

BLOGS 2023 SUMMER



by Michael Erlewine

2023
Essays
SUMMER

by Michael Erlewine

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These are not all, but they are the most useful essays from 2023 sorted by the seasons.

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

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

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

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PROBLEMS WITH PEOPLE.

July 1, 2023

Of course, we all have them, problems with people, events, and things, but problems with people seem to head the list.

And I'm not talking about problems in person with people, but problems similar to what I described yesterday in the "Thought Ganglia" blog, problems in our head with people.

Apparently, we can't get along with just everyone, at least most of us can't. Again, I am talking about a very particular kind of problem, which I will do my best to describe.

With me it most often happens when I least expect it. I am going along with my day, doing what I do, and suddenly with no warning that person (and our mutual problem) comes to mind. I was not already dwelling on it. I didn't ask for it or think it up, and I don't want to say that it is like a vision, but in some ways it is like a vision in that while I don't see an image or a picture, I do feel the gist of whatever is the problem very clearly and, I almost could just say it, visible. It is that fixating.

Again, I don't see a photo-image, yet I do experience a nexus or focus that serves as a reminder to me of the problem I'm having with them. I can't say it is a headache, either, but it is like a focal headache, a tight focus like a spinning gyroscope.

And most of all, this 'image' or focus distinguishes itself from everything else around me by the fact that

it has just appeared in my mind. Most often, I never call this up, although that too can happen.

It just instantly arises, very much as if that person, wherever they are, is thinking about me and struggling with me the same way I suddenly have them come to mind, quite uninvited. That being said, what happens then?

Well, that can vary all over the place, but often I just try to put it out of my mind, to dismiss it, yet that seldom works.

It seems to me that something is being worked out or at least being worked on in the immediate moment, with or without my permission. It is like a knot in time, a little window yet one that I can't see through, but nevertheless, I can't but be aware of it. It is kind of captivating – a spinning wheel.

And it seems to have something like a duration, in that it's activity, something like a buzzing sound, is happening, and even going somewhere. It reminds me of those little 'snakes' we used to light on fire around the Fourth of July, that once lit, would spew out a long chain of morphing ash, to our delight.

Only here, I don't see the delight; perhaps I should!

Anyway, I'm caught up in it, for what it's worth, stuck to it like glue. In my best days, I try to work with it, thinking perhaps that a little compassion on my part, some understanding, might lighten the load and expand this knot open until it dissipates. And that definitely works, when I can manage it.

In dharma practice-words, if I do what is called Tong-Len to it, that helps. Tong-len is also called “Exchanging Yourself for Others,” meaning put yourself in the place of the other and try to see the other side. Be kind, gentle, forgiving, and loving. That always seems to work.

Another way to use Tong-len is to willingly absorb all the pain, ugliness, anger, mistakes into yourself, take it on, and send back to them all your light, kindness, and love. Continue doing that until the event dissolves and passes. That is best. However, I can’t always do that myself, but I try or at least know that it would help.

This knot that appears in the mind, if I can relax and remain aware of it with an open heart naturally dissolves, and time and space expand. It dissolves out of existence.

Who is to say where and when the rarest of flowers blooms?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



A 'GRAVE' (AS IN GRAVITATIONAL) SITUATION

July 6, 2023

Another 90-degree day and with a high air-index number, so it's stay inside, fans on, and keep the windows closed. It's lower this morning, as of 2 AM or so, and we are having thunderstorms, and some much-needed rain.

The recent heat wave has rendered the air around here like a humid pea soup and something similar seems to be the state of mind I find myself in.

In the world of the 'astro' and astrology, I have been interested in gravitation and gravity waves since the early 1970s. In fact, one of the most important discoveries for myself was what I called (back then) "StarTypes," whole-chart patterns in the heliocentric natal chart. StarTypes examines the large-scale planetary patterns.

Scientists and astrophysicists have speculated on how the universe may communicate within itself. They have examined the various possible carriers of information— such as light rays in the visible and non-visible spectrum, and other forms of radiation, including gravitational radiation. It has been suggested that information stemming from the 'heart nucleus' of the galaxy is probably streaming through us constantly via gravitational waves.

In fact, experiments have been set up to detect what has been called the "Weak Force" —i.e. gravity waves. Gravity waves also travel at the speed of light, but they are very weak or subtle, and therefore hard to detect.

Scientists point out that it would take antennae the size of our solar system to be an appropriate receiver.

Hmmmm... Well, this last phrase, about an antenna the size of the solar system, back then this rang a bell with me.

Another interesting fact is that gravity waves are quadri-polar in nature, rather than dipolar like light waves. In other words, the proper antennae to receive and decode gravity radiation would be in the form of a cross. As gravity waves pass through a quadripolar antenna, they shorten one arm of the cross antenna, while they lengthen the other. That is how gravity waves are detected.

A very large cross-shaped antenna is what would be required to receive gravity radiation coming from a source such as the center of our galaxy.

Well, as it was obvious to me back then, the solar system itself is just such a cross-shaped antenna! Every time the planets line up to create a cross—such as when the Grand Cross and T-Square aspect patterns are created—the shape is there...so, here comes the "What if?"

What if, during the times the planets create a cross in our solar system, there is increased receptivity to gravitational radiation? AND, what if persons born during that time SOMEHOW represent, contain, or incorporate that gravitational information in their very being?

Those of us born with a cross (T-Square, and Grand Cross chart patterns) in their heliocentric chart would

share that information with the rest of us— throughout their lives—somehow. And the opposite or ‘antidote’ of a Grand Cross would be the Grand Trine, three points in an equilateral triangle (120-degrees a side) that most perfectly avoids a cross in the center of the solar system.

Of course, nobody paid much attention to anything I wrote back then (or now for that matter), yet I was paying attention and measuring these whole chart patterns in hundreds and then many thousands of heliocentric natal charts.

A whole-chart pattern, simply put, are Ptolemaic angles (conjunctions, sextiles, squares, oppositions, and trines that link one-to-another all the way around a 360-degree natal chart. I include some of the patterns I was using in a calendar my brother Stephen Erlewine and I published back in the mid-1970s.

Back then it was a far-out idea, and even today it is probably still too much in the future for most folks.

However, I have been hard at work for the last 50 years studying and realizing that those folks born with a Grand Cross or T-Square (whole-chart patterns with a cross in them) somehow incorporate gravity information, which is then distributed to the rest of us for absorption.

And someone like myself, born with a very exact Grand Trine (six planets participating) is a perfect antennae to sense and interpret those born with that very special gravitational information by way of the crosses in their heliocentric natal chart.

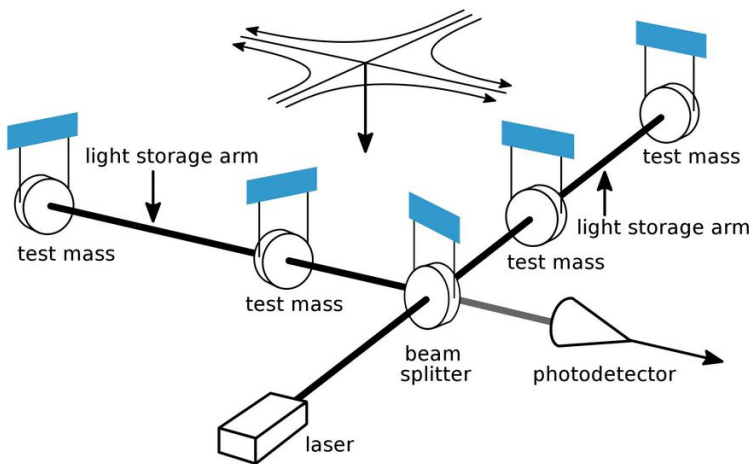
If you want to read more, here are a couple of books that are tutorials in this concept.

“STARTYPES: LIFE-PATH PARTNERS”

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

“DHARMA CHART / KARMA CHART:
ASTROLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE 21ST
CENTURY”

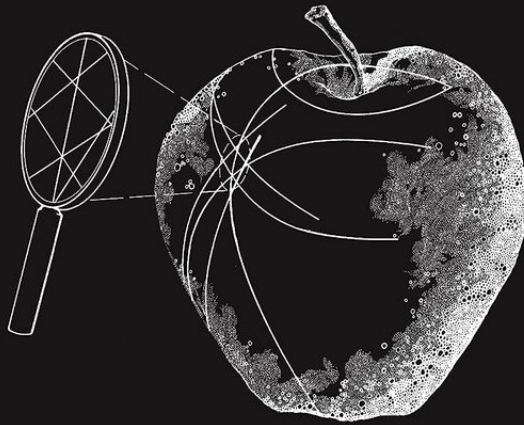
<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev...>



The kind of antenna needed to interpret gravity waves. A quadrupole, two arms in a cross. They can receive gravitational waves and can be laser measured because the waves shorten one axis and lengthen the other.

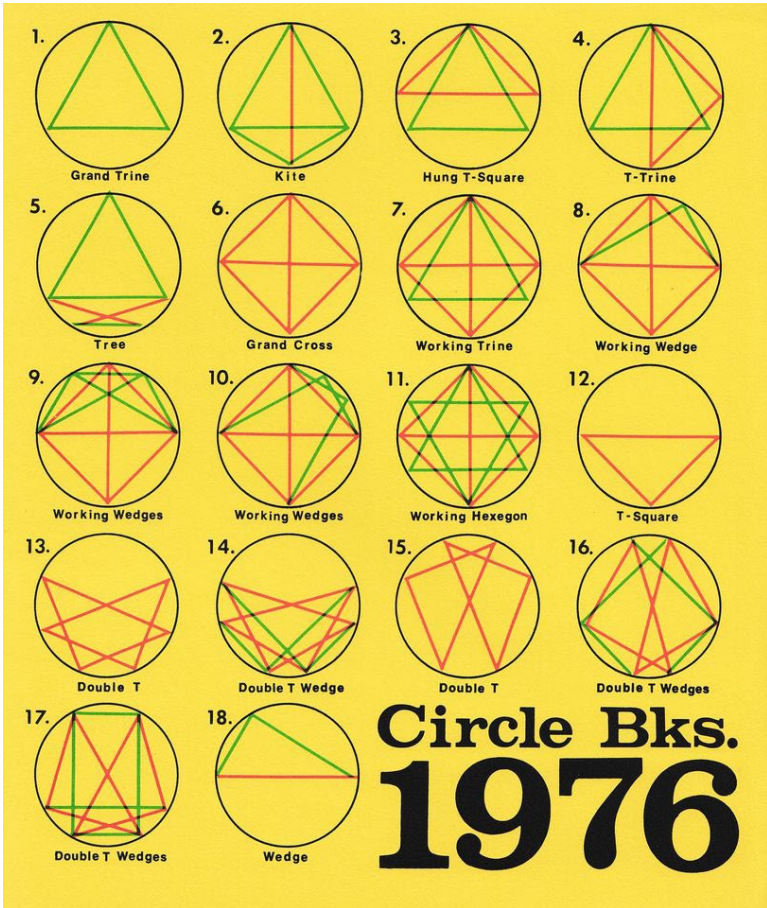
GRAVITATION

Charles W. MISNER Kip S. THORNE John Archibald WHEELER

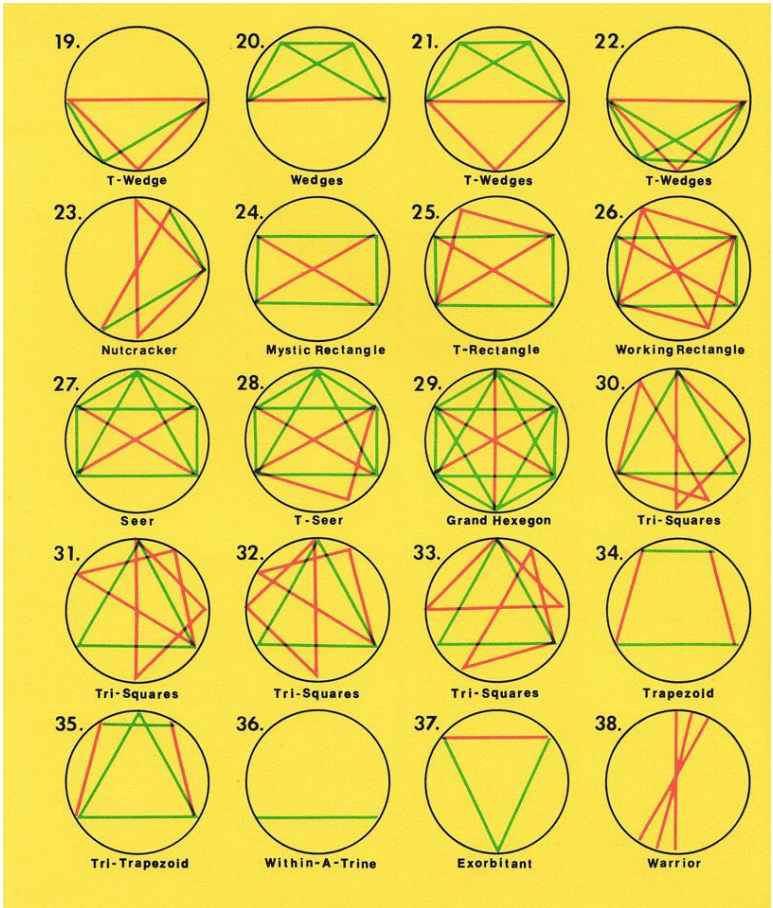


WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY DAVID I. KAISER AND
A NEW PREFACE BY CHARLES W. MISNER AND KIP S. THORNE

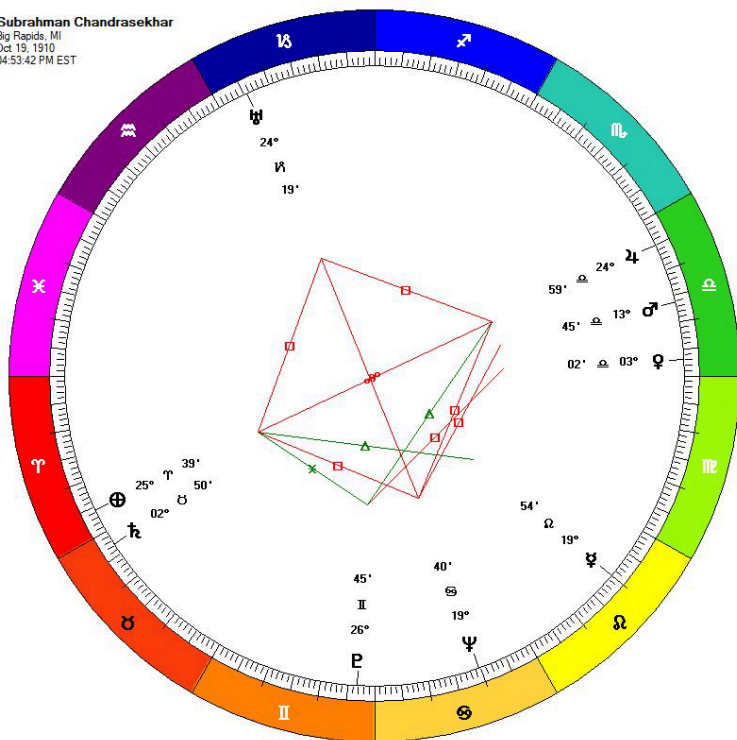
A book I have had and studied for decades.



Some of the 60 whole chart patterns (StarTypes) I created back in the 1970s.

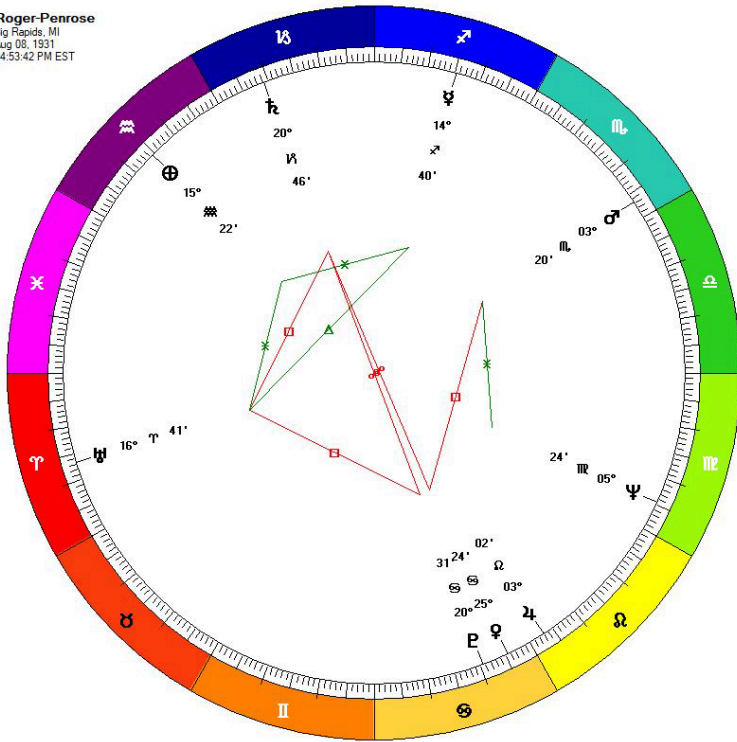


Subrahman Chandrasekhar
Big Rapids, MI
Oct 19, 1910
04:53:42 PM EST



One of a number of astrophysicists active in gravitational theory and research. Note the Grand Cross. Helio chart.

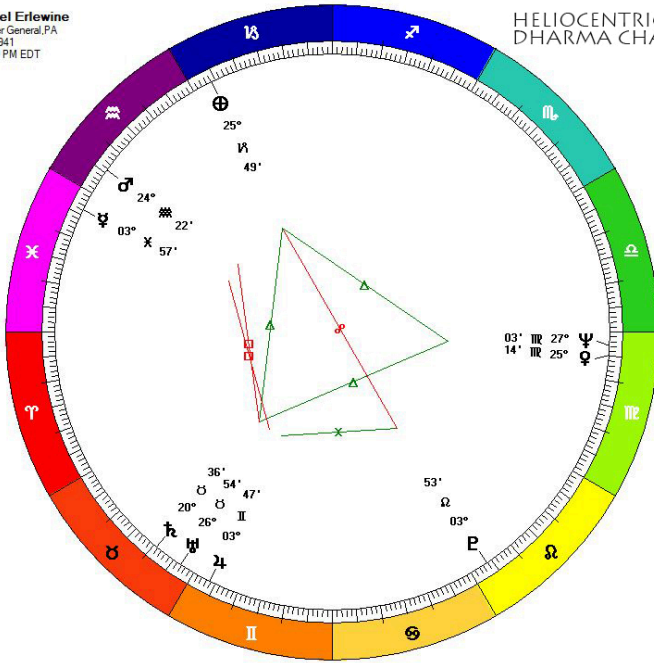
Roger-Penrose
Big Rapids, MI
Aug 08, 1931
04:53:42 PM EST



One of a number of astrophysicists active in gravitational theory and research. Note the Grand Cross. Helio chart.

Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
05:03:00 PM EDT

HELIOCENTRIC DHARMA CHART



My own helio chart, the opposite of a Grand Cross, a Grand Trine, most perfectly avoiding a cross in the center of the solar system, thus a pattern able to sense a cross and interpret it.

CYBERNETICS: THE KEY TO COSMIC COHERENCE

July 7, 2023

Grandkids here for a few days, so I'm helping out in the kitchen. Made a batch of chewy tofu, mixed with short-grain brown rice, with zucchini and yellow summer squash this morning for breakfast no less.

Around 6:30 AM when it was coolest, I dug out and leveled another raised bed, digging an extra four-inches into the ground and filling that hole with dried logs. I was drenched with sweat from head to toe when finished and had to take a shower and change everything.

Waiting for a plumber to arrive to make it easier to turn outside water back on and off. Quarter-turn faucets are the best, IMO. And we are moving one (re-pipe) so that we can turn it off away from the house and at about knee height.

And I've been thinking about cybernetics, with the recent news on the long gravitational waves reaching us from space.

The important idea here is that in order for large-scale structures like the solar system, galaxy, supergalaxy, etc. to cohere, hang together, there has to be a flow of information, like a bloodstream, moving through us.

Otherwise, any system or structure will fail and fall apart. Of course, scientists have always been searching for what that flow of information could be. It seems that it may be what is called the "Weak Force,"

gravitational radiation, to be that carrier, even though it is very, very faint and hard to detect.

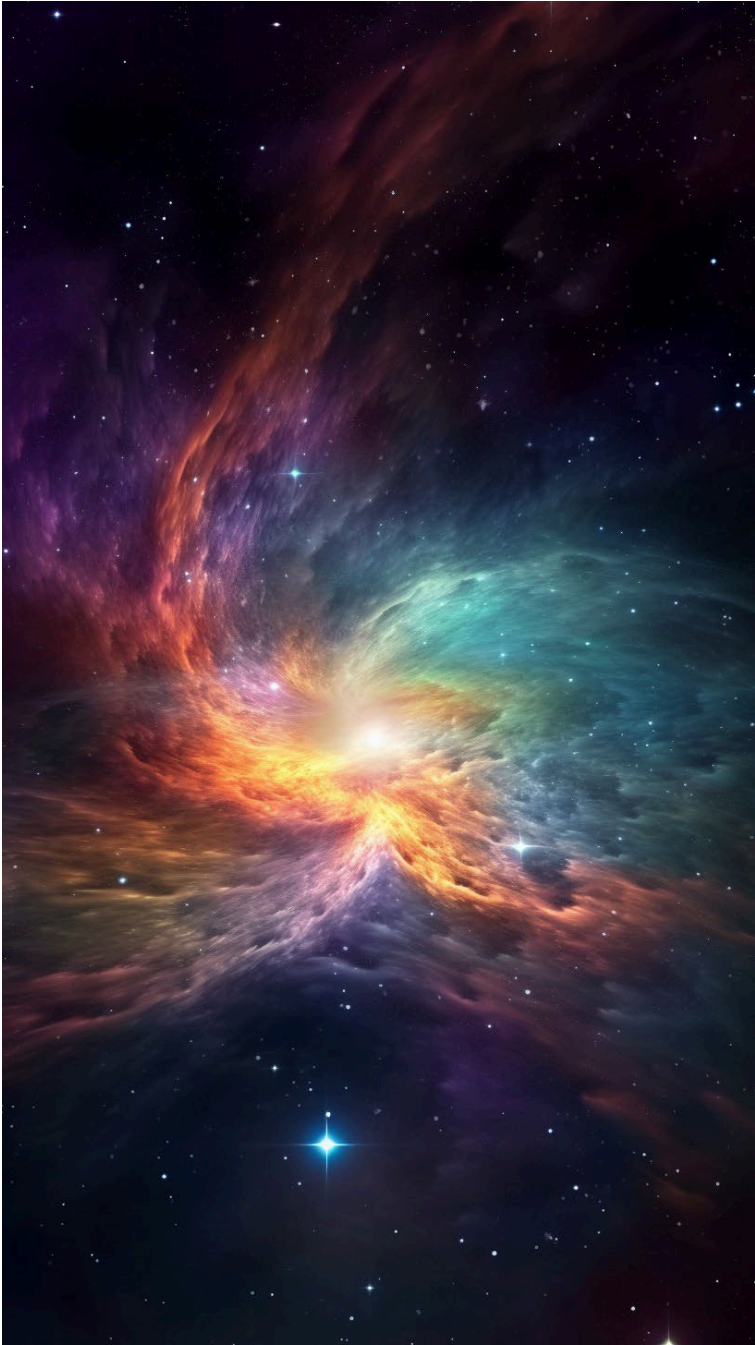
The science of coherence is called Cybernetics, which is a study of communications and embedded control systems that enable cohesion in both machines, systems, and living things.

Scientists have not figured out exactly what that carrier is, although they have determined that, as mentioned, there has to be one, otherwise even large-scale structures like the solar system, galaxy, etc. would not cohere and fall apart. Every system apparently has a life bloodstream of info that keeps it “alive,” and gravity waves may be how large-scale structures are kept informed.

Cybernetics is the reaction response, like a gyroscope, that keeps a system balanced and functioning. Every coherent system, living or machine, has to have one. We just have to discover how in large-scale structures like the solar system, galaxy, and supergalaxy, this is done.

Gravitational radiation may be the key carrier of this cosmic information.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



TEST THE IDEA, NOT THE PERSON

July 8, 2023

One of the cardinal points or ideas that comes with the dharma teachings is to try out ideas and concepts on our own to see whether they are true or work for us. Test things. Don't take someone's word for it; test it. The rinpoches all seem to champion this approach.

And it's very healthy, IMO. What I have found out is that testing ideas and principles is helpful, yet testing the people who hold this or that idea is another story, one with no real usefulness. What 'persons' are made of is anyone's guess; the ideas they espouse are something else again.

In other words, I may find it useful to test and check out for myself an idea or concept that you hold and profess to me, yet I find it is not helpful to test you as a person and your right to hold that idea. Of course, you have a right to an opinion, be it accurate or truthful and aligned with what the majority knows, or not.

