+1.7 TC), I end up finding the most use for the wide-angle XCD 21mm lens.

One thing that has occurred to me is that unlike my Nikon system, where I have a great many lenses, with the Hasselblad X2D, even one single good lens can be enough. How we find and figure out which that one lens is can be costly. It might be best to rent a few.

As for the XCD 21mm, it's not just because it is wide-angle. My history is not one of much use of wide-angle lenses. I've seen too many real-estate photos where wide-angle photos make the house seem larger than it is, and when you arrive for a showing its about the size of a postage stamp. In other words, I'm more just the opposite, into closeup and near-telephoto macros.

However, the XCD 21mm lens is addicting, and in my case very addicting. This amounts to a new experience in my book.

Perhaps I don't use the XCD 21mm like one would a wide-angle lens, for it's breadth of scope. I seem to more use it to have plenty of expansive context from which to crop a photo in a number of ways, as I like. This 21mm lens seems to stretch space out in all directions tastefully, giving me room, room, room.

Yet, from all that context, that space, I find room for a great deal of creativity on my part. It's not that I'm usually not creative, but with the XCD 21 I seem to be more at home with my creativity. Very intuitive and natural.

I can get quite close up with this lens and I can also pull in a lot of space from that wide angle for context, on all sides.

It's not a lens I would choose for portraits, yet again and again I find myself taking portraits of people with this lens, featuring them, and then adding in whatever I like from the surrounding background as context to bring them out. It could be as simple as I've been too many years with closeup and macro. I need to let some light in.

I also seem to come up with what I could only call 'wide-angle closeups', something brought in near, close-up, but then inset into an extensive background of space that stretches away wherever.

Most of all, I am troubled, because no matter whatever other lens I put on the X2D, I seem to find myself wishing I had the XCD 21 instead. And so, for me, the XCD21 has become a kind of Swiss Army Knife, a single lens that can serve many purposes. Why? You tell me. Anyway, these are the facts that I'm wrestling with these days.

So, should I just consider the XCD21 my idea of a "street Lens," because I seem to use it for almost everything, but yet never before would I consider such a wide lens for that. Yet here I am choosing it and using it for this, that, and the other things.

Yes, the XCD21 is sharp. Yet, more important it also has a special character that is appealing, which only a few lenses seem to have. For me it is a special lens, and I cannot understand why Hasselblad discontinued it. I don't consider the XCD 25 V lens a replacement. I grabbed an XCD21 used while I still could. It's on the X2D almost all the time.

I feel a little guilty letting my other XCD lenses sit on the shelf while I use the XCD 21, yet that's life and there must be some kind of lesson learned or in the learning.

In my Nikon lens cabinet I have all kinds of lenses, each is (or at least often) quite different from the next. I can't say that about the Hasselblad XCD lenses. Yes, they are different, yet aside from the difference in millimeters, they seem surprisingly similar.

The XCD lenses tend to have the same f/stop when they are at their best, all are quite sharp, have a lot of microtones, and so on. If you have one good Hasselblad lens, you kind of have all of them. I have a lot to learn.

[Photo by me using the X2D and the XCD 21mm lens.]

EMAIL

"I Want To Be In that Number"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 9, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e6ebf2c8-b20a-4f6e-98e4-f78ff80d8b16_1024x2048.jpeg

"Yes, I want to be in that number When the saints go marching in."

Ok, I get it. How can we be in that number?

Well, the best I've come up with is that its like getting in line, or getting aligned with reality, as it is, whatever that is.

Or is it like folding dough in making pie crust or pizza. I notice, as I age, that it seems that no matter how far and wide our spiritual and other excursions are, all of us, we end up getting back in line, going single file, as we exit this world.

As mentioned above, it's like folding pie dough back into itself. I find myself doing something similar, concatenating, or should I say 'collapsing', folding space and time, again and again, down into the essence of my life and who I am. Perhaps, 'Distillation' is the word I'm looking for. Who am I? Who are we?

Gathering what went before, my entire life, but reduced into the here and the now, where it has always been anyway. Our life adds up to what is present here right now. What have you? And what was lost in the exchange of all these years? The answer to that is: everything is lost that's not here now.

I believe we do our best. We bring with us what we can. We dream a bridge to hold back what we are, yet by old age there is a lot of water over the dam, so in the last analysis it's about how can we be a proper steward of our own life.

Some days my life seems like a moving kaleidoscope expanding and contracting, simultaneously, at the same time.

Yet what comes of all this? Not even a sense of this self paid forward. The present moment, right now, is the 'Magic 8-Ball', which it has always been. I wrote this little poem for my brother Shakespeare in the 1960s.

FOR SHAKESPEARE

"Look at yourself,

First yet first,

No better,

And yet not worse.

“Now get yourself together in a bunch,

And call what carriage as ye may your hearse.”

Oh yeah, I must not forget that it’s a good ride.

[Photo by me of the small shrine in my office.]

EMAIL

A Tribute to the Hoxeyville Music Festival

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f52d91d0-9e00-4e63-b14c-a3e02dc2fdbd_2048x2048.jpeg

Just back from a music festival about 50 miles from here, Hoxeyville Music Festival, part of our intimate music scene for the last 23 years. I can't think of any music festival as old as that which has done as much in launching and nurturing music groups. 2024 will be the last Hoxeyville Music Festival as far as I understand.

I was there today to take photos as a rogue photographer gathering vibe or mood photos of the scene as invited, but now also marking history. There were many artists there as well, their paths crisscrossing for a day or so. One of these artists reports that on his journeys of late he sees music venues and festivals closing up all over. And another, a production worker, says that kids and grandkids of my generation are telling their folks that they have little interest in doing what my generation enjoyed, going out in the country, sitting on blankets and listening to music, while drinking beer, smoking weed, or both. What?

I hadn't thought of that, that my kid's kids might not enjoy what we enjoyed, as mentioned above, going out to the country, sitting on the ground, and listening to music. That's what we did back then. I never would of guessed this!

Of course, I assumed that's just what we did when we had the opportunity. Apparently times change.

Anyway, I'm just repeating what I heard today. Tomorrow, I'll be going back out for the final day of the Hoxeyville Music Festival to take more photos to commemorate this great festival, and to also hear (and take photos) of my daughter May Erlewine and her band 'The Animals.'

Times indeed are changing, but I did not see or anticipate losing what we as young adults did (and still do today), something important that is still taking place for some of us, yet apparently here it is. The end of an era, something I never saw coming.

I guess not everyone these days wants to sit on a folding lawn chair or blanket, kick back, and listen to music. Perhaps today they like massive concerts or another nature, etc.

And no, I don't have 'ALL' my eggs in one basket, that of popular music, but I do have a lot of them there.

I'm not sure if what's affecting the large music festivals is affecting the in-club performances, but that's a question I am now aware of.

And I can't see the love of or the need for live music going away because there is no real substitute for it. I'm writing words and taking images, but the visceral effect of live music is something even more powerful that moves all of us at the core.

I salute Jake and Kristen Robinson, founders of the Hoxeyville Music Festivals and producers of Camp Greensky. Thank you so much for what you have brought to our lives!

[Photo by me taken yesterday, a gray day at Hoxeyville, our own form of Prayer Flags endlessly waving in the gentle chalice of the sky. These times.]

EMAIL

Touch Me If You Are!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f62068e0-0718-4921-a974-5376322be8c1_2048x1617.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/30f339dd-d59f-4199-8039-ba83d39a1630_1178x2048.jpeg

{My last two photos at Hoxeyville, Allison Cole introducing Jake Robinson who along with his wife Kristin Robinson brought us all this wonderful music for the last 23 years.]

Saying goodbye to the Hoxeyville Music Festival. What a wonderful experience that was, even in its last hurrah. Of course, many of Hoxey's closest friends showed up, so for me it was one after another after another of folks I care about and know. And they know me and my family.

It does not get much better than that!

I took over 1500 photos which will keep me busy for weeks developing all the raw images, but I should be able to give to Jake and Kristin a flash drive filled with various sizes of images from which they can enjoy the memories of the festival or put them toward some kind of archive or book of festival photos.

In fact, so moving those two days were that I find it hard to pick up where I left off. Now, where was I? Or have I changed enough from the experience to have go back to the drawing board and reset my View.

Speaking of View, I want to share with you a new song put out by Elvin Bishop, an musician acquaintance from back in the 1960s. Elvin was the second guitar (and also sometimes the lead guitar) for the Paul Butterfield Blue Band.

We met and hung out with the Butterfield band many times and played at same venues. Although we were much closer to Mike Bloomfield, the best known lead guitar for the Butterfield Band, we of course knew Elvin as well.

Anyway, here is a new song by Elvin Bishop backed up by the guys from Los Lobos that address our current political situation. It cracks me up

Hope you enjoy it!

[The last two photos I took at Hoxeyville, Allison Cole speaking to the crowd and introducing Jake Robinson, our benefactor for so many years of incredible music.]

EMAIL

Spacewalk

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7a9efcff-b442-4515-a191-8cf583014976_1024x1024.jpeg

With detachment, comes, well, detachment. If things get detached, they then can float away, and this includes our grip on things and control. That's the whole idea of "Let go," to let go. Yet, then what?

We work hard all our life for security, to tie ourselves down and take root. Obviously, that's a problem aside from what we may view as a blessing -- security. We are not used to being unattached and free floating.

What I'm pointing at here is that with every bit of detachment we achieve comes the responsibility of being unattached. It's like being in a giant ball of cotton, unable to feel anything as we used to because we are no longer attached in this or that way.

We feel differently because we are not bound in the same way but suddenly find ourselves free floating, kind of feeling everything instead of something, if that makes sense.

Being free of attachment may not be a comfortable feeling, at least at first. We are no longer secure as we hoped and tried to be, yet we never were secure; we were just clinging on to anything we could get our hands on.

When our practice of meditation (or whatever you want to call it) pries our fingers from whatever we are attached to until we let go of it and float free, it's a whole new world, at first quite unfamiliar to us.

We are used to the 'hidey hole' of our attachments. When we find ourselves floating free, it may feel like we are a disembodied ghost.

And it's not like we become unattached all at once. We might wish. Rather, it is a gradual process. It takes time, yet there are greater detachments at times than lesser, and we are quite aware when that happens.

My first dharma teacher used to say, there are two kinds of peaches, the Cling and the Freestone. With the cling peach, the pit clings to the flesh of the peach, while the freestone pit just pops out. Popping out happens, but I understand it is rare. Most of us are like the Cling peach, tightly attached to the flesh.

When we go through a shock or sustain an untoward event, it can force us out of our attachments for a time, loosen the grip on reality that we struggle to maintain.

And as uncomfortable as that loosening may feel to us, it can be a time when we can look around and take flight. It may last but a day or two or it can go on for weeks. When our sense of Self has imploded (come tumbling down) and we find ourselves more wide open and at loose ends, that is a time not to be frightened but to take note and see what we can see while we are out of the body of our attachments for the moment.

The Self soon reanimates and takes back control, pulling the veil of flesh attachments around us again like a cloak, so enjoy the spacewalk while you can and take note of what you see.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Garden-All

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/74f77d11-a204-433c-9f01-16bc74cfc910_1536x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/43aca33a-5065-48de-a53b-d4fbfacd867e_1536x2048.jpeg

Non-Solanaceae Ratatouille

Solanaceae Ratatouille

By Michael Erlewine

That's what Margaret and I used to call Ratatouille, because we would take whatever is left in the garden and make a kind of stew out of it, essentially Ratatouille. As mentioned, we called it GardenAll.

Well today I made two batches of Ratatouille, one for me and one for Margaret. Margaret is not eating Solanaceae plants these days (tomato, potato, eggplant) or onion. I eat all that so I thought I would make a version for her with no Solanaceae in it. And did.

I'm trying to get more protein in my diet and since we don't eat meat and I only a little salmon, it's hard to find enough protein.

We have tofu and tempeh, which helps. I don't eat dairy, but I do have a nibble of sharp cheddar cheese when I dare. Also, Greek yoghurt has twice the protein, half the salt, and half the carbohydrates of regular yoghurt. I'm considering eating some of that.

What do you folks do to get enough protein if you don't eat meat and eggs?

EMAIL

Let It Go, Let It Go, Let It Go

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 15, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f12d6151-ead6-4ebc-a939-f86ae8bf19bf_1024x1024.jpeg

Before we can let it go, we have to have it to let go, which should be no problem, our being attached to all kinds of things to let go of.

On occasion, life up and blows out the candle of the Self and our attachment to the self, and we can be liberated at least for a time. And if that happens, we roam free when we are unattached, but only for a time.

At a time of great shock or upset, the Self is fractured into a million pieces, and it takes time for it to reanimate and take back control of our life. And during that time of temporary liberation, we can look around and learn. Often, we can see very clearly.

In summary, what about when we no longer have any place to hide and are increasingly detached. Do we become a will-o-the-wisp, a phantom or disembodied ghost?

Our spirit lives and is connected to the body by sheer attachment. And what about when a shock to the system or earthshaking event shatters our Self and forces or jars us out of the body for a time. We pop out and have what is called an out-of-the-body experience, usually accompanied by the sense of loss that comes with an untoward event.

In other words, we go in and out of the body all the time. We are not glued to the physical but are connected to our body by all of our attachments to it, one by one. When through a shock to the system we suddenly become detached or relatively detached, we leave the body to one degree or another and for a short or longer time our attachment becomes very tenuous. We are cut loose. We are floaters.

A sudden shock to the system, like a death in the family or an untoward event, shatters or collapses what is called our Self and we leave or are separated from the body and find ourselves floating outside in what is called an out-of-the-body experience. In moments of personal shock we find ourselves detached from our normal attachments. We just don't care like we usually do and what seemed so important suddenly is less so. Yet, this is a temporary liberation.

Out time out of minding everything is most often brief. Put it to good use.
Look around. Learn. And then react accordingly.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Two Photographic Tales

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 16, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/769e4262-4e71-4488-811c-8c26d4d653a7_1977x2048.jpeg

Photography has been on my mind, so that's about all I have to offer, and I will. Spiritually I am changing as well, but its too soon to put it into words, yet I'm watching it develop.

So, here are a couple of stories you might enjoy:

First, I did another music festival photographing, using the Hasselblad X2D and the XCD 21mm and XCD 55mm lenses. This was a two-day project, driving to and from the festival, 52 miles each way, each day. The first day it was just me since I had a lot of photographing to do and the second day, Margaret and I went, each in our own car because I had to be there early.

All in all I took over 1500 photos. And I was mostly using the Hasselblad X2D camera, and those two lenses mentioned above. I did my best and the Hasselblad was excellent for all the photos of the festival grounds shots, the booth shots, and many of the people shots. I was on my feet carrying a heavy-enough camera for many hours and trying to keep hydrated.

Yet I also had to do some documenting of the actual act and sets of music, in particular my daughter May Erlewine's set (May Erlewine and the Animals) and a close friend's set "Luke Winslow King."

Where I ran into trouble was shooting the live bands, which were moving quickly and energetically. It was just too hard for the Hasselblad X2D camera to handle focus that quickly, so I switched to the Nikon Z8 camera which I was lucky enough to have brought along and I happened to grab just the kit lens Z 24-70 f/4 and not my f2.8 version of that lens.

The Z8 was wonderful for live work, and I learned quickly one of the limitations of the X2D. It's not for sports or fast-moving scenes. I knew this would probably be the case, yet I learned it was true right on the spot in real time.

However, the combination of a Nikon Z8 system and the Hasselblad medium-format system is a good one. That is story number one.

The other photo story took place right around home. I've been selling camera lenses on Ebay for many months, although it is a bit like watching paint dry. The lenses do sell on Ebay, yet it takes a long time to do so. And I have money to pay back to our savings and don't like to be in debt, even to myself.

\

And so, I felt around to several online businesses that buy used equipment and resell it. Of course, I can't make as much money back going wholesale as selling on Ebay.

Eventually I settled on Roberts Camera, a well-known brick & mortar site and also an Internet sales outlet.

I sent them a couple lens descriptions for some quite rare lenses I am willing to part with, and they sent back what they would offer if all was well with the lens. Of course, it stings in terms of the amount of money that comes back. Yet, at the same time I feel I have better things to do than to monitor, sell, track, and pack and ship lenses for the foreseeable future.

Basically, they paid something like 65% of the resell price on a place like Ebay. Not as much as if I sold it, but no hassle and instant money.

And sure enough, before I knew it we arranged for one of their representatives to come to my house and go over the lenses I am willing to sell.

And sure enough, within weeks a gentleman came to our home at 9 AM sharp one morning. I was prepared for him to perhaps only be interested in the low-hanging fruit, the rare and more exotic lenses

And it turned out they are VERY organized, have some 70 employees, and a very sophisticated system of vetting lenses.

And to my amazement they took almost all of the lenses I had up for sale (over 30 lenses) except three weird lenses not in their database. And before I knew it all the lenses were packed up and being shipped out and I stood there with a check for \$12,000 in my hand. I liked that.

With that money I was able to pay myself back for monies borrowed to buy equipment, get the Hasselblad XCD 80mm f1.9 lenses (used) that I had been salivating over, and also order a new 24 core computer with all the bells & whistles that I really needed – long overdue. My current computer is over five years old and is taking longer and longer to do simple photographic tasks. It takes me 5-10 minutes to do what my friend's computer can do in 15 seconds. And I do a lot of photography.

So, I couldn't be happier to do all that and not to have to put a score or so of lenses through Ebay. I'm a happy guy.

[Photo taken at Hoxeyville Music Festival with the Luke-Winslow King Band using the Nikon Z8 camera and Z 24-70mm f.4 kit lens. That's band leader Luke-Winslow King on the left and award-winning multi-instrumentalist Drew Howard on the right.]

EMAIL

Learning to Fail Successfully

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c44b7f15-85ab-44da-bcc2-d00481958997_1024x1024.jpeg

No doubt. Eventually we will, physically speaking, all fail. The question IMO is can we fail successfully? I posted recently the advice my first dharma teacher, Andrew Gunn McIver, gave to me back in the 1960s. He contrasted the two kinds of canned peaches that were available, the Cling Peach and the Freestone Peach. In today's market I can only find Cling Peaches, the Freestones are not around.

With the Cling Peach, like so many of us, the pit can't be removed without tearing out a lot of flesh, while with the Freestone Peach, the pit just pops out.

To just 'pop out' is divinely to be wished. In the same breath, to fail successfully, like the Freestone Peach, seems something many of us don't know the first thing about.

I learned this from the famous economist Kenneth Boulding, while he was teaching at the University of Michigan. Back in those days I had no fear. On May17, 1967 I just walked into Boulding's office unannounced and spent the morning with him. He did not protest. And together we sat and read each other poems we had written, wept, and shared a moment in time that would be hard to find today. It was Boulding who said, "Michael, we have to learn to fail successfully." How true that is.

And so, as we sort it out, along with everything else we have to keep in mind as we age, failing successfully might well be toward or at the top of the list.

I repeat. With time, fail each of us will, at least physically. How to let ourselves down gently and to have a soft landing, so to speak.

Our force and bluster, perhaps admired as a youth, has no audience when we face personal oblivion. As "1 Corinthians 13:1" put it:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

Toward the end of life, when we begin to face eternity and are not taken up with looking back in time, we are more agreeable to swap that youthful bluster for the gentle rain of acceptance.

It occurs to me that I must relax and allow myself to fail successfully. I love Dylan Thomas and his poem "Do not go gentle into that goodnight," with its "Rage, rage against the dying of the light." I hear that.

Yet, as they say, that and a ticket will get you a ride on the bus. IMO better yet is learning to fail successfully, gently, and with kindness.

Kenneth Boulding wrote a series of sonnets based on a single paragraph written by Jame's Naylor in the year 1660. I quote it here.

THERE IS A SPIRIT...

By James Naylor, 1660

"There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; and takes its kingdom with entreaty and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It is conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it, nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression. It never rejoiceth but through sufferings: for with the world's joy it is murdered. I found it alone, being forsaken. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Michigan Music: A Welspring

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2ee3fdea-baf0-4ff7-b9cc-0e45642a7fcb_1466x2048.jpeg

I'd like to discuss Michigan and music, a topic dear to my heart. I love Michigan, particularly Michigan's alternative community of musicians, artists, poets, gardeners, authors, organic foods people, and on and on.

We all know that Michigan is surrounded by 84% of all the fresh water in North America and 21% of all the fresh water in the world. That's a fact not without effect as well as being an appreciating asset. All that water is significant and produces something.

It's not just the water, but Michigan is, as the old Michigan license plates used to display, a 'water wonderland'. It's no wonder that some of us probably live here because of the water, a renewable resource that the whole world wants. I don't know how that works, but something works, and here we are. I was born in Pennsylvania, and moved here as I kid to Michigan. I grew up here.

I don't know the relation between water and music works, but somehow Michigan has that.

Of course I became active in music in Michigan many decades ago, not only as a performing musician but also as a sincere archivist of popular music. The All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com) is the largest music database on the planet and it was founded by me in this small Michigan town.

All that is fine, but most important is that I believe musically Michigan is like a natural spring that is flowing music and has for as long as I have known it.

We have had a Water Festival here in Michigan for many years. Here is a song my daughter wrote called "Waterfall," one of my favorites.

I have done a number of interviews and posts on Michigan music. I include a few below.

And some of you have asked for more music photos and I have some, I will try to put together some more extensive collections of photos of Michigan music festivals like Smiling Acres, Blissfest, Hoxeyville, and of course Earthwork Harvest Gathering.

I also have many photos from the annual Earthwork Harvest Gathering because I have gone for some many years.

While I gather some photos to share, here are a few interviews I did with Michigan musicians.

Interview of Seth Bernard, Founder of the Earthwork Music Collective

An Interview with Music Historian. Michael G. Nastos

[Interview with Bill Chesney, General Manager of Earthwork Music](#)

[Interview with Peter Madcat Ruth Part 1](#)

[Interview with Peter Madcat Ruth -- Part Two](#)

[Interview with Singer-Songwriter May Erlewine Bernard](#)

[Interview with Michael Shimmin – Jazz Drummer](#)

[Interview with Dave & Linda Siglin of The Ark Folk Venue](#)

[Graphic by me.]

EMAIL

Common Sense

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/efb64765-8164-4f67-b38f-247359225a55_1024x1024.jpeg

Trailing reams of books we do not understand, we cast out or are cast out onto the sea of unity, uncertain yet to swim.

Is it no wonder that we have to engage senses other than the visual and mental? We can't 'think' life, try as we might.

We can hear music and move with the beat. We can feel our heart beating in our chest. We can taste the blood of birth and smell fresh bread cooking.

Our senses are the only pure experience available to us, undefiled and uninterpreted by, as Shakespeare put it, the pale cast of thought.

With the senses, we are wired in. The senses are meant for us to use to liberate ourselves, not to be cloistered and denied. They are the only pure avenue of experience. No other choice.

Be sensible!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Work with the Problem at Hand

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d7a34916-fb21-493b-8810-9e1a12dab2b0_1024x1024.jpeg

If you are looking at what to work on, the most obvious place to look is to work on the problem that confronts you, every time. Work the problem.

In life, as I look around, meet, and observe others, it seems clear to me that most of us ignore the big problems. Perhaps we don't see them or allow ourselves see them. We turn away and ignore the obvious.

We love the old chestnut "Be Here Now" but that does not seem to be true for our problems. We don't look them in the eye, take note of them, and do something about them.

We don't work the problem.

Yet, decades of study, teachings, readings, all seem to focus on being present in the moment and dealing with the obvious.

All this dharma says to relax as it is, accept what is present, and work with that. Work with the problem at hand.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Heat, the Last Hurrah

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/83595a67-66d4-40e0-940a-546c2098e464_704x1696.jpeg

A few of the more than 90 hard drives I have to keep track of

By Michael Erlewine

That's what our mailman told me as he passed by this morning. Well, since I posted a little bit of Blue-Sky yesterday, today I will bring it back to earth and the hardtack.

Aside from the rowing machine and some physical weight exercises, the next thing I did today was power-wash our house, particularly the north side where all the mold and algae grow. That was a workout, holding that water hose at a high angle and washing all that green stuff away,

When finished, I was soaking wet and had to shower and completely change my clothes and my thermometer said we reached 90 degrees today and humid. I couldn't keep enough water in me and also was using electrolyte caps, something called 'SaltStick Electrolyte Caps' which I very much recommend. Professional runners use these and take one every mile or so. They really work well.

And that's not exactly all either. I have been preparing for a new computer, which will arrive today. And it's a big computer, not only physically big (19x9x22"), but it also weighs 30 lbs. and is going to fit right next to my current computer, the same size and weight. And they have to share the same monitor, mouse, and keyboards.

Because of all the photo work I do, this computer has an Intel Core i9 14900K 3.2GHz 24 Core 36MB 125W chip, 128 GB of RAM, PNY GeForce RTX 4070 SUPER Verto 12GB video card, 8 TB internal SSD, Super Flower LEAD EX VII Gold 1000W power, and Noctua NH-U12AP internal cooling. Also, 64bit Windows 11, and extra ports all around. Sorry about the jargon.

I'm busy making that happen. The hardest part is coordinating my external hard drives. I have over 80 external drives, most of them on the shelf, plus some seven external SSD drives and four Sata drives available that I use all the time.

Anyway, I had to check all the 7 external SSD drives, and print out a list of their main directories to place in a notebook

I have built a special wooden rack to hold these two computers. Later today, when the new computer arrives, I will have to line it up next to my current computer and make sure both machines can share my one 30-inch monitor (NEC Multisynch PA302W), plus mouse and keyboard. It will be a balancing act to get these two computers working together and sharing data. I also have a third computer just for email and news, etc. And its hotter than blazes and humid.

Right now, it's the crack of dawn and we are in a thunderstorm.

EMAIL

Shear Winds

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0065ce6c-6632-434b-ae09-1cfe9e7d6288_2048x1536.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6c377c0c-8e5d-4b6f-806d-16948fca8c27_2048x1536.jpeg

Well, a busy day beyond imagination. I will relate the story. My new computer arrived, but very late in the day, so I did not have much time to work on setting it up. I busied myself with what I could but, mostly just waited. Meanwhile, Margaret took a turn and finished up the power-washing of the north side of our house, so there was the constant sound of water under pressure hitting the siding. The day was very hot. My thermometer says 90 degrees again. And the weather report was one with no rain for yesterday, etc. In the last years the best the weather report folks can do is report what is happening at the moment. There is no reliable forecast any longer. And then it came, a sudden almost tornado, what we call around here "SHEAR WINDS." The sky darkened in minutes and then in seconds. The pressure dropped precipitously as both Margaret and I dived for the windows to get them closed. We barely got there. As I raced to close windows the air inside our house just got sucked right out. I could feel it, and trying to close the windows in my office, the office door behind me was slammed shut three times, as I kept reopening it with one hand also closing the windows with the other because a torrential downpour was about to happen. This was the wind, and then the rain came. These shear winds only happen very rarely here, but like a tornado, they literally shear off whatever they encounter. They took our back fence out some years ago. In this case it was the tall pine tree in our back yard. The winds simply took off the top of the tree and plunged it to the ground, many hundreds of pounds of tree. Nothing was damaged other than some clay pots with flowers in them. It was done in a minute, but the rain stayed for some time. We could hear the sirens. When it was all over, I was out with our chain saw beginning to cut it up, but the main trunk was too thick for the saw and way too heavy for me to move. And now here is the spooky part, so hold onto your hat! In our little town, with a population of around 8,000 people, no one (hardly) ever comes here other than students to Ferris University and hunters in the fall. Big Rapids sits on the edge of 900,00 acres

of the Manistee National Forest. Well, as it turned out vice-president candidate J.D. Vance came to our town yesterday (Tuesday the 27th of August), and he spoke only a couple miles from here. I doubt such a high official has ever been to Big Rapids. Margaret and I did not attend because Vance is not a favorite of ours, and there is no use my being there and thinking unhelpful thoughts, and also Covid is having a resurgence around here. Well, here is the odd part. According to Vance's itinerary, he would be stopping by our local A&W Root Beer place which is only a block from our home. I believe that was set up for 2:30 PM and 2:30 PM was almost exactly when the shear-force winds struck, turning a sunny day into a hurricane in about two minutes, followed by a hard rain. So, the shear winds came through at the same time candidate Vance was about a block from where we live. No idea whether he made it there or not. The spooky part for me (I try not to think it) is that all of this, the shear winds, the Republican candidate, etc. all came together in like a nexus, right on the spot on Earth where I am. I'm not thinking anything, but if I were, what an odd triangulation! [iPhone shots of the tree.] EMAIL

Let's Get Physical

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1e4cd02e-d57a-490e-9a4d-f5283f68f13d_903x1267.jpeg

Living in eternity. I know, it's this physical world we are living in, with our feet on the ground. Yet, this Earth is more than just a rock-ball somewhere in outer space. We also live in eternity, so how do the twain meet?

I have done my best and touched the earth about as much as I am able, often keeping busy seven days a week and long hours at that. So, at least I have tried to keep occupied, keeping busy counting the beads of eternity in real time. Yet, that won't do it because that's not it.

Yes, those two worlds (physical and eternal) not only meet, they also interface, however obliquely or at right angles. Their bond is strong and as real as real is. In fact, reality is what is tenuous here, and not the otherworldliness.

There is no amount of getting physical that will quench our thirst for reality. It's like drinking tons of water and still not getting the electrolytes we need.

And that's because, try as we might, reality is not real. We are living in an 'unreal' world in which our being is always becoming, but has never 'been', so to speak. Be here now? Not a chance.

What does it matter? That's the whole point here, that reality does not matter. Get used to it because it's always been this way and has never been anything different. As mentioned, our being is becoming. We have never actually been. That's the itch we cannot scratch.

Think about it, because we CAN only think about it and imagine. Why are we not satisfied with our unreality, since there is no and has never been any 'being' with a capital "B".

That's why I so much love and appreciate the incredible tune by Les McCann and Eddie Harris, written by Gene McDaniels. If you have never heard it, you have missed something precious, IMO. If you have heard it, do hear it again while you are able.

[Image "Dance of Albion" by the mystical poet William Blake.]

EMAIL

Peter Grams: Master Craftsman

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 31, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b2de07b2-3c8d-40a6-84af-10038c565ae9_1000x799.jpeg

Coming up, married with a new wife and a first child, I didn't know how I could provide for a family. I did everything I could. I even worked on a garbage truck, worked as part of a stage crew, and I did janitorial work. And for a time I worked as a potter's helper, mixing clay. I used a giant Hobart mixer. I did not learn to really throw pots, but I did do a little glazing. I mixed clay.