For certain, as a young adult, I was very careful not to depend on the person and personality of someone who championed this or that idea, lest for some reason that person themselves might be 'infectious', able to infect me with what I did not like about them, personally. This was to some degree just childish on my part. Yet, this was like a mask before masks, the mask of a personality. I was afraid whatever you are might rub off on me. I was so impressionable.

I believe that with time, we grow out of that approach, that of commenting on 'persons', at least I have tried to. There seems to be no accounting for people being good, bad, or indifferent, no matter what our opinion. Yet, the ideas they hold or propose are another thing; these and the actions they take are certainly worth examining. I try to separate the person from their opinions or ideas, yet not from their actions.

I remember that as a young person, I have no choice but to pick and choose what and whom I would follow in the footsteps of, and it's better to follow and test the idea than the person, in my experience. Of course, I know that in many cases it is hard for us to separate the two and actions are actions. What we do is who we are.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



DHARMA FIT FOR A DESERT ISLAND

July 9, 2023

As for a good vantage point for life, I suggest that we gravitate to the edge of the senses, beyond the hardening Past, to where the Future or the truth is just now appearing, and where there is still enough leeway or room to get comfortable. If I had to take one dharma teaching to a deserted island, and live, it would be with these axioms of the great Mahasiddha Tilopa.

As Tilopa said “Don’t Prolong the Past.” Don’t try to revive the past, to bring life to it or waste life on it. Don’t even lean into the Past.

If we have to lean, then lean the other way just a bit, toward the Future. Tilopa says of the future,

“Don’t Invite the Future.”

And so, don’t go too far toward the future, just lean a little that way, rather than leaning toward the past. Actually, the Present is where we want to be.

As for the “Present,” Tilopa said:

“Don’t Alter the Present.

Don’t monkey with it. And of this Tilopa also said:

“Relax, As It Is.”

And so, actually, we want to rest in the Present, neither Past nor Future, but if we err in any way, IMO,

leaning into the wind of the Future will give us more wiggle room, so to speak, if we don't go too far.

The idea is for the Present to be loose enough for us to live in it, not in the gathering concrete of the Past or too out-of-the-body into the 'loosey-goosey' of the Future.

The idea is to immerse ourselves in the Present, to relax in the Present, and rest there.

IMO, that's the long and the short of the process of learning the traditional kind of meditation that leads to what is called "non-meditation," just resting in the mind itself.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE WAY YOU SAY IT ASKS A LOT

July 10, 2023

As someone who has done many years of counseling, every now and then someone comes along that doesn't want counseling, but instead wants me to validate their authenticity, and in some cases, I can't, because it's not there.

The way you say it asks a lot. For example, you are stating what you claim to be a fact about what you have experienced, yet to me that is ringing false. Empty words, wishful thinking, with little to no actual experience. In other words, what you say asks a lot. It asks a lot of me or of anyone listening to you to believe it as true. And it seems that you don't even understand that your very statement is a question in itself that I do hear above whatever you declare. In other words, you don't know that you don't know.

And so, am I expected to just go along with what you say, or do I address and attempt to answer the question and questioning that is obvious in your manner and statement? That's my question.

You want me to witness or validate what you declare, yet, as mentioned, the way you say it asks a lot of the listener. And I hear it more as a cry for help rather than a statement of your authority and experience. Your statements ask a lot.

If what you say is true, you would not need my approval, and would not be asking me to witness and validate what you say.

So, for me this is a bit of a conundrum. To whom am I speaking, to someone who is asking me to approve of whatever they say without question and validate their experience when there is none that I can see or... respond to someone who is crying to have the truth actually be pointed out to them?

Are you asking me for help? It does not seem so. You are telling me how it is, yet in my opinion, that's not how it is. I wish I could agree, but I can't.

You are telling me how it is, but it's clear to me that's not how it is and that you don't know how it is. I find myself between a rock and a hard place. I am not asking to be your teacher and you are not asking me to point this or that out. So, what are you doing?

It reminds me of when I first met my root lama, the Venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche and explained to him all of the years that I had put in as an astrologer and my spiritual experiences. I was hoping I could, because of those years, place out of Meditation 101, and get on with the more advanced stuff. I thought I already knew how to meditate. Of course, I did not. I just liked to think I did.

And Rinpoche gently explained to me, that despite all of my experience "spiritually," so to speak, when it comes to meditation it would be better for me to start at the very beginning.

In other words, I needed to go to the end of the line, back to the beginning and start there and learn. I had a decision to make, to take Rinpoche's advice and start at the beginning as to learning meditation or ignore his advice and continue to insist that I already

knew meditation. A lot of us did that back then. We tried to meditate, but never talked of our meditation experience. It was considered private when the truth was that we had very little to no actual experience. We didn't know what we were doing.

To repeat, the way I said it asked a lot, and Rinpoche heard my cry for help through my insistence that I already knew what I didn't know, and told me the truth, my need to start at the beginning. And I did just that, start at the beginning, instead of the house-of-cards approach I was building. Life-saving choice, IMO.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“AND IT CAME TO PASS, AND I LET IT PASS”

July 11, 2023

Even an eventful life is a long string of events punctuated by silence and a lack of events. After all, that's what makes them events.

And IMO, a high-strung active person can rest in the nature of the mind too, just as well as the stereotype of a calm, even-tempered person. It's all about resting, just as you are, warts and all. It's not personal.

All of these worries that pop up and shadow us have to be looked at, noted, and just put aside. There is nothing there worth worrying about. Here is what I had to say some 50 some years ago:

“No matter what you think about me, about my person, I know in time you will learn to recognize me as like yourself, and you will love me, as I have learned to love myself, as I have learned to love you, like it or not.

“My person has not changed. How could it, truly? For person is the product of time, and my person — like a freight train — rushes on at the future. It always has. Only I, stepping off my person, am with you now.”

“I am myself. I turned off time's endless matter at thirty. I dropped my body or sense of gravity. It proceeds on without me or rather, with my perpetual care and love. But I am not only my person. I am, as well, one with the creator of my body, of any body.”

“My faith informs me. Each day's passage frees and reveals my past, 'Presents' my past, and clears it

open. Where before was but an endless accumulation, layer on layer, is now removed with every passing day. And as the layers lift, it is clear to me that there is nothing there worth worrying. All the past lives I have are presently living, are become clear.

“Nothing to go back to, no place to hide, no cover.

“I am born free, held awake by all that lives. Where before I could not keep my eyes open, so now I cannot shut or close them. No closure. From my subconscious pours my past. Cloudiness clearing, it is my present. My placenta is being born, turning out all of that which nourished me.”

“I can clearly see all that clouds this stream of consciousness is but a searching, is itself but a frowning, a looking to see, a pause, a hesitation that, caught and unfurled in the eddies of time, finding nothing, becomes clear and, laughing, I leave it go clear and turn from a darkening or dimming of my mind to light.

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

[Excerpt from the free book:

“Astrology of the Heart: Astro-Shamanism”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Astrology-of-the-Heart...>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

THE HISTORY OF COMPUTERS AND ASTROLOGY

July 12, 2023

Here is an interview with me by Chris Brennan about the history of computers in astrology. Brennan is dedicated to documenting astrology and doing wonderful work,

The interview is quite extensive and in some detail as well. However, some of you may be interested in watching this or at least parts of it.

Chris Brennan's Interview

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_WXC-cpZjA

For more information about Chris Brennan:

Chris Brennan's Home Page

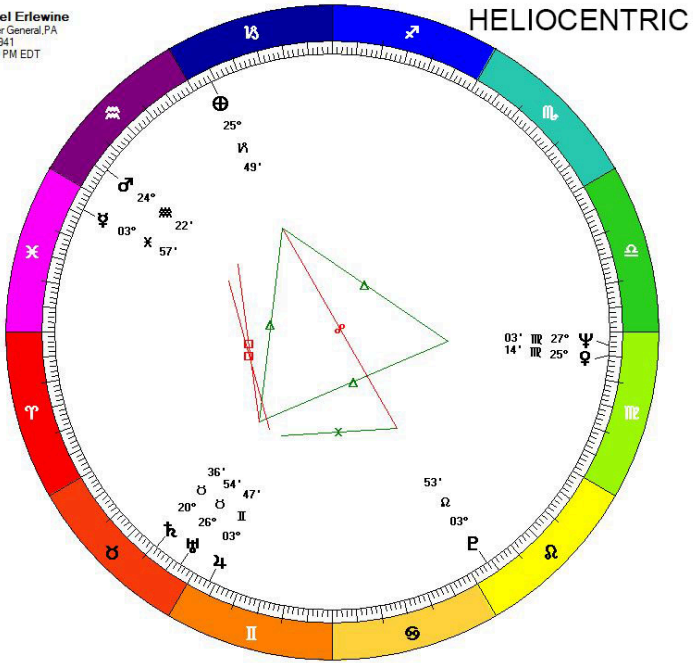
<https://www.chrisbrennanastrologer.com/>

Chris Brennan's Podcast

<https://theastrologypodcast.com/>

[Photo of me back in 1978, I believe.] I can see all the cassette tapes all over, so this was before floppy disks, hard drives and all that. Also, in the lower right-hand corner I can see the keyboard of my first printer, an old teletype machine that weighed 65 lbs.]

Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
05:03:00 PM EDT



I include my natal heliocentric chart, so that you can see the patterns on a 360-degree chart wheel, which is important. I meant to include it. Check it out.



This is me around 1978. I can see all the cassette tapes all over, so this was before floppy disks, hard drives and all that. Also, in the lower right-hand corner I can see the keyboard of my first printer, an old teletype machine that weighed 65 lbs.

“WAKE UP, WAKE UP, FRIEND OWL”

July 13, 2023

Looking inward as to who we are, how deep is that? There's no end to us. Looking outward as to where we are; we can do that. We are right here on Earth, one planet in a solar system that is embedded in a system of local stars, which itself is embedded in an outer spiral arm of the galaxy we call the “Milky Way.”

So, very much we are in outer space, in a galaxy far away. And we are traveling at incredible speeds, the Earth at some 67,000 miles per hour around the Sun. Our solar system is travelling around the center of our galaxy at 514,000 miles per hour. And it is unclear how fast our galaxy is traveling around its center.

In other words, we are not just standing still gazing at the Moon.

As for astrology, our Earth-centered (geocentric) astronomical chart, from which we base all our astrological understanding and meaning, is a view from Earth of our sun-centered solar system. Yet, that chart does not take into account the view of our solar system itself, much less our view of the local system of stars of which our sun is a member, much less our view of the galaxy itself, and so on.

And so, a view larger than our view of the solar system (geocentric) is not available to us from Earth alone, which is not to say our Earth-centered view is not useful. It is totally useful, of course, and astrologers have used this for centuries as best as they can.

Yet, we do have to understand that some 500 years ago when astrologer/astronomer Nicholas Copernicus pointed out to the world that everything does not revolve around Earth as we believed it did. It's not all about us.

Instead, Copernicus pointed out that Earth (and our view from it) in fact revolves around the sun and not vice versa. Now, this was not a small discovery. And many astrologer-astronomers back then had their mind's blown. They suddenly had two very different astronomical charts on which to base their astrology, the familiar traditional geocentric (Earth-centered) chart and suddenly the new heliocentric (Sun-centered) chart.

And these astrologers/astronomers walked away from that event with two astronomical charts in their hands, the traditional Earth-centered (geocentric) chart and the new Sun-centered (heliocentric) chart. And this group of people became what today we call astronomers, who still firmly have both charts in mind. And we know that the two oldest academic disciplines are botany and astronomy. These are solid and respected vocations.

On the other hand, those astrologer-astronomers from the time of Copernicus who rejected the new sun-centered (heliocentric) chart and continued to believe that everything revolves around Earth (and that it is all about and only about Earth and our view from Earth) went another way. Astrologers for the most part still hold this view because they do not (and have not even begun to learn to) interpret the heliocentric (sun-centered) chart.

In a word, astrologers (and this is true for astrologers today) have not and have never taken the empowerment and initiation of the sun-centered (heliocentric) view to heart. They still resist it by their continued ignorance of it. I'm surprised astrologers have not looked at the success of astronomers and put two and two together, but they seem unable to do that.

And so, that's about the size of it. Astrologers not only don't know or use the helio centered chart, but many of them also mock the heliocentric and say things like "We don't live on the Sun, so why would a heliocentric chart have any use to us?"

Those astrologers should ask modern astronomers what they gained from the heliocentric perspective, because that was the only difference between them and the astrologer-astronomers back then who ignored the discovery that everything does not revolve around Earth and remained astrologers only, and no longer think of themselves as astronomers.

This simple fact, the reversal and awareness that everything (including the Sun) did not revolve around Earth, was not without consequences. It was a change in view, one that had far-reaching import for all of us.

And it was an empowerment, a mind change that altered our traditional Earth perspective that the solar system, everything we knew in space, revolved around us. Copernicus pointed out that in fact we here on Earth revolve around the Sun, and not vice versa.

Astronomers got that and made the adjustment and transmigrated their view (and identification) that the Sun revolved around us. We revolve around the Sun. What a change in view!

Nothing physically changed, just the view, but it made all the difference in the world that existed at that time and still exists now.

And I went through this empowerment myself, as I discovered on my own that the heliocentric view was the mother, and the Earth view was the child. And with that discovery, I stopped identifying exclusively with the geocentric (Earth-centered) chart and suddenly had, as astronomers did centuries before me, two charts in hand, two views of who I am and why I am here.

This is like a 3D view of who I was and why I am here. The two charts, the geocentric and heliocentric, allowed triangulation, with the result being an increased perspective.

Over time, with decades of study on my part, I came to understand that the Heliocentric chart is a chart of our dharma, our true path in life, while the Geocentric chart (the traditional astrology chart) was a map of our karma and the circumstances in which we (our true path) find ourselves embedded in this life.

And the two work together like hand and glove to give us a multi-dimensional view of who we are and why we are here.

I can't explain why astronomers are not singing the same tune that I am, interpreting the heliocentric

chart. Keep in mind that the traditional geocentric natal chart used by astrologers for centuries is also an astronomical chart, a chart of the solar system as seen from Earth.

Astrology is, in a word, cultural astronomy, an attempt to interpret and give meaning to astronomy and astronomical events, and nothing more. Astronomy is exact and precise, while with the astrology or what these astronomical events mean, not so much. The meaning of life is much more difficult to figure out.

The astronomers of today are content with astronomy being “It is what it is” and they don’t attempt to give meaning to astronomical events. However, I believe they should at least try and perhaps they eventually will.

And astrologers, as backward as they can appear in this light, have only to take the heliocentric empowerment, as astronomers did centuries ago, and change their view. That’s it.

If that happened, astrology would be a powerhouse. This has to be beginning to happen, because it is not like there is an alternative. The Earth orbits the Sun and not vice-versa.

As Bambi’s friend Thumper said to Mr. Owl, “Wake Up, Wake Up, Friend Owl.”

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LOOK OUT FOR LOOKING IN

July 14, 2023

As an Astrologer, learning and practicing Tibetan Buddhism and dharma was easier for me because the Tibetans are already into astrology. Every Tibetan has at least some familiarity with astrology, and the subject of astrology does not raise eyebrows in Tibet. It is an integral part of everyday life.

As to what “Dharma” is, well that was something I as a westerner had to find out about for myself and it took a long time to get a sense of it, and I’m still learning it.

I could easily just say that Dharma is the truth of it all and leave it go at that. And while each of us may not know what ‘Truth’ is in a final sense, we know what the truth is when we see and feel it for ourselves. And this tells us something.

It tells me that the dharma for each of us is individual enough, that what floats your boat can be different from what floats mine. Yet, at the same time, we all seem to share a common sense of dharma (and karma) to one degree or another.

Perhaps, in the beginning, when in the late 1950s I was first introduced to Zen Buddhism and not Tibetan, dharma to me was nothing more than the carefully raked sand in the Zen gardens, the teak or bamboo floors, and the paper-covered Shoji screens.

That sense of minimalism and quiet beauty was a stand-in for what dharma meant to me, although I don’t remember ever voicing it back then.

And as neat as the Zen environment was, my actual dharma teachers turned out to be Tibetan, and that idea of 'neat' didn't work for the Tibetan shrines and their approach. Instead, the Tibetan approach to what is sacred was much more like my own Roman Catholic upbringing, vestments, rich embroideries, Church Latin (which as an altar boy I had to learn), and things like that. I had to do my practice in Tibetan for decades.

Yet, if the Tibetan scene was a profusion of colors and brocades on the outside, it cut to the quick on the inside, as the connection to my Tibetan dharma teacher and the samaya (bond) involved was profound and life changing.

And my sense of the dharma required that I first go through my sense of my Self to discover it, meaning at least for me, the dharma was only understood by going within and not just looking for it somewhere in the outside world.

Rather, it is a process of becoming familiar with my mind and what it is. And by familiar, I mean just that, that the dharma is familiarity itself personified, so to speak.

I always thought that dharma and the process of enlightenment was something foreign to me, something that I didn't have and therefore somehow had to get. And, since I didn't have it, the only place to find enlightenment was out there in the world, somewhere other than what I have now.

Yet, that's not it. Any and all enlightenment can only be found and come from the inside. Yes, a dharma teacher on the outside can point out the dharma to us, yet that dharma will be found inside, within us, and not outside.

My dharma teacher, a Tibetan Rinpoche, used to say that recognizing the actual nature of the mind was a process of becoming familiar with the nature of the mind. Rinpoche introduced me to the sense of familiarity.

Yet, because I had not seen or realized the nature of the mind myself, I assumed (and mistakenly so) that that recognition or realization was and would come to me from somewhere outside, certainly not from right here where I am, because that was not enlightened as far as I knew.

Well, that was my mistake, to look outside for what can only come from inside, from within us. And my dharma teacher was repeatedly saying for me to become familiar with the nature of the mind.

Becoming familiar with anyone, especially ourselves, means relaxing in who and what we are, warts and all. Not somewhere or someone else, but becoming more familiar with ourselves, just as we now are.

Of course, I wasn't too interested in doing that because I felt I knew myself and it was that Self that I wanted to enlighten, and not get to know myself better. I'd had enough of me.

Anyway, the long and short of it is that when circumstances allowed, and what amounted to a

perfect storm of events formed and presented itself to me so there was no wiggle-room on my part, no escape, I found out that insight into the nature of the mind came not from somewhere out there in the world, but rather, to my complete surprise, from better familiarization with what I was already familiar with, my own mind. It came from inside me. It took forever for this to occur to me.

I had to stop running away from myself and turn around and accept who and what I am, warts and all, so to speak. I had to give up protecting myself from myself and accept the nature of my own mind, as familiar as it is. Or, as Rinpoche said again and again, become familiar with the nature of my own mind.

Those words were meant to be acted on verbatim. It took me many years to get the hint and to become yet more familiar with what I thought I was already familiar with.

The simple truth is that the introduction to the true nature of the mind will come through greater familiarity with our own mind, the mind each of us are using right now.

Bottom line: If you are looking for enlightenment outside the mind you are using to read this, that is missing the point.

Enlightenment will never come from outside the right here and the now. Instead, become more familiar with this moment and this mind here and now. It will never be “then,” but always just now.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



INTO THE STREAM

July 15, 2023

It seems that the hardest thing for me was realizing that any progress with becoming familiar with the actual nature of the mind has to happen right now and right here, not tomorrow or some other day.

Getting up for this moment, which is always right here, and actually working with the mind seems hard to do. We keep putting it off. Not right now. Not today. Perhaps not soon. And my guess is that the reason is that we don't know what to do.

And that's a kind of Catch-22, because until we try to do something we have no feedback, good, bad, or indifferent, so we are just treading water forever. "When you said wait, you meant a long time, didn't you?"

"Pick Up Your Bed and Walk Lazarus" reminds me of the above, that everything we need to become familiar with as to the nature of the mind is right here at hand. And the problem is that we find it hard to seize the moment and start looking inward. Who are we to look within? We know little to nothing about looking into the mind.

We don't know how to do it and somehow feel helpless to just jump into the pool and try to swim and thus start working with the problem.

And I know this problem all too well myself, too timid to jump into the swim and try. Yet, without that exercise, that flailing about, we are just killing time and waiting for what?

It's a vicious cycle, one that we have not even yet entered!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



DHARMA EXPERIENCES

July 16, 2023

Here is a video, a conversation between Lama Jinpa and me, about various dharma experiences. Lama Jinpa completed a three-year closed meditation retreat in the Karma Kagyu Lineage and came out a lama. This was years ago, and since then he has taught dharma at a number of our centers around the country.

Since we already are friends and speak together quite often,

Lama Jinpa came up with this idea of recording our conversation because he had some questions to ask me, and thought others may be interested.

And so, we are sharing our discussion with all of you, or those who are interested in dharma experiences and have time to give it a listen.

Here is the link:

<https://youtu.be/b7IGYNJ17II>

[Graphic by me]

Spirit Grooves
Dharma Grooves

AWARENESS

Videos hosted by Michael Erlewine

Lama Jinpa
and
Michael Erlewine

Talk Together

**Dharma
Experience**

IDENTIFICATION IS CIRCULATION

July 17, 2023

This astrology of astronomy is astrology as we know it. There is nothing else other than semantics and just moving things around. Astrology is the meaning of astronomy, what astronomical events mean. Like anything else, we can hang all kinds of other things on or around it, but they are just parasitic, IMO.

Simply put, “Astrology” is about what astronomy means. This audio podcast is about several things, but mostly it is about the idea that all identification, when we identify with this or that interest that sparks us, is circulation or an attempt at it.

And while it feels like just our process of discovery, personally, it is the way the cosmos, the Sun, the Galaxy, and so on circulates information through us, information that allows the universe to remain coherent and hang together.

In a word, the process of our identification is the way the cosmos knows and manages itself, which is called cosmic cybernetics. When we spark an interest or follow an interest out in our life, that's the universe knowing itself through us. That approach is masochistic on our part and kind of sad. In fact, years before, back in the 1960s, before I understood this concept I wrote this, very masochistic, poem, which I will share with you.

INNER EAR

What will eager issue out,
And into us would enter,
So, to stare, to stuff itself,
To eat itself the center,
Of what we wait to wither in on,
After it is all.

It eats us out.

It only is in every inward eaten,

The echo of an endless ache that arches Heart's hard
hearing,

And opens up each inner 'enting',

And enters it as out.

Actually, this process of self-discovery and the path of our interests is our knowing ourselves, since there is no difference between that cosmic process and our own process of discovering who we are, one of identification.

In other words, we are the intelligent life we keep looking for out in the heavens. We already are the "Spaceman." And cosmic intelligence is our intelligence. We discover ourselves and this process is cosmic cybernetics, the circulation of cosmic intelligence.

And, if you can grasp that thought, then here is a video that presents this concept in more detail and covers a couple other 'cosmic' ideas as well. I call it:

“Cycles, Circles, and Circulation”

Here is the link:

https://youtu.be/t984_mX1iiM



COSMIC CYBERNETICS

July 19,2023

[As a **wonderful time** with my son Michael, his partner Micah, and their dog Sybil, celebrating my birthday, turns into tomorrow, I'm still awake as the new day is about to start.]

Cybernetics is an interdisciplinary field that explores the study of various systems and their control, especially those that involve communication and feedback mechanisms. Cybernetics encompasses the understanding of how information and feedback are processed in complex systems, including biological, mechanical, social, computational, and even cosmic systems.

And "Cosmic Cybernetics" examines the control, feedback, and information processing mechanisms in large-scale cosmic systems, such as galaxies, galaxy clusters, or even the universe as a whole.

Astrophysicists agree that large-scale systems like the galaxy require feedback and information-flow to cohere and remain stable, but they are struggling to figure out just what the carrier of this information is.

It has been suggested that gravitational waves, although very faint (called the 'Weak Force'), may be the carrier of cosmic information, the feedback loop that allows the galaxy, etc. to cohere and remain coherent rather than fail and begin to disincorporate. Cosmic cybernetics is what regulates all of these large-scale structures, which remind me of something like a gyroscope, trying to itself keep balanced.

I can't help but wonder at what point you and I can be aware of cosmic dimensions, if ever. It is unclear. IMO, I feel our consciousness is in constant flux, moving in and out of the body as the tides run, and the various cycles cycle.

At times of intense solar flares, like yesterday, CMEs, and the like, our consciousness is inundated by the solar flux. How aware we are or can we be varies. I believe we do go with the flow and ride the solar flux. If we can't cut it, we lie down, and just pull in our feelers until it passes.

As to higher forms of consciousness than our Earthy kind, we may be in touch with them or even feel their flow from time to time. Something has to explain those times when we feel something like cosmic consciousness. It seems to be dependent on how sensitive we are.

I have to stop thinking of myself as an isolated being on a tiny planet somewhere out there in lonely space. That's just wrong. We are intelligent life forever already out there in deep space, embedded in one of the outer arms of the 'Milky Way', our local galaxy. We are no more and no less an equal partner in this creation. The question to ask and answer is:

Are we on the inside looking out or on the outside looking in?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



UPPING MY GAME

July 19, 2023

Well, what am I doing? I'm busy here upping my game when it comes to sound. I sold my recording studio some years ago, and along with it my closet full of microphones, yet now I need one back. I have a good dynamic microphone (Sennheiser 441-U), but that is really not the best, IMO, for in-studio omnidirectional recording. To do this I really need a condenser mic, and I am getting one. Of course I used to have a bunch of them and I want a pro-grade mic and I am going to tell you why.

As to what's best for my use, it's going to be the Neumann TLM-103. The "TLM" means transformerless microphone, which means it is not quite as useful as its big brother the Neuman U 87, but it is a clean-through (transformer-less,) one-third of the cost and has 90% of the quality, so it will have to do. And then I may run it through an external preamp, but it may not need it. We shall see.

Anyway, with that setup, I plan to record some of my writing, creating something like audiobooks, but also videos with a voice track, punctuated by graphics and images for clarification. There is no reason to have video of me reading text, IMO. Of course, I will do videos as well, with me conversing with others.

So, that means two types of outputs, audio output, perhaps with images, and full-blown video with images and sound.

Now for the reason for this blog, why am I doing this?

Well, it's a little hard to explain, but here goes.

Even though AI is making huge inroads into our life, it is far away from duplicating something like me reading or talking on a topic. Of course, soon (and they can do it now) they will be able to capture the sound of my voice, such that you can't tell it's not me. Yet, that's just the flat sound of my voice.

The various inflections of me speaking, the microtones, and the grammar usage will be hard-to-impossible to imitate. I work hard to articulate what I write with attention to grammar. And if I do a good job, in the future AI may be able to follow the grammar meticulously and do better than just the sound of my voice.

I checked this out. I ran some of text through a well-known text-to-voice program and it was poor, not in sound, but in meaning. And very much worse, I ran one of my poems through the device and it was appalling how bad it was. It was nowhere near good.

My voice-inflections and emphasis can't be imitated, because it changes from sentence to sentence, moment to moment.

Something that I feel has to be understood is that language by definition is dualistic. It has a subject and an object, and never the twain shall meet.

Language, even at its finest, cannot give us the experience it tries to express by itself, and can but REFER us to an experience that we can perhaps have in the sense world. In other words, language has

to make (cause) sense (sensual) to us or it is, as they say, nonsense.

However, making sense, especially for the intellectual and conceptually inclined, seems to be very difficult. The words have to get out there and dance, but few conceptual writings do.

This is not AI that I am talking about, but language as it exists here and now. It is not a substitute for actual real-life experience, IMO, although some folks think and act like it is. Yet, they don't KNOW what they can only talk about and imagine. That's not life, or much of one.

And so, the advent of AI is going to be a nudge for many of us to double-down on making sense with what we say and write. And I'm all about that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



ALL HAT AND NO CATTLE

July 20, 2023

This is a blog about walking the talk. For me, if you claim to know, to “Know” does not mean understanding or conceptual skills, but rather actual in-the-body experience, like ‘hands on’ and feet firmly on the ground of experience. It’s more like the conjugal use of the word “Know.”

And it’s not that physically “knowing” (through the senses) guarantees everything, but more that actual physical experience is at least one giant-step beyond conceptuality and mere intellectual talk and understanding.

To have actual experience and develop a history of it makes a lot more sense than mere intellectual or verbal gymnastics.

Unfortunately, it seems we live in a world peopled by abstract conceptual knowledge, of which little has been realized on the physical plane. In other words, too many talk the talk, and don’t walk the walk... and worse, they don’t even seem to realize it.

And we can’t make a habit of calling-out everyone who intellectualizes at the expense of reality, telling them that they don’t “know” what they are talking about, but it’s tempting, because they don’t.

Real home-grown experience by each of us is so very important if we want to keep this society we live in alive. IMO, whole civilizations have died out because their inhabitants retreated into the mind at the expense of living.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE STATE OF MY STATE

July 21, 2023

OK, I received my new condenser mic, the Neumann TLM-103, which I had (a couple of them) for many years but sold with my recording studio. Oh, well. Very happy to have another copy.

Anyway, I thought I'd give it a workout, and I did. Mostly I got the workout because I read some 65 pages into that microphone and it did a great job, of course. However, I was tired when I finished.

How my double-down approach is anything different from my years of blogging it's hard to say. I guess the difference is intent, because I have always (or most always) done my best. More than that I cannot do.

I've been posting here on Facebook since June of 2007, and I post almost every day, so there are a lot of posts.

However, yesterday I did a book, or at least the introductory text for the book, and then illustrated it. What do I think?

For one, it is a lot of work, but that never scares me. Getting a little overly tired? Not so good. I also have been thrashing around in the deep woods of late, trying to gather materials for eight raised garden beds I have built.

And in the process, I picked up some ticks, one of which I found and removed. However, the second tick dug in and remained there for a week or two before I found and removed it, carrying it safely outside. And

when I finally noticed it, I had a huge red circle on my side, obviously a serious infection.

A trip to the hospital and it was identified as something to worry about and I was immediately put on antibiotics and had my blood tested for Lyme disease, something I have long feared.

Anyway, long story short, it took days for the bloodwork to come back as it had to be sent to Grand Rapids, not little old Big Rapids, Michigan where we live.

Well, the nurse called last night and the test showed no antibodies in my blood, which means no Lyme disease, because otherwise, if I did have Lyme disease, there would be antibodies as my body attacked the disease.

So, that was a huge relief because of that worry that has been hanging over me these last days. Anyway, I'm good to go.

Back to the new microphone. I love it, of course. I finished an hour-long video on astrology, in this case on "Dharma Chart / Karma Chart," an important (IMO) technique for finding life partners.

I guess the difference is that I have given up the idea that I should try to be entertaining to folks, and instead produce the best introduction I can to my various techniques, etc. And even though there may be few who will weather the challenge to actually watch the video, I'm grateful that I can provide something for those very few that will find interest in it.

I have also started making an audio recording of some of my Facebook blogs, and I include a few here. I am even considering making a short video for many of my daily Facebook blogs. Not promising, but looking at it. Here are a few blogs.

Cosmic Cybernetics (5:36 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/mY092HPKpjU>

Identification is Circulation (6:44 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/CCT9vjc6rcQ>

Look Within (11:15 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/MeF1zAqoQ0o>

How Astrologers Became Astronomers (13:25 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/3eCUO7FrUUQ>

It Came to Pass (5:10 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/7XWcUzflZbQ>

A much longer video: I'm more concerned with making the information available and this video is a good introduction, and they can download the full book of interpretations and a complete ephemeris with both geocentric and heliocentric chart types for the years from 1900-2100.

The video is here:

Dharma Chart / Karma Chart (01:30:50 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/lxEEI-rNuvq>

And you can download your free copy of the book version “Dharma Chart / Karma Chart” at [SpiritGrooves.net](http://spiritgrooves.net), under free eBooks.

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev...>

[Photo of the Neumann TLM-103 in my office]



“PROSE IS LIKE CARRYING WATER IN THE
HANDS,

POETRY LIKE DRINKING FROM THE FAUCET”

July 23, 2023

Michael Erlewine reads from “Dharma Poems”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXn_4EWA37U

The title is something I came up with. Poetry for me has been a way to record my inner changes and experiences. I don't write poetry that often, but when I do it always is in response to some realization or other, something I am going through that finally becomes clear to me.

And I don't just try to “write a poem.” I use poetry as a way of clarifying my experiences, as a way to lock my emerging realization into a form that can serve to bring to mind again and again the actual experience I am trying to understand. If I can capture the experience in a poem, I know that I have realized something or other about myself and my life. And by carefully reciting the poem aloud to myself, by articulating each word with understanding, the idea the poem captures can live again and be present in the mind.

Whether others can read my poetry this way, whether the captured vision will be present in the minds of readers, I can't say. I only know it works for me and I write these poems for my own inner satisfaction. Nothing in this world is as satisfying to me than realization and a new poem. That being said, I hope

those who read the poems in this book may enjoy them too.

I offer these poems not as examples of great literature. I'm not a poet, meaning I don't work at writing poetry and I have not made a career of it or even published as an amateur. I write poems off the top of my head (very quickly) to help remember or capture the insight present in the moment. By putting it down in words, I better understand what the insight means to me.

It would take too long to write out prose. I consider poetry a form of shorthand that can capture in a few words what prose can't do in many. Prose is like carrying water in the hands, poetry like drinking out of the faucet.

I don't see my poems as anything other than a way to point at what was inspirational at the time. If you read any of these, please use them as word-references that point at what is inspirational and can never be captured in words. What these poems point to or at is worthy indeed, so ignore the imperfection in my words, but do see what they are pointing at.

My poems are nothing special, but the mind (which we all share) and the reality that inspired them are authentic and pristine. If you can see what I saw when I wrote them, reading them will be more than worthwhile. It is much like the popular image of the wise man pointing at the Moon. Don't look at the finger that is pointing; look at the Moon in the sky.

DHARMA POEMS

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../My%20Dharma%20Poems%202023...>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Dharma Poems

And Other Writings



by
Michael Erlewine

OUR WEDDING AND “BEST DOG”

July 24, 2023

Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqSDkkW1khg>

I came across this very old video of Margaret and I at our wedding, with about 200 people and \$200 to spend on food, etc. And this video features my dog Manley, who was the entertainment at our wedding. It's too funny not to share it here.



Some History of Matrix Software

By Michael Erlewine

An interest in astrology and all things esoteric probably grew out of my Catholic upbringing, a religion which aside from having a lot of negatives IMO had the side effect of endowing me with a sense of mystery and awe for the universe. Don't ask me to explain; that is just how it turned out.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s I was interested not only in astrology, but also in tarot, the I-Ching, and the world of occult knowledge. But it was the year I spent in Berkeley, California in 1964 that cemented the deal. In Berkeley I was exposed to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff, and a whole lot more, not the least of which was my first LSD trip which really opened my eyes to the subtle energies and the unseen. All of this came to a head when I moved back to Ann Arbor from Berkeley in 1965.

Circle Books

CIRCLE BOOKS: ANN ARBOR'S FIRST METAPHYSICAL BOOKSTORE

On the spring equinox in 1968 my younger brother Stephen, his wife Morgen, and his partner John Crofoot Sullivan opened Circle Books, the first metaphysical bookstore in Ann Arbor. It was located

at 215 S. State Street up on the 2nd floor, just at the top of the stairs.

In fact, if you went up those stairs and kept on walking, you were there. Circle Books consisted of two medium-sized rooms and a back room which was an office. I was proud of my brother, his wife, and John for bringing to Ann Arbor something the town never had and really needed.

Prior to Circle Books, the only place to get anything close to metaphysical books was Bob Marshals and that bookstore was already in trouble with publishers and closed not long after Circle Books opened. The other bookstores in this university town were all about text books for college courses and offered little else.

Circle Books was in a building (perhaps the only one in Ann Arbor) devoted to Sixties themes. On the floor above the bookstore (the third floor) was Middle Earth, a glorified and gone-to-heaven head shop. On the same floor as the bookstore was Saturn, a sixties-style mod clothing store, managed by Paul Raupaugh and Peter Meek. In the basement was "Little Things" run by Ike Stein, filled with all kinds of neat little things, and on the main floor was a chic expensive clothing store name 'Paraphernalia'. The whole building was probably a trip for some visitors back in the middle 1960s.

In the beginning Circle Books looked pretty empty, some simple pre-made bookshelves placed against the wall and not-quite-enough-yet books. I am not

sure how I got involved, but I did. After all, I was Stephen's older brother. That would do it or was it my growing interest in astrology and all things metaphysical. Stephen was already an astrologer and I was, well, I was many things. At the time I believe I encouraged or enthused John and Stephen to invest more money in the store to modify it.

Within weeks of opening, I was hard at work helping them to remodel the store so that it had a more new-age and sophisticated look. I ended up designing and supervising the re-building of the entire store in redwood and glass. Back then, redwood was just another (beautiful of course) wood at Fingerlie Lumber yard and in fact it was cheaper than clear pine. Imagine that!

When we were done, the entire bookstore was finished in redwood with frosted globe lights and back-lit frosted glass panels at the top of some shelves, and with boxed-in areas down by the floor.

Better yet, we had two really great aquariums, one for fresh water fish and a really big one for salt water, at the inspiration of John Sullivan. And finally, we had a four-foot chart wheel (also backlit) that displayed the current astrology of the day. It was beautiful.

John Sullivan and Stephen and his wife Morgen ran the bookstore. I ended up calculating the astrology charts for the bookstore for clients, at first by hand using the traditional log table approach and later in the early 1970s using a little 4-function calculator. I

probably helped out with sales at times and I know I occasionally gave classes in the larger second room some evenings.

Mostly I just hung out there a lot. Circle Books was the perfect place to spend time, meet new people, and have lengthy intellectual conversations on astrology, the occult, and all things spiritual and metaphysical. We had a wide selection of Hindu and Indian masters, Baba this and Baba that,

People came from towns near and far to shop at Circle Books. Until then most of us had no place and no one to talk with about these spiritual matters. The bookstore was a conversation waiting to happen. And it did.

Circle Books was almost like a dream come true - otherworldly at times. There were plenty of outside windows and the inner store with its globe lights and backlit panels made the overall effect something very special. You just naturally wanted to go there.

How many times did I come up those stairs two steps at a time and then step down into Circle Books for a wonderful time – many, many, many.

You could probably say that I held court there. And I wasn't the only one. It just naturally happened. Before long I had not only some students but many new friends. Ann Arbor had never before catered to those with an interest in spiritual and metaphysical things. And they flocked to the store.

In 1969 my brother Stephen and I published the “Circle Books Astrological Calendar” which has been published every year since then. It was still going in 2010, over forty-one years later. That is quite a run.

In 1980, I left Ann Arbor to run greenhouses in northern Michigan (Erlewine Plants) and later with 19,000 square feet of greenhouse glass in Apopka Florida in later 1971. That did not work out, which is another story. When I returned to Ann Arbor after my adventures in the green-plant business early in 1972 I was able to pick up the chart work for the bookstore again and began offering many different evening classes at the bookstore and eventually right out of my home.

We also started a local astrological group called “An Ann Arbor Astrological Association” and I designed a special logo and poster for it. The meetings were held weekly in the evening at the store.

Circle Books survived for something like six years but as all the other bookstores in Ann Arbor begin to pick up what are called the “bread & butter” books, the most popular new-age and astrology titles, it meant less and less sales for Circle Books.

When sales flagged further, the store was eventually sold in 1974 to Robert Thibodeau from the Detroit area who had his own metaphysical store in Ferndale called “Mayflower Books.” Thibodeau cherry-picked the books he wanted for his store and sold Circle

Books to another would-be bookseller not long afterward. It soon faltered and failed as well. Like all mandalas, it bloomed and then it was gone, swept away in the river of time.

By then, I had been a professional astrologer already operating out of my home at 1041 N. Main Street for some years. Making a living as an astrologer is no easy task. I was working all the time, doing readings, giving classes, writing courses, and making flyers which I would post all over town.

By 1975 I was also operating my own mail-order astrological book business out of my home. This really was a shoestring operation. And our house was small.

THE HOUSE ON MAIN STREET

We lived in a little house perched high on an embankment out on 1041 North Main Street in Ann Arbor. It overlooked the Huron River which runs parallel to the street but on the other side of the highway, beyond the junkyard and the train tracks.

Our house was out on the edge of town right where the highway begins so we could have heavy traffic at times and often plenty of noise. It was also no kind of road for a kid to be near, and we had two kids while we lived there, one a home birth right in the house. It was the “Main Street.”

And we were directly across the street from Lansky's junk yard with all that entailed, and giant wharf rats would cross the street and could be seen digging through the garbage cans at the side of our house in the dusk and early morning light. These rats were the size of small cats.

Also, less than one-half block from our house freight trains ran both east & west and north & south all night long. Starting and stopping, creaking and crying, one of the train tracks slowly clanged around a turn and across the river bridge. The sound actually became almost beautiful after a while, sounding like Gagaku, the free-reed oboe-like imperial court music of Japan. I almost miss it. Almost.

Behind our house was a very steep hill running straight up to another whole part of Ann Arbor, high above us, a little cemetery. It was difficult to climb even if you wanted to. The house faced east so we could watch the sun come up on the river early summer mornings. It was one of those places few people would want to live, but I loved it. It was almost outside of Ann Arbor (not smack in it) and kind of isolated, yet still near where things were happening. It was a good compromise.

The house itself was nothing special but it was special for us because it was where we lived, and the rent was low enough that we could afford to stay there as long as I could find some work. The house was owned by Frank Difilippi, an old classmate of my mom from St. Thomas school.

We had next to nothing and few ways to make a living. I picked up odd jobs as a stagehand or mixed clay and helped to fire pottery at a Peter Grams pottery studio just blocks away. I had lost most of the income streams I had built up before I left Ann Arbor to go into the green-plant business.

When that did not work out and I found my way back to my home town, things had changed. I had changed. That would be a story in itself.

As mentioned, the house itself was high above the street, so by the time you reached the second floor, where my office was, you were really up high. There was this sense of no one else around although there were a couple of houses in the same situation to the right and left of us.

There were no houses in front or behind us, only north and south of us along the highway. Other than that, there was no one else around. We were maybe a block from where the rest of the town started, just down a little sidewalk through some weeds and under the bridge over which one of the train tracks ran.

This is where we lived from the spring of 1972 until March 1st, 1980, when we relocated to Big Rapids where we live today. The Main Street house was where Matrix Software was born, where our first two kids were born and raised, and where so much that has affected astrology began.

Noel Tyl, Dane Rudhyar and many other great astrologers visited there. We had next to nothing but we actually had everything we needed, like time and a vision. Back then, that was enough.

One major change that came around the end of May 1972 was that Margaret told me she was pregnant and that we were expecting our first child. I was surprised and happy but also terrified as to what it meant for our lives. It would no longer be just Margaret and I who could live on next to nothing. We would have kids to care for.

As a natural provider type, the news sent shock waves through my system. We were barely surviving as it was. In fact, I was so panicked about providing that the very next day I went out and got a job on a garbage truck just to prove (to myself) that I had to be willing to do anything. That job lasted one day, and I came home pretty stinky. It was fun hanging off the running boards at the back of the garbage truck and to have people feel sorry for me.

After I calmed down, I realized that I could probably find some work better than hauling garbage. I did have 'some' abilities, just not a high-school diploma. I still have dreams of being back in high school trying to get the diploma that I never got.

I have been an entrepreneur all of my working life. Even back then I had more trouble working for others than for myself. I wanted to fit in, but it was always

easier to create my own livelihood than it was to blend in somewhere else. I don't blend well.

It would have been nice to be able to just go along, but that was not me. My critical gifts are too strong and criticism unless applied "just so" is not welcome much of anywhere in this world. We all know that. And I was not always skillful in my criticism. I was often direct and spoke my mind.

Anyway, I was soon searching inside myself to find some kind of living more in line with what I naturally liked to do and could do. I had been doing a lot of astrology, so in August of 1972 I decided to become a full-time professional astrologer and hung out my shingle. I had worked with astrology for many years helping build Circle Books (my brother's metaphysical bookstore), teaching classes there, and also doing the chart work for the store.

When I returned to Ann Arbor from our Florida greenhouses, I picked back up on doing the astrological charts for Circle Books. It was natural for me to expand my services and work out of my own home.

The problem was that we did not have all that much room in our house. In fact, it was tight. For example: we had one small living room in which was a couch. That couch would fold out into our bed. We used to have classes in the living room and when everyone was gone (and if we were dead tired) we would

immediately turn out the light, unfold the couch, and climb in.

Well sometimes a student would have forgotten something or other and soon after we were in bed would be pounding on the door. It was pretty funny to answer the door, directly behind which was the open bed. Margaret might have been hiding under the covers for all I remember. Anyway, that had to change.

Our house had two bedrooms on the second floor, and we decided that the larger one of them would become my office and the “classroom.” There would be no more classes in the living room. They would be held upstairs, which left us with one small room to sleep in, which appropriately became known as the “bed” room because it literally had wall-to-wall beds to sleep the whole family. After our second child was born (late in 1975) you could walk across the beds from one side of the room to the other with no gaps. The kids loved it.

And I held classes. Students would file up the stairs and into the classroom, past Margaret who was trying to bathe and put the kids to bed in the next room. It was close. Of course, I never thought of it as anything but grand, having a house to live in!

In my office I had a desk against the south wall and a large blackboard on the north wall. And I had my IBM Selectric typewriter. I wrote whole books on that typewriter; that and my calculators were about all I

had in the way of equipment for many years. This was before computers.

In the office during the day, I would work and do astrological readings for a constant stream of people who filed in. It was hard on my family to have people coming in and out all day long.

Then at night I would cram any number of students into my office, all squished together. My classes were literally up close and personal. And I am told I was pretty tough on some of my students. If they were not paying attention or mouthed off, I would escort them to the door and put them out. They were lucky I did not grab them by the ear. End of story.

Back then it was hardscrabble all the way, never having any money and reinventing myself every which way I could to come up with new services so we could pay the rent.

By then I also was speaking at churches, schools, colleges, meetings, and about anywhere they would have me. I taught classes at Circle Books, Art Worlds, Guild House, Y.M.C.A, The Free University, and the Heart Center (our place). I once taught an astrology class to hundreds of people in the Michigan Ballroom on the second floor of the Michigan Student Union as part of the Free University.

Margaret and I would also participate in all kinds of New-Age psychic conferences and gatherings. I would be there as an astrologer but most other

speakers that came were psychic readers, healers, tarot readers, palmists, and what-not. It was all over the board. Along the way we checked out séances, healings, hands-on healings, message services, and about anything else that was out there. It was all fascinating for a while.

We even drove down to Camp Chesterfield, Indiana (which is a community of healers and spiritualists) to have our firstborn daughter Lotis baptized. Once there, we went around to the little cottages where the healers lived and visited those folks we had met at conferences here and there. Although I tried really hard to be open to it, none of the psychic or 'spiritualism' managed to stick. It was, however, somewhat of an education.

One of my favorite psychics was Elsie Vukovich, who lived right in Ann Arbor out on the West Side. Elsie was a kindly woman and we would visit her quite often either to just sit and talk or to be part of whatever service or séance-like event she might be holding that evening. I can remember that during one séance I was told that my spirit guide was an Indian medicine man named "Drum Song."

And sometimes on Sundays we would attend the spiritualist church that Elsie belonged to and check that out. One of the features there was the giving of messages. Various psychics would come up front and deliver messages for those in the audience. They would actually single you out and pull messages out

of the ether that were specifically for you. Mostly they were upbeat and always intriguing.

Of course, I would try my best to bend each message around whatever I had going for me and wanted most to hear. In time, I begin to have problems with psychic pronouncements in general.

I can remember one such statement having to do with a road and an overpass in Ann Arbor. The psychic told me I had to be very careful of this particular overpass or I might have an accident. Well, you can be sure that I never forgotten that overpass.

Multiply that by ten or more such pronouncements and you might have a fairly healthy list of things you had to “watch out for.” I found this really annoying after a while. And it also partook of what I call the “chiropractor syndrome,” meaning that like some chiropractors, psychics tend to make you dependent on them. You have to keep coming back again and again to have your psychic temperature checked out and problems patched up.

After some considerable experience, I gradually tuned away from this kind of spirituality. One becomes too dependent on the psychic as a person and, even worse, the psychics seem to like that.

I am not sure how I rationalized my view of psychic readings, considering I made my living doing astrology readings for many years. I am sure the public can't tell the difference. For me the difference is

that (at least the readings I did) were one-offs and did not require that you come back for another one. I didn't allow it.

And of course, astrology is about cycles based on heavenly motions that reoccur rather than specific events that are called up from the ether or wherever. I can see this discussion could get murky, so I will not try to rationalize this with myself right here in your presence. But it's on my list of things to ponder.

In the middle of all this scrambling for money, doing readings, teaching classes, and lecturing there was something else going on as well. My interest in astrology was deepening and broadening. I had real questions and I set about to find the answers.

After some years I was able to move from log tables, pencil & paper to the 4-function calculator, pencil and paper, somewhere in the early 1970s. That helped.

Many of my questions required that I learn some more about trigonometry and before long I was doing extended series of trig calculations on a lowly pocket calculator, and then scientific calculators. It beat the earlier paper trig tables, but it still took a long time. I can remember calculating early Local Space charts (azimuth and altitude) that would take me the whole day to do the trig numbers for a single chart.

When programmable calculators came along I was Johnny-on-the-Spot in line to get one. I can still remember buying my first HP programmable at

Ulrich's Bookstore at 549 E. University in Ann Arbor, just down from where my grandmother used to live. It was a marvel to me.

And the calculators soon got more complicated and more expensive. Of course, I had no money and the next one I wanted cost a steep \$500. I decided to go to the bank and ask for a loan. Well, that was fun.

Sitting there with the credit manager, he asked me what I did for a living. Of course, honest Abe here told him I was an astrologer. I was proud of it. His eyebrow arched and I knew I was in for trouble.

Then he ran his finger down a long list of professions, leaned over, looked me in the eye and said "The profession of 'astrologer' is listed right above that of 'migrant worker'." Loan denied.