Most of all, I got the chance to work with Peter Grams, one the leading potters in the Ann Arbor area and to my taste a master of the clay form. His pottery spoiled me from almost any pottery I have seen since, and I have seen a lot.

When you picked up a clay mug or vase made by Peter Grams it was always lighter than you imagined, and the walls were of a constant thickness and the base was never heavier than it should be.

Peter Grams was a master of clay but also an expert welder of steel and aluminum. He would build large gang pottery wheels, one piece that five or six folks could sit around all at once. Today Peter Grams has a studio out in Massachusetts. Here is a link.

<https://www.petergramspottery.com/>

Peter and I are still in touch, and I consider him one of my dearest and closest friends. Margaret and I, plus our kids, have used Gram's pottery for over 50 years. Every time we, by accident, break one of Peter's pots, we mourn it, glue it back together if possible, and often just keep the broken pieces. To just feel the delicate rim or wall of a Grams cup is to experience his mastery in fact with your own hands.

We have cups, dishes of all sizes, lamp bases, vases, and even suribachis made by Grams. I thank Peter Grams for demonstrating that a craft can be mastered. I have learned much about the physical world from being around Peter and his work.

[Photo of one of Gram's cups.]

EMAIL

Nam-Tö-Se (Perfection of Generosity)

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4f3df1f5-348a-4cd6-817f-78107a022d2f_1962x2048.jpeg

Nam-Tö-Se, also called Vaisravana, is the considered premiere leader of the four guardians of the cardinal directions (lokapalas), in this case the compass direction North.

Nam-Tö-Se is the embodiment of the Perfection of Generosity, which means he is the de facto guardian of wealth – riches. His is also another name for Kubera, the Lord of Yakshas.

Nam-Tö-Se is traditionally dressed in a suit of armor; he carries a victory banner. He holds a mongoose in his left hand, which represents generosity. The mongoose (a natural enemy of the snake of greed and hatred) is spitting or pouring forth precious gems from its mouth, which is considered generosity in action.

I first became aware of the guardian Nam-Tö-se who is also associated with Jambhala (deity of wealth), by memorizing his name in what is called the Tashi Prayer, which is in Tibetan. I would recited it each day, and always noted the name Nam-Tö-Se, also an emanation of Ratnasambhava.

However, my real initiation with this deity, outside of reciting the Tashi Prayer, was in 1997 on our first trip to Tibet, in this case to the city of Lhasa. Located in Lhasa is the legendary Jokhang Temple, and it is surrounded by what is called the Barkhor, a large circle of shops surrounding the vast temple.

What was most interesting to me in the Barkhor was a small older monastery called Meru Nyingba, which was attached to the larger Jokhang. We had time to spend while we adjusted to our altitude sickness, which took several days.

This particular monastery is very old and has a kind of special quality to it. A little difficult to find, it is located down an alley behind where most of the Tibetan rugs are sold. You have to push through the rug merchants and go farther down the alley, at the end of which is a gompa (shrine room), along with a number of smaller shrines.

Within Meru Nyingma I fell in love with a tiny protector shrine, the Jambhala Lhakhang, which is the oldest part of this complex. This particular protector shrine had, along with the Jambhala statue (connected to wealth), a number

of other statues of protector deities, including my favorite, Vajrapani, and also (and a bit new to me) Nam-Tö-Se (Vaishravana), the protector king.

I was immediately attracted to the figure of Nam-Tö-Se, and even moved to tears by it, for some reason. I wanted to practice in front of this statue, and I did. I came back as often as I could.

Later, I was to find out that the great king, Nam-Tö-Se is the emanation of generosity, the protector of wealth.

Considering that one of the main reasons I had come to Tibet was to ask and oracle (the the 17 th Karmapa) about certain financial problems, my spontaneous interest in Nam-Tö-Se, with his ability to protect wealth, made a certain sense. I met a young monk there who watched over this particular shrine. As mentioned, later I would find my way to Meru Nyingba whenever I had a chance.

For many years this particular rupa (filled statue) of Nam-Tö-Se has sat on the very top of my personal practice shrine, kind of hidden by various colored banners that obscured it.

Unlike all the other statues and rupas I have, which are mostly of Nepalese or Indian design, this statue of Nam-Tö-Se is the only statue I own that is fashioned after the Tibetan way of constructing statues, and it is filled with sacred mantras and gems, so it is considered a 'rupa'.

However today, for some reason, I brought Nam-Tö-Se down from the panel at the top of my shrine, dusted and cleaned him up, and placed him directly to the left of my main shrine on a little wooden stand and a block of cherry wood of his own. And there he now sits.

I thought I would tell you about Nam-Tö-Se and share a little about his history with me. He contains the blessing of generosity.

[Photo of Nam-Tö-Se by me.]

EMAIL

Knock On Wood...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d37754ec-2ed6-4523-8603-ae22c50ffa7f_647x752.jpeg

I'm not in the mood. The whole country is not in the mood. The republican candidate is well past his expiration date for politics. IMO. Enough, in this case, is too much.

It seems we are all counting the days until the election and glad it will soon be over. It would be nice just to have a regular life again, with no chaos and have politics at a slow boil rather than fever pitch.

We are all just tired, tired, tired of all the baloney, lies, attacks and misdirection, sometimes on both sides. How invasive!

When I was brought up, both my parents were Republican, although mom was probably just not making waves.

Back then, it was not a big deal whether we had a Republican or a Democratic president. They all ended up working together if they wanted something done.

I don't have to tell you what it's like today because we all know how tedious this has been and so unnecessary. My hope is that the Democrats win and do their best to unite both sides, because that's what it takes.

There is no way I am inviting the Republicans back to the White House as they are now configured. As mentioned, I used to not care (back in the 1950s and so on), but after suffering all this abuse to our peace of mind, I care.

Meanwhile, the rest of us had better get on with working the problems this nation has, all that has been ignored and shoved aside during this infighting.

"A New Way Forward?" Yes.

[Graphic by me.]

Blow Out the Candle ...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 3, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7d1c7a73-855c-4d8a-9d12-0725af7294cf_1024x1024.png

For years it seems that we try to be still, to still ourselves. Hard to do. Yet the day comes when it's OK that the stillness is outside, and yet we are in motion. And it makes no difference, inside and outside.

With that realization, the world turns and, in the turning, somehow we are freed and turned loose. The sun comes up. We have made a circle round the Sun, all 360 degrees. It's like an internal rotisserie. The bread is baked.

What then?

It's all about our stopping to try, to stop making effort. No longer trying. At some point, our trial is over, done.

Perhaps this is what is called "entering the silence." I can't say.

And if it feels like we alone enter it, that's because we each do enter it alone, although surrounded by others and in the middle of everything. Years ago, I wrote this poem which relates.

TIME OUT

In the middle of time,

Without a thought,

It comes,

(Not at life's end),

Like the tide coming in.

I had planned,

To get away from it all.

Too late,

Now,

For retreat;

Distance is close,
Far is now near.
Motions are going,
Every which way,
Striking me dumb.
I'll speak while I can.
The rest I am seeking,
Overt-ook me;
It's already here!
And it's:
Precious, Precious:
Stillness in chaos,
The silence in sound.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Night-Blooming Cereus

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9c20f1dd-69f7-4329-90c0-e705e69e33d0_1536x2048.jpeg

Once a year, in summer, and in the night, this succulent blooms. Here is a photo taken just hours ago, and as you can see there will be another bloom tonight. That's it. These blooms are usually 8-9 inches long (or larger), and have a scent that is stronger than any scent I know. It penetrates deep in the brain and is unmistakable and unforgettable. I will try to get some more and also time to develop the shots I have. Here is just one, for starters. [Photo by me.] EMAIL

Take Note, Own it, Drop It

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2532700f-df9d-42a3-bcb6-b0a6b03fbf8a_1536x2048.jpeg

The Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche wrote:

“Three ways of dealing with the afflictions—suppressing them, viewing them as emptiness, and indulging them will not work. What we need to do instead is take them as the path. But how can you put that into practice? Here Khenpo Gangshar gives us an analogy: “For these reasons, just as poison can be extracted from a poisonous plant and taken as a medicine, the special quality of this teaching lies in the fact that any disturbing emotion may arise as wisdom the moment you relax in naturalness. Look directly into it, don’t deliberately reject it, regard it as a fault, indulge in it concretely, or regard it as a virtue.”

The above quote says succinctly what has to be said, but realizing this is not easy. The whole idea of taking whatever arises to the path and then work the problem, so to speak, is crucial.

In my own words, become aware of the problem, take note of it and accept it as our problem and no one else, and then just drop it. Let it go.

What we don’t do is note it and then follow that train of thought and try to figure it out. Simple taking note of it is enough, own it, and then just go on with your life. Don’t ponder and dwell on the thought. Drop it.

It can be hard not to think about it, try to think it through, and ride that freight train of thought through the day. Not recommended.

It is a process of relaxing on our part, just letting go of all that is what is effective. If we think we have to extract some kind of lesson from the event for our own good, don’t. Just relax and let it go. Move on.

Simply noting the problem and our reaction, plus owning it is enough to set the process of deconstruction of the problem in motion. And repeatedly doing the above at every instance of occurrence is the remedy required.

As the great Mahasiddha Tilopa put it, “Relax, As It Is.”

[Photo of New England Asters by me.]

EMAIL

Toothpaste and the Tuber

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ca208c77-1e03-4b19-8ed4-3910cfc4f075_1623x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a015cb1c-144e-49ea-a0a5-f1d00965b7ec_1474x936.jpeg

Well, who woulda' thunk it? My right front tooth just came out of my head while I was eating pasta. Actually, it turned out to be like a bridge of three teeth. And it came out whole and clean, leaving an old snaggle tooth. What to do?

What I did was drive two hours to my dentist and, as it turned out, he was able to just cement it back in. I'm good to go.

With aging, it's always something. Our habit is to assume that the various signs of age will just level out and we will go on as before, but that's that not reality.

The reality is that these kinds of events will increase and there is no "getting back to usual" possible. It's a downhill slope folks with only momentary stations from here on out.

And so, I fix this, fix that, and hope for the best. Well, the best is behind me and before me is the possibility of the 'best attitude'. As an old friend said to me "Michael, we must learn to fail successfully. That I do have something to say about.

Anyway, there is that, and today I had to take my car in and have fixed the fact that my brakes shudder when I step on the pedal. This can be fixed.

Meanwhile, I am packing to head out early Friday morning for the three-day Earthwork Harvest Gathering. I will go early so to

catch the morning light. I am looking forward to a serious amount of photographing.

Speaking of which, here is a photo of one of my garden's blooming *Datura* flowers, one of dozens over time. Note the little beetle in the photo, and I include a closeup to make clear how granular Hasselblad lenses can be.

My best wishes all of you!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Toothpaste and the Tube

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cb11e620-ab3a-43fc-a9e2-780b6861fb55_1623x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/fa238b4b-d59e-4ee9-9973-7a7b5d372503_1474x936.jpeg

Well, who woulda' thunk it? My right front tooth just came out of my head while I was eating pasta. Actually, it turned out to be like a bridge of three teeth. And it came out whole and clean, leaving an old snaggle tooth. What to do?

What I did was drive two hours to my dentist and, as it turned out, he was able to just cement it back in. I'm good to go.

With aging, it's always something. Our habit is to assume that the various signs of age will just level out and we will go on as before, but that's that not reality.

The reality is that these kinds of events will increase and there is no "getting back to usual" possible. It's a downhill slope folks with only momentary stations from here on out.

And so, I fix this, fix that, and hope for the best. Well, the best is behind me and before me is the possibility of the 'best attitude'. As an old friend said to me "Michael, we must learn to fail successfully. That I do have something to say about.

Anyway, there is that, and today I had to take my car in and have fixed the fact that my brakes shudder when I step on the pedal. This can be fixed.

Meanwhile, I am packing to head out early Friday morning for the three-day Earthwork Harvest Gathering. I will go early so to

catch the morning light. I am looking forward to a serious amount of photographing.

Speaking of which, here is a photo of one of my garden's blooming *Datura* flowers, one of dozens over time. Note the little beetle in the photo, and I include a closeup to make clear how granular Hasselblad lenses can be.

My best wishes all of you!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Earthwork Harvest Gathering

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/032915cf-220f-4deb-b8fa-ec9fd9483583_604x507.jpeg

Tomorrow, early, as the sun comes up, I'm off to the last Earthwork Harvest Gathering to see old friends, meet new ones, and do my best to document with photos this last hurrah for one of the most seminal experiences in my life, The Earthwork Harvest Gathering..

Created by family friend Seth Bernard, his father Bob, and a host of volunteers and helpers. The Earthwork Harvest Gathering was founded in 2001 by a group of musicians who, after a summer of music-festival performances, met to hang out and play music with one another.

This small gathering soon grew in numbers as more musicians wanted to attend and the public heard about it and wanted to listen and share.

I have met so many folks from mid and northern Michigan, people of like mind, that the simple fact is that this group, these kinds of folks, are what I could call my tribe.

I never thought of it that way until one day, in a moment of incite, I realized here are the folks I am wending my way through life with, for the most part. And my four kids were raised in the same climate.

Anyway, tomorrow I am off to the Harvest Gathering. I may attempt to post my experiences, if there is Internet, or accumulate notes to post here later.

I hope to see some of my FB friends at the Gathering, so look me up. I will be everywhere photographing, if the weather holds and I am well.

THE EARTHWORK HARVEST GATHERING

Tomorrow, early, as the sun comes up, I'm off to the last Earthwork Harvest Gathering to see old friends, meet new ones, and do my best to document with photos this last hurrah for one of the most seminal experiences in my life, The Earthwork Harvest Gathering..

Created by family friend Seth Bernard, his father Bob, and a host of volunteers and helpers. The Earthwork Harvest Gathering was founded in 2001 by a group of musicians who, after a summer of music-festival performances, met to hang out and play music with one another.

This small gathering soon grew in numbers as more musicians wanted to attend and the public heard about it and wanted to listen and share.

I have met so many folks from mid and northern Michigan, people of like mind, that the simple fact is that this group, these kinds of folks, are what I could call my tribe.

I never thought of it that way until one day, in a moment of incite, I realized here are the folks I am wending my way through life with, for the most part. And my four kids were raised in the same climate.

Anyway, tomorrow I am off to the Harvest Gathering. I may attempt to post my experiences, if there is Internet, or accumulate notes to post here later.

I hope to see some of my FB friends at the Gathering, so look me up. I will be everywhere photographing, if the weather holds and I am well.

<https://earthworkharvestgathering.com/>

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Celbrating the Rising of the Sun

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/46926c5c-8d8e-42da-a33e-4f6f84a65cad_2048x1536.jpeg

I'm back from three days of photographing at the final Earthwork Harvest Gathering. I was out on the site each day at 5:30-6:00:AM in order to watch the sun come up and take advantage of the good light. I took almost 1,000 photos and worked hard at it, most by carrying a tripod, camera, lens, and bag up hill and down dale. For an 83-year old, it was arduous. My mind is still awash from it all, a cascade of images from the experience, thousands of people, within which was the subset or tribe of those I know and have known for the 20 years or so I have been celebrating the Earthwork Harvest Gathering. It will take me a month or so to develop all these photos and I will be posting some of them here on my blog. But they all will be archived and preserved so that years from now folks can remember this most seminal yearly event. As mentioned, right now my mind is awash with images and moments from these last three days. All kinds of thing happened. For instance, like today, Sunday, September 22... While walking down the dusty road from Hill Stage to the Barn Stage, I was stopped by an dear old friend, Zachary Ray. Zach was there with his partner Birth-A-Melody and he asked me would I marry them here at the Gathering. Over the years I have done a number of marriages, not making a habit of it as something I did. And Zach asked for the ceremony to be public. And today was the Autumn Equinox to boot. Well, I said 'Yes' and we immediately set about figuring out how that could be done. Thanks to my friend Wendy Johnson, who gets things done, and with the permission of Seth Bernard, we set about figuring that out. As it turned out there was a short time between the traditional Sunday set by Frank Youngman and a set by Josh Davis for the ceremony. And that took place. It was raining, but nevertheless there were hundreds of folks out in front of the stage, some with umbrellas, some with raincoats, and some just soaking wet. The ceremony was about as simple as it gets. I asked Zach and Birth-a-Melody if they each would take the other as a partner. They yes, after which I said that the groom could kiss the bride. We will do the paperwork later. And the ceremony was closed by Rachel Davis singing "Circle of the Sun," after which a brass band from the previous set marched off around the property, taking with the newlyweds Zach and Birth-a-Melody. It was now after 2 PM and since it was raining and forecast for the rest of the day, decided

to pack up as rain is not good for outdoor photography, I headed home, tired as an old retiree, as my friend Luke Winslow King put into a song. More on all this as I can pick up my life and piece it back together after three days of intensity. [Photography by me, celebrating the rising of the Sun.] EMAIL

The Razor's Edge

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/07c25467-4dcd-4802-bbfc-ae8ec71fc2ab_2048x2048.jpeg

Life is turning upside down, the privileged heading down and the underprivileged topping out. A lot of it is based on the fact that if privileged we don't know what to do with that, how to behave.

I saw it this last very clear last weekend at a music gathering. The performers are often uptight, the regular folks having more fun, IMO. I don't usually associate privilege as a cross to bear, yet there it was, being acted out.

Of course, it's all in the mind. What isn't?

There is a price to pay for celebrity, for notoriety in general. 'Walking Point' can be painful. I believe that many have no choice. It's why they are celebrities.

I am reminded of a piece I wrote years ago, which I will shar with you.

GROOVE AND BLUES IN JAZZ

<https://medium.com/@MichaelErlewine/groove-and-blues-in-jazz-efd4b4f31cf1>

We are coming out of a time when jazz has been measured by how outstanding the soloist is — how high can they fly? Critics only seem to know how to rate what stands out. This won't work for groove music. In groove, the idea is to lay down a groove, get in it, and deepen it. Groove masters always take us deeper into the groove. These artists are our windows into the groove, and their hearts become the highway over which the groove can run. They reinvest. And we ride the groove. This is why jazz critics have either passed (never got it) over groove masters like Grant Green and Stanley Turrentine or heard something but did not know what to make of what they heard (and felt). If music is not viewed as such an intellectual thing (something to see) but more of a feeling kind of thing, then groove masters can be appreciated. You may not see the groove masters, but you sure can feel them. In groove, the solo (and all else) only exists if it adds to the groove. Witness Grant Green's incredible single-note repetitions. Who would ever think to do that? You wouldn't dare think of that. It is done by pure feeling. It feels good and you keep doing it. Nothing to think about. Stanley Turrentine has been laying

down grooves for many a year for all to hear. I am surprised at how many books don't even mention him. Grant Green has received an even shorter shrift. There have been a few voices crying in the wilderness of soul jazz criticism. Producer Bob Porter of Atlantic Records and Bob Rusch of Cadence Magazine have always known and told us about the groove. Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder is another pre-eminent groove expert. More than half of all great soul jazz sessions were recorded by Van Gelder. The next time you hear some real groove music, in particular if there is a Hammond organ on it, just check the album for this engineer's name. Grant Green: THE Groove Master All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered. To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. A lot of people used to say the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing.

The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that we can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvet-toned singer. Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now, that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too. Someday everyone will be able to hear it, because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is — a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap and Hip-Hop is changing it even now. Billy Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there. We try to absorb it and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!), she entrances us in a delightful dream-like groove and we are lost to criticism. Instead, we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us. Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest — to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into

ourselves. He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master.

If you can follow this analogy of 'groove music', than it's just a hop and a skip to examining what I presented above, the difference between celebrities (standing out) and regular folks.

I believe we stand at the edge of a huge shift in consciousness. As we tire of sacrificing our greatest minds to the celebrity edge, burning them up in the phoenix of public notoriety, much like groove music and the groove masters, we could learn instead to turn inward, to instead of taking the obvious way out of celebrity, if we have done something to earn it, we will learn to reinvest inwardly and do so over and over and over.

I'm sure time will see us out enough to live on the surface, exist on the razors edge of inside and out. We will learn to take from within and share it outwardly with all.

Just what I see starting to happen. Your thoughts on this?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Point to Life

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ec14f17b-3f0b-46b9-a8df-762d1021aca4_1024x1024.jpeg

My preoccupation and enjoyment of Groove Music and the groove in general, was not just a predilection on my part, but rather a prediction of the future, An insight as to what is to come.

The concept of reinvestment, of not taking the obvious outs that society offers, including the concept of celebrity, of fame, etc. will no longer be a goal or the goal in life. That's a failing concept, IMO.

Many years ago, when I was studying deep-space astrophysics, I learned that what first appears as an anomaly or singleton, a lone apparition, over time doubles, triples, etc. until that 'anomaly' is determined a member of a class or cluster. Everything clusters!

There is no such thing as 'one' anything. Eventually each is found to be a member of a cluster or class. It's the same with the odd or unique person you discover, whether beneficial or terrifying, or even a scary thought. All eventually are one member of a cluster of the same thing. We need not fear singularity.

However, there does seem to be a hierarchy in all things.

The 'new' (new to us) has to start somewhere with some person or some thing.

Celebrities suffer their celebrity. Celebrity mostly separates and divides, not joins and unifies. The remedy for celebrity and its suffering is surrender of the celebrity through giving back. Pay it forward.

Don't let things accumulate or gather to a point, but instead reinvest in paying it forward or paying it back. Extend and spread it out.

As mentioned, my fascination and interest in groove music and its reinvesting in the groove rather than taking the obvious out toward 'celebrity' is just a premonition of the future where there is no particular point to or in anything. And coming or bringing things to a point is just inefficient, a sign of impending failure. Instead of concluding, reinvest, share!

Is sublimation the same as the principle of reinvesting in the groove? I think so, more or less. I know the books on sexual organism speak of sublimating the climax so that it extends throughout the body rather than comes to a point and is over. Extend and extension are an imperative with dharma training.

This same principle of sublimation or putting off coming to a head is a herald of the future, a future for humankind in general and for each of us individually.

So, the advice is to reinvest, pay it forward. Take the onus off the 'right now' from coming to a conclusion, climax, or point. Sublimate. Spread it out throughout the entire body, and socially in the body of humankind. Share. Share it, whatever it is.

This explains why great dharma teachers are so self-effacing. The Self is not the point of life.

In other words, there is no point to life! Life is a continuum.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

May Erlewine: East-Coast Tour

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 30, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0dc5ec02-1b6b-42b2-a77b-c8cea76ced07_818x818.jpeg

My daughter May is currently on an east-coast tour for those interested is seeing her perform live.

Here is the schedule:

SEP 28, 2024 ROCKPORT, MA @shalinliuperformancecenter with Ray

SEP 29, 2024 EXETER, NH @thewordbarn with Ray

SEP 30, 2024 SOUTH BURLINGTON, VT @highergroundmusic with Ray

OCT 02, 2024 SYRACUSE, NY @443socialclubcny with Ray

OCT 03, 2024 NEW YORK, NY @dromnyc with Ray

OCT 04, 2024 PHILADELPHIA, PA @citywineryphil with Peter

OCT 05, 2024 MONKTON, MD @manormillmonkton with Ray

OCT 06, 2024 PITTSBURGH, PA @clubcafelive with Ray

OCT 16, 2024 FERNDALE, MI @themagicbagmi with the Animals and the Charlie Millard Band

OCT 17, 2024 GRAND RAPIDS, MI @wealthytheatre with the Animals and the Charlie Millard Band

OCT 26, 2024 TRAVERSE CITY, MI @dennosmuseumcenter with the Animals and the Charlie Millard Band

FORTHCOMING BOOK ON CONCERT POSTER ARTIST GARY GRIMSHAW

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 30, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a32f0fa1-6ed9-4d60-bc32-9753780ff292_2212x2212.jpeg

Just finishing up a three-day weekend conference here at our center for a book on the great rock-poster artist, Michigan's own Gary Grimshaw. I am writing much of the text for the book. Meeting with the publisher, the design and layout person, and Gary's wife Laura Grimshaw. Gary passed on some time ago.

I had the good fortune to know Gary Grimshaw, had him visit here, photographed, videoed, and interviewed him many times. I am the only person in that group who was there at the time that Gary Grimshaw created his first concert rock poster, at the opening of the Grande Ballroom in Detroit on October 7, 1966. I pulled that first poster (The Seagull) out of my basement years ago. It's worth today something like \$20K.

Grimshaw is my favorite rock concert poster artist, and I have almost 1000 of his works scanned or photographed. I will be writing the main text about Grimshaw's posters, while the rest of our crew also writes and implements the writing into the actual book design.

His wife Laura and our design person Kristi Pesick work to implement all the writing into a large coffee-table sized book. Our publisher and team member Charles Nelson was also present.

It was a busy weekend, carving out the essential layout for the book and agreeing on all that has to be agreed upon.

Have also, in the odd hours available to me, finished off developing all the posters for this year's music festivals I photographed this summer. Out of many thousands of photos, I have this many I am sending on flash drives to the various festival coordinators:

Smiling Acres: 256 photos

Blissfest: 300 photos

Hoxeyville: 315 photos

Wheatland: 364 photos

Earthwork Harvest Gathering: 617 photos

And now, with the above all done, I see some blue sky I must look at.

[Photo of one the incredible posters by Gary Grimshaw, featuring Curtis Mayfield.]

EMAIL

The Strongest Solar Flare Yet

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 3, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/77da3fc2-37dd-4039-a592-6074e97e4315_1059x669.jpeg

Yesterday was one of the two largest solar flares (X7.1) in this cycle of 11 years. And more important another X-Class solar flare today is the largest in my memory, an X9.1 out of ten.

Compared to the steady stream of sunlight we are used to this is HUGE and will bring a CME (Corona Mass Emission) wave, in fact two of them, that will impact us through Oct 6 th , one after the other or if the large one catches the first wave, simultaneously.

In other words, sunspot AR3842 exploded again today, producing the strongest solar flare of Solar Cycle 25 so far. The X9-category blast hurled a CME directly toward Earth. This makes two CMEs now en route to our planet.

The forecast calls for auroras this weekend.

Of course, I have given you these links many times before, but the time seems to be coming when you want to keep track of these massive solar bursts of energy yourself, in order to know when not to get upset because these solar barrages can be upsetting.

<https://solarham.com/>

<https://spaceweather.com/>

Anyway, it does not get much stronger than this, at least it has not for many years, so take any upset you feel with a grain of salt, because it will tone down in a few days and be more normal.

Of course, such solar outbursts can send us into hiding, staying in bed, trying to absorb what by nature is upsetting, etc.

In the same breath, we can also attempt or find ourselves trying to surf these massive solar changes, modifying our life as pointed out by these changes for better or for worse.

So, ride it out or surf these intense solar waves that totally vary from the steady stream of sunlight we are used to.

In other words, hold on to your hats! You are not imagining that change is upon us because it is.

We should be experiencing two large CME (Coronal Mass Emission) in the next few days, through at least October 6, 2024.

Some free books here:

<http://spiritgrooves.net/e-Books.aspx#Astrology>

[Image of the X 9.1 flare.]

EMAIL

Down the Drain

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a562703b-8a52-4b61-bd61-c850a930d8ea_1024x1024.jpeg

[This is a post sooner than later, a post sharing with you the effects I experience these days of these very huge solar flares and their resulting CMEs (Corona Mass Emission). And they are not what I expected, but nevertheless, here is what I am experiencing.]

With all this solar flare flareup and its impending CMEs, you would think that I could seize this very moment and punch through to something. Yet, I'm afraid my only punch-through right now is by not punching through at all. Does that count? It does and has to.

All I get of late is increasingly restless, pacing around, not being able to settle on anything, like on something to eat and then eat it, etc.

I can't even find something to watch on the tube of what's streaming. I get about five minutes into something possibly interesting, wanting to get distracted for a moment, and find myself switching it off. Instead, I just sit here twitching, unable to settle on anything. Yes, I am present! I am not distracted, unable to be distracted. And I'm trying to make my non-distraction a distraction.

If we are given lemons, they say to make lemonade. Of course, I understand all that. Yet making the lemonade this time is more than a little off-putting. So, what am I left with?

Obviously, I'm left with 'the left with' state and might as well just relax and let myself stew in the moment, because that's what's happening. Apparently, I missed the boat if there was a boat passing through. I can't surf this particular very high solar surge or, if I am, it's tedious as hell. Certainly, I am undistracted. I'm like a sore thumb.

So, I just have to grin and bear it and write a blog like this, a blog about how I'm stuck like glue in this frustrating moment. I have to sort it, but how?

I checked all the areas of my recent interest and flipped through them like those picture books we used to flip through as kids, only in this case I see no movement while I'm flipping past the images. There is nowhere to go because I'm already there, present. How frustrating!

So, far, I've spun around and around and ended up back where I started from, and I'm just sitting here taking it, looking around. I'm on the spot.

Actually, it will be a relief when I get tired enough to fall asleep, because I hope to wake up in a time and place where I'm on some kind of track again, moving along, going somewhere. This is what it's like to be undistracted. I'm used to being undistractedly distracted, but distracted nevertheless.

In other words, if I find myself in a problem, I just work the problem until it morphs into something that knocks me out and puts me to sleep in the moment, meaning I find myself off and running down some kind of track, going somewhere. This time, not so much. I'm just here. I'm already there and its here.

For me, right now, there is no track, no runway, no extension that this moment that has of any particular meaning. And so, I write about that, which I am doing right now.

And so, the moment, this moment, is so ingrown, turning in upon itself, that it's all in and no out. I feel like the swirl of the drain in a bathtub that is draining its last and increasing its whorl as it builds to an end.

Only, right now I don't see any end, or any dimension at all, and that by itself is a sign or signature as to what's happening. It has to be. Forced to be present, my eyelids held open to what's happening, which is mostly nothing at all other than nothing.

So, there you have it. The nothing that this moment entertains holds me awake in its grasp and that itself becomes significant. No choice.

Is it that this moment points to nowhere but itself, recursively?

Where usually I am caught up in a train of thought, and hurtling down the track toward nothing in particular, but all caught up in it. Instead, right now, here and now, I find no extension elsewhere, anywhere.

How do I untangle this bunched up moment and unroll it, expand or extend it beyond itself? What if I don't? Will I or it implode?

Or is there a wormhole from all this inwardness imploding that extends beyond itself. There I said it. Extension. Our thirst for extension, as if we are going some place, getting somewhere other than right here and now. That's what we do and we do it all the time, seek distraction.

I have seen this before when I had me big stroke, abandoned to the present moment.

What if the place we are going to is the here and now and we are already in the here and now? Is that not recursive? We are going to where we already are and no farther. Is that spinning our wheels?

And so, this my friends are what this intense solar energy is doing to me. I find myself in the here and now at the expense of linear anything, of going anywhere else.

We are going nowhere other than right here and right now.