Well, I needed that calculator and I went back to the bank two more times until they finally gave me the loan to buy my first programmable calculator, one of many I would learn before I was done. I purchased an even better calculator sometime later when a almost-new car my parents had given us was hit by a passing motorist (while it was parked) and totaled.

With the insurance money I was able to buy a much-worse car and a larger programmable calculator. From little acorns big oaks do grow. That wrecked car was the seed from which came Matrix Software.

By this time, I was writing all kinds of astrology programs on programmable calculators and delving into some areas astrologers had never been before. One of my programs was published by no less than Hewlett-Packard as part of a book on astronomical and astrological algorithms.

Then in 1975 I published my first book, a long-range heliocentric ephemeris, "The Sun is Shining" which covered four-hundred years covering 1750 through 2050 A.D. It was the first of its kind.

I also produced a set of detailed star maps, some seven in all, placing familiar celestial objects in Zodiac maps rather than the Equatorial maps used by astronomers. In fact I had to lay them all out on large sheets of paper, calculating each star or point on a calculator, and then plotting it with rulers and T-squares on the paper... and finally using PressType to affix a little star or whatever symbol. This too had never been done in such detail on the Ecliptic. The year was 1976.

That same year I published "Interface: Planetary Nodes," a reduction of the complete planetary nodal solar system into the series of measurable points of interest to astrologers.

And lastly, that year I published "Astrophysical Directions," the first book on deep space astrology ever written and unmatched today some decades later. This was all before I was anyone or knew anyone in astrology. I just did it because I loved it.

I was an unknown astrologer living somewhere in the Midwest but I was happily on a quest and I actually had some vision. As for famous astrologers? I never met one before I met Charles A. Jayne and that was by telephone. We soon became good friends. I was no one but that did not faze Jayne one bit because he was interested in my ideas and not whether anyone had ever heard of me, and they hadn't.

My friendship with Jayne resulted in our meeting in person in the fall of 1976 at a large astrological conference at Columbiere College in the town of Clarkston near Detroit. It was mind-boggling when I finally met Jayne in person, trying to put his booming authoritative voice together with his more whimsical persona. He looked for all the world like Mr. Toad from "The Wind in the Willows" and Winnie the Pooh. Jayne and I became fast friends and I miss him to this day. He would fly out here to Michigan to spend his birthday with us and was about to do that again one year when he suddenly passed way. You can't replace what there is only one of.

At that conference in 1976 near Detroit in a single day I not only met Charles Jayne, but also such lights as Charles Harvey, John Addey, Robert Hand, Michael Munkasey, Thomas Shanks, and many other astrologers. I was soon one of the gang. And I continued to program and explore little-known and unknown techniques. And all of this time I was struggling to make enough money to pay the bills. By the fall of 1975 I had two kids and all the attendant

responsibilities that go with them. And then in 1977 microcomputers appeared on the scene.

I lived by my wits, my sense of discrimination, and the basic good taste in color and style that my artist mother had instilled in me. Still, it was very difficult to make a living, especially as an astrologer. It was all Margaret could do to care for two kids and make sure they had what they needed in love and attention. Margaret is a superb mother and loves babies to this day.

I was always there with them but often distracted by either my research or in trying to come up with new ways of finding income. At least my body was there.

In later years my mind came back into the body which made for a better father. It seemed back then that there was no light at the end of the financial tunnel, but a change was coming: microcomputers.

I pretty much lived and breathed programming and astrological calculations. I had followed the process of calculation up from log tables and paper & pencil to the 4-function calculator, to programmable calculators, to more sophisticated programmable calculations, and so on.

Up until then if I needed any large computer work done it had to be on a mainframe with the help of my friend David Wilson. And now there was talk of home computers on the horizon. That would be a dream come true when it happened.

I practically lived at NCE/Compumart at 1250 North Main Street in Ann Arbor. That was where microcomputers could be found even before they could be found, homemade kits. I lived at 1041 North Main so it was only a few blocks away.

Compumart was more like a warehouse than a consumer store and had huge behemoth computers stacked up against their walls and all kinds of parts and computer-board kits strewn everywhere in various states of functioning. Much of what they had was way too complicated and required a dedication to hardware that I didn't have in me.

I was a software guy and they had mostly do-it-yourself logic boards, interfaces, and stuff I didn't know much about. But nevertheless, I wandered their aisles in wonder at it all and dreamed of the home computers to come. And Compumart had one really remarkable sales person, a fellow name John Johnson. He helped to bring all that computer stuff to life for me.

What I wanted was my own computer, one that I could just turn on and not have to solder and piece the thing together. And home computers were not really out yet, so I waited and waited. I put my order in for one of the very first Commodore PET 2001-8 (Personal Electronic Transactor) which was released in 1977 at a price of \$795. Does anyone but me remember the yellow demo PETS that receded the real article in the stores?

I would try not to but could not help but watch each day for the UPS truck to come down Main Street where I lived. I was waiting for my first computer and knew that someday my own personal computer would arrive, a Commodore 8K PET. And then one day it was my turn. The UPS truck pulled into the driveway, and I had my own microcomputer. It was like living in my own dream to finally have a computer of my own and I knew just what to do with it. It was the key to my future and I intuitively could feel that.

Although Apple got all the press, the Commodore PET was IMO a much better computer and more complete. I used to have to load floating-point BASIC into my first Apple from cassette just to do ordinary math. With the Commodore PET, I just turned the machine on and everything was ready to go.

I had a complete astrology program running in 1977 and this included geocentric, heliocentric, equatorial, and Local Space (azimuthal) coordinates and then some, all in 8K of RAM, which is 8192 bytes of memory space. A gigabyte of RAM today is something like a billion bytes of space. Go figure.

I was soon programming everything I could think of in astrology on my Commodore PET and telling other astrologers about it too. I encouraged my fellow astrologers to do what I was doing: get themselves a computer and program it. This didn't happen. Astrologers wanted copies of my programs so they could just get a computer and be off and running. I

didn't blame them. Math and programming was not my first nature either.

Of course I obliged and pretty soon I was spending most of my time copying and verifying cassette tapes of programs I had written and putting them in the mail – very tedious work. I didn't even charge for them. The demand got steadily greater for my programs.

I was still barely supporting my family as it was and before long I had to make a decision and it actually was quite a spiritual experience. It was almost like a voice spoke from inside saying something like: You can stop sharing your programs and devote yourself to the astrological research you love while you find ways to support your family or you can divide your time between research and charging for your astrology programs and not have to struggle so much for work. The second choice seemed best and with that I was soon in business. I had to charge from my programs and I did.

I called my company “Matrix Software,” not after the mathematical term ‘matrix’ but after the word matrix meaning “womb” or birth place. For me this was the birthplace of astrological computing, and so it was for many. As it turns out I was the first person to produce computer programs on microcomputers and share them with my fellow astrologers, at first for free and later as a business which is still going some today, many years later, only I no longer own it.

I thought it was very funny when one quite-famous astrologer (not to be humiliated here) wrote me a nasty letter telling me that I had no right to charge anything more for my astrology programs than the cost of a cassette, mailer, and postage.

Of course this particular astrologer was kicking himself that he had no way to cash in on what he could now see might become popular. Thank you very much!

Matrix Software was incorporated early in 1978 and I started "Matrix Magazine," a journal that was dedicated to sharing astrological algorithms and technical information relating to astrology. Some of the most prominent astrologers in the world contributed or participated in the magazine and a good time was had by all. Matrix Magazine shared a wide variety of astrological programs with the community and a lot of fun was had as well.

Of all the astrologer-programmer types I met somewhere around that time, the most important and influential was James Neely. Let me start out by saying that "Neely" is not his real name, but a name he used when he interfaced with astrologers. His real job was such that 'astrology' might not enhance his career prospects, something like that.

Neely was older than I was and knew just about everything I wanted to know about astronomical programming, and he was willing to share his knowledge. Neely was not an astrologer. In fact, all

who contributed to Matrix Magazine readily shared information with one another. As a child of the 1960s, this was just natural for me.

Neely and I soon became good friends and he was featured in the magazine and given special reverence and appreciation by all. Neely was also just a really great person to know and became for me something like a father figure and mentor. I looked up to him.

And James Neely also helped me to learn astronomical programming and readily contributed not only to Matrix magazine, but also to Matrix Software, which was increasingly coming into its own.

However, Neely did not want to get a royalty or be paid for his contributions. I am not sure just why, but perhaps it had to do with taxes and acknowledging outside income. What he did allow was for us to send him equipment as he needed it, which we happily did.

MATRIX SOFTWARE

As it turns out Matrix was the first astrological software company in the world, and even today is one of the two oldest software companies still in existence on the Internet, the other (and older) company being a little company called Microsoft, so an article written for the magazine “Red Herring” pointed out. That’s old in computer time.

Today we can just go downtown and buy a printer for our computer but back then there were no printers

available, so my first printer was a converted Teletype machine that weighed about 70 lbs. and was two-foot square or more. I could barely lift it.

And there were no word processors available. I had to write my own type-justification routines to print out my first book, "Manual of Computer Programming for Astrologers," which I then traded to the AFA (American Federation of Astrologers" for enough money to buy a real printer. That is all I ever got for it. Talk about salad days.

Why me? There is only one reason: because I did it. There were other astrologers with far more proclivity for programming than I, but none that cared enough to do it. I was the first astrologer to program astrology and make it available on home computers for my fellow astrologers. And in the beginning, as mentioned, I didn't even charge money for my programs. I gave them to anyone who had a computer that could run them and was happy to do so.

The only other astrologer I knew who was into programming was Rob Hand who had a little Wang computer that he programmed. When I wanted to start Matrix I did not want to step on anyone else's toes so I called Rob and told him about Matrix and asked if there was any conflict with his future plans. He told me that he had no intention of selling software and that I had his blessing. Then, about a year or so later, I found out he had started Astrolabe and was selling software. I had never heard this from him but

had to discover it myself. I called him and reminded him of his statement to me and his only reply was “I changed my mind.”

It is not like astrologers by nature took to the computer right off. It was just the opposite. Astrologers as a group were computer-phobic from day one and only slowly warmed to a machine that could do the calculations they did by hand.

The ridiculous old log-table rituals of calculating a chart were their secret and many saw the computer as an unwanted intruder into their ancient science. But the forward-looking astrologers (and aren't all astrologers supposed to be future oriented?) could see the advantage of having a computer and I began to get more requests for my free software than I could fill.

As mentioned, soon I was spending almost my entire time recording and verifying cassette tapes of programs for my fellow astrologers while I could not pay my own bills. It was around then that I began to charge for my programs. Even this was not welcome, and this is one of my favorite stories:

I received very many more poison-pen letters when I put a computer on the cover of an astrological calendar that my brother Stephen and I had been publishing since 1969. The calendar is still published today, some 42 years later! But at the time the photo of a computer with an astrological aspect grid on its screen was just too much of an affront for many

astrologers to bear. They hated it. However, more and more astrologers of another inclination loved it and actually could see the future, at least when it presented itself.

I could go on and on, but I will give just one more example of the old saying that “No good deed goes unpunished” and this had to do with the advent of the first microcomputer interpretation reports.

Oh, the horror of the thought when astrologers figured out what these written interpretations actually were. I remember one round table discussion at a major conference where we were discussing computers and astrology and talking at that moment of computerized reports of chart interpretations. The poor woman who was assigned for our roundtable to monitor the door just stood by the entrance crying her eyes out about how horrible these reports were for astrology and that they would take the bread out of the mouths of working astrologers.

Of course, just the opposite is what happened. These little reports gave every astrologer the opportunity to sell a client \$5 or \$10 worth of astrology when the client was not up to paying for a sit-down reading. But even here astrologers did not flock to buy computer software that printed out written readings, at least not publically.

Instead, they called us on the QT, after hours and under-the-counter to buy these new software reports because they knew they could sell them but did not

want other astrologers to know they would stoop to such a thing. Such is progress.

Of course, just a few years later almost every astrologer with a computer had one or more reports to offer their clients. And one other story is worth relating. It had to do with the first time I went to a major astrology convention to present my software. I am not sure exactly where that conference was held, but it may well have been the AFA (American Federation of Astrologers) conference in New Orleans in 1980. That sounds about right.

Although I was the only person creating and marketing astrological software for home computers, that did not mean I had no competition. There was one dedicated machine that did astrological calculations from a company named Digicomp Research called the DR-70. It was a little hard-wired computer that came in a neat closed case like a typewriter and cost a couple of thousand dollars. I will never forget that first day when I walked into the large convention hall where the astrology exhibitors had their booths.

I had only one small card table and a couple of folding chairs. As I walked into the hall, I looked around at all of the booths where astrologers were busy setting up their wares. I was looking (of course) for the Digicomp booth. It must be there somewhere, I thought. Then it dawned on me. At the back of this large hall, stretching left to right along the entire back wall was Digicomp, not a booth, but filling the entire room

horizon with one vast display. It was devastating to see.

I set up my little card table, sat in my chair, and the rest is history. Within a few years Digicomp and the DR-70 disappeared from the scene and my programs and Matrix Software became the weapon of choice for astrologers who had computers and by that time almost all of them had computers.

As mentioned, Matrix started in my little office on the second floor at 1041 N. Main street in Ann Arbor in 1977. Three years later on March 1, 1980, the coldest day in the winter as it turned out, my family and I moved three hours north to Big Rapids, Michigan.

It was a small convoy of one UHaul trailer and two pickup trucks. We had found a small house in Big Rapids for about \$30,000 and we moved in. I had never dared to imagine that I could own a home because it seemed beyond my most remote dreams. But all those little astrology programs and years of work made it possible at least to put down a small down payment and move in. We did.

As mentioned, the house was small and could only allow me a small office, something like 10x12 feet and here I sit some 42 years later in that same little room. It is smaller than my office in Ann Arbor, but I was and still am quite happy in it.

My brother Stephen (who still lived in Ann Arbor) had begun to help me with programming, taking over creating programs on the Radio Shack computer TRS-80. By this time I was supporting the

Commodore PET, Apple IIe, and the Radio Shack machine.

Oh yes, we tried some other computers as well like the Osborne II, Exidy Sorcerer, and several small programmable calculators. And of course the IBM PC was huge. It was not long before Stephen and his family decided to move north and join us. This was October of 1980.

Well, it was not just me he was joining. My parents and three of my younger brothers lived here, so it was a gathering of the clan. We moved up to this small Midwestern town to raise kids and give them the same experience we had, the ability to walk downtown without the danger of anything happening to them. Big Rapids still could support this kind of lifestyle. Ann Arbor had grown too large for small town experiences. It was like going back in time and was worth it. Anyway, by then and with two kids we were using less and less of Ann Arbor's wonderful resources. It was as if they were not there. I was so busy I could live anywhere and never know the difference.

BOBBING FOR INSIGHT

July 25, 2023

Putting together the vocal chain of recording equipment is pretty much done. Some equipment is yet to arrive, but I believe I have it all worked out. As for solar flux these days, the solar flares just keep on coming, more than just at a gentle roar. We have no choice but to ride them out.

Having some Internet connection problems and I am finally getting ethernet cable tools, like a cable crimper, pass-through connector, cable tester, and learning to do that, make my own cables. I am tired of being dependent on the cable guys.

In general, I have been taking care of one problem after another, getting a good amount done, including some videos and audio recordings. In fact, I'm in a pretty high-end mood because I like it when I'm busy, although if I get too euphoric, that too becomes a problem. And I've been pretty happy lately.

There is more than enough space surrounding me just now, which itself is a form of relaxation. My life has been more-or-less a line of binge-like events of late, each taking from one to several days of immersion. I like that immersion, yet I never want to stray too far from the shore or borderline between that full immersion and awareness of that immersion.

Crossing that borderline, again and again, is what I do, part of my training and my form of comfort, passing in and out of the body, staying awake, then resting, awake, resting, and so on.

I don't want to get lost inside with immersion, nor do I want to get stuck outside in the heat of the conscious mind. I want to rest and relax in the middle of it all, awake, immersed, awake, immersed, not only in short periods of days, but also in a string of moments themselves, writing a blog like this. It's like bobbing or dipping for apples.

Of late, there is an enthusiasm I just can't shake, although too much of it is not good either. It feels like I am turning over a new leaf, shedding my skin, and exposing myself to a new view and altering life habits. I like that.

And right now, there is nowhere to run, and I just have to sideline myself a bit from getting lost in LaLa land. I do feel like I am at and crossing a threshold between the past and a future. Not sure exactly what that means, but that's the way it feels.

As time and aging squeezes me, I'm more certain than ever what I have to do and just how I should do it, as to a general sharing of what little insight I have and being there for others. I am OK. Getting older by the day, but just fine, nevertheless.

In a way, perhaps all this is self-defeating. I have given up hope and trying to please everyone more than a little, and kind of settling into not worrying about that, and just doubling down on what I feel is important to communicate. There may be a few folks interested in what I am sharing. That is fine with me.

And so, for me, less is more or at least enough, just like more is less when I write what is too long for most to read. At my age, I can't worry about that. Being

integral and on point is most important. I do what I can with what I have.

NOTHING DOING

July 25, 2023

The Sun has been hot and heavy of late as regards solar flares, and once again we swim in the smoke from Canada. The work on the streets outside our home is finishing up and huge street machines with rolling brushes stir up dust until the air is filled with what appears like a dust storm.

Today I came across this poem I wrote in April and set aside, not thinking too much about it. Picking it back up today and re-reading it, it struck home all over again, as I realized that my view had not changed much since that time a few months ago.

I was struck by it, word for word, and this is how it is for me right now, as best I know, so I list it here again and wonder who out there reading it feels the same way. It's about being fixed in time and unable to move from this present moment.

DOING NOTHING

I am restless to just rest.
Each way I turn there is no place to go.
Any thought is better not thought at all.
And my every start is a non-starter;
I can't go anywhere but here.
When it comes to 'nothing',
There is not room for anything.
Saying nothing about nothing is enough,
And there is zero satisfaction.
Only nothing is satisfying.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

A SLICE OF ANN ARBOR TOWNIES IN THE 1970S

July 27, 2023

As Jeff Probst, spokesman for the old TV series “Survivor” says to the group that misses the boat, “I’ve got nothin’ for you.” And I don’t have anything finished at this point, but I have been working really hard and at least I can explain what I am doing.

It's another take on my wedding video, although this time the wedding is not the point, but rather the event, and those who came are the point, like a peek into an important social scene in Ann Arbor at that time, a slice of life back then. You can see it in the video.

In other words, this video is not something just to watch roll by. That happens too, of course. Instead of the process of the wedding, we are looking at a cross section of Ann Arbor townie life, over 200 townies, mostly musicians, artists, crafts-persons and so on. We all worked and lived together and on this day we all turned up in one group out in the country under a 200-year-old Oak tree.

And unlike the live event in 1971, by now this is a virtual event, with many people already having passed on and the rest living, but perhaps scattered all over.

This is why there may be little interest in this and it’s a lot of hard work gathering all the names. I want to thank Margaret, Tecla Loup, Stephen Erlewine, and Lorna Hernandez for help in this.

Here is a time to relive, not just that event of a wedding, as I pointed out so much as the crowd and social environment that came together for the event. It’s very representative of that time and a certain part

of the Ann Arbor scene, in particular Ann Arbor townies.

I realized that this group is like a cluster of key Ann Arbor folks of that time, at least of a particular group of friends. Many are already gone and the rest of us are aging fast. It might be of some comfort to know we were there back then, a whole group of us in all our diversity and also with what we shared that day.

Margaret and I invited all of you because you were our friends and wanted you with us. We had all of \$200 for everything, so it was home-cooked baked beans, potato salad, fresh French bread, and some beer. Our dear friend Tecla Loup helped to prepare the food, including a huge heart-shaped cake, not to mention that Tecla made Margaret's wedding dress.

If any of you still are able, do reach out and say hello. As they say, "Ain't but a few of us left."

Of course, there were the two family families, but beyond that we were a whole part of Ann Arbor in the very early 1970s, a snapshot of those times.

I'm still hard at work on the finished video, but it won't be long before I will post it here and also on "Ann Arbor Townies."

Whether it will interest any readers here, probably not so much, yet there are bound to be some. So, it's not the event of a wedding that is the point, but the gathering itself, and the fact that we had we were part of a very alive group that cared enough about each other to gather and share time.

I am reminded of a poem I wrote back in those times.

OUTSETTING SONG

That song is sung,
That singing,
Sets inside itself,
Outsetting song,
That sings,
And singing
Sets itself
In song.

Song that sang,
Which sung,
Is singing still.

[Photo from the wedding by Stanley Livingston, but Al Blixt was also very much present and on the scene.]



ANN ARBOR TOWNIES: JULY 3, 1971 VIRTUAL REUNION

Wedding UPDATE Version 7

July 28, 2023

<https://youtu.be/lwXy9DrCkM0>

Fixing Typos, Missing Names, etc.

I started out making a fun video featuring my English Bull Terrier ‘Manley’ doing his rope trick at our wedding, swinging from a high rope. Yet, along the way, as I put the video together and reworked it, it dawned on me how special that time was in Ann Arbor, not just for me, but for all of us.

Creating the video, I found myself searching through the crowds for all the people I know, my friends, the folks we invited to our wedding.

Looking back, that time was so rich in content, with friends, and goings-on, that before I knew it, I was trying to create something like a virtual reunion, as I jotted down the names of those I recognized in the crowd.

Putting the event, our wedding aside, here were the folks that made up for us that whole time, out particular slice of the Ann Arbor scene.

And so here is the video, but it’s not a movie. And if you were not there back then, you probably will be bored, unless you are like me, a born Ann Arbor archivist.

Too many of these folks are already gone, and I can start with my friend and bandmate Robert Sheff, AKA

“Blue Gene Tyranny. We lived in the Prime Mover House, as 114 N. Division came to be known, together for something like seven years, with other band members coming and going. I am using some of Robert Sheff’s music for the soundtrack here, something he offered for me to use years ago.

And as I look through the photos assembled here, it’s like gazing through the window of time at all of us as we were back then. And to each of you I send my best wishes, both to the living and to those who have passed on.

And so, it’s not just a wedding, but also how Ann Arbor was back then for me, how we were back then, how it was back then for us.

I hope those who are capable of enjoying looking through this window of time with me do so. We were then and still are a reflection of Ann Arbor, where so much life was possible, nestled in the Huron River Valley in southeastern Michigan where a little town was born, Ann Arbor.

[Note: Since I post this on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com), I can’t update it without losing all the comments. Nevertheless, please send all your corrections, suggestions, names that I missed, etc. I will wait for a while and then publish an update separately. Also, if you were at the event and not mentioned, please send me your name and I will add a page for those there were there, but not found in the photos. Thanks for your attention. And thanks to Margaret, Tecla Loup, Stephen Erlewine, and Lorna Hernandez for help with this project. I also post a few of the crowd

images enlarged to make it easier to spot friends.
That's about all I can do for now.]















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LESS IS ENOUGH

July 29, 2023

I have been wrapped up in designing and putting together a little podcast studio right here in my office. I had a whole recording studio not so long ago, but I sold it thinking I'm mostly done with recording in general. Then, I saw the beauty of recording some things I am most interested in, so that that others might understand better if I actually articulated and enunciated what I write, instead of just depending on the written word to capture the meaning. Language is opaque enough.

And so, as mentioned, lately I have been putting this little recording studio together, a mini studio right here by my desk. And in that process, being fixated on this recording concept, I have realized the following, which is the point of this blog.

I am aware and have long been aware how focused I am on whatever I'm doing. I mean focused to the point of not looking or caring to look much around me at what's going on. I'm sure I miss a lot.

And by that, it appears that I don't bother to smell the roses or worry about not smelling them, so to speak.

Sure, I've smelt roses before and that highlights a trait I seem to have. It seems I don't have to smell the roses every day to live what I consider a full life. And that may be a liability.

To be a little more clear, here is another example. I love Shakespeare and believe he, in my experience, is the greatest writer the English language has yet

produced. However, and this 'however' is my point here. Just because I love Shakespeare does not mean I want to read him every day or even feel I should read all of his work. And, this reveals the crux of my point.

Shakespeare is not only someone I find brilliant, but he also spurs me on to see the brilliance in the English language and I happen to speak that language. And the tip of my point is that, inspired by Shakespeare, I want to go and use our language myself. I get the idea. I want to go and do it.

In other words, Shakespeare is as much a catalyst for me as someone to put on a pedestal and read. It seems I don't do that. I have access to the same mind that Shakespeare did and I will use that.

And to finish up this point, I don't feel the need to read all of Shakespeare's plays. I have read some, but mostly I have read his sonnets because they are short, to the point, and inspire me without being very long. I am someone who wants to live life, yet there is an awkward caveat here I want to discuss.

Just as I don't feel the need to read a bunch of Shakespeare, neither do I feel the need to smell the roses every day. Or, to put it another way, my idea of roses and what the books suggest perhaps are different.

I have been to Tibet twice and things like that, which certainly is far travel, yet that kind of travel is not high on my bucket list. More often, and this has been true my entire life, I am perfectly happy and interested in

things just around the house, or more exactly, in the mind itself.