How do we rest in that?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Looking at Flares from Both Sides

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/786448b1-1532-4857-9a37-5b2add436e16_1024x1024.jpeg

[I finally got a handle on these extreme solar flares that makes sense. It involves flipping my current view, so for me that's progress. Can you relate to it?]

My takeaway from yesterday's blog about my ennui or whatever we can call what these extreme solar flares engender is that this feeling was very close to the experience I had from my major stroke. This realization just popped up. It tells me something and changes how I view this extreme solar inundation.

Among other things, it tells me that the physical and the spiritual are closely connected and are one and the same.

And that solar energy and spiritual energy are so connected as to be identical.

With the major stroke, I was stripped naked of any attachment or cover and forced to weather that barren state until my shattered Self was able to reanimate itself several months later. When I finally reattached, life went on like the dream it is.

And with these current solar energy flares I find myself restricted in a similar manner to the here and the now, with little ability to extend myself in any linear direction and get distracted or carried away. I seem unable to enjoy the past and also to bother with the future. The sheer un-distractedness of this present moment is overpowering.

It seems we are perpetually distracted and carried away in the moment and thus successfully avoid what this strong solar influx has brought with it, the shattering or withering of our ability to distract ourselves so as to successfully avoid this boring un-distractedness.

In other words, we don't like being undistracted and without the cover of our distractions and attachments. We don't know what to do when those attachments are cut loose, leaving us momentarily undistracted and without emotional cover.

In the same way, with these solar influx days, I can't get any linear extension to extend, so that I can be or get carried away in the moment and not have to suffer the unease that is so prevalent of late.

It's like flicking a cigarette lighter that's running out of fluid and just won't light. We keep trying to spark it into flame and it won't go.

Instead, I'm limited, as mentioned, to the here and the now, and not able to reach the 'there' and the 'then' or 'when'. I can neither recall the past with enjoyment nor imagine the future but am stuck in what seems like a boring present, limited to the here and now.

This realization reinforces the certainty of my previous major stroke experience which up till now was unique and a singleton but appears to be part of a group or cluster of experience that is similar. I now have something to compare my stroke experience to, and I am comparing.

And all of this, at least for me, reflects on the upcoming bardo experience when we eventually pass on. It seems to me that I will not have the kind of extension and ability to distract myself that I now have, which distraction has been curbed to almost no distraction by the recent solar flare inundation.

And with that realization, I am turning my current discomfort with these solar emissions into an exploration, and a rare opportunity at that for me to come to terms with being without extension, being on the spot with no distraction. What an opportunity because there is no choice.

And so, it seems I have managed once again to turn my non-distraction into a distraction. How clever of me! I can't seem to not turn whatever experience I have into a distraction from the non-comfort of raw being in the present, instead of coping with seeming barrenness of being undistracted.

Nevertheless, I must savor this insight and this solar time we are now in. An equal opportunity to learn will not come again soon. Time to take stock and learn, painful or not.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Solar Flares: Immediate Response

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 9, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/efb78eae-e902-44ec-b502-366cc76b6d54_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, I can't sleep. And I can't sleep, can't sleep, and can't sleep. That's how many times I have gone to bed tonight and did not nod off. Something is up say I, like me. I'm up.

And then about midnight I checked the web for the solar flare graph and I find that we had an X.1 Class Solar Flare at 10 PM, EDT, the very time I was first trying to sleep.

And I've been watching flares for years and especially this year because it's the peak of the solar flare cycle, and sure enough I am at this point certain that our response to solar flares is not just when the CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejection) roll in some days later, but at the actual instant and time of the flare itself on the sun.

That's how linked we are. No Delay. This is research where we are the thermometer. Well, what am I supposed to do with that news?

Not sleeping is one thing. There is intimacy, these solar flares and me. I'm right there, wide awake, although I'm tired. And this is happening all over the world to everyone and everything in this world. No one is left out of solar events.

Do I feel like writing about this just now? Not so much, because I'm tired, yet I find myself floating in this mess of no-sleep-time and taking it all in. Write a little something down? Ok, perhaps a little. Margaret was up too. She also can't sleep.

I tried eating a little, and then after a while, a little more. Nothing seems to help. My body wants to eat something with some substance to sink it to sleep. I'm trying to reach a state where I can drift off and get some rest. Not happening so far.

This solar flare stuff is not our imagination. We dance to it, one way or another, like it or not. The solar flare graph on the web shows the flare declining, yet you could have fooled me. I'm still up and getting even more tired yet.

<https://solarham.com/>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Still Movement

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 10, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/455b2550-f5a6-4306-b821-783a179d8589_1024x1024.jpeg

[Basically, October 9 th , 2024 had three X-Class solar flares in one day, a X1.8, X1.4, and an M7.7. That's a lot of influx to absorb.]

I am old, my hands shake a bit, and I am a nervous type. Does that interfere with resting the mind? Not that I can tell. Not related.

And it's not about what you think, and that by definition. Thinking is not involved.

How do we stop thinking? By letting go and just resting.

It's like moving the cursor on your computer screen. If you take your hand off the mouse, the cursor just stays where it is on the screen. Resting the mind is like that. Make no effort and the mind is at rest. Because the mind is always at rest, even when moving.

In other words, this is something we each can do. And resting the mind will wait until we do just that, meaning until we stop doing anything and just let go. No effort is required.

One of the best realizations I ever had was that resting the mind through dharma is no different than resting the mind when we plop down on the couch at the end of the day and put our feet up. Rest is rest. So, give it a rest.

When we wear out our effort until it is none, then we are at rest. How do we do that?

Well, some combination of letting go and stopping moving the cursor. Effort is just a habit.

The great Mahasiddha Tilopa so clearly said:

"Don't alter the present."

Like the old blues refrain: "Take your fingers off it, don't you dare touch it, because you know it don't belong to you."

That's effort, what we don't need, can't use, and have to remove. Removing effort with making an effort is effective dharma practice. Just let go.

In one of my trips to Tibet, small plots of barley were everywhere. And they cut the barley stalks, stand them on end, and bind the stalks with a piece of twine.

One of the ways that the Tibetans explain letting go is that when you cut that the string on a stack of barley stalks, it does not just fly all over, but rather almost imperceptibly just slumps ever so slightly. That's removing effort.

It's not hard to learn to be aware when we are making undue effort and just let go. When we are aware of effort, we just let go and stop making effort.

The cursor will then stay on the screen of life without movement.

All movement will be still.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Here We Are

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bc61e363-1477-4aea-ad9e-1de0740c30b3_2048x1360.jpeg

Where do we go from here?

Well, if you mean by “here”, the ‘here’ and ‘now’, there is no other place to go. All the great siddhas and Mahasiddhas have bent over backward pointing out to us that there is nothing in the past worth dwelling on. And equally they feel the same about the future, that expectations and hopes are ephemeral. If we are addicted to the past and the future, we may need blinders like on a horse.

The total consensus among dharma saints and serious practitioners is that the ‘here and now’, this present moment, is the theater of operation, period. We stray from here at our own risk.

Of course, it is up to us how much of our time we want to spend musing on the past or imagining the future. Just know that both (and either) are considered by dharma teachers to be beside the point because there is no point to life, It’s pointless. What we have is a continuing continuum.

Those of us who meditate or attempt to meditate end up swimming in the pool (and well) of the present moment. Where else really, is there?

Yes, we may have and make what we might call ‘sacred space’, in a corner of a room, a cushion, a votive lamp, an image. Better yet is to say that our actions may make space sacred.

However, that’s just a starting point because, later probably than sooner, we will find that all space is sacred or the same amount of sacred. What then?

Well then, we have unlimited freedom to move across the earth and through time, being aware of just that.

EMAIL

Hobby Horse

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f768fc3b-c210-4864-8f79-d867e4e6920e_2048x1337.jpeg

[This hobby horse was built by my brother Dan, who aside from being a master craftsman, is known all over the world for building guitars and also teaching hundreds of thousands of folks how to repair and maintain their guitars. The lovely saddle, etc. was crafted by Dan's wife Joan who loves and cares for horses to this day. The leather ears and actual horse tail are long gone, because our kids have ridden that horse to the state it's in today.]

I doubt that many here will feel about lenses as I do, but most of you will probably have some interest that sparks you,

things you collect or care about that occupy a significant place in your mind and probably gobble up time. For sure, camera lenses are one of those interests or hobbies in my world.

As to why? Because when I had my once-in-a-lifetime realization as to the nature of the mind, it was while crawling around in the wet grass just as the sun rose, peering through a camera lens at an object. In that moment I stopped seeing the object and instead saw the Seeing seeing itself, and the dewdrop slipped into the shining sea.

I'm always trying out new lenses or at least reading about them to find out if they would work for the kind of photography I do, which 'photography' itself of late is changing.

I'm always scouting around to see what new lenses have appeared for the cameras I use, mostly Nikon and now Hasselblad. However, in recent years a plethora of lenses have come on the market, way more than I want to try out. Of course, as mentioned, my interests and my whole take on photography are changing right now as well.

I posted yesterday about waiting for a lens to arrive by overnight UPS shipping, in this case the new Hasselblad XCD 20-35mm zoom lens. For me, so much can be riding on a lens that it's hard to believe. If I ordered a lens, that means I believe it is the best. And at worst, I hope for the best. At the same time, I have to see it through to be the best, if I can.

I never know the quality of a new lens without testing it, as in ‘take photos’ with it to see if it works for my particular kind of photography. No number of positive reviews guarantees how I will react to a given lens.

I have found that depending on positive reviews, no matter how many, does not swing my opinion if I have a sinking feeling inside when I first use the lens, if the lens does not quite measure up to what I hoped for or expected. There is no way around that sort of caving-in, if I don’t like a lens.

Often there is considerable time between when I first learn about a lens and when I purchase it. It can be months, and during that time I study and read everything I can about that lens and from that, form some kind of opinion. And I mean I read everything.

That opinion that I first form is not mine from experience with the lens, but rather the general opinion from reviewers. I’m sad to say that there are very, very few lens reviewers that I trust and, for the most part, most reviews are simply a recital of the facts, with very little actual experience communicated. Perhaps true experience is too individual and personal, but that’s a round robin, a Catch 22.

This is why, time and again, I’m thrown on my own recognizance, and it always comes down to that moment when the lens arrives, and I mount it on the camera. That’s when my actual experience begins, when the rubber meets the road, IMO, because then my opinion actually begin to form, right there on the spot in real time.

Even then it takes time to demonstrate to myself that the lens actually delivers on its promise. Does it deliver? Only I can answer that question. Reading what others say may be encouraging, but I have to live with the lens. Am I happy with it? Does it do the job I imagined?

It is a great relief to have a new lens deliver what I hoped for, what I imagined or heard that it can do. And seeing is believing. Yet, the buck stops with me.

I have probably had some 150 lenses over the years, each one having to be tested by use. Most of them are now gone for one reason or another. The ones that remain are stellar.

My reactions to a new lens are all over the board. Some I mount and immediately see that this lens will not do the job. I put the disappointing ones on the shelf and ignore them for a while, or sometimes immediately send the lens back where it came from if it is within a reasonable time frame.

Others I use straightaway and put to work. Far too many subtly disappoint me and I have trouble admitting this even to myself. I certainly don’t post about

it. I recently sold some thirty lenses all at once, cleaned house so to speak. This brought me great relief because I had to admit to myself that I am not a lens museum and these 30 lenses' collected 'non-use' on my part weighed on me. Poor lenses for my work? Lens be gone.

Gradually, over time, I have become more realistic about all of this. I have slimmed down my collection to those lenses I actually use and like to use. And there are some that, at least for my work, are the best of the best, and have been transformative for my photo work.

And there are others that certainly had their day, only to fade away in use because my own standard of what I need shifted upward, raising the bar.

Unfortunately for many of us, the master of modern lenses, IMO, resides behind a pay wall. However, having been behind that wall, there is a college or university education in photography waiting there for anyone who enters in. IMO, no one else is even close.

This is the expert lensman and photography-wizard Lloyd Chambers. He also offers a free daily blog that gives some (but not all) of the information. Chambers has become my lens teacher. Here is the link:

<https://diglloyd.com/>

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

The Hasselblad Experience

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 15, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/217eaeef-932f-46ab-b96c-d004d0b65339_2048x1481.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e5e6b97e-e93a-4130-a028-dbf9e10ad970_1536x2048.jpeg

[I apologize for the length of this. Just ignore it. I'm trying to get all this lens and photography pegged and out of my system, so this is just a very long post, mostly talking to myself or those few out there who struggle with cameras and lenses. Also, I am on the road before dawn driving in the dark to get where I have to go.]

I started into photography way back, a long time ago, in the late spring of 1956, armed with the 35mm Kodak Retina 2a camera, light meter, 2 closeup lenses, and a small tripod. I was all of 14 years old and traveling in an old school bus with kids my age across the country, into Mexico, up the West Coast into Canada, and all across Canada to the U.P. of Michigan and back down the Mackinac Bridge. All that time I was photography and spending all my living money on film. It was all about film back then and I waited for each roll to be developed to see how the photos came out.

Of course I used film after that, but sparingly because film cost a lot. When digital photography came along in the 1990s, I started with a small Nikon, but soon settled inot the Nikon D1X (5.4 MP, \$5000.00) and went on from there all the way up through the many DSLRs, and to the mirrorless cameras, the Z7 and Z7II, and on to Z9 and the Z8, where I am today.

And I don't even want to talk about lenses, yet, because I am mostly lens oriented and into apochromatic lenses at that, so don't get me started. I will get to lenses down page.

Over the years, speaking of digital cameras, I had Pentax, Mamiya RZ67, large-format View Cameras, the first digital Hasselblad X1D, GFX 50, and all kinds of Sony, but mostly the complete line of Nikon digitals up to the present time.

And all that time, since digital photography arrived, I have shot raw and used Adobe products for developing those raw images. I tried Adobe Lightroom, of course, but after it trashed my complete photo library a couple of times, I

abandoned it and concentrated on Photoshop, Camera Raw, and Bridge, which I still use today (2024).

And over time I have been developing my raw images in Photoshop/ACR, doing my best to make the color in the Adobe software match the color as shot with the various cameras, for me a kind of thankless task.

When the Hasselblad X2D came out, I watched it out of the corner of my eye, however as I had been very disappointed with the first digital Hasselblad the X1D 50C 50MP medium format camera, I was not quick on the uptake with the X2D, but after a while I got around to it.

And the X2D was very expensive compared to my Nikons, but as the price came down a little, I finally had to check it out. And I did.

At 100MP, with a terabyte of internal storage, I couldn't resist and set about selling enough photo equipment to obtain a copy of the X2D. What I was not ready for was what is called the "Hasselblad Natural Color Solution" (HNCS), something that my adventure with the Hasselblad X1D failed to bring home to me.

Perhaps it was the 16-bit color files embedded in the Hasselblad Natural Color Solution (HNCS), a color management system developed by Hasselblad for their cameras that hooked me.

HNCS aims to produce accurate and natural colors in photographs, closely resembling what the human eye perceives. The system involves advanced algorithms and calibration processes that work with the camera's sensors and imaging software.

HNCS ensures that colors are rendered faithfully, which is especially important for professional photographers who require precision in color reproduction for tasks like product photography, portraiture, and landscape photography. By using HNCS, photographers can achieve consistent and reliable color outputs straight out of the camera, minimizing the need for extensive post-processing.

Hasselblad provides more extensive calibration tables in their cameras than most anybody, which is key. Here is a description:

"Each of these sensors is manufactured by Sony. As Hasselblad puts it, "Everybody uses the Sony sensors, because you have to." But where the Swedish company believes it sets itself apart is in the calibration and tuning of that sensor. Hasselblad believes it produces colors that are more true to life than anyone else, and it does have its own color profile, though ultimately the company says it all comes down to how much time you spend perfecting that

calibration. Hasselblad dedicates a lot of time to that, and others seem unwilling or unable to match that commitment."

That last phrase, "others seem unwilling or unable to match that commitment" is key, and is further explained below.

And my favorite photographer, Ming Thein, who worked for Hasselblad on the XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens commented:

"I shoot the X1D comfortably to ISO 12,800. In fact, each camera has nearly half a gigabyte of calibration data in it. I believe Hasselblad is the only company to do this – it's one of the reasons output is so spectrally neutral and tonally natural across the sensitivity range, and no dark frame subtraction is required even on exposures up to one hour. Color accuracy is one of the main reasons I switched; those of you who have Workflow III will see that the Hasselblad profiles have almost no adjustments, and by far the least HSL adjustments of any camera included. Individual sensor calibration also means consistency is excellent – my H5D-50c, H6D-100c, CFV-50c and X1D all produce identical tonal response (with the exception of course of the H6D-100c, which has a bit more dynamic range extension at either end)."

Anyway, the long and the short of it is that I have been captivated by the color rendition of the Hasselblad X2D camera that I have. It is so good that it drives me on to take photo after photo. For me, this is no comparison to my long experience with Nikon digital.

And with each Hasselblad photo I don't have to try to adjust White Balance or tinker with the color. It's perfect just as it is. I might lighten or darken a scene and a couple other things. It is unique in my experience.

LENSES

Finally, a few words about the Hasselblad lenses, in my case just the recent XCD lenses. Having owned scores and scores of lenses made for or adapted to the Nikon F-mount, with a particular emphasis on apochromatic (APO) lenses (lenses that have been corrected for the various aberrations), how do the Hasselblad XCD lenses compare to my Nikon mounted lenses?

Well, while I do have few Nikon Z or F-mount lenses that are or come close to being APO lenses (there being no official standard for APO), these Hasselblad lenses are very well corrected.

Of course, many (or most) Hasselblad XCD lenses are also expensive, it took me a moment to adjust to the quality of the Hasselblad lenses. The following comparison kind of says it all, IMO.

I am known and have been an 'early adaptor' to focus stacking, taking many images of a (still-life) subject at progressive distances and assemble these layers into a single image that appears to be in complete focus.

I did this for many, many years because I wanted to see an image that was fully focused and did not have a direction or point of view embedded or baked into the image, one that led the eye as traditional photos do. I became quite good at stacking focus, and it can be a very tedious process – focus stacking.

However, when I took up and really got into the Hasselblad lenses, the first thought I had was that they were all very sharp, so granular or sharp that if you had one Hasselblad lens, why did you need any more? All the Hasselblad XCD lenses are amazingly sharp. After decades of seeking sharp lenses, I have reached some kind of sharpness euphoria with the Hasselblad lenses.

Of course, that statement is an exaggeration, yet in general it is true. All the XCD Hasselblad lenses (at least at higher apertures) produce something similar to what focus-stacking produces. The resulting image is in strong focus. Well, that fact had a powerful effect on me.

And the import of that effect was that, rather instantly, I lost my desire to stack focus, and this after some 20 years of stacking focus religiously. That, my friends, was a shock to my system, and a welcome one at that.

The output of the Hasselblad XCD lenses was already pretty much already in focus, so I had no need to stack focus. And, to my surprise, the overall effect on me was one of relief, not having to touch up focus stacks and all that. I had taken many hundreds of thousands of images for my focus stacking.

With Hasselblad images, suddenly everything was in decent focus, or enough so that it crossed some threshold in my mind that wanted granularity and insisted on some kind of sharpness. I was freed.

And a side effect, one yet to be proved by me: in that same collapse of my stacking focus years, I suddenly no longer restricted my photography to nature, in particular plants, and especially flowers.

With the Hasselblad, X2D, every photo I took was so wonderful that anything I photographed led to taking more, not less photos. And most surprising of all, suddenly I wanted to take photos of all things, people. I would never had expected this!

And this summer I went out and took thousands of photos at four major music festivals here in Michigan where I live, at their invite, provided I shared my photos with them. Of course I shared them. I share all my works.

And all of this transpired with the advent of the Hasselblad X2D and its lenses into my life. I was drawn into the Hasselblad system but did not expect the unexpected, that it would change my life.

For sure, in tandem with the granularity and focus of the XCD lenses, the 100MP sensor of the X2D magnified the whole effect, and between the two of them, extreme resolution and 100MP magnification, so to speak, the dewdrop slipped into the shining sea. It matched my dharma meditation and I was fully immersed.

I felt a kind of perpetual motion machine start up within me, where every photo I took with the X2D only made me want to take another. That, friends, was very satisfying!

In a word, it transformed me and turned my photographic desires upside down and sideways too. And that's where I sit today.

THE XCD LENSES

As for the Hasselblad XCD lenses, that IMO is a work in progress. I will say a few words on my experience with these lenses.

Lenses I have-to-have or would never sell are:

The XCD 120mm macro lens, because, based on my history as a macro photographer, I have to have at least one macro lens.

The XCD 21mm (no longer available), because it is one outstanding incredible lens I have ever used. It is such a lovely lens.

The just released XCD 20mm-35mm f/3.2-4.5 Zoom because like the XCD 21mm, it is an astonishing lens, literally a Prime Zoom, which up to now in my photo world a prime zoom was an oxymoron. Yet, here is one.

Also, the XCD 35mm-75mm, (f/3.5-4.5) zoom because it also is an incredible 'Prime Zoom'.

The XCD 45mm P f/4 (and earlier 45mm, f/3.5) because it is sharp, small, and light and if I'm walking around, that is a lens to walk around with. However, I mostly walk around with the XCD 21mm on the camera.

The XCD 65mm f/2.8 is a heavy but great lens and well worth having, but how much I will carry it around, I wonder. Probably use it in the studio or if traveling, not far from the car.

The XCD 80mm f/1.9 because it is so fast, and because the lens-expert Ming Thein designed it. A heavy and awkward lens but in the studio or on a tripod a lens that has a special character.

The XCD 135mm, f/2.8 (with teleconverter) because it is sharp and about the only real telephoto lens. Again, a very sharp lens and underappreciated!

This leaves some I don't have or had and did not value.

The new XCD 55mm V lens is admired and loved by very competent lens experts, but for me that dog just won't hunt. I had it, tried it again, and was not impressed. I wanted to like it, but don't.

I also had the XCD 28mm and could not love it. So, it too was sold. I never had the XCD 38mm and the XCD 90mm, and may look into them down the road, yet I doubt it. For me, at least so far, the new XCD 'V' series of lenses just are not my cup of tea. People are different.

And there is another factor I need to discuss, the "In Body Image Stabilization) or IBIS in the Hasselblad X2D. I must say it is incredible to be able to hand-hold that camera at very low shutter speeds and still get in-focus results that are reliable. The X2D can do this! I have shot thousands of images this way.

However, and this is pretty much my personal problem, I will shoot handheld, and I do get good results. The problem is that if I use a tripod my results are always assured and so, crazy as I am, that's what I do, still use a tripod when I probably don't need to. If I can up my chances of a perfect image by using a tripod, I'm going to do this.

In my own defense, I do put my heavier RRS tripods to the side, and carry a little tiny Gitzo 1545T with a small ball head that weighs 2.74 lbs., rather than one of my RRS tripods (with C1 Cube geared head) which weighs 5.13 lbs... and if you add the X2D camera (2.5 lbs) and also the XCD 21mm lens (1.9 lbs.), we have something to carry indeed. That assemblage spells studio for me or short walks.

My point is that I can't resist using a tripod even if I may not need it. Force of habit, and I'm a stickler for nailing focus.

And so, that's a brief summary of my discovery of the Hasselblad X2D and its XCD lenses. And trying to find experts on the Hasselblad X2D and the XCD lenses has been tough. While there is plenty of "hats off" to Hasselblad, most reviews result in a simple rendition of the facts, but little sharing of experience.

Many don't have much because they are working on loaners and only have the system or lenses for a short time. They are so expensive. One exception is the photographer Vieri Bottazzini:

<https://www.vieribottazzini.com/2020/04/hasselblad-xcd-35-75mm-f-3-5-4-5-in-depth-review.html>

Bottazzini at least details his experience with many of the lenses, even though it is a little cookie-cutter for me, meaning one lens review is similar to the others. Yet there is some real experience there.

However, if you want the motherload of information on Hasselblad, in particular recent Hasselblad and its lenses, by all means go to the blog of Lloyd Chambers, which is:

<https://diglloyd.com/>

This blog shares valuable information, although for the real in-depth nitty-gritty you have to subscribe and that costs money. Trust me, a subscription is worth every penny.

Inside Chamber's paywall is what amounts IMO to a college or university of photography experience. Everything is there, and in detail. Not just a recount of what the camera manufacturers put out there, but hands-on, in-depth, personal experience with the lens or camera, and comparisons of one lens to one another as well, all with full-sized images of several sizes. It helps me make my mind up on what to get into. The amount of information on this site is staggering.

When I consider how much I spend, despite myself, on photographic this and photographic that, a subscription to Diglloyd.com is peanuts. Not just Hasselblad, but Sony, Nikon, Fujifilm, etc. cameras and lenses are covered, as well as every aspect of the photographic journey, all loaded with actual real-time experience.

For example, at Diglloyd.com all of the XCD Hasselblad lenses are present and covered in great depth and detail, even the brand new XCD 20-35 Zoom lens, which is just barely out, has 16 essays or posts, many with full size images I can examine. You get the idea.

Lloyd Chambers has become my go-to teacher on Hasselblad and photography in general. If you know of other experienced experts, please let me know. Here is what is offered by Chambers on just the Hasselblad system. See for yourself.

<https://diglloyd.com/idx-mf.html>

So, there you have it, my experience so far with the Hasselblad X2D medium-format camera and its XCD lenses.

[A couple of Hasselblad photos with the new XCD 20mm-23mm zoom lens.]

EMAIL

Rush Hour

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 16, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ce92881b-b0cf-472c-aeaf-c901fe37a686_2048x1365.jpeg

Well, I was off before dawn (it was pitch black) this morning, on the way to Grand Rapids (50 miles away) to have my car worked on. I have inherited my light blindness at night from my mother, so I had to be very careful. All was well until I got into the rush hour traffic coming into Grand Rapids, where cars at 75 mph were tearing by me on all sides. That was tough, but I made it. However, it took a toll.

They had a car for me to use, but I never used it. I'd had enough of fast city traffic and decided just to stay where I was, thankful for not still being in traffic.

Well, with a six hour wait and I had all kinds of things planned that I would do. Well, that and a ticket will get you a ride on the bus.

Mostly, I just sat in this open cubicle and watched time pass. I imagined that I would write like this, yet that did not happen.

I imagined that some good food was nearby, but only a McDonalds was next door and that some terrible food. I couldn't even get some saltless French fries, because it was still too early for those. I was hungry.

Instead, I settled for a couple of what are called breakfast hash-browns at McDonalds, and they were just horrible, two elliptical patties that tasted like nothing I know, certainly not potatoes.

As for McDonalds, the whole place had timed out in my mind. I remember Ann Arbor in the late 1950s, when the McDonald sign read "Almost 100,000 hamburgers sold." The price was like 19 cents for a cheeseburger and 10 cents for fries. Today a Big Mac costs about \$8, and its bad food at that. Too much salt, too many calories.

And so, there I sat while two mechanics worked on my car at the same time, one replacing the struts and the other on my wheels rims, grinding them down so they won't leak air anymore. And three of the sensors in my tire stems had to be replaced, so they would turn off all the warning lights on my dashboard..

I was amazed how large the struts were when they put the car on the hoist. And they said they would wash the car. It needs it.

And so now it's all about what I will do when I get out of here and back home. Reminds me of grade school when all I did was dream of doing stuff after school.

Driving home, with four new struts, it felt like a new car, a race car, because the steering has now almost a feather touch. And whatever boat-like feel the car had from tired struts is now gone.

My car is a 2008 SUV and it was rusting out. An expensive car, it was paid for by my company, when I had a company. I could not afford to buy a new one today, so about a year ago I had all of the side panels, the hood, and the hatch back panels replaced with new ones from the manufacturer, so the car today is like brand new. No rust on it, and only 125,000 miles. These cars can go to 500,000 miles easily.

And now, with new struts (and all those panels) it looks like something you could put in a car show, but I just want to continue to use it because the new models, not that I could afford them, have a fierce-looking grill that makes them seem predatory. Many of the new models are going this way. It looks like they are wearing braces. A mark of the times?

Anyway, as of now, all my car problems solved.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

These Days ...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 20, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/082b7442-709b-46b1-b793-e0c6c1f1f348_1024x1024.jpeg

[I can't say that I'm all together in all this chaos but buffeted by it more than transcending.]

These times, following on from the Covid years, now with the horrid politics that converge on voting day come November 5 th , we each weather as best we can.

So many ordinary or regular things, at least for now, are more or less just out the window. There seems to be so much going on just now that it's hard to track, much less sort it.

Let's see: the Full Moon, the crescendo of politics as we lean into the voting days, the coming return each month of more large solar flares. Wars. It goes on and on.

And beneath or through it all, in the midst of it, it's like we are swimming under water and not able to come up for air. No relief.

As for me, I am relatively speechless these days, muted by all that's going on as it thunders forward.

Not very ambitious of late, it seems like there are ample opportunities for me to get out, go here or go there, and while I entertain the thought of going, I end up just letting them all pass and go nowhere. I just stay close to home.

Everything seems too much trouble, and with so much going on in the world, that itself is tiring. It's almost like I'm hunkered down and riding it out, meaning the whole kit and caboodle – this world.

And I've run out of excuses for not being more active, more engaging, fluid and instead opted for being an old stick-in-the-mud. "Hang on to your hat," is my approach just now.

I also have trouble keeping up with just keeping up, like doing my daily exercise and weight training, taking my pills and supplements, brushing my teeth, anything. Hard to get me motivated to do much at all, and I shamelessly take naps, and even watch movies or whatever, right in the middle of the day if I want, long before any "Happy Hour," not that we celebrate that here.

Indeed, “Now is the winter of our discontent.”

I seem to leave, trailing behind me, all the things I have not done that I usually do. There they are, not done, and I don’t seem to care, although I do take note.

In short, I am weathering all that’s going on as best I can. I can’t say that I’m on top of this, more like I’m waiting for it to pass.

Of course, I have already voted, and I pray for the liberty and constitution that we so cherish to continue.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

À La Carte

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a9c806f7-4020-4357-9ab8-c8f3446dc16c_1080x1080.jpeg

Three simple words, not even from English. That's the message I am gradually coming around to. I'm talking about eating.

Even when I cook, and I do cook to live, and not live to cook, I find that I start small and often end up with a big, sometimes huge, amount of whatever I'm making. I can't just make a little. It comes out as 'a lot'.

And whatever I cook, and especially whatever I eat, it had better satisfy something, or I will just eat again, and soon.

Processed food does not work for me. Too many add-ons that are either some gentle kind of poison or just are fattening.

Often, my body will tell me what I need. For example, I look through the pantry and come across a can of salmon or tuna fish. And ever so slightly my mind or instinct skips a beat in favor of that food. It's not always there, but when it is, it is. I need something that is in that particular food.