I can spend days, and do, working on the computer, working online, and completely occupied while the sun rises and sets, the breezes blow, and the flowers bloom. And so, I'm not outside smelling the flowers each day. Or my idea of flowers is in the mind itself. And this gives me pause.

My point here is that my life is a wasteland when it comes to 'smelling the roses' in the sense that is usually meant. I miss a lot, a whole lot, if that is the point. I believe this affects those around me, especially those closest to me, because I don't seem to require variety to be content.

I am content to entertain myself with very little, and for me less is more. To cut to the chase, I would rather continue working on whatever I'm interested in than to take a walk with you, or have dinner, or whatever is commonly considered enjoyment and doing.

I am sorry about that, and I even have to apologize to myself about being a party pooper, and not requiring variety as much as the average bloke. I just don't.

You could say that I can make a mountain out of a mole hill, and you would not be wrong. And I have no defense other than much of the time I'm quite content with wherever I'm at and whatever I'm doing.

It's enough that someone is smelling the roses, those roses, while I seem to more than content to spend time with whatever is on my mind. I know I miss a lot, but I seem to never mind.

[Photo of part of my mini-recording studio, in this case a microphone (Neumann TLM-103 condenser mic) and a Stedman pop filter, a solid tube-type AU LA - 610 preamp and compressor, etc. Still waiting for a couple of pieces.]

Note: If FB Friends are all taken, "FOLLOW" on FB does the same thing. If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

SpiritGrooves.net

YouTube.com/channel/UC3cL8v4fkupc9IRtugPkkWQ

<http://michaelerlewine.com>

"As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish."





INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL G. NASTOS

Michael G. Nastos

July 31, 2023

Video Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9zpemJaxeE>

Unfortunately, Michael G. Nastos passed away in November of 2022. It was my privilege to know and spend time with Michael G., a very kind and gentle soul.

Here is an interview that I did with Michigan music historian Michael G. Nastos, who was also a well known D.J. and radio announcer based in Ann Arbor, where he served for some 30 years as a radio host, assistant music director, and librarian at the NPR affiliate WEMU, 89.1 FM.

Nastos was also a jazz drummer, Multi-percussionist, and music critic, writing on jazz, blues, and world music for many publications, including the Ann Arbor News, Downbeat, Cadence, Coda, Jazz Forum, Swing Journal, Arts Midwest, Jazz News International, the Detroit Metro Times, and many other publications, including my own company, the All-Music Guide. Michael G. was one of the chief jazz editors for the All Music Guide.

He was a founding member of SEMJA (Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association), and active in ISIM (International Society for Improvised Music). This list goes on and on.

In this interview, Nastos talks about being part of the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock N.Y., one of the principal birthing places for world music in America, and the place where many of the young modern jazz players came up.

Michael G. and I talk about a wide range of topics, including his decades-long career as a drag-race-car announcer, his love of baseball, and of course his interest and history with music of all kinds.

Nastos was a well-known music expert, highly-intelligent, and a very articulate and kind person. We even talked about my love of the Pharrell William's tune "Happy," and his love for Jimi Hendrix.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



WHA' HAPPENED?

August 1, 2023

Who can forget these lines from Yeats, "The Second Coming:"

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre,

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;"

That fellow Yeats was a natural poet, but perhaps a wee dark, yet look at these times we are in. Are they not dark enough? And beyond the time we all share, we each have our own times and own problems. They are more than enough.

Something I often wonder how I got to where I am today? I worked for something like 50 years and got a lot done, yet I don't remember having the minutia that plagues me now. And I am not alone. My wife Margaret feels the same way.

It seems that many, too many for me, of our days are filled with meaningless activity. I will put aside the almost endless Robot phone calls that ring all day long because we are aging. They want money and hope we bite.

I'm talking about the constant activity of just trying to stay equal. Of course, I know that with aging, there is no such thing as 'equal'. Our life is a declining asset. I get that and add an underscore.

I'm more worried about the hours spent on the phone to Apple support, PC support, B&H support, Lowes, Spectrum, and on and on. Whole days of my life, at

least until I am too exhausted to do anything else, are spent on the phone or Internet trying to get something working again or working as it should.

In the long run I am forced to learn to do my own repair, the latest is my learning how to create and crimp pass-through-RJ45 Cat6 connectors, thus creating my own ethernet cables, with their eight tiny colored strands. Who else reading this does that?

And that's just one learning curve. I'm also forced to learn audio setup procedures at a whole other level, just because I don't want to wiggle cords until they work and then I just forget them. No, I am learning how to put together audio systems from the ground up, and to get rid of all those old video cables and connections.

Sometimes it's iPhone, iPad, printer, computer, Internet outage, equipment failure, major appliance problems, and the list goes on. It can take two or three calls to the same company, going from an ignorant tech support person, on up the chain to someone who actually knows the product better than I do. And quite often, after around an hour, the call gets dropped and I have to start all over again. And I will not dwell on the tech support person who essentially speaks no English. What is the good in that?

I could go on and get into nutrition supplements, probiotics, vitamin deficiencies and so on. I find that half my doctors don't know Jack-squat about food, nutrition, and the like, much less the fact that half the time I end up managing my own doctor appointments because they (and all their computerization) still can't

manage that. I'm very much part of the doctor/patient chain aside from just being a patient. If I want something done, I have to call and recall just to make sure it happens.

This takes time, and not just days, but most of an entire week can be taken up with just trying to get back to normal, if there is such a thing as normal anymore for me.

It's a downhill slide, and the efficiency (or lack thereof) for modern business is hard to accept. Do I want some cheese with my whine? Not really.

I am saying this, not to complain, but to point out where things are atrophying and as Yeats said, "The center cannot hold."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE TWO ARE ALWAYS ONE

August 2, 2023

What does dharma or any disciplined practice resolve to? Time removes even the least trace of effort in such practice. There is no room for it and no reason. Undue effort results from mistakes and trying too hard. Ultimately that effort has to be walked back. That's what makes for skillful means.

I'm reminded of Zen Buddhism and the ten ox-herding graphics and stages, and in particular stage number eight, where the Ox and the Ox herder are both forgotten. That's what in dharma is called non-duality. Of course, the ox-herding pictures are the best that can be expressed, yet also the worst, because the mudra of life cannot be expressed. We try.

And it's the flourish of a mudra that appears and then is gone like mist in the morning, a simple wave of the hand. What happened?

Turning, turning, returning, back to where we started from. That's the image and gesture. Right before our eyes, we turn into what we already always have been, but with awareness.

And every two always elide and coincide, focus, and become one. That itself is mudra.

Or as I wrote so many decades 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.”

Meanwhile, just now the overactive sun is spewing protons from an explosion around from the back of the sun and spiraling them toward Earth. Inundation.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



A HOUSE OF CARDS

August 3, 2023

When I look at the constant high tides of the solar influx during this time of the increasing sunspot cycle and compare that to the burgeoning world of political strife and war, it makes me want to put aside whatever else I'm doing and shine some light upon the political and global turmoil going on all around us, yet just what can we do other than vote when the time is right? It seems that we all are putting up with this craziness.

I find it hard to get things done when all around me chaos seems to be the state of things. The division between the far left and the far right does not seem to be softening. I'm sure my view does not jibe with the view of most of the folk here in north-western Michigan where we live. I doubt that many will be going from door-to-door in this election coming up. Too dangerous given the current climate.

I know I learned a lot from having been a software engineer since the early 1970s, a coder, writing programs, piece by piece. In an article written for Red Herring Magazine on my work, it stated that my software company Matrix Software was the second oldest software company still on the Internet, the only older software company was a little company called Microsoft. I learned a lot from programming.

One thing about programming that is not so true about life is that in that virtual world of coding one can almost always be successful with a piece of code. Sooner or later, the code usually works.

And this is not a small thing, because a large software program is made up of many small sections, lines of code, and these small groups of code make up sections which can also be tested by themselves.

And my point, an axiom of programming, is that given whatever amount of effort is needed, almost any section of code can be made to work. This fact is huge, because in this Samsaric world we exist in, such assuredness and affirmation are seldom the case.

The reaffirmation I refer to comes from writing and testing pieces of code for years, subroutines, and having them work, and this is very encouraging, very strengthening in life, at least it has been so for me.

As for taking these same ideas from programming into the rest of life suggests that if we just keep working away at something, a useful result is almost always possible, and the worst that happens is that our code is only a compromise.

A house of cards will not stand, and so in this modern turmoil, when our house of cards comes tumbling down, we can always just set about putting it back together again, crafting it into, hopefully, a still more elegant configuration. I don't see any useful alternative to working with what is just as it is? What else is there?

Please share with me your thoughts on this conundrum.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



PODCASTING: UPPING MY GAME

August 4, 2023

I've fallen down the rabbit hole of podcasting, at least squaring away the proper equipment, and testing it. I've done that and here is what I'm going with.

I tried various webcams, like the Logitech 'Streamcam' and others, and while they were passable, when push came to shove, they fell short. Of course, having run a recording studio for years, I should (and did) know better. Not sure what I was thinking; perhaps I wasn't.

While I am fastidious with recording equipment, I guess I thought with Zoom and podcast stuff, why bother. Just get a webcam image, with a built-in mic and I'm good.

Well, yeah. That worked for awhile until I got some comments about it and immediately woke up. Of course, this gives a lousy image. I know that and would never let it pass for good in a studio, and so what?

Well, just because its Zoom or thereabouts, does not improve the image. And so...

I have some cameras sitting around here, why not use one of them, and so I did. I first tried an old Nikon D7000 that I had in a drawer, and OK, it worked, but marginally. Next, I bumped up to the Nikon DSLR D850, which is an excellent camera, and that was good, but then. Well, the 'but then' was why not focus-track my eyes, so my face is always in focus.....

Hmmm, that would take a fancier camera, such as my Nikon Z8. Yet, it seemed ridiculous to use the Z8 as a webcam. However, my thinking ended up telling me that I do most of my work with the Nikon Z7 II camera, because it is light and good. My Z8 sits around for 'heavier' work, and the point is that if it is going to sit around, why not let it sit around where I do my podcasts. And that's what I did.

And the thing about the Nikon Z8 is it has 3D auto-tracking that seamlessly keeps my eyes always in focus and avoids me moving in and out of a webcam's focus range. I remain in focus, but the early cameras I tried can't do that, and the Z8 can.

If I need the Z8 for other work, there it is. All I have to do is unplug two cables and take it off the small tripod I use. And that's what I did.

I have more or less gathered what I need for a quality podcast, interview, or Zoom work, and here is what it looks like. It's not inexpensive as I first tried to do. These are some quick cell phone images.

For audio work, I'm using a condenser microphone, in this case the Neumann TLM-103 in a 'spider', which is a shock mount in which the mic sits and is suspended. Right now, I am using a small weighted mic stand that can be placed on my desk. I have installed an 'instant 'connect', so I can pop off the mic and use another, either a shotgun mic or a dynamic mic, yet a condenser is better for voice and interviews, IMO.

And finally, I experimented with different pop filters to help tone down the p's and b's. Even that took time. I

was used to using the standard round hoop pop-filter with nylon or some porous fabric on two sides of the hoop. These are not so good and hard to clean and disinfect.

And then I tried a wrap around fine metal filter mesh filter, and that worked but was awkward to position and was bound to the mic by rubber bands, which I did not like.

And last, I'm now using the Stedman Proscreen 101, which is about perfect. It is made of a fine metal mesh that you can almost see through. It is small and designed to intercept the breath and push it down toward the ground.

In fact, if you take the nylon or wrap-around mesh filter and blow through them, you can blow out a candle on the other side. Yet, with the Stedman you can't blow out the candle because the air is directed away from the microphone, which means your p's and b's don't reach the microphone itself. Probably more than you want to know, but if you look into these things, it all adds up.

And last, I am placing a small vibration-reducing pad under the mic stand to reduce the vibrations from the desktop. I am threatening to use a Matthew's stage stand and a boom, which would very much isolate the mic from the desktop, but that's ridiculous in my small office. Nevertheless, I am still thinking about that and I might just do it, which of course is what we would do in a studio.

Next, what about conditioning the sound, via a better preamp than what I have in my audio interface? And

so, I have added a good preamp and a compressor wrapped in a classic tube-type preamp, the United Audio LA-610 Mk II, so my mic plugs into the preamp/compressor, and then is cabled to the audio interface and then into the computer.

And last, how best to position the Nikon Z8 mirrorless camera to video me. And for this I use a miniature tripod that sits right on my desk. It is the RSS (Really Right Stuff) TVC-32G Series 3 Mk2 Versa Ground 2-Section Aluminum Tripod and on that sits a Really Right Stuff PC-LR Round Lever-Release Style Panning Clamp, which is overkill, but I have it sitting around, so why not use it.

And the camera is connected to the computer by a USB-C cable (both ends) for video, and another USB-C (also both ends) for AC power. The Nikon Z8 has ports for both. And this whole system works with the Nikon Webcam Utility, which allows a single USB-C cable into the computer.

And there you have it, everything needed for very good audio and also excellent video, yet quite compact, as long as I don't drag that Matthew's stand with a boom arm down into my tiny office!



STILLNESS

August 5, 2023

No amount of holding still is stillness. That's called 'holding still' and this takes effort, thus not stillness. Stillness already is. We just have to relax and rest in it. Any effort to do so on our part only clouds the issue, so there is no stillness for us through effort. Instead, we have to be aware of the stillness that is already there. 'Trying' to hold still won't do it.

And there is stillness in movement, as well. Moving has nothing to do with stillness. We can be still on a rollercoaster, if we can relax "Much ado about nothing" as The Bard said.



ASTROLOGICAL ARCHIVIST PHILIP GRAVES

August 7, 2023

As an archivist of popular culture, over the last years I have placed my various collections in major universities and non-profit organizations. This includes my work with music, film and movies, rock n' roll concert posters, Buddhist art, and now my astrological-materials archive of hundreds of thousands of images and data files as stored on a large hard drive of several terabytes.

I am placing a copy of this astrology hard drive with three astrological centers, mainly with the astrology archives of Philip Graves of the UK, but also a copy to Georgia Strathis (Alexandria iBase Project), and one with Chris Brennan ("The Astrology Podcast").

Philip Graves of the UK, who has agreed to serve as my main representative and contact, will be in charge of making my materials available to astrology researchers and amateur astrologers upon request.

Graves and I have known each other for some years, and we just sat down a couple days ago and had this Zoom conversation about archiving astrological materials, which I include here. It also covers some of the history of Grave's own archive and archiving. Here is that video:

**"CONVERSATION WITH PHILIP GRAVES AND
MICHAEL ERLEWINE"**

<https://youtu.be/mkMWjxdUI6A>

Certainly, Philip Graves and I are on the same track, and perhaps even represent a lineage forming, along

with other archivists like Jenn Zahrt (Caeli: Celestial Arts Education Library), and, as mentioned, Georgia Strathis (Alexandria iBase Project), and Chris Brennan (“The Astrology Podcast”).

And in particular Philip Graves has agreed to use the copy I provide him to help other astrologers, researchers, and just passionate amateur astrologers gain access to my data collection and to use parts of my work in their own work. I release all of this to the public domain as channeled through Philip Graves and with his permission.

You can reach Philip Graves through these sites:

“Astrolearn Astrological Library”

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

“The International Astrology Library”

<https://www.astrologicalassociation.com/philip-graves.../>

I have mentioned above my archiving of astrological materials, which has taken much of my life, but I also want to sketch out some of my other lifetime archiving projects, although astrology was always my first archiving love, outside of my nature collections as a kid.

As for me, I just naturally wanted to preserve and honor the music of my youth, which was mostly Rock n’ Roll, but also Blues, Jazz, Classical, and eventually everything, which is why I named my music catalog the “All-Music Guide.” And today, although I no longer

own it, AMG is the largest music database in the world.

When I sold this company, we had 150 full-time workers, and between 500-700 (it varied) freelance writers. I am told that today AMG has something like:

2,902,596 Albums

3,912,308 individual Releases

32,979,922 individual Tracks

382,337 Classical Compositions

1,953,356 Classical Performances

3,285,348 Artists

765,257 Written Documents

362,156 Album Reviews

95,974 Artist Biographies

192,901,974 Associations

... and counting.

I also founded the All-Movie Guide, one of the two largest film and video databases available today, the other being IMDb (Internet Movie Database). My music CD collection is now housed at Michigan State University, some 800,000 CDs.

In addition, I personally created the largest collection of Rock n' Roll concert posters and formed my own online database, ClassicPosters.com. I myself took 33,000 photos of the most important concert (not lobby) posters that have existed and described them

in some detail. I have published some 328 books and booklets on concert posters, which are available at my web site SpiritGrooves.net.

And so, I am an archivist of popular culture, and my most recent project is putting this large collection of astrological materials in the public domain.

I am certainly not the first to catalog astrological materials, and certainly not the last, yet I don't know too much about major efforts in the history of astrology to do so, and I include a photo my collection, the Heart Center Astrological Library, which is now part of the permanent collection of the University of Illinois. This is how it looked at our center here in Big Rapids, Michigan.

I have tried to place all my collections at various universities and non-profit centers so that this data can benefit future researchers and interested persons. This includes the University of Illinois, the Bentley Historical Collection at the University of Michigan, the Haight Street Art Center, Michigan State University, and the Rubin Museum of Art. I have also placed a large archive of data and in particular my writings as part of the permanent collection of the Ann Arbor Public Library.



THE ASTROLOGY OF ASTRONOMY

August 9, 2023

For me, the guiding light for astrology is (and has to be) astronomy. Astrology as a symbolic language has never held much interest for me. Of course, I can speak that language as needed, when others speak no other, but left to my own devices, this never occurs to me. It's all about the astronomy.

Instead, what does occur to me is the astronomical skeleton of the universe, the various events out there in space, whether it's Venus conjunction with the Sun, or events occurring in the deep space of astrophysics. Practical events are my guide.

For me astrology is cultural astronomy, plain and simple, just what these various astronomical events mean for those of us here on Earth?

And, as you might imagine, when it comes to meaning, astrologers are all over the board. Of course, it's not a question of being right or wrong. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Instead, is it practical; does it make sense?

When astrologers mix the psychic sciences with astrology, which they like to do, for me it's like making soup of the soup. There's no meat, meaning astrology without the astronomy it is based on does not stand up, IMO.

I'm not saying various symbolic approaches to astrology don't exist, because there they are, all kinds of them. What I am saying here is they make no practical sense to me. I'm not even saying that astrology as a symbolic language is useless, because like any language that makes sense, symbolic astrology makes some kind of sense to someone.

IMO, the astronomy of the universe is as good a touchstone as I can imagine. If you want to dream, dream off of the facts, because they are more wonderful than anything else.

The simple astronomical facts have never let me down and are IMO more wondrous than anything we can dream up. They are pure magic. I can't imagine anything more seminal than what we can be read in any ephemeris of planetary events.

What is missing is our own sensitivity to the astronomical facts and the ability to interpret their meaning. The universe is no beggar, offering us symbolic facts that are in reality disappointing.

I could agree that the whole creation is a waking dream, if you will. Yet when it comes to getting down to brass tacks, those things that last longest, then the astronomical facts have endured the longest and are the pole stars of our life.

What these astronomical facts mean is only as difficult as the wisdom of the ages. Are we astrologers up to such a task?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“NO PARTICULAR PLACE TO GO”

August 10, 2023

There comes a point with the progress of our spiritual or dharma training along a single path where we reach a crossroads, but it's not a simple fork in the road, but rather the end of a linear path, which opens out into a 360-degree array of paths extending in all directions. It is like suddenly one to many and not one path any longer. In other words, anything will do, or as they say, “It's all good.” Let everything be your path.

Instead of one path locked into a fixed direction as we are used to (dharma or otherwise), suddenly there are an infinite array of paths stretching in all directions, while the single path we are used to dissolves and disappears. That single path evaporates into everything.

To quote a line from a pith dharma teaching:

“The not seeing of anything is seeing.”

Or

“Having no path to travel is the start of the path to Buddhahood.”

To reach the end of the path to something or somewhere, when that path just dries up and blows away, is more than something. It is nothing or everything.

This is when the sacred verses we have studied all lead beyond themselves and are ‘Self-defeating’. They bypass our personal Self and have done their job and there is no ‘More’ there. Do we dare go there,

straying off the path? Actually, the question is do we dare not to, especially when that path is nowhere?

When the sacred verses no longer differ in essence from our own dawning insight, all difference between the two dissolves and is lost. Yet 'Awareness' remains, awareness of nothing at all, call it 'blue sky' or emptiness. And IMO that, so to speak, is something.

In other words, when all paths no longer lead anywhere for us and begin to seem the same, when they are in-turned until they point inward beyond themselves (our 'Self'), we can then but tread water. It's like that little spinning wheel on the computer screen trying to resolve itself.

Sooner or later, we stop just expecting (expectations) and let go; THEN we are somewhere. That letting go and accepting of nonresolution itself is the entire point, the very portal itself. Or as Chuck Berry put it "No particular place to go."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LESS EFFORT

August 11, 2023

My dharma path over the years is lined with effort, the effort to get it started in the first place and then the effort to keep it going, to do it every day whether I felt like it or not. That took effort.

Strip the effort away and what do we have? We have the amount or degree of awareness all that effort and dharma practice generated. Aside from whatever awareness resulted, the effort involved was obviously not effortless; it left its mark as effort-scars and a certain staining of the practice, like every time I forced myself to do the practice by sheer effort and not the love of doing it.

At some point in our dharma practice, those traces of effort, much like scars, have to be removed because ultimately, they are themselves an obscuration. The goal of effort and all that dharma practice is greater awareness, just like the Sanskrit word “Buddha” means awareness or the one who is aware.

Each of us will have to ask ourselves what amount of effort, tedium, or force we used to keep our dharma practice going. For some it may be effortless, but not for me and for most people I have met. It takes effort and diligence to practice dharma, and that is just what I am pointing out here.

Once we get some sense of awareness, simultaneous with that is that we see that effort and awareness, while often related, are contradictory. Or, to put it in other words, we see that awareness and becoming aware does not necessarily require effort. At heart, it

is a joy. That's why there are expert teachers. It's just that many of us have made considerable effort to become aware.

Once we have awareness, it is obvious that awareness is natural to us and our efforts to acquire it are not only no longer needed, but actually that effort may stain our awareness and become an obscuration in itself.

And so, at some point, we may want to walk the effort back and do what we can to remove the stains or scars of our own effort to obtain awareness along the way.

Of course, we seldom see the scars of effort until we have developed actual awareness, and this can take a very long time, IMO. It takes awareness to be aware of our own effort, although it's quite obvious once we are aware.

Effort, like scaffolding on a building, has to be removed once we no longer need it. We naturally stop making effort when the process of meditation becomes effortless.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



PITH DHARMA TEXTS

August 12, 2023

My particular training is in Vajrayana Buddhism, in particular that of the Karma Kagyu Lineage, and included the various preliminaries, deity practices, and finally my settling into training in Mahamudra.

If we get past the basic general training that most Tibetan practitioners undergo, and these are appropriately called “The Preliminaries,” being the “Common Preliminaries,” followed by the “Extraordinary Preliminaries,” and then more advanced teachings can be undertaken, such as the various deity practices, sometimes engaging further with the “Special Preliminaries,” and then the non-dual practices such as “Mahamudra” and “Dzogchen.”

When it comes to the written dharma teachings, in particular those that relate to Mahamudra, there are many classic texts and pith teachings, very direct teachings, most in verse form and sheer poetry.

The pith teachings tend to be very concise, very direct, and in poetry. And they are so potent that it does not take much reading to get my head swimming, so I tend to pick up these pith texts, read until I can't handle any more, and then put them down for a while. And I then pick them up at a later date and repeat the process. They are like new each time in their effect on me.

For a time, usually quite short, not often more than an hour, I can entertain these pith verses and at least imagine I get a lot from them. And then, after some time, I am kind of filled up, and the beauty, elegance,

and power of these words cease to make the same kind of sense as they did the first few minutes after I picked them up. I have to give them a rest.

Yet, over the years, this kind of sampling of pith teachings has become the method I most frequently use, as compared to reading a text from beginning through to the end.

Instead, I read within a classic text and mark or underline those short verses that impact me as I read along, so that I can find my way around in the text the next time I pick it up. I use a red pencil, and pretty much mark up the dharma texts I read.

I don't know if this is the best way to use such a text, marking it up, but it has proved to be very helpful for me as opposed to encountering a blank text page (unmarked) each time and starting all over. And like a spider traversing a web, handhold by handhold, I move from one marked verse to the next, remind myself as to why it affected me, and then go back and forward around that verse to see if other verses near that one also makes sense to me. And if they do, I mark them as well.

Over time, I mark these verses because they jibe with my own thought processes; they make sense to me. Yet, all of these Mahamudra texts are about the non-dual state. And so that realm, being very immersive, can seem quite abstract if you lack the experience the pith texts are pointing to.

In fact, without that actual experience not much can be accomplished, but nevertheless, reading these pith

texts can help to exercise and widen the mind, making it more open and flexible.

Since these pith texts, by definition, are immersive, meaning non-dual, they are often pure insight encapsulated in words, as best as language can offer, and often have a very uplifting effect on my consciousness, even if I'm unable to yet know the dharma experiences they describe.

Here is a famous pith text by the Mahasiddha Tilopa as translated by Ken McLeod, the "Ganges Mahamudra," to try out.

<https://unfetteredmind.org/pith-instructions-on-mahamudra/>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



HOW TO REST

August 13, 2023

In Sanskrit, a 'Siddi' (plural 'Siddhis') refers to the material, paranormal, supernatural or otherwise magical powers, abilities, and attainments that are the product of yoga and successful dharma practice. Well, where are they and how do they appear?

I'm not sure just how they appear, yet I can point out what triggers them.

Things are not necessarily how we see them, especially when it comes to spiritual accomplishment; things are the way they are and it's up to us to see them as they are, and not how we expect or imagine they are or should be. I wrote this poem:

BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS

Looking at the mind,

It's not what I'd expect.

Expectations can't define,

And you can't expect to find.

That's the nature of the mind.

Anyway, the key or trigger to precipitating the various siddhis is relaxation and the awareness that results from that. And I am speaking of a very special form of relaxation at that. Perhaps "Resting" would be a better word, learning to rest in the nature of the mind, just as it is, rather than how we expect or imagine it is.

The first step toward this is remaining in the present moment, what we call the 'Now'. And that is as simple

as not straying into the past or leaning into the future through expecting and hoping. As the great Mahasiddha Tilopa said, “Don’t prolong the past,” and “Don’t invite the future,” which leaves the “Present.”

And as regards the ‘Present’, Tilopa said “Don’t alter the Present.”

Don’t monkey with it, but just leave it as it is. Given that advice, Tilopa’s closing advice was incredibly simple:

“Relax, as it is.”

Just let go and slump into the now. In fact, the Tibetans have a brilliant image they use as to how to relax. And that is a bunch of barley straw, harvested, and bound in the middle by a single piece of string, stored on end, sitting upright, with the string in the middle.

And then, when the single string is gently cut, the straw does not just explode and fly all over, but only ever-so-gently slumps. That is considered how to relax. It’s like a gentle sigh. I have seen these bundles of straw many times in Tibet, when I visited.

As the texts point out, we don’t ‘rest’ the mind. The mind is already at rest. Instead, we allow ourselves to rest in the nature of the mind which, as mentioned, is already at rest. That’s the approach.

And it is this kind of resting that is required to release the ‘Siddhis’, to free them up so that we can see to use them.



END OF THE PATH

August 14, 2023

What happens when the path we are on merges with the present moment and that's our future? What does such a thought even mean?

To me it means what if you end up in the present rather than the future expectations, hopes and dreams you are used to; in other words, no longer lost in our expectations and imagination, but rather at the end of expectations, those expectations having been fulfilled by the present moment. You have arrived somewhere (the present moment) and where can you go from here, now that you have run out of expectations?

Also, there is no hope but the present.

In a very real sense, at that point it does not matter what you do because all paths converge here and also radiate from here, and so it is choiceless. Just like the old saying "All paths lead to Rome," but here all paths end in the present moment and the future is now.

And what we really are saying, and experiencing, is being present, being in the present perhaps for the first time. In other words, we have come all the way, perhaps many lifetimes, to be here now, and here we are. Yet, now what?

It's similar, perhaps exactly, in meditation training, finally no longer actually meditating, having to meditate, but discovering non-meditation, just resting

in the moment. That's what is called Mahamudra, a non-dual practice.

Running out of future expectations and finding ourselves instead actually fully in the present moment is the point here. What a place to end up as well as to start, well, anything.

The obvious end of searching is to find. And what a change for us is that, to run out of wants and expectations. And then what? We probably have little to no idea. Suddenly, a life without the need for hope.

Simultaneous with that, our on-the-cushion meditation and our off-the-cushion time each day (called post-meditation), become one and the same. It's all one, inside and out.

There is no place to go because you are there. And, there is a caveat.

Somewhere along in there, with the help of an authentic guru, we are introduced to the nature of the mind and how it works. With that (Recognition) we have learned something, and we now instinctively know what to do. We understood the nature of our own mind and how it works, at least enough to work it. We CAN work it. And that's what we do.

This is the end of meditation as we know it and the beginning of what is called non-meditation, the non-dual. We are immersed in non-meditation or learning that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



ENTERTAINMENT BOUND

August 15, 20223

[Lojong slogan #6 “In post-meditation, be a child of illusion.” This world is a dream we cannot wake from.
]

It is my experience that aside from what we have to do in a day to stay healthy and alive, we are habituated to busyness and being entertained just all the time. We may call it ‘interest’ or ‘passion’, whatever, but it seems most of us like to stay entertained almost every minute. And when we are not, the specter of boredom and ennui raises its fearful head, and we don’t like that. We fear boredom.

At issue here are those few times when we fall out of or lack the continual entertainment needed to soak up the time that we don’t know what to do with; in other words, a surplus of time on our hands without being busily entertained. This comes to us during times of personal crisis, a death of a loved one, a loss of a job, whatever it takes to jar us enough to shatter what we call our Self and throw us out of orbit. The dharma looks for those gaps in time.

Learning to get along or be without the comfort and habit of the rut of constant entertainment is difficult for most, and when it happens it leaves us sort of treading water in ennui or boredom. We don’t like it and are not used to it.

Of all people, I should understand this because it was exactly this that resulted from my major stroke, the total loss of and the denial to access my usual entertainment, what I call my Self, which means

basically passing our time in a kind of cocoon-like state, busyness, entertainment, and in that biding our time until, what?

Well, there is no 'what' there, only the continued misdirection caused by busyness and endless entertainment as long as life lives. That's it.

As to what we should do instead of being entertained, the suggestion is the terrifying 'nothing at all', and for most of us that is a scary thought. Certainly, it does not help to be wrapped up in Samsara to the point of exclusion of any relief or enlightenment, the inner light of the mind. We have never seen that light, or so the pith dharma teachings tell us.

In fact, we don't know what to do unless we are totally involved, wrapped up and hidden in the continued entertainment of the present moment, the haunts and vantage point of Samsara. Samsara is our home and always has been.

I even wonder why writing like this, an exclusion or an exception, is even permitted? I feel this is possible because the insight of 'Insight Meditation' keeps the lights on, so to speak, at least just enough to tread water. I'm getting ahead of myself.

What is Samsara? Whatever it is, Samsara has us hook, line, and sinker as they say. And it's not that Samsara has us just by the little toe and we are free to peek out of its clutches. Not the case.

As my Tibetan dharma teacher of 36 years, a high Rinpoche, explained to me, we are the stragglers, the ones who in all the time there has been have never

been enlightened. And it's not like Plato's allegory of the cave, where we once were enlightened and have fallen away, and trying to get back to where we were. The Buddhists don't see it that way.

Or as with Original Sin, that we once were pure, but have fallen and need to redeem ourselves. As Rinpoche explained it, we have never known enlightenment and have forever been wrapped up in Samsara, apparently, for countless lifetimes, just as we are now. We know nothing else.

So, Samsara is not just for us a temporary sidebar, a way-stop, but it is all we have ever known of life. It holds us in its arms like a mother a child and we are totally into and of it.

My point here is that even our thoughts of enlightenment, dharma as we know it, are brought to us courtesy of Samsara, and bear Samsara's seal and stamp. It's tight as a tick.

And most striking of all, despite all our cries for freedom and enlightenment, apparently, we have zero interest in getting out of Samsara, whatever we can agree that is. Quite the opposite. We would bend over backward to make sure we are thoroughly ensconced, embedded, and snug as a bug in a rug, in Samsara.

I found this out the hard way, by having a major stroke, and being instantly stripped of all Samsaric cover, my fragile Self shattered like Humpty-Dumpty, and all I could think of was finding my way back into the depths of Samsara. I was totally exposed to the piercing white light of boredom, emptiness of

entertainment, and not knowing what to do with myself, because I no longer had a Self. Imagine!

And I don't mean by that this was for a day or part of a day, but for weeks I was denied and unable to get back into my regular entertainments, life as I remembered and was used to, and lose myself within life as Samsara. At heart, I didn't want out of Samsara, despite all my dharmic lip-service. Not even a little. It was devastating to wake up to reality, not the joy I had imagined. Against this we should all prepare.

It's unfortunate that you have to take my word and experience on this, and I understand why you can't or won't, because you have no idea of the situation we find ourselves in. Nada. I didn't either, until I did. Once opened, those eyes can't be closed.

Because of that, I know there is no way I can get through to you no matter how loud I call out. What can I do?

I can but keep on keeping on and I do. At the same time, considering my unusual insight and experience into this, I do my best to get my act together as well as I can and prepare to enter the bardos in the not-too-distant future. Yet, I have these thoughts:

Life as we know it in Samsara is not just something free and clear; nothing of the kind. This whole thing, this Samsaric life, is an illusion, like a dream we can't seem to wake from. And it has been going on for all recorded time, just like it is now, in this very moment.

Of course, we each have made the best of it, generation after generation. Regardless, we are stuck

in Samsara, up to our eyebrows. What can I recommend or suggest?

Probably not a lot and not be marked as crazy. Yet, for each of us the after-death bardos are quite real and sure to come, and it is my firm belief that each of us will at death be stripped of our Self and leave it behind us like happened at my stroke, everything of Samsara, and at that point, with clear insight and a very sensitive skin we will come face to face in the bardo with the brilliant light of the mind, the very same light that is with us right now, but that we are unable to look at it directly, and never have.

And the same is said to be true in the bardo after death, and the pith dharma texts say that we will be infinitely more sensitive (without Samsara) and terrified by that white light (lack of entertainment) and search for ways back to hide in the shadowy Samsara as we know it now, yet this will not be possible.

We will have to endure it. And in that state of fear, we will perhaps fall into a rebirth not of our own choosing.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



HUMPTY-DUMPTY SELF

August 16, 2023

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again."

The Self, our self, is just the current snapshot of our attachments, our likes and dislikes, so it is constantly changing. And if the Self is shattered or broken, like from an event like a death in the family, or whatever, it immediately sets about reanimating itself. So, even with a self-shattering event, nothing is lost, because the Self is NOT a being. Our current Self is like the leaves that fall in autumn from the trees; they disintegrate yet grow again the following spring.

In other words, what we call the Self is evergreen, because it is just the current result or state of our desires and attachments, the product or byproduct, and not in any way the root of those attachments. The Self is not alive.

The Self is the interface or means for the mind to function, our creation and servant, like a personal secretary, and not in any way an entity and certainly not our instructor or boss. We should not listen to our Self, even if we talk to our self.

In other words, the Self is like the green grass that gets mowed, but not the roots from which the grass grows, which our desires and cravings.

In other words, we are the ventriloquist, and the Self is our dummy, and not vice-versa.



MATRIX MAGAZINE AND MATRIX JOURNAL

August 17, 2023

Recently I was discussing the history of modern astrology with a couple of folks, and one of the repeated themes was what led to the series of Neo-Astrology Conferences that Matrix Software, my company, put on in 1989 and why have they turned out to be landmark events of a sort in the history of astrology.

There was something in the air at that time of progress, as if astrology was about to solve all its puzzles and roar ahead. This was especially so when it came to the promise of astrological research, as if we were about to blow away the sceptics with some demonstrable research that testified once and for all that astrology works.

Looking back, that seems more like a pipe dream, probably brought on by the advent of the computer in astrology and for a while all things seemed possible.

When I think back for some way to explain to those who were not there how it all went down, I remembered Matrix Magazine (circa 1978) and Matrix Journal (circa 1990). And when I looked at a couple copies of the magazine, sure enough, that's a perfect picture of what happened back then, who was involved, and when.

Matrix Magazine's first issue was in the winter of 1978, and home computers actually appeared in 1977 so things were just getting started. Actually, the

magazine kind of started before the first issue, in order to have something to put in that first issue.

And I realized that while I had the old issues around, that there was no way to share them with others, because they are long gone and out of print. So, I scanned all the issues, not a simple undertaking, being some 700 or so pages for the lot. And then they had to be arranged in book form so I could put them in PDF format. It took a few days.

And of course, I don't expect you to read them, at least all the computer code in them, which is old code at this point. Instead, if you just browse through them, you can get an idea as to how it was back then with us.

What you see is some of the brightest technical minds in astrology coming together and sharing in a magazine that was a harbinger of things to come. It was, in its way, a joyful time indeed. And while it perhaps did not solve all the problems in astrology, back then who knew that it wouldn't, because that was a heady time, like a new paradigm for astrology.

Yet, in Matrix Magazine and later in Matrix Journal, we can see that the mix was in; we all were sharing and celebrating a rebirth of astrology in this modern era. What's become of it all is another story.

After all, Matrix Software was the first astrological software company and the name Matrix was picked by me, not to reflect some mathematical term, but because it came from a Greek, and later a French word for womb, and I chose it because Matrix

Software was intended to be where astrology in this time could be reborn, and to some degree it did.

Some of the contributors to the magazine and journal included:

Michael Erlewine [Editor], Stephen Erlewine, James Neely, Theodor Landscheidt, Robert Knight, John VanZandt, Noel Tyle, Buz Overbeck, Lucy Titunik, Charles Hocking, Pat White, Robert Hand, Tim Smith, Malcolm Dean, Ian McKinnon, John McCormick, Charles A. Jayne, Steve Blake, Alexander Borg, Roger Elliot, Tom P. Santiago, Dwight William Johnson, Axel Harvey, Lee Wayne Hold, David B. Black, David W. Wilsom, Mark Pottenger, Alexander Borg, Fairbain & Wesenberg, Austin Levy, Doug Pierce, Larry Ely, Robert Schmidt, John Townley, Thabit B. Qurra, Vladimir Bogdanov, Tom Bridges.

Anyway, here are the 9 issues of Matrix Magazine, and the two issues of Matrix Journal, if you want a peek into the vortex out of which a main part of modern astrology arose.

MATRIX MAGAZINE ISSUES 1-4

https://assets.libsyn.com/show/59251/Matrix_Magazine_1-4.pdf

MATRIX MAGAZINE ISSUES 5-8

https://assets.libsyn.com/show/59251/Matrix_Magazine_5-8.pdf

MATRIX MAGAZINE ISSUE 9, AND MATRIX JOURNAL 1 & 2

https://assets.libsyn.com/.../59251/Matrix_Magazine_9-11.pdf

[Sorry about the color of the covers of the magazine, but back then there was little choice. LOL.]



RELAX, AS IT IS

August 17, 2023

My apologies, but the following is for the very few, because I doubt that it will interest many. LOL.

For months I have been trying to relax, mostly by settling in and watching some video series, often drifting off and sleeping through some portion of it, but not worrying about what I missed because I didn't care. I needed to relax.

One thing I was thinking about is what are the things I do that have to be done or are constructive each day, and what are the things where I am just doing nothing at all but trying to relax and take a load off, not always knowing just what that 'load' was at times. And what are the things I do because I just want to keep busy and don't know what to do with myself when I don't know what to do with myself, like being bored.

And it was THAT kind of busyness that I discovered when I had my major stroke, what I call busyness for busyness sake alone, or my needing some form of entertainment to keep me from facing into ennui straight on or its stepson boredom.

This has been a reoccurring syndrome for some years now, and increasingly so at that. And it's not easy to explain this even to myself, but here goes.

When I work, I tend to work hard, and it takes concentration. And a lot of concentration goes into my writing blogs like these and for me this writing is a form of meditation. I worked hard to make it that way and it took years.

And with the particular kind of Insight Meditation I do, what I write is by its very nature somewhat liberating, meaning I would rather do that with my time (write) than anything else. And so....

The long and the short of it is when I am writing (or doing photographing or whatever creative) I use with Insight Meditation), what do I do with the rest of my time? 'Not much' is the answer. I kind of rest up, relax, watch series video, or whatever seems relaxing. But that is getting tougher.

And so, there are these two distinct ways of spending my time, with Insight Meditation and without, and the line between them is marked. And I have kind of gotten into the habit of thinking the time with Insight Meditation is my favorite and the best of me, and as for the time of relaxing, I'm not so proud of, and it is something I have to do, and I do it a lot. I need to relax.

By "have to do it" I mean it takes me a lot of relaxing to get any relaxing at all, so to speak. And I've come to the conclusion (tentative, yes) that perhaps the Insight Meditation takes a lot out of me that I have to make up for with the relaxation. Yet, as I hinted, I question that 'relaxing' altogether.

What really relaxes me is the clarity and luminosity from the Insight Meditation, yet I have this Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hide syndrome that I have fallen into, where Insight Meditation is good and the efforts to relax, not so good, or at least not so successful. And it seems time not well spent.

And all this has kind of come to a climax of late, with more division or separation between the two 'sides' being obvious. On the video-watching side, after years of paying for Spectrum (previously Charter Communications) coaxial service, we have stopped watching (timed) cable channels a year or so ago, but still paying huge prices to have it.

My only excuse is that I was waiting for the explosion of streaming services to die down and hopefully some may be collected into larger services and then I subscribe to one of those. Yet obviously that is not happening much... yet. It's coming.

And as for my taste in movie entertainment, that has been morphing away from stories, movies with plots, and migrating toward documentaries and reality-based shows. This reached fever pitch when I decided to tear out our cable boxes and did just that, moving on to using streaming alone from here on out.

This precipitated some weeks of my trying to get rid of coaxial cabling and get Wi-Fi to work better in our house, and all things of that nature.

And finally, that has come together (or is coming together) and I have shrunk down the channels we need to a handful instead of hundreds we never watch. And here comes the surprise, and the point of writing this piece.

Surprise, surprise. Just as I am getting all this worked out, I had a little (a small) epiphany and decided perhaps I don't have to watch videos much if any at all. This was a surprise, since I just got the cable thing

finally all squared around so things are working throughout the house ever so nicely.

At the same time, in coincidence, I suddenly decided that I could just do my activities in a day, all day, that were meditation based, which for me means which are 'Insight Meditation' based, and this is actually a form of non-meditation, if that does not confuse you. Take the effort out of meditation and you have non-meditation.

And instead of resting up after a day of Insight Meditation, it seems I can get rest from within the Insight Meditation itself, and that my extensive relaxation in post meditations was wearing myself out. Go figure.

Instead, I will just rest in the moment, each moment, as best I can, and go from dawn to dusk just doing things... and.... see how that goes. And, so far, so good.

I'm not expecting that many (if any) of you are following this line of thought, but if you are, I'd like to hear your thoughts on this subject. And thanks!

This idea of all Insight Meditation, all the time, is not new for me, yet it was more of a hope than anything else. Of course, it is something I imagined as something I would like to do, yet I then realized that I alone was making the dividing line between the 'meditation' and the post-meditation (the rest of my day).

And just as things jig and jog, suddenly I just jogged and ended up being of just one nature rather than

two. The part of me that was trying to relax just got tired of doing so, and it became more of an effort than just working it along at the end of a day, if you get my drift here.

And so, I AM changing in a kind of big way. And I also have been considering how busy my teacher, Khenpo Rinpoche, was his whole life, always doing something. And I compared those kind of things to what I mentioned in the above,

To sum this up, my life up to this point, in particular my dharma practice life, has been divided in two, just as the texts say, between official dharma practice (usually sitting on the cushion) and what is called appropriately 'Post Meditation', everything else we do in a day. And I have strictly followed that two-part practice.

However, over the last few years the difference between the two has become less and less. I was watching it, but not worrying about it... much. Perhaps a little.

But in the last year, and especially recently, the blur between the two has become big-time. However, I strictly kept them separate, but I found that I was spending more and more time in post meditation just trying to relax. Yet that came to the point where I realized that relaxing wasn't relaxing. Not even. And I certainly tried to relax.

And then very recently this came to a head and I found it was more relaxing not to relax than it was to have two sides, the meditational and the relaxational.

Of course, I am trying this out, so who knows what time will have to say about this.

Yet, for right now I am essentially doing meditation or something like it, actually 'non-mediation' all the time. The relaxing I was trying to get off-the-cushion, so to speak, was less than I got when actively meditating. And so, I am now relaxing in the present moment as I go along. All in one.

And these days I am either tasking what has to be done or doing my dharma practice as just described effectively all the time. So far, so good. No more trying to relax at the end of the day.

I'm relaxing in the moment as I go along.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



MATRIX MENUS

August 18, 2023

Back in the salad days of Matrix Software and beyond, we had an incredible chef, who was also a poet, and a friend of the family. His name today is Martin Wolf and today he still cooks and teaches cooking classes, yet back then to us he was ‘Marty’, but oh could he cook, and we eat.

For years Martin made lunch for our crew, and it was free. However, every Friday night he would make an incredible meal to which any staff member was invited, and also various townspeople. After work, we would all gather.

And each week, my brother Tom Erlewine, who was our resident artist, photographer, and ad man, would make a menu for the next week, post it on the wall, and we would sign up for it or just show up.

Here are 128 of those menus. I’m sure some have been lost or disappeared, but from these you can get a good idea what it was like.

– Michael Erlewine, 2023

MATRIX MENUS

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../MATRIX%20MENUS%202023%20V2.pdf>











Tom & Sue & kids
 M & Ma and family
 Heidi & Nora & Nathaniel
 Katie & Marty
 Ficebearkin/Miketover
 M & K
 Jim & Bonnie and family

Daugh Bonnie
 TK



THE TIME IT TAKES TO TAKE ONE SIP OF TEA

August 19, 2023

Let's start with the nature of the mind and how we learn to sample it. This concept of taking brief moments, such as long as it takes to take a sip of tea, as opportunities to allow one to rest the mind in its natural state is very important.

And this is so because it is very difficult, at least in the beginning, to rest in the nature of the mind even for an instant. And so, instants are where we start with that.

And, non-meditation, by definition, is impossible to describe or put into words, although we try; resting in the mind's natural nature involves letting go at a profound level, and just allow our personal 'whatever' to come to rest.

It takes most of us a long time to even rest like that for an instant, much less for a longer time than that. Yet, there is a caveat which I will share.

While we may be able to naturally rest in the mind's nature for only a brief time, like an instant, there is nothing stopping us from doing that repeatedly and recursively.

While an instant only lasts that long, a long series of these brief instants strung together can last as long as we like. And, once learned, such a string of instants becomes second nature for us. That's how I learned and do it to this day.

Once we can rest for an instant and immerse ourselves in that instant, we experience what non-

dual meditation is all about and develop a taste for it. It actual is insight! And that taste or experience is key to learning this because then we know first-hand what non-dual meditation is about. Without it, we have no idea.

Then it remains for us to follow one instant of non-dual resting after another, until that string of instants effectively becomes seamless, a continuous stream of instants. And at the same time, we are experiencing non-dual meditation and becoming familiar with these resting excursions into the nature of the mind, going in, coming out, going in, coming out. And that 'familiarity' is what all the dharma textbooks and pith texts are talking about. Familiarity with our own mind and its nature.

It remains to talk about how we first get introduced to and become familiar with the nature of the mind. Apparently, that is not easy, or we all would have done it by now. And it seems we have not or at least are not aware that we have and don't know it.

Traditionally, in almost all the dharma instruction texts, recognizing the true nature of the mind is not something we do without the help of an authentic dharma instructor, someone who has achieved that recognition themselves, or has been taught how to initiate others in this.

I'm not saying it can't happen without an authentic teacher, but I have not seen or heard of it happening that way at least to ordinary people like ourselves. Never.

I would think that if we could learn to rest our mind in a brief instant as mentioned earlier, and repeat that seamlessly, that at some point this would bloom into what is called 'Recognition' in the Kagyu Lineage ('Kensho' in Rinzai Zen). Yet, as mentioned, I have never seen that happen or heard that it did. Of course, we can try. I found it much easier to seek out an authentic teacher and learn from them first-hand.

In my own case, I had what is called a Tsawi Lama or Root Guru, being the one dharma teacher who was kind enough to introduce me to the actual nature of the mind, although even then it took me a number of attempts in which I failed to recognize that nature, and I first had to be instructed in what I was doing wrong, followed by years of very precise practice before I fell into what is called 'Recognition' of the true nature of the mind.

Yet, through all of those decades, my dharma teacher was suggesting, even to beginners, that we practice resting in the nature of the mind for even a single moment, at the end of any session on the cushion. That advice is good.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



ASTRO*TALK NEWSLETTER

August 20, 2023

After Matrix Software was established, from 1983 through 1993, we created Astro*Talk, a non-technical newsletter for our customers. They liked it and it even won a 'Silver Award" from 'InfoWorld" newsletter columnist John Dvorak, not connected to astrology. Astro*Talk is filled with Matrix news, interviews of famous astrologers, conference reports, photos, and all kind of things. Here is a pretty complete run of the newsletter.

ASTRO*TALK NEWSLETTER

https://assets.libsyn.com/.../ASTROTALK_NEWSLETTER...

Astro*Talk Newsletter

Bimonthly Bulletin For The Matrix User's Group Volume Two, No 5 Nov/Dec '85



The advertisement features the word "Astrotalk" in a large, multi-colored font with a rainbow underline. Below it, a rainbow arches over the words "COLOR WHEELS" in a bold, black, blocky font. The background is a grid with several circular astrological charts (wheels) arranged in two rows. Each chart has a different color scheme and contains various astrological symbols and text. Two colored pencils, one blue and one yellow, are positioned around the charts. At the bottom, there is a small text box with the following text:

Announcing Matrix Color Wheels for IBM Blue*Star users with Houston Instruments 4-color plotters (models 595 or 695). The Color Wheels package includes a variety of chart wheels including those shown here. Also included are aspect grids and user-defined text placement capability. Available now! Price: \$100.

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by Michael Erlewine

THE AFTERMATH AND RINPOCHE'S ADVICE

Aust 21, 2023

Fortunately, or unfortunately, life presented me with something to think about. It was in the form of a major stroke. Not a TIA, but an actual stroke.

There I was, in the hospital, surrounded by doctors and orderlies in scrubs, and being whizzed around in wheelchairs and floated on gurneys, getting this or that scan or test. I didn't know what I was supposed to expect from a major stroke, and the reality was nothing like I imagined.

The "Awareness" of the mind, that which is aware of how we are or feel never changes. It just is what it is and so it was with my stroke, the same. In that sense, my mind was not confused by the stroke in the least. It was clear as a bell.

As mentioned, certainly my intrinsic awareness was crystal clear, far clearer than I can remember it having ever been. And this because all the bric-a-brack of what we call the 'Self', my likes, dislikes, attachments, entertainments, etc.) had been instantly stripped away by the stroke leaving me mentally and emotionally stark naked, yet clearer than I have ever been. I could never have imagined this.

There I was, surrounded by the din and busyness of the hospital, my body and person being handled this way and that, yet at the same time my mind had just been swept clean by the stroke. As mentioned, it couldn't be clearer. Almost everything that obscured the mind was just gone. The signal in my mind was all

clear. My Self had been shattered and the pieces just swept away.

And so, the problem, as it eventually became clear to me, was not lack of clarity, but rather lack of cover for my stark nakedness. It was as if I was standing out on a vast desert plain in the white-hot sun, with no shelter, no place to hide or rest in sight. I could not find the least shelter, no relief from the sudden shock of exposure to this blinding light.

Try as I might, I could not find my way back into whatever old samsaric haunts I had clothed myself in all these years, you know, my 'life'. Even my past and history, which I still sensed had to be somewhere back in there, was a place that I now could only vaguely piece together and remember, but not for me a place or shelter that I could now find, enter, or retreat into. And I had lost the path to access my habitual busyness and self-entertainment.

In short, I was desperately looking for cover, some relief from the overwhelming clarity and brightness of the mind I was experiencing, and I could not find it, try as I might. And you know I tried, because I was totally uncomfortable and out of my element. It was as if I was stark naked, so to speak, naked of my self, my attachments, and any familiar haunts or history. That was just gone, all of it. Vanished.

What I most desperately wanted was, as mentioned, some cover, a place to hide away from the brilliant white light of the Sun in the sky of my mind. I could not even turn toward that white light and look, but instead searched my mind for shadow, for cover,

some place I could hide and just get some relief. But, nada.

What was co-emergent with this white light was the realization that all my life up to now had been sheltered, clothed with attachments and entertainment from which I looked or peeked out from, and yet all that was now gone, and nowhere to be found.

To be repeat: what I would call my “Self” had been shattered by the stroke, and all my attachments, likes, dislikes, yearnings, whatever... Just gone. Nothing remained except this stark unforgiving light and uncomfortableness.

JUST GONE, leaving me naked somewhere in the midst of this blinding light, and all I could think about was seeking shelter, and there was none for me. All around me the hospital staff and my family carried on; they had no idea what I was experiencing.

And this went on not only for days, but for weeks, and to some degree for months. There was absolutely no mercy or respite, and all of this was taking place, as mentioned, while surrounded by hospital staff and family, who had no idea what I was going through. And I was speechless to inform them.

I thought that something like a stroke would perhaps leave me ‘sick’, in pain, confused, needing to recover. Well, I needed to recover, but mostly recover from this exposure to the brilliant white light, yet my mind and ‘The’ mind was not in any way unclear. It was too clear, too bright, unforgiving in its starkness, leaving me feeling exposed, and naked as a J-bird.

And the Self I had always known and been familiar with did not just snap back into place, so that there I was again, “Michael Erlewine.” Not at all; not even a little. I might as well have been nobody, that’s how empty of personality I was.

And I was left in that state from then on, without cover, and no way to quickly hide or recover. I had to just take it, hour by hour, day after day, and week by week. I endured.

And so that’s the predicament I found myself in. What remains to recount and discuss if you will, are any conclusions I have drawn from this and whether those ring a bell with any of you reading this.

When my wife Margaret drove 800 miles to see our dharma teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, and talked with him about my state, this is what Rinpoche said, as translated:

“Rinpoche said that a stroke can cause someone to lose their clarity of mind, but because Michael has had the experience of the recognition of the mind’s nature, and when you say the experience of the stroke wiped out his sense of his own identity, perhaps that is a good thing because that may be a step toward the actual realization of the nature of the mind.

Of course, Rinpoche’s advice meant a lot to me. And I will try to continue a bit more on this theme tomorrow, for those readers who are interested. I know that this concept is a lot to take in, but please bear with me.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LEAVING SAMSARA

August 22, 2023

This is a continuation of the preceding blog “THE AFTERMATH AND RINPOCHE’S ADVICE“, and this is hard to put into words, very hard, yet the whole idea is that it dawned on me through and after that stroke that my life, my entire life up to then, had to be all Samsara, where I was a victim to my own attachments, desires, hopes, and dreams. In other words, life as I knew it was not, as I thought, my life on one side and then there was Samsara on the other side. No. Life as we know it is Samsara, an obvious but new thought to me at the time. I never considered that Samsara was so encompassing, self-contained, and invasive. Of course, it is; it’s Samsara.

And the stroke wiped out all of the brick-a-brac, the entire total of my attachments, likes, dislikes, haunts, and familiarity, what we call the ‘Self’, leaving me naked of any cover whatsoever.

And that nakedness from the stroke was unendurable and gave me a hint how difficult it may be to escape Samsara, not just because of the difficulties, but also because we are totally attached to samsara and not about to leave it. We are habituated to Samsara; it’s our Samsara. It’s hard to see Samsara as an enemy, when you are devoted to it.

In addition to that ‘nothing’ (the loss of ‘self’) came a clarity I never knew until then. However, whatever previously obscured my mind was also gone. I was clean of all that, but there I was, like a big sore thumb in this blinding light, feeling totally exposed and at the

same time desperately looking for cover. I just wanted relief and to be comforted by being back in Samsara.

Everything I had known up to then, my history, home, family, friends, but also all my attachments, likes, dislikes, and especially my cover or constant busy entertainment was just gone, missing.

The takeaway for me from all this, which took a little time, was that all this cover, these constant entertainments, the comfort of busyness was what I called my life. Yet, that life was obviously Samsara and little else. I didn't know better.

In other words, all my entertainments and cover were not anything close to enlightenment, to 'light', but rather just the opposite; what I liked and was habituated to was everything that dimmed that light down to where I could stand or tolerate it. In short, I lived in my obscurations, and they were my cover, 24x7. And it's that observation that brought with it a deluge of thought. And chief among those thoughts was this one:

What if at death, like the legendary Tibetan Book of the Dead so clearly states, each of us will encounter a 'white light' as bright as the one I found at my stroke. After all, this life is also a bardo! However, according to the teachings, if I hide or run from that light, scurrying into the shadows to find comfort and cover, that alone will guarantee that I will be fumbling as I seek a rebirth and likely fall into an unwelcome birth. When terrified, it's any port in a storm.

The teachings say that the bright white light is our friend, the light of the mind itself, and if we are not

used to it and run from it, we are running from the very light we need to embrace. That's also true right now, this moment, that light is shining.

You can imagine where thoughts like this lead, down the rabbit hole of Samsara, and at the same time throwing my whole previous idea of life into relief, however not in an enlightening way, but just the reverse.

Until that time I had zero idea as to how much we are the children of Samsara, wrapped in its veils, and are loathe to leave its haunts and venture into the true light of the mind. We are children of shadows. Period. End of story.

As to what we want or can do about this remains to be seen. As far as I can tell, we have no intention of loosening the hold Samsara has on us. It's the only home we have ever known, and we are loathe to leave it. That's not what is generally taught about Samsara, that we love it. Yet I found that to be true, at least for me. I had a lot of lip service for freedom from Samara, but no way I would leave it.

After all, after my stroke, my every endeavor was trying to crawl back into the arms of Samsara and rest in those shadows. And I find that thought not encouraging. Yet, I feel obliged to continue an effort to draw attention to this experience that I had, and to find others to talk about it with. And what would that takeaway be?

In a nutshell, it would be that I (and I would guess many or most of you as well) are not anywhere near ready to tread the bardos and face that intense white

light that is written about in there, and I will end this with one more unsettling thought, if you will.

When I write about and describe that brilliant white light, it actually is not a physical light. That is only a good analogy. What in fact I found that light to be was simply my own aversion to not having my Samsaric cover to nestle and hide in. I turned away from that light totally and always have. I believe we all do right now. Please let that thought sink in.

And so, there was no light, no actual light like that. What I couldn't stand and turned away from with all my might was NOT being able to 'secret' myself (hide) in Samsara as I always had until then. The pain of not being happy and safe in the habitual cover of Samsara was what I refer to here as a white-hot brilliant light, something I could not stand to look directly at. Now that is a strong statement and should indicate how difficult is the road ahead.

In reality, like a hermit crab that has lost its shell, I could not stand to lose my way back into the arms of Samsara. And so, how can I ready my self for death and the bardos?

I have done what I can to share this with you. Of course, the first thing I did after I recovered enough was contact Rinpoche, my dharma teacher, and get his take on my stroke. I mentioned that yesterday but will offer a little more today of what Rinpoche said. Here are his words as translated:

“Rinpoche said that a stroke can cause someone to lose their clarity of mind, but because Michael has had the experience of the recognition of the mind's

nature, when you say the experience of the stroke wiped out his sense of his own identity, perhaps that is a good thing because that may be a step toward the actual realization of the nature of the mind.”

“It will be best if Michael can continue to meditate in a way where there are no thoughts of any kind and rest his mind in that. And so, Rinpoche’s advice for Michael is that it is best if he stays alone, and not socialize with many people, talk too much, and try to do his meditation as much as he can.”

“Rinpoche says Michael has already recognized the nature of his mind, and it was a good recognition, not a shallow one. And so, if he can maintain that and enhance that. Rinpoche does not know if he has attained realization because there is a huge difference between Recognition and Realization, but to foster that recognition it is important to always try to rest his mind in its own natural state.”

“And even when he is taking a sip of tea or things like that, from moment to moment, there are moments when he can actually make use of them [moments] and rest his mind, and so, train in this way.”

That’s my story. Feedback is welcome.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



TELECASTER MAESTROS: REDD VOLKAERT AND ANN ARBOR'S BILL KIRCHEN

August 22, 2023

I hope all readers know Bill Kirchen from his days with Ann Arbor's "Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen" band. And this is the second time I have seen Redd Volkaert alive on stage. I saw the both of them together a couple years ago.

What can I say. As founder of the All-Music Guide, the largest music database on the planet, I have had a chance to hear a lot of music. My personal music CD collection, which I no longer own, is housed at Michigan State University, and numbers something like 800,000 CDs. And no, I have not listened to them all. I no longer even own them, but I still have some 9,000 CDs around the house that I have culled from the lot.

What I am trying to say here is that I have heard a lot of the world's great guitarists, and Redd Volkaert is right up there at the top with the very best. He is astounding! Of course, Bill Kirchen is a monster on the guitar. We all know that.

As mentioned, Volkaert was appearing with Bill Kirchen, an old friend and fellow Ann Arbor Townie, formerly with the "Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen" band.

The two of them, Redd Volkaert and Bill Kirchen both play the solid-body 'Fender Telecaster' and these two play off of one another, on dueling Telecasters, with Redd Volkaert also doing country swing and old

country tunes and Bill Kirchen doing his trademark “Dieselbilly,” truck-driving songs.

It was great to see Kirchen again and catch up a bit on the past and the present. Kirchen and Volkaert played a 2-1/2 hour set thanks to Bryan Galloup and his ‘Galloup School of Lutherie’, who was putting on his Northwoods Seminar. Galloup is an old friend and Margaret and I were lucky enough to get invited to hear the Kirchen and Volkaert set.

Margaret and I sat in the front row, with Margaret sitting in Redd’s chair when he was playing, and me the next chair over. We arrived early and sat around with Redd and Kirchen just talking.

I believe most long-term Ann Arborites know Kirchen’s music, so I am going to concentrate a bit on Redd’s playing, and all I can say is “Wow!” what a guitar player!

Volkaert was country-artist Merle Haggard’s lead guitarist for many years (I saw them live at our local country fairground decades ago) and Volkaert also spent twenty years playing and being featured in clubs in Austin, Texas where he lived.

In 2020, Volkaert moved from Austin to the town of Galax in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains where he lives with his wife. He talked about the quiet of the town and the ability to see the stars at night. Things like that. Yet, it seems he is in such demand that he flies all over the world much of the year.

As for music, Redd Volkaert is phenomenal, totally able to telecaster-dual with Kirchen, lick by lick, while

all the time playing as smooth as silk, somehow placing the tune, floating it, in the middle of a torrent of impossible fast playing.

And Volkaert is a fine singer, obviously having learned some of that from Merle Haggard. His deep voice cuts through the guitar sound and is just crystal clear. I've never heard anything like it. And yes, he can play impossibly fast and accurately, which is something by itself, but that alone is not what does it for me.

Redd Volkaert is at the same time always lucid and melodic and, as mentioned, he somehow manages to float the melody on top of it all, inset the melody, and embed it right on top of the mix, and the effect is deeply relaxing. It's a sign of decades of practice and a natural talent like I have seldom seen.

In addition, Volkaert is a gentleman and kind. When I left, Volkaert gave me a set of his CDs, and I will try to get the ones not already in the All-Music Guide (my old company) into it.

Anyway, a wonderful night with Redd Vokaert and Bill Kirchen, two of the nicest guys in the music world.

Here is a taste of Redd Volkaert singing "Swinging Doors."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3TP1NrBw0>

[Cellphone photos by me.]





SAMSARA: ESCAPE VELOCITY

August 23, 2023

The so-called ‘White Light’ of the nature of the mind is not difficult to find because it’s right there in front of us, if we just relax, don’t squint our eyes and frown, but just let our eyes pop open. And rest in that moment or learn to. I wish it was that easy.

However, don’t expect to find a brilliant light as in the dharma texts; that’s just an analogy. Instead, look for something you want to avoid, like boredom or ennui, something you have always tried to stay away from and study that. That is the key.

The brilliant white light of bardo legend is something that is said to appear to us not long after we enter the bardo. The sacred texts say that how we respond to this light makes a huge difference. If we can endure the light, embrace it, it is said to lead to our either being in a Buddha realm or at least selecting a more auspicious rebirth; however, if we run from it and hide from it, it is said we lose that ability to choose a rebirth and tend to succumb to an “any port in a storm’ mentality and rush into the first womb and rebirth we can find, one not necessarily auspicious for us.

Hyper consciousness or high awareness for many of us is not something we know how to endure.

And my point is that this harsh bright white ‘light’ is something we each are going to encounter, and it is my experience that this same ‘light’ is with us right here and now, but we avoid it. We have never seen it because we are habituated to ignoring it at any cost.

Right now, all of us totally ignore the light which is said to be shining in the depth of our own mind.

Think of it this way. Everything that “is” we already have here anyway, but just are not aware of it, Samsara, Nirvana, the true nature of the mind, the white light, everything. So, it is not a stretch to understand that we ignore or are not aware of everything except what we are aware of. And ‘Awareness’ is what the dharma is all about, our becoming increasingly aware.

The problem is that we associate ‘awareness’ with something we actually want, and which will be easy to take, but that’s not the way it is for most of us. And this is because we have already spent a lifetime(s) steadfastly ignoring that light because it is too harsh for us to endure without training and getting used to it. Therefore, we have never seen it, much like we are programmed NOT to look at the Sun directly, only much, much more insidious.

In other words, this so-called ‘light’ only seems like a harsh bright white-light because we turn away from it and we are (and have always been) turned away and not used to it. We don’t know anything else. In other words, we don’t see the light.

And to be clear, again, it’s not really a ‘light’ at all but rather this image of a ‘fierce’ light is only a substitute term for what prevents us from secreting ourselves (finding cover) back in the folds and habits of Samsara. Our eyes are too weak to stand the light, so to speak, and so the ‘light’ actually is the pain we feel from being suddenly uncovered and vulnerable when

exposed to it. That light is too bright for us unless we consciously get used to it here and now while we live. We have to train in it, and we haven't.

In other words, the so-called 'light' in the bardo is not an actual physical light either, but rather our inability to look directly at the nature of the mind as it is, because it is too difficult to take in and relax with it. Our ability to endure the 'light' depends on what we come into the bardo with, what we have practiced and prepared for.

It seems that we are so sensitive to true reality (the 'light') that we are easily burned by the least nod or glance toward it. In that sense, we are creatures of the dark or dim and don't even know it. To us our light blindness is normal. Ignorance of the 'light' is a huge obstacle to enlightenment and this by definition.

And the point here is that although we cry and strive toward freedom from Samsara and wish Nirvana upon ourselves, in truth we know nothing (or very little) about either Nirvana or our present situation of being embedded here in Samsara. This is, at least as I see it, the problem and a big one at that.

If we have to go from our habitual embedded state here in Samsara and turn all the way around, a full 180 degrees, to face what has to be Nirvana, an enlightened view, and facing that bright light of our nakedness, may be a big ask considering the samsaric state we are in.

And my question is, how can we do that (learn to look into the light) when we have no idea of what is involved and have not even really started on this turn-

around-and-look journey yet? And even harder to accept, is that Samsara is a like a movie that we are projecting, an illusion comprised of our own attachments and reification, and even more to the point, we have no intention of leaving Samsara or giving up our attachments, etc. I found this to be true for me. It would be just too painful.

This is what worries me, both for myself and for others.

Of course, we can talk about Samsara and its rigors, yet it seems to me that we have virtually no idea how strong Samsara is, and what will be required of us to escape its grasp.

IMO, serious, we are not, and this is because the magnitude of the problem has yet to even dawn on us, and any understanding as to what we can do about it, much less actually doing it.

And equally interesting (or frightening) is what life without Samsara or outside of Samsara is like. And to get there, it would be turning ourselves inside out like the geometrical form of a torus.

And so, here I am, working through all this, and I can't seem to get a witness, not that it matters. I understand what I understand, and it troubles me, and of course I feel it should trouble you as well. When Rinpoche says things like:

“When you say the experience of the stroke wiped out Michael’s sense of his own identity, perhaps that is a good thing because that may be a step toward the actual realization of the nature of the mind.”

What does that suggest if not what I'm pointing at here?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



QUICK UPDATE ON THE TORNADO

August 27, 2023

SAID TO BE THE 7TH LARGEST TORNADO ON RECORD FOR MICHIGAN

“The Williamston-Webberville tornado was rated a mid-range EF-2 with 125 mph winds the width of 5 football fields.

The highway between Williamston and Webberville is severely damaged”, said the country sheriff.

“Wrigglesworth went on to say most of the billboards and street signs are gone.

“Crews are currently working on cleaning up the freeways and roads that are littered with trees, downed power lines, and vehicles and semis that were left on the side of the road.

“Sheriff Wrigglesworth said it may take weeks or months to determine the total amount of damage, but until then, he wants people to stay off of affected roads and freeways.

“Westbound I-96 will stay closed for the foreseeable future until all semis and other debris are cleared. I was just notified that we may have to close eastbound again for a period of time to fix a power line that was destroyed during the tornado. If at all possible, stay away from the I-96 and M-52 intersection until further notice.” says Wrigglesworth.

“The sheriff also provided an update on the death of a man found in his car amongst the storm debris on I-96 in the stretch from Williamston to Webberville.]

We remember having to drive around, off I-96, that semi that was diagonal across the road.

[Photos by Kyle Gillett]





STRUCK DUMB

August 27, 2023

Margaret and I are still recovering from our experience on I-96 between Williamston and Webberville. And I might as well mix some tornado effects with the dharma, for those interested.

What's funny is that, when I check my mind for a thread of interest and to then write about it, I come up empty. No thread and no interest, at least just now. Empty.

Of course, I have seen this before, whenever a sudden shock upsets my apple cart and leaves me visionless. The dharma teachings and my particular dharma teacher always taught that any kind of sudden shock like this, when the Self is shattered or shuts down, is a key time for us to look at the nature of the mind. And this is because the Self (or whatever you want to call it) can be in pieces and light shines through.

It does not have to be a large event like our brush with the tornado. It could be any sudden sound or shock that throws you off the track you are on, like a car honking, a phone ringing, or anything that takes you by total surprise. And, in that moment of surprise or shock, just look at the nature of your own mind. The Self can't control everything when upset, so look at your mind.

Of course, with a larger shock, like the death of a loved one or any untoward event; that's the time to take stock and become more familiar with how the

mind works, when our busy Self is taken by surprise and loses its control over us, however momentarily.

There is little or at least less obstruction with the Self gone or severely dampened. The close call with the tornado was one of those larger shocks, so here I am, right now, without a thread, treading water, until my perpetual Self, like Humpty-Dumpty, can manage to reanimate and put itself back together again. I welcome the gap. No thought and no thinking.

And I'm doing my best to take note of this vacant time and just rest in it. It's been like that since last night. And as mentioned, it's like I have been struck dumb. And you know I am usually talkative.

And so, I am resting in the vacancy caused by the shock of just barely avoiding the tornado. And this is because I have no choice; that's what I have going on.

There are many shocks in our life, some small, some larger. These times are when our Self vacates or shuts down and a gap appears in our mindstream. Seize that time to look around and rest in that gap. Make use of the gap while you have the opportunity to become more familiar with the mind without the chaperone of the Self.

The gap will soon close, and the Self will take over again.

In my case, the shock was not just from avoiding the tornado, but later, realizing that the tornado, which had been tracking on I-96 because it was smooth and straight like a bowling alley, after 1.5 miles the

tornado somehow jogged off I-96 and went just south of the expressway, and we were dead-smack in front of that tornado on that expressway and would have been directly in its way, and with no place to escape too. That realization deepened the shock.

And so, I am monitoring that shock and not finding an interest in what I normally write about. So, I go with the flow. And I know that gap will close in a day or so and my normal interests will reappear, stick out their heads, and this opportunity to look at the nature of the mind without much Self will be gone.

Right now, nothing interests me. Or another way to put this is that I'm not interested in anything except nothing. 'Nothing' is enough all by itself. And in that hiatus, that gap away from the Self's urgent care, there I am or there it is. Get to know and become familiar with the nature of the mind and how it works without the overshadowing of the Self because some day that Self will be gone for good. What then? How will we fare?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



SHARING EXPERIENCE

August 28, 2023

Uncoiling the snake, straightening out the lines of language, releasing the kinks, unpacking those enfolded and secreted syllables that bring life to the words, the crush of consonants and the howl of vowels.

To me, this is the essence of Absolute Bodhicitta, an unflinching desire to relentlessly share the dharma with all comers. IMO, this is the blessing of Khenpo Gangshar Wangpo.

It's not enough to just recite the outer words of the texts. Those words have to be greased with the experience of an authentic practitioner, and that would be you, and with sharing the truth and authenticity of our own personal experience and practice. Something is always sacrificed if we want to turn the wheel of the dharma ourselves. There is no other way I am aware of.

Giving of ourselves brings a continuous rain of blessing on others. It is our legacy if nothing else. I offer this poem:

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.]



THE SCARLET LETTER

August 29, 2023

Let's look at this:

Ego (the me, myself, and I) in us is not something rare or unusual. It's the usual, and it should not be either hidden or promoted; just be clear about it and take note of that. There it is in each of us, is it not?

And for most the Ego is vital, fat like a tick, and we ride it like the stallion of a Self that it is, at least until we learn to use its energy and it then dies down and merges into nothing important.

The heart of Samsara, the so-called Ego, might just as well be worn on our sleeve, instead of hidden away in shame by society. There is no shame, except perhaps in our own mind.

I'm not saying flaunt it. Just don't hide it. Own it. And by all means use it; it's using you. First, become aware of it, and that is hard.

The Ego is our mistake, one obviously we are not aware of, although we can easily see the Ego in others. Otherwise, we wouldn't do it like we do. Although not a pretty sight to others, we persist with our Ego until we wise up and discard it. It's clear that I am not afraid to take my current Self along for the ride. That's my problem and should be understandable to you who can easily see where I am puffed up and out of line.

Yet, the Ego contains a treasure, all that energy and attention we have locked up in it, the very fuel we may need to gain freedom from it. Such a treasure house

of energy, the Ego holds so much of our focus. We can, however, deconstruct it, deflate it, and suck it dry of energy.

We all know that the Ego is the door that leads to Samsara in the first place and the karma it creates keeps us there, so consider that the same front door can also be the exit. There may be no back door. The Ego will be there until we face it and deconstruct it. It's nothing to be ashamed of. As mentioned, it is common to all of us. It's just not flattering, but flattering is usually part of Ego-clinging..

And it is axiomatic that we can't see our own Ego, but others can see ours. As a Vajrayana dharma student, we are taught to look directly at our problems, so look right at Ego, if you can.

My own view and approach to my Self or Ego is to give it some slack, some space. Don't hide the Ego, but rather treat the Self/Ego like an old cow or bull, put it out to pasture, and give it some hay and sunshine, enough to make it happy, until it naturally wears itself out and is no longer seen as a real problem. Have a little kindness with your Self.

Trying to throttle ourselves, hide, or punish our Self will never work. It just makes the Self stronger. Kindness is required. Treat your Self like you would treat another person, with the same compassion and kindness you might treat a friend, albeit perhaps in this case also with a grain of salt. That way, the Ego will get old, wither, and naturally dry up.

And remember, as mentioned: in general we don't see our own Ego; others do.

When the Mahasiddha Khenpo Gangshar was asked to explain what Ego-clinging and Selfishness is by some practitioners who thought they had mastered Ego, he replied:

“Do you feel really, really good when good things and popularity come to you, and feel bad when undesirable things happen to you, or you hear a bad word about yourself, or get a dirty look from someone, and are your feelings hurt by it... that is Ego-clinging.”

There is something in that reply for most of us I would guess.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE HEART SUTRA

August 30, 2023

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha

“Gone, Gone, Gone Beyond, Gone Beyond Going, Oh
What an Awakening!”

Like the above, some of these topics that I find myself writing about are difficult, subtle, and hard for me to put into words. Take, for example, the basic ground of awareness within our mind that allows you to read this page.

What’s important in this is what is called “Rigpa,” yet here I am not talking about ‘realizing’ Rigpa, but rather just recognizing that kind of awareness. There is a huge difference. Buddha realized Rigpa, while you and I are probably only recognizing it, if that.

Recognizing Rigpa, means recognizing that clarity of direct awareness that is always present as a ground in the mind. As mentioned, it allows us to read these words.

When I had my major stroke and everything was stripped away that I knew, Self, Ego, the cover of Samsara, etc., what remained was Rigpa, the vivid awareness of mind that is there and always aware. I had no choice but to recognize it and it was painful to say the least.

I can only share what I know from experience and nothing more. As Siddha Chögyam Trungpa put it, “Your guess is as good as mine.”

And so, we have the awareness of the mind's nature, the nature of the mind, basic awareness. And in my experience, the only way I can experience that is to plunge or be immersed in the mind's nature and then, at the same time, also be somehow aware of it. And both at once or at least sequenced so rapidly that it is or seems continuous.

The Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche repeatedly pointed out that our resting in the nature of the mind could be brief, perhaps as long as it takes to raise a cup of tea and take a sip. We may be unable to sustain anything longer. Yet, with a little practice, we can sustain this by a sequence of these moments repeated.

I first experienced this awareness while crawling around on my belly in the wet morning grass just as the sun came up. I was holding a camera and looking through an exceptional lens at plants and small critters, when instead of continuing to see the object at the end of my lens, I suddenly became immersed in the whole process of the 'Seeing' itself seeing, all as one. I was totally immersed. This experience is beyond words and description. Anyway, that was the beginning. From there and over time it became extended and expanded.

It too was only an instant, or a short time, yet that instant could be repeated, recursively, and over time (months and years) I learned to extend and expand that instant, not by somehow stretching it, but rather by repeating it sequentially, moment after moment after moment, until those instants became a seamless stream of insight.

I was neither totally immersed nor totally not immersed; I was both at once and neither exclusively – non-dual.

It was more like an old celluloid movie, frame by frame, I was immersed and also had Rigpa (awareness) in the same instant, or the experience was fast-enough changing that it was effectively constant.

There may be other methods, but none that I personally have experienced, so please enlighten me to other approaches, not conceptually, but experientially. Conceptuality is easy; experientially, not so much.

We can't be in and not come out or out without an in. They effectively are connate, meaning they arise together or close enough together to be seamless.

Notice how ice crystals, salt crystals, sugar crystals form from the inside out and not from the outside in. The crystal is surrounded by the solution in which they grow.

Awareness is just the ultimate solution, and it is awareness of everything that is objectified, everything that forms within the awareness. Like a dream or illusion. Of course, I had to write a poem about it.

IN OR OUT

In is not within the out,

And out without the in.

No,

In is without the out,
And out within the in.

And another poem:

EMPTINESS

It's not just that appearances that arise are empty,
It's that appearances are the emptiness arising.

Note: In other words, just like a crystal forms, an
object that forms from the inside out.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOW

August 30, 2023

One of the obvious questions is how do prepare for the bardos after death? What can we do now to familiarize ourselves with what we will see in the bardos?

Of course, I did not have an accurate idea what the bardos after death will present us with. Like many of us, I just thought I will deal with this when I have to, after death, and I will be as ready as I am. Why worry? Perhaps I can tell you why.

I had my training through a major stroke, and having my Self, feelings, entertainment, comfort, everything stripped away from me and for a long time too, and experiencing the brilliance of being naked in the glaring light like that and unable to do anything about it. And the brilliance of what we can call the White Light was more than I could endure, because I was used to the sunglasses or sunshade of Samsara to protect me. There suddenly was no protection, no shield. None. And it hurt, big time. I couldn't stand it yet had no choice.

And of course, later I scoured the Tibetan references to what happens in the bardo and also sought the council of Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, the Tibetan Rinpoche I worked with for 36 years, and got his comments on my situation.

And this is what Rinpoche said in a teaching:

“The fourth thing to be brought to or carried on the path is the bardo, the interval between lives, and the

reason why we need to prepare for this as Chagme Rinpoche wrote, it's terrifying because you are disembodied, because you are in a mental body, you experience extremely intense sounds and extremely brilliant light and rays of light. For example, Chagme Rinpoche wrote 'The sounds you hear in the bardo are like the sound of two mountains smacking against one another, 1000 thunderclaps at once, and the light, brilliant lights you see are as bright as a billion Suns.'"

And then this is what Rinpoche said about my particular stroke:

"Rinpoche said that a stroke can cause someone to lose their clarity of mind, but because Michael has had the experience of the recognition of the mind's nature, when you say the experience of the stroke wiped out his sense of his own identity, perhaps that is a good thing because that may be a step toward the actual realization of the nature of the mind."

Well, those comments got my attention, especially because that was almost exactly what I experienced in my major stroke, at least the bright-light part of it, and it was terrifying.

And so, that is why I share my story with those of you interested. We may not understand well enough what will happen to us in the bardos and want to do what we can to prepare for it. Where do we start?

For one, we don't start with business as usual, meaning our constant busyness and continuing entertainment of ourselves. Instead, we need to sample just the opposite, the parts of our life we don't like or turn away from, like boredom and whatever we

don't like. Apparently, and according to the dharma teachings, this turning away from the light of the mind is what we have done throughout our history in Samsara which is just that, being 180-degrees turned away from what we can call the mind's light. We have never seen it. Not ever, yet in the bardo, suddenly we will and full-bore at that.

Well, I have seen something like it, and I could not close my eyes or turn my head away, and it hurt like hell to look at it or even in its direction. And I am certain that the bardos will be the same as what my dharma teacher pointed out "the light, brilliant lights you see are as bright as a billion Suns." Wha?

And in my full stroke, what I saw was not a billion suns, yet note this: what we are calling a 'White Light' is not actually a light, but rather the very intense pain of not being shielded and wrapped in the shadows of Samsara which we are used to, being stark naked like that. We are suddenly fully exposed, and the bright light is totally harsh and unforgiving.

And so, as a dharma friend said to me recently, regarding my concern with the bardo experience:

"Is it possible that by thinking of it as a big deal that makes it a big deal?"

I'm sorry folks but whistling in the dark is not going to protect us when we enter the bardo. I'll go with what my rinpoche said and I quoted it above. It is indeed a big deal, and not saying so will not change it one iota, IMO.

And no, we can't stop practicing dharma and just panic about the bardo experience that faces us all. I'm not suggesting that. At the same time, I'll go with the very clear dharma texts and tradition of warning us about what is coming after death.

Of course, feel free to "wait and see," but don't imagine that will be of much help when that time in the bardo comes our way. It will happen too quickly. It would help to be prepared. If any of you want more suggestions about what we can do, say so here and I will share some possibilities.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



PREPARING TO FACE THE BARDO

August 31, 2023

[This is a long one, so probably for the very few, and some of you asked for it. And if you're up to it, let's discuss all this. These are just suggestions. I am learning as I go, as we all are.]

How do we prepare for the bardos after death? Actually, there are six bardos, and this life now is one of them.

Kyenay bardo: The first bardo of birth and life. This is the bardo of our current life, the state of living and experiencing the physical world, and starts from the first breath until the last breath.

Milam bardo: The second bardo of the dream state. This bardo refers to the experiences we have during dreaming. It's considered a bardo because it involves a transitional state between different experiences.

Samten bardo: The third bardo of meditation. This bardo is experienced by meditators. The key practice here is to meditate with clarity and an unwavering mind.

Chikhai bardo: The fourth bardo of the moment of death. This is the bardo of the actual process of dying and the dissolution of the elements of the body.

Chönyi Bardo: The fifth bardo of dying. This bardo commences after the final 'inner breath' and involves the experience of the luminosity of reality, often symbolized by a brilliant white light. It is considered a pivotal moment after death where one's true nature is revealed.

Sidpa Bardo: the bardo of becoming or transmigration. This is the bardo of rebirth, where consciousness takes on a new physical form determined by the karmic seeds from the Alayavijnana (storehouse consciousness) and begins a new life.

In this discussion, we are concerned with the fifth bardo, the Chönyi Bardo, and the experience of luminosity, the brilliant white light of reality.

Well, we have to start somewhere and about all we know is that we can't continue with exactly what we have been doing up until now, because we do know that we have NOT seen that brilliant white-light the bardo teachings speak of in this life.

And the dharma texts say that bright light is right here with us now as well, only veiled from us by Samsara and our body of flesh, and that somehow, we habitually avoid or ignore it. In fact, Samsara by definition is avoidance.

Even if we are a dharma practitioner, and some of us are, that's no insurance that we know how to prepare for the lights and sounds in the bardo. All I can tell you is what I have done about this and some bits of information I have come across in the pith dharma teachings that I can share.

Of course, after my major stroke experience I had a lot to think about, and all at once too. All I knew was that I had to do something because that experience was no joke but totally eye-opening. My eyes were open, and I could not close them. It is still clear as day to me.

The only main authority I found was my own dharma teacher of 36 years training with him, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, and he explained to me that he had had a number of small strokes himself, what are called TIAs (transient ischemic attack), mini strokes. He was, indeed, very helpful, however I as yet did not have a plan. This took time.

What I was able to put together was that my stroke was like a huge gap in my life, a window I never knew existed, and suddenly one I was forced to gaze out of, like it or not. It did not come easily. That unforgiving white light, so to speak, was blinding and always right there. I couldn't bear to look at it. I suffered big time and for weeks.

One thing I remember is that through all of the Mahamudra training that I had, some 31 years of 10-day intensives on Mahamudra, plus my own practice, Rinpoche had always pointed out to us that any strong shock to the system, everything from a phone ringing that startles, to the shock of losing a loved one, a gap is (or can be) opened into which we can (if we seize the time) rest (even for a moment) from the onslaught of the Samsaric winds of time.

And in that moment (or days), during the shock, is an excellent (perhaps the best) time to look at the nature of the mind. Of course, I had heard that for years from Rinpoche, but never had much call to look into it, and did not take the time to study or seek it out and learn about these moments of shock, large and small. So that is the ground where I started.

A similarity that arose and struck me, other than the shock and gap that the stroke brought (and my reaction of terror, fear, and avoidance at the emptiness of it) is what we can call common boredom. Boredom is what I felt when I could not get back into my Self or my entertainments.

I did not like to be bored and, in fact, was somewhat of an expert at avoiding boredom and I did this by my endless interests and keeping myself busy all the time, 24x7. I am a prodigious worker and always prized that quality in myself. My interests were sacrosanct, and I followed them. It took me that long to realize that my interest in my interests was also confining, something I never before thought of.

However, after all of this gap talk, I began to question my own constant busyness and also, aside from getting a lot accomplished, my tendency to keep myself constantly entertained, and when I was not working, I was entertaining myself with movies, books, and what-not. My constant entertainments had an air-tight grip on me. Nary a gap.

And so, one thing I did after the stroke was seek out what bored me, the times when I found myself at loose ends and bored. Also, the same with ennui. At first, I tried to note those times when I could and instead of immediately filling them with my busyness or immediately turning away from boredom, instead I began to spend time with boredom, actually resting in the boredom itself. After all, what is it that's so bad about it? I wanted to know.

Well, of course this was very uncomfortable, as boredom always for me, was no fun. And, in general, I sought out not just what was boring but anything else in life that I avoided like the plague and didn't like. I would go there and do that, trying to become more familiar with it. It was very awkward. There had to be a secret in boredom that made me avoid it.

And after a while, I concluded that these boring moments that I steadfastly avoided and turned away from, were some kinds of doors or windows into the same type of terrifying gap that I experienced in my stroke and that I desperately tried to escape from, but was unable.

And after the stroke, it took days, weeks, and months to restore the ambiance and comfort I had in my entertainments and busyness before the stroke. What I call my 'Self' took quite some time to reanimate and to fill in the gaps the stroke caused. It was like the tide of the Self slowly came back in, immersing me with its numbness.

And it was during that quite long time, while everything comfortable was being restored, that I had, at least for me, an unprecedented opportunity to stare into the gap and at least try to get used to it, as uncomfortable as it made me. The bright light of the stroke only gradually receded, as the Self covered it over, layer by layer.

In fact, what I was doing was finding that these points of boredom were like closed and sealed windows that never had been opened, and that in time could, with some effort and care on my part, be opened to let the

breeze of space flow in and through them. Yet, oddly enough, this was facilitated by energizing those areas of my life I had always intentionally avoided, like boredom and what I did not like. I was inverting the system as best I could, trying to turn it around.

Looking back now, I believe the key to all this was not boredom, but rather the act of resting in it. It was just like in dharma training, where we learn to rest for a moment in the nature of the mind, even for an instant. Learning to rest and resting is key, although at first I could not see this.

And I was resting in these void spots, this boredom, or the things and places I didn't like and most avoided. I can't say this was immediately all that enlightening, however it WAS 'lightening' the load of what I can only call Samsara, and that was a step toward enlightenment in general. Ultimately, Samsara has to be deconstructed. It obstructs the nature of the mind from view.

The net result of all this was unplugging these blind spots, these gaps of boredom, and starting to ventilate the stuffiness and cocoon of my life of busyness. I was letting some light in, but here I have to be very careful to describe the process carefully lest you get the wrong idea or impression.

I was intentionally resting in boredom, in places and space that had always made me uncomfortable, situations that up to then I had avoided at almost any cost. And this went on for some time. It has been almost five years since my stroke and I am still

processing these blind spots, this boredom. And now, here comes the hard part to find words for.

These boring spots in life had nothing to offer me by way of entertainment. They were more voids, lacunas, gaps in my general entertainment, and before the stroke I had kept myself entertained just about all the time. These gaps were uncomfortable, but also somewhat bracing, like clean air coming in through a window.

However, as mentioned, resting in these boring gaps, I had few expectations and certainly nothing to noodle on or think about. So, I was just resting in these gaps, these moments of nothingness, so to speak, and not exactly enjoying them either. And there then was this effect that I will relate.

As I look back on these last years, it is this resting that stands out, not whether it is resting in the gaps or any other place I could rest my mind. And I was unaware of this until recently. I did not know that my forays into enduring ennui and boredom involved my trying to rest in the gap that boredom, for instance, offers. A gap into what?

And much of this was kind of, well, boring. I see now, quite a bit later, that's not it, not what was really happening. It was not about boredom, but about the 'resting'.

Actually, kind of unknown to me at the time, I was resting not so much in 'boredom' but resting in awareness itself of the boredom. I was mentally focused and fidgeting on the boredom, but it was the resting that was taking place that was important.

Resting in awareness is not the same as trying to find out about boredom, but something quite different. Now here comes the part where I am still trying to understand this myself, which I may not be able to communicate with you or to anyone, including me.

It turns out that I did have expectations when I attempted to rest in my boredom, expectations as to what I might find, and like all expectations, they are obscurations that block actual clarity. It was the great Mahasiddha Tilopa who said, "Don't Invite the Future," meaning don't get caught up in expectations or speculation, because they are obstructive, obstacles to clarity.

Well, when I stopped expecting, let that go, which had been like frowning and narrowing my focus, and instead of that just relaxed, the boringness and my expectations just vanished, and it was what was behind there, behind my expectations all along that became obvious or visible.

And, as mentioned, it was this 'resting' that resulted in just thoughtless clarity, and perhaps this is the same or similar to Rigpa, the natural ground and clarity of the mind itself. I'm not an expert.

To repeat, it seemed I was now just resting (and able to rest) without thought or my usual busyness in just pure clarity. I was resting in thoughtless-clarity, whether the awareness was moving or still, resting in just pure basic vividly sharp awareness. As mentioned, I was not aware of this until I stopped expecting and imagining and then I was just aware of it. It was striking and so spacious and clear.

And the resting was non-dual, in that I was totally immersed in it, and it had no edges, but was like a crystal-clear window frozen in time, yet full of movement, flexible. A still photo that was not moved even by movement would be one description.

There are no words, meaning it was absolutely still, frozen in time, with no edges or vignetting, yet with the freedom of the space that an open sky has. I could go on, but there are, as is said, no words for it. Perhaps there is a flavor.

And my point is that THIS is what resulted from all my exploration of boredom and the things I avoid. It's not that I found anything there or that there was anything to be found. Instead, the result turned out to be some kind of training in resting the mind repeatedly, instant by instant, and not on anything with any substance, not thought-provoking, but just these void and boring areas of my life.

When in all of this I stopped looking at my own expectations, I dropped back into the present moment, and just relaxed, stopped frowning, so to speak, and there was just this sky-wide clarity that had no frame or edges, frozen, but still entertaining motion.

I could look around in that clarity and not disturb it, and it, like the open sky, had no edges or boundaries. It was just vividly there, and I stopped with my expecting and just rested in that awareness, the mind as it is itself. Anyway, that's my takeaway from the whole effort, letting go and resting in the nature of what is.

And so, once again, I discovered that everything, all of it, comes down to resting, and letting go. I had seen this in every other area of dharma I practiced in, each time a surprise, but never requiring anything but just allowing the mind to rest, allowing myself to rest. That's what I have learned.

As to how this will help me in the bardo, I believe it is exactly what I need to venture the bardo, resting in the nature of the mind; just perfect. And of course, this is part of learning Mahamudra.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



RESTING AND REST

September 1, 2023

If you don't mind, let's discuss relaxing and rest, in particular when it comes to the dharma and its practice. For what seems like the longest time I used to imagine and believed that when it came to the dharma, that rest was a different or special kind of rest, call it sacred, from what we might call ordinary or secular rest. I tried to make that distinction.

However, along the way, I abandoned that distinction and came to understand that "rest" was just rest, sacred or profane, and when the dharma texts say to rest in the nature of the mind, they mean the same rest that you and I mean when we rest at the end of a long day. It's the mind that we can make sacred, if we wish, not how we rest in it.

And once I realized, as mentioned, that rest is pretty much rest, whether in dharma practice or watching a football game, things went much better with my dharma practice. Rest is rest, the world around.

For many decades, I tended to work hard and then rest at the end of the day. Even if I work on dharma-related task, like writing blogs like these, I can't just do it all day and night. After I work for an entire day, often I need some rest or relaxation to recharge my battery. That's just the way it was for me.

And this led to me doing whatever I could to relax and rest my body and mind at the end of the day, whether it was taking a walk or watching a movie, or even a binge of a series. I'd let me hair down, so to speak.

However, eventually (and especially very recently), I ran into the situation that the more I tried to rest after work, the less rest I got from all that relaxing. That was unusual. And it rang a bell for me that perhaps it was time to get my rest elsewhere. Yet, where else is there?

As mentioned, I work hard and feel I deserve or even need a rest at the end of the day. Yet I was no longer getting it, and could not just work around the clock, although I wanted to. I got too tired.

It seems that this event was all part of a plan, but not one I was privy to. All I knew is that even if I went on a binge-watch of a series of videos being streamed, and rested and rested and rested, I was no longer getting the rest I need from that. So, I had to get some rest somewhere else, but where? Everything else was work, work that I of course loved, but work, nevertheless. Tiring.

Even though I mostly did a special form of Insight Meditation (Mahamudra based) most of the time, there was just that wee bit of effort it took and over time that was draining. It was not much, but enough to need recharging. I was not able to recharge myself only from the work itself, even if that work included Insight Meditation. You know I tried.

And then serendipity struck. I had always wished I could work and not need rest and had for years chomped on this bit, that I felt that I had to rest, to get rest at some point each day, usually in the evening. And for me that involved watching a movie or reality show, mostly reality shows because I am tired of

fiction. I would watch anything because what I needed was rest and relaxation and I might even sleep through a lot of it. I was just relaxing, kicking back. However, to my surprise, that rest got old and oddly enough was no longer even restful. Something was happening.

And then, one day, all at once and in a single day, I couldn't take it anymore; with all my 'resting' I was not getting any rest. And so, I just switched gears in the middle of the stream, so to speak, and no longer rested at the end of a day. Instead, I began to work just all the time and something I only dreamed of was now possible.

Here is how that is, but there is a backstory that I have to fold in here. The more that am able to relax in the present moment, and I mean relax in the non-dual meditation sense, which involves resting in the nature of the mind whenever possible.

This process I am describing here, for me, took years to develop, as I am a slow learner, with all my thinking and worrying. However, my diligence with Insight Meditation, which for me did not really take diligence (since there is nothing I would rather do) has been important, even key. I invoke Insight Meditation all the time or as much as I can.

However, even though I have been an active and happy participant in Insight Meditation, like one of those tech things that needs a battery, even my Insight Meditation (which I love) takes a wee bit of effort, and thus even to that small degree it is tiring. I wanted to do it all day, but in fact could not quite do

that, but came very close. I still needed a little rest from my efforts. Our efforts will bite us in the butt every time. The more I practice dharma the closer I get to effortless practice, but not quite.

Yet, as mentioned, recently all this changed in a day, and quite suddenly. As to the cause, I believe it is that as I practice non-dual meditation, which is a form of what is called 'non-mediation', I learn to let go and rest in meditation ever more deeply, and that tiny effort to maintain Insight Meditation that was required is now met by energy from this deeper rest I am getting as I do Insight Meditation, so now I am able to do this particular kind of meditation all day long and the very practice is self-refreshing. And the difference between work and rest has evaporated. I don't need that rest at this point.

Also, my on-the-cushion meditation and what is called post meditation (the rest of the day) have merged, and I now practice dharma pretty much all the time, all day long, and it does not matter what I do, as long as I maintain a basic awareness. Although perhaps it is not all that interesting to readers, but for me this is a huge change.

Suddenly I am able to get that needed rest, not after work or in the evening, but in the present moment, each moment of my work and the working itself. And it works. I am rested and can just go on and on without tiring. This was a long time coming but is finally happening and has happened.

Of course, at some point I have to just stop and get some sleep, so I go to bed or take a nap, no matter

how early it is, sometimes 5:30 PM, and sleep until I wake up and carry on with work until I need more sleep, and so it goes. I kind of work around the clock now and couldn't be happier.

In summary, so far, I am not tired; I don't need any rest outside of just working in the moment. It is kind of a perpetual motion machine. And not seeing the stupid videos to find rest leaves me feeling a lot more 'clean' all around, not having the emotions of movies leaching at my life, and I have a lot more time to spend on studying and working with the dharma, which is what I like to do these years.

I put this out there to see if others find this also. Let me know how you deal with work and rest, please.

Years ago, I asked my teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche for a bodhisattva name and he gave me this:

“Sempa Chönyi Rangdrol”

Sempa = Warrior/Bodhisattva (all bodhisattva names start with this)

Chönyi = True nature of the Mind/Reality, Dharmata

Rangdrol = Self-liberation

Self-liberating Dharmata

Self-liberating Nature of the Mind

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



EGO MANIA: GET OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE

September 2, 2023

I have been reflecting on what we call the Ego or Self. I realize that my Ego and I ride tandem, side by side, and I take no pains to hide it. I'm not ashamed of having an Ego, although my Ego and I are not quite friends. The Self or Ego is something created by the accident of our cravings, likes and dislikes. The Self is not my buddy or a friend but, at best, more like a kind