And my doctors have told me I need Omega-3s and should eat a little fish, even if I am a vegetarian, and I am a vegetarian, aside from an occasional excursion into fish or a rare sometimes piece of meat.

Often, however, that can of cheap tuna fish is too skunky, pieces of fish that have no integral center, but are just that, odd pieces.

Something I have found recently is 'Natural Catch Tuna'.

<https://naturalcatchtuna.com/>

This is a fillet of tuna, in one piece, available in water or in oil, that you can eat right out of the can, and I do. Not very large (4.4 oz per can), it is not too much or too little, but just right. And they also have mackerel.

The main point is that if I eat a can, it is satisfying and I need not eat anything else with it, no carbs, chips, bread, etc.

What I need is a few more mini-meals like this, 'one shot satisfiers', that tell my mind that I have eaten something substantial. No chips, crackers, etc. and etc.

I would be interested in what one-shot small meals you can suggest that work for you. I need more 'somethings' like that.

EMAIL

We Can't Change What We Don't Accept

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7cdf91ac-e5b0-4eeb-9687-acae571f3df0_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, I seem to be getting a second wind, although I'm still treading water, keeping on keeping on.

Branching out or carving out new territory, not so much. I find myself conserving energy and holding fast, not my favorite mode.

Between the political chaos and the reoccurring extreme solar flares, my inner gyroscope is working full time just to stay balanced. And I'm not alone in all this. Friends around me feel the confusion as well. It's obvious.

My axiom has always been, "Put one foot in front of the other, and keep moving. So, if I find myself going in circles, where does that get me? Exactly nowhere to speak of. How do we build on that? What part of 'treading water' do I not understand?

Intellectually, I know that, as my first dharma teacher would say to me. "Michael, this can be hell; we have to make our own little corner of heaven in the middle of this."

Implementing that advice and actually being that way, is a little more difficult. Nevertheless, it's staring me in the face. What to do about it?

What it takes is relaxing on my part, embracing and accommodating whatever 'IS' right now, this present moment, and not turning a blind eye to it. It's always a matter of acceptance, complete acceptance of what is, especially if we want to change it.

We can't change what we don't accept. Oldest rule in the book.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Eye of the Flame

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/174227cd-56c3-4d94-8303-81bb860104a5_1024x1024.jpeg

Flick, flick, flicker, flame.

What's not gone is still here,

All there is,

That's important.

The wandering flames did not go out,

Were not blown out,

Despite worries and fear.

They alone burn on.

Phoenix like,

All-consuming,

Still burning.

Oil of the lamp,

Samsara,

Flames burn on,

The wick of attachments.

Everything consumed,

Yet still present,

These five flames.

Like waves that roll out,

Come back,

Defining the border line,

Of all that isn't.

[Poem -- Eternal flames, the five senses, direct and pure, consume everything that can be consumed, replacing whatever is missing.]

REAL ESTATE : 3-Card Monte

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0f254051-96be-4b7b-88f2-7cde81dae394_1024x1024.jpeg

Another trip downstate, some 250 miles, to look at a couple of houses in the East Lansing, MI area, where some of our kids live. Were these houses keepers? Did we bid on them? Not so far; we are waiting for some information, but probably not.

It's a long drive and a long day. We have been looking for a house since before Covid. Nothing wrong with the house we have here in Big Rapids, MI, just that it's not close to any of our kids and grandkids. As we age, we would like to be near family of some kind. And the real estate market has changed.

I wondered about this recent real-estate change, which is supposed to make buying and selling easier and more equitable. IMO I just imagine that this change is about money, probably not money for me, but money for someone. How does it work?

I'm not an expert on this and have not even found time to read all the new documents we home buyers have to sign, yet I did get a taste as to what's in it for buyers yesterday, and as I imagined, it's going to cost me more, not less, at least in some offerings.

Margaret and I looked at two houses yesterday and they both were of this new variety, where not only do we as buyers pay for house, but now we also pay our agent at least the 3% (or so) agents fee that is traditional for sellers to pay.

The sellers simply declare they are not paying agents' fee and that we buyers are to pay that fee ourselves to our own agent. This was news to me, but it's exactly what I feared would be the case, that the real estate market would find a way for houses to be even more expensive for buyers than they have been. Of course, that's what it amounts to.

Theoretically, or so they say, this allows the seller to offer a lower price instead of tacking on the seller's fee to the purchase price as has been tradition.

Of course, there is nothing stopping the seller from avoiding the fee entirely and still charging whatever they want for the house, and in a competitive

market, people are already overbidding the asking price and having to pay for that, the price of the house, plus the agent's fee, our agent.

I see how this is going to work. So, here on this blog is an opportunity for any readers here who are also into real estate to explain to me (and to us I imagine) how this new system is going to be a boon to home buyers instead of another drag, which it appears to be. This must be something good in this. I would like to hear about it.

What I saw yesterday was my agent not only presenting us with all kinds of papers to sign guaranteeing that we would pay him the agent's fee on top of the buyer's price for the house and, it also looks like, paying the overage or overbidding on the house, because more than a few buyers want it.

Our agent, who is a very nice person, spent a good half hour explaining to us how this works for the best, but he seemed to be more talking to himself. All I took away from that was what I have been sharing with you here, that if we wanted this house, we would pay the expected price, plus his 3% fee (the other 3% going to the listing agent), and probably have to overbid on top of that because he felt there would be overbidding, folks paying more than what the selling price that was listed.

Please, how is this a good thing? Please explain and I will listen, but I would be surprised if I like what I hear.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Speed of Light

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b5f0b603-7a4a-4c58-8ddd-d2afe91d5472_1024x1024.jpeg

I would like to say something about how fast light can travel, and here I am referring to the internal light that travels between Guru and student. I feel that this topic warrants a mention. I might as well just jump to the chase.

In a word, insight travels, well, as fast as light travels – instantaneously. I'm not talking about soaking up information or gradually growing a realization like a plant in the garden. Of course, that happens too.

Here I mean the insight that travels between guru and student, irrespective of any control. It just happens and blindingly fast.

In this particular case, it was between a guru in a video and me. The teacher just said a simple thing verbally and I understood it verbally, but the import or upshot, the meaning of it, was massive and it transpired instantly, like fire racing through a fuse. In a moment, it was done.

Suddenly, a whole part of my dharma understanding just lit up, with no 'anything' done on my part, and of course none on their part. This was a video I was watching. It was etched in stone.

So, when I say 'kriya' I mean an instantaneous evolutionary action or insight toward enlightenment as regard some issue.

When a kriya occurs or a flash of insight, it takes no time. It is timeless... and the transfer is instantaneous. The transfer between Guru and student is automatic and can't be slowed down or speeded up. It pervades.

And the effect of even just that one word, which was the case here, said it all. I realized what was said, revealed in a single word.

My life changed from that moment and that day. It was like a 'mind termā', a hidden treasure or insight that imploded a whole intellection construct and deconstructed it.

I mention it here, not because it is common, but because it is possible and does happen. It does.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

America Be Vigilant

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 4, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/00593405-8ffb-475c-b20e-fe984100b203_1537x2048.jpeg

Below is a poster I published in 2003, a collage by the great Sixties poster artist David Singer. This image and theme express my view and feelings about this or any other election. I am a patriot, for sure, but a liberal patriot. They do exist! LOL. To me America is the 'Land of the Free' and while, imperfect as it may be, it's what we have and have to work with. Working together, all races and creeds, we must preserve our liberty and treasure our differences, not give in to authoritarianism, whether in the form of an autocrat, king, or an avowed dictator. Vote your heart!

Work the Problem

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

November 8, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c7311eda-0fcb-4abe-a8b3-e7bd8593345c_2048x1536.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b36a43b6-4417-4213-a26f-c0f4a96f7284_1572x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4353e51e-3e37-4234-87c3-fccfc2feae0_1659x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/71b5dbd1-072d-47b6-b986-fadf79619a13_1536x2048.jpeg

The media and news sites have gone all bonkers. The talking heads keep on talking and saying even less than they did before the election. NONE of them saw this coming. Yet, they continue to hog the airways with their gibberish. I've given them my attention all these months, trusting they knew what they were talking about. They obviously don't.

It's like the weather forecasts. The best the weather channels can do of late is tell you accurately what is happening in the moment. Forecasts? Fuhgeddaboudit. It's the same with forecasting the election. Not even Bill Maher saw this coming.

I admit to being awash in the shock of the moment at the magnitude of the Trump win. I'm trying to recover. In fact, it took until around 6 PM on Thursday for me to reconnect with myself spiritually. The election results shattered my Self's equilibrium and for a short time I could not find my moorings.

And when I recovered, I knew it at once and felt like I was back in my body. I was supposed to be on a five-day trip starting Thursday morning, but I knew I could not drive without being connected dharmic-ally, so to speak. So, we cancelled our trip, and I spent most of Thursday (yesterday) hassling online

between two Internet companies trying to obtain an SSL-Certificate for my main web site "SpiritGrooves.net."

It was like a huge battle taking place, back and forth, each time waiting 15-20 minutes to get through the phone tree, back and forth, again and again. I worked through two SSL-Certificate companies, gave up on the first, trying to get a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) certificate, and then the SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) Certificate. This went on from around 11 AM to 6 PM, and I am still waiting for the final acknowledgment, although I believe all is now in order.

All this busyness transpired, while internally I was waiting for the shock of the election results to subside and for me to better reconnect and for my normal dharma practice to take full hold again. It has.

Meanwhile, I need to tune the election pandemonium out and talk about something else for a change. Perhaps the news media will find their balance, but I have (for now) lost confidence or interest in them. They did not prepare me for the election results.

It's time that I tune out depending on the news, turn down any preoccupation with politics and the direction our country is leaning, and turn inward toward my family and friends, and interests. Life will go on with its politics, yet I feel I have to turn to my own interests and our local situation. With that in mind:

Let's talk about photography.

I am well aware that I am mostly talking to myself when I talk about some photography here and now, and that few readers are interested, so I apologize, yet here goes.

Hasselblad XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens

The Hasselblad XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens is 63mm and F/1.5 in 35mm format. It is the fastest XCD lens to date. And this lens has a special import to me because I know the main designer for the above lens personally. And he told me in a private email that he put everything he wanted to see into this lens, before leaving Hasselblad. He was working for Hasselblad for some time and got to influence the design of the XCD 80mm lens.

Unless you use this lens and can know for yourself, IMO, it may be difficult to see how useful it is. I found a used copy recently (a new XCD 80mm costs \$4,845.00), and finally got around to using it. WOW is all I can say!

The bokeh of this lens wide open is really incredible. I post some photos here just taken around the house that show you what I am seeing. The lens is

heavy, large, and a little clunky, yet once you use it, you want to keep on using it. At least I do.

The lens is very sharp, yet because it is so fast (F/1.5 in 35mm camera terms), the very gentle bokeh (blurred background), also called 'bouquet' is lovely. I could not ask for more. No, I will probably not take it on hikes because of its weight and bulk, but I'm not doing all that much hiking these years anyway.

As for the election that I mentioned above, with the so-called "New World Order" that the Republicans have announced is coming, I have no choice but to accept and make the most of it. I will again share my experience early Wednesday morning at about 1 AM, when it was clear that the Republican win by a landslide was inevitable. I was in shock.

My wife Margaret took me outside to our porch where we could see the night sky. It was a crystal-clear night and cold. As I looked up at the stars and constellations in the sky, I realized that some things don't change and that all that I love, family, friends, and my life is still here.

In other words, I am back in my body and my dharma practice is functioning as it always has. I just have to work this problem. I can do that.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

The Bodily Divide

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9dac21c7-fa4d-4eb1-82fc-e8b24303bec2_1024x1024.jpeg

I want to say something and something that perhaps is a little subtle or unusual. At least, it's different, so probably not worth mentioning, but I'm aware of it, so let's look at it.

I believe we are all somewhat aware of when we go out of the body (out-of-body experience), usually into our heads, intellectualizing, thinking, dreaming. And sooner or later we return, stop thinking, come back into our body, and perhaps do some more feeling and experiencing of life. I will leave you to see whether what I just wrote is familiar or not. Does it make sense to you?

I've been having something different going on than the above. Instead of leaving the body and daydreaming or abandoning the body in that quite familiar way, daydreaming for a while and then returning, I'm not daydreaming, not leaving the body, but instead I'm losing the separation or dividing line between my body and the rest of the world. This is news to me.

And this is not as hard and fast as even these words sound, but it's rather more subtle, so let's go at it gently.

It's like whatever divides my body and me from, let's say the rest of the room, or it could be the movie I'm watching, or it could even be through the door and out into the next room. Whatever divides is no longer dividing!

It's almost like I have tentacles or better put, I have waves of feelers that ripple and flow out from me, connecting to areas outside of my body, not unlike a giant octopus. However, this connection is, rather than a connection, the dissolution of any connection at all. What divides me from the objects around me is dissolving, making me one with my environment to the point of there being no difference.

About all I can say is this is a new experience, the softening of the hard line between what I call 'Me' and the rest of the world. Even this description is not accurate, but it's almost like I am this huge being, of course the 'me' that I know, yet also feeling connected to and flowing beyond me and identifying with what is beyond my body as also me. There is no longer any separation. It's almost like a greater immersion in the wide world of myself.

The subject/object duality or dichotomy is fading and dissolving. It's not an unpleasant experience, yet it is unusual.

And, its not like anything has changed other than I am more at one with or united to my environment. It's like I'm projected beyond myself and identify with everything beyond my skin or body.

I thought for some while whether to even bring this up and I almost regret it now, yet there I've said it. It's expressed, and

Let's see how it falls out.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Minding My Own Business

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 16, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f1d3678a-6970-4efb-8a6e-a8270a16d157_2048x1365.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7ae85b8b-e90d-4f62-b5ad-2f47ca55386b_2048x788.jpeg

Politics these days have reached non-stop proportions, with news breaking every few minutes. I can't spend my life monitoring all these political events.

I have to let the politicians work it out, while I turn away from the outside news and tend to my own life, as uneventful as that may be.

As for what I do, it's fixing stuff up around the house, and I want to spend more time with photography, or try to figure out what to eat and how to make it. That kind of thing.

With so many outside distractions, it's hard not to be drawn into the world's events and political maelstrom, not to mention deal with the disappointment and consequences of the outcome of the recent election.

At the same time, the solar sunspot cycle reaches the peak of its eleven-year cycle this coming year, bombarding us with huge X-Class solar flares, while we are in the midst of hurricane season.

Anyway, as mentioned, I have to turn more inward toward my own life and family, tend to various interests, photography in particular, and try to keep up with writing FB posts as I can.

And all the while, sustain my dharma practice, which goes back to the late 1950s when it started. And of course, I will keep my aging body as healthy as I can.

[A couple photos from around the house.]

EMAIL

Round Robin

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1a4d521f-fa88-4981-9523-c565694e407b_1024x1024.jpeg

[Time out for a bit of the pointless.]

Like a stuck record, I'm too often driven to the very edge of pain, where I remain, going around in circles, aimlessly cycling.

How to avoid that and go in the opposite direction, away from what is the sharper edge and back into some kind of relaxation and rest. Good luck!

For sure, it's time to take stock and adjust something somewhere.

Endlessly weaving with words, a matrix that means something, or is the weaving itself the only meaning, meaning it means nothing.

This is what the Tibetan hand gestures, 'mudras', are all about, but signs and signatures in themselves? Are they their own meaning?

As the philosopher Hegel said, "We go behind the curtain of the Self, to see what's there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen."

In other words, it's always about the One and never the Two. Duality is but a meaningless construct that eventually resolves into one, like trying to trace the trail of a bird's flight across the sky.

Or is that the point, that there is none?

We are going nowhere.

If that's true, where are we going is a pointless question.

And where does that leave us, if the meaning of life is itself meaningless?

It suggest that where we are going, the 'goal', is how we get there and never, never anything in itself.

Back in the mid-1960s, when I was young and in my Shakespeare period, I wrote this for the future.

"Look at yourself,

First yet first,

No better,

And yet not worse.

Now get yourself together in a bunch,

And call what carriage as ye may your hearse.”

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

MAY ERLEWINE IN COLORADO: THREE TUNES

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/437148ce-a86b-4191-88cb-eea37670e61b_1212x520.jpeg

I have a whole family that's doing things, and I get emails AND notes from many of them. I just got a link to an interview that my daughter May Erlewine did while traveling through Colorado. Here she is interviewed and sings three songs just on the spot, no band, just May. They are wonderful to hear, and I am sharing the link. Not sure how long it will last at this URL, so if you want some rest and beauty, at least hear that first song called, "It All Comes Down to This." It's mesmerizing.

<https://www.krfcfm.org/shows/krfc-interview-archive/>

Just CLICK on the arrow that marks the tune.

EMAIL

The Worm Turns ...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/330d2d01-d7e1-4383-99f1-192359d2b1bb_3840x2160.jpeg

And the pendulum swings.

Well, it seems like I have reached the corner and am in the process of turning it. I knew it had to be coming, just didn't know when. It's happening now.

I'm sure that I'm not the 'Lone Ranger' here, if others are feeling this too. Aside from the politics and world turmoil, I have reached a stationary point, come to a standstill, and am reversing direction. I'm now going the other way. Heaven sent.

As to what that is will vary with each one of us. I can only tell you how it's going down with me.

I'm not fighting back, being antagonistic, but just turning around to face the music. And, as mentioned, I don't only mean world events, politics, and all that's bugging us these days.

I mean a whole lot of things that have been simultaneously coming to a head personally for me and which up to now I have kind of ignored; I'm suddenly facing all this and mean to do something about it.

This would include food that I'm not supposed to eat, and I've been eating. And snacking has to stop. That's a killer.

I also mean the exercise I need more of; I have to have it and also keep doing the weight training I already do. My body needs it.

All kinds of things that have been festering or heading downhill, and I have to stop the festering and just execute the remedies.

In short, everything that's grown beyond its means must be cut off at the pass, so to speak.

It's like the New Year Resolutions I never actually make happening right now.

I'm feeling the reversed motion and moving on with taking care of the business of my life. What's out of line has to be realigned. I can do that now.

I've been watching it for a while, wondering when my own conscience would kick in and just say "No!" Enough is enough, too much being too much.

It's happening. Is it just me or are you feeling something similar, that we have reached a reaction point, a turnaround?

EMAIL

Rain Dance: Birth of Alternative Culture

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a9a718e2-186e-4672-93c9-5c5b6769850b_1020x750.jpeg

There is going to have to be an alternate culture to the now Fox News dominated White House. If that is going to be the dominant culture in America, it reminds me of the mid-1960s, when the alternate Hippie culture arose. Back then it was the ‘squareness’ of the 1950s, perhaps it is this MAGA kind of stimulus that will spark the creation of a creative counter-culture that will be of historic value.

After four years of MAGA taking up all the oxygen in the room, the constant distraction, I am not about to do it all over again. And that’s just what is happening now, constant distraction.

Sorry MAGA folks, but I have to just go and live my life and ignore as much as I can your endless clown show. We are not like a ‘real’ minority, but roughly half the population and perhaps this MAGA dominated culture is just the kick in the butt we need to jumpstart a new culture for the rest of us into a wonderful period of experience.

If anything, what’s happening politically now is like manure to grow the flowers from the rest of us creatively.

I do agree that the current liberal and Democratic party is tired and out of gas. There will be some changes made there, for sure, and we do need some, like solving the immigration problem. The Democrats missed the boat on that one.

What I’m pointing out here is that I’m not about to just hide away and bide my time for four years or whatever time is required. I plan to use this coming time to become creative and more socially active with others like me, who can band together and be mutually supportive.

This change could well herald a new cultural renaissance in America. Rather than be dead time we have to wait out, let’s use it contrast to the MAGA movement.

I can well remember the coming of the Internet. I was part of that, having email in 1979 and according to an article for Red Herring Magazine on my company Matrix Software, the article stated that the only older software

company still on the Internet than Matrix Software (1977) was a little company called Microsoft.

Back then, with the advent of Internet, no one stopped us from walking right in and take over technology with no awareness on their part of the threat of putting Hippies in charge or resistance from the establishment. We just took it over without a fight. Who knows what is possible now.

That's my wish and hope, that what we lost in the election we will gain from the incentive to better form our own alternative culture and usher in resurgence of social creativity.

["Rain Dance" print by Yvonne Davis.]

EMAIL

Eating for Life

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/19e0c738-5e91-4365-a0c5-de9f5a6329be_1968x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8d7a08af-d254-4ad0-84ae-bf4e2ce5f302_2048x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/08d01bb3-676a-49bd-be38-a18b54a003dc_455x700.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c387ba39-800c-44b2-9499-9bb722ccfa56_2048x2048.jpeg

As I get older, what to eat seems to become more and more important. I can't eat just anything as I used to when I was 25 years old, without paying for it in one way or another. So, without meaning to be preachy, I want to share with you something about what we eat and why.

And we are not newbies in all this. Both Margaret and I were trained in Macrobiotic foods and their preparation, me in the late 1960s and both of us in the early 1970s. As I like to recite, I chose the day (by astrology) when Eden Organic Foods first opened and I designed their logo, which they still use today.

I seem to be more or less following what is called the Mediterranean Diet, not by formula, but by eating what seems good to me.

Mostly whole grains, organic vegetables, beans and lentils, tempeh, some tofu, fruit, and so forth. And while I seldom eat red meat, at the request of my doctor, I do eat some Omega3 rich fish, like salmon, mackerel, and tuna.

Food is so important, especially as you age, and what you put into your system adds up. It makes a difference what we eat, especially when we get older, and even how we eat it.

Processed foods we don't eat, or if we do, we read the ingredients label very carefully. And even then, the fact of processing itself is seldom without its mark.

Same with whole grains. And white rice is something we never eat or even want to. The only rice we eat is Lundberg's whole-grain brown rice. We eat no long-grain, basmati, or any other type of rice because we need the yang strength that short grain rice brings, especially in winter.

And we eat a lot of root vegetables, carrots, potatoes, squash, yams, rutabaga, and the like, coating them with olive oil and baking them in the oven.

We eat only whole grains and whole-grain pasta, although whole-grain pasta can take a little getting used to. And organic, organic, organic, although it's getting harder to know what is really organic and what has some county's thumb on the scale. Whole grain flour is what we use for baking.

In our house we have shelves of glass (not plastic) jars with whole grains, whole beans and legumes, all organic. And organic nuts of every kind.

And in the fridge, we have organic dried fruit. We don't use milk or milk products, with the exception of a little piece of cheese every few days... I eat. We do use oat milk, and I like the barista style for use in grain coffee, mostly used in the winter season. We don't drink coffee or tea or take anything with caffeine in it.

Sometimes a small piece of dark chocolate with 72% or greater Cacao in it.

Margaret is not eating any vegetables that are in the Solanaceae family, yet I do. That includes tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant, etc.

We don't eat red meat, yet at the suggestion of my doctor, I do eat some fish, those that have a lot of Omega3 in them like mackerel, salmon, and tuna. I either cook them up or eat them from tins, taking great care that they are wild-caught and not farm raised. I eat small amounts, like 3.5 ounces.

We are big on lentils and Ethiopian-style food, and we also like Lebanese food. We are not eating much, or any salt and we go easy on the hot sauces.

Fruit yes, organic, and for me I find blueberries an important part of my diet. Bananas too. I like 'Food For Life, Ezekiel 4:9 Sprouted Organic Whole Grain Cereal, which I eat cold with fruit and some oat milk.

No sugars, but for a sweetener we use a little honey or maple-syrup, knowing that these too are sugars. We avoid all sugar substitutes.

We have a reverse-osmosis water filtering system and use that.

We use fermented foods, particularly tempeh, a lot. We also use a much smaller amount of tofu on occasion. Also mochi brown rice.

For bread and flour, it is whole-grain and organic; I like sourdough myself. We have a flour mill.

Margaret is an ace with food and health, much better than I am. She makes up oatmeal or kanji by the huge pot and freezes portion-sized pieces. We also know how to roast oat groats (and other grains), soak them overnight, grind them a bit, and cook them on the stove.

I am not a gourmet, more of a gourmand. We don't use many spices and we don't make fancy recipes. We just cook the food or eat it raw, and with a minimum of spices and virtually no salt.

As mentioned, when I was 25 years old, I could eat almost anything, but not anymore. I have tried to give you an idea as to what we eat as older folks, not suggesting you would like this diet. Yet some of these suggestions may serve as a guide as to what we find healthy and don't mess up our system.

[Design and poster silkscreened by me in the late 1960s, photos from our kitchen.

EMAIL

Kanji or Porridge

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 24, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/608e97af-e955-42d4-9b52-87a988eac621_1536x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c2eaf659-0c23-4124-a1ea-d69b2723de52_1024x1024.jpeg

Kanji (India) or Congee (China), or Porridge (USA), often slightly fermented to become a probiotic. Most often made with rice, and often slightly sweet from fermenting.

Margaret makes it here, no fermenting, and the way she does this is as a multi-grain porridge using oats, barley, and buckwheat in a large pot with water, slow-cooked for many hours, watching with care that the water does not boil out, and then frieze as small individual portions to later defrost and eat in the cold of winter. One large pot as show here is often lasts for many weeks and is welcome as a breakfast food in Michigan winters.

We take a frozen slice out, defrost it, and have it as a porridge with condiments or fruit, oat milk, and the like.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Nothing Doing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3684f2ba-9e57-4075-9a75-0197846fae7e_1927x2048.jpeg

If you want natural creativity, it's not helpful to tell yourself, "Now I'm going to think on this" and then try to think on this or that. Don't pick a topic. In fact, I find it best to do just the opposite of 'trying' to think.

If we want fresh spontaneous insights, we have to avoid thinking on something or anything. However, we can't 'try' to avoid thinking either. Instead, we just have to let go of any effort or attempt to do anything. It's like surrendering, surrendering any attempt at effort whatsoever.

In other words, we have to let what happens happen, what comes to mind just come to mind without our intent or help. Let what occur arise.

What comes to mind that way is pure.

It is said: "Mahamudra transcends the intellect and is the absence of doing something with the mind."

[Photo of large India-style Tilopa statue by me. This another Tilopa statue on our shrines.]

EMAIL

Happy Thanksgiving!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/326f3f7a-b426-45c4-9512-78bf2ed31d93_1536x2048.jpeg

It's quiet here, gray day, below freezing. We made an apple pie. I peeled and cut up the apples, while Margaret made the crust and put together the pie. We will have some whipped coconut cream on top.

For food we cut up a bunch of carrots, celery, and a lot of mushrooms into very fine pieces and are putting together a rice pilaf with mushroom gravy. I cut up the carrots, celery, and some of the mushrooms. I also am making some mashed potatoes. I usually make dressing, but am taking a break this year. Also, we will have some peas on the side.

In the background is the Lions/Bears football game.

That's about it for today.

[Photo of the apples for the pie and in the background applesauce in the making.]

EMAIL

The Exercise Room

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 2, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9ada789d-c567-4cf2-b62e-8804da5c6d5b_2048x1480.jpeg

We are not finding that house to move to, and it's been five years and running. So...

I've got to change my workroom into more of an exercise room. Winter is coming (and already here) this week and I'm going to need to amp up my daily exercise or pay the piper.

In the workroom I have a small twin bed to take naps, which I never seem to use. I need to take it out, so I have more room for various exercise machines. On Black Friday, I just got a small treadmill to add to my elliptical, rowing machine, and weight-training bench. I've got a gym going. This is what old people do while trying to maintain what can't be maintained.

So, before I knew it, I found myself disassembling the bed, and the first step was to pull the bed frame. Where to put it? Well, the bed can go in the attic crawl space, but several of the parts of the bed won't fit through the rather small attic door, so more disassembly and then cart all the parts and me crawling into the attic, piece by piece, place them out of the way. Did that.

Next, a talk with Margaret and we agree that the dissembled bed (now in the attic crawl space) would be better placed in our dharma center next door, where we could remove a futon frame in room #8 that is a devilish danger for pinching your fingers if you try to move it. It's going out to storage or just be given away.

In its place will be a twin bed that now is in room #3, a small bedroom in the center. It has a nice bed frame, but I will disassemble that frame so I can haul it upstairs, piece by piece, to room #8.

Next, I will bring the very nice bedframe from my workroom next door (now in the attic) and reassemble it in room #3. Sounds easy right? Well not quite. I have to crawl back into the attic, fish the bed parts out, get them downstairs and then to the house next door, our center. The mattress is heavy and carrying above the snow by myself, well, is no fun. I did that.

As it turned out, the nice bed from my workroom next door is slightly larger and it exactly fits in a single direction in room #3. What this means is that I

have to assemble it in place with only inches to spare and can't assemble it and then place it where we want in room #3. That was like a Rubik's Cube, assembling the larger frame, the slats, the slat cover and all that in a very tight place. I did it, but it took some figuring how and patience.

Then it was disassemble and haul the previous bedframe in room #3 upstairs and put it all back together again. It was a little easier than the first frame, yet by this time I was on my third bedframe deconstruction/reconstruction for the day. I also had to scrub the floor under the bed in room #3 because there were spider poops and flecks that you had to scrub hard to get them off the floor. There was that.

I'm finally done, but I am too tired to finish setting up my exercise room, and don't need any more exercise today anyway.

EMAIL

The Afflictions

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 3, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a1855135-95f1-4e56-964b-34b248301189_1024x1024.jpeg

THE AFFLICTIONS

The Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche wrote:

“Because we are ordinary individuals, ‘the afflictions’ will naturally occur from time to time. No one can give us a medicine to stop them nor can anyone else prevent them from happening.

Actually, when we practice, the afflictions will naturally disappear. The reason is that they are just a type of thought. Like anything else in the mind, they appear to us, but if you look at their nature, you will not find anything solid about them, no matter how strong they seem. In essence, they are just a thought in the mind.”

End of Quote

All I can say is, “What a thought!”

When the ‘afflictions’ are upon us, when they arise, we are caught in a vortex of confusion and chaos. Suddenly, our life becomes about what afflicts us. I know it well.

As for my own suggestions on this, aside from battenning down the hatches and ride the current afflictions out, is to not make any lifechanging decisions until the smoke clears. Be patient and don’t fight it. Think of your afflictions as a hurricane and you are in a safe place.

On the other hand, Thrangu Rinpoche’s advice is correct of course. The problem is that too many of us don’t know how to look at the nature of our mind, including the nature of this thought or that particular affliction. That should be our first concern.

These hard times come and go. They can be only a moment away and suddenly they are there. I find that relaxing, resting right in those afflictions, looking directly at them is the best medicine I know to neutralize them. As they say, “Take them to the path.”

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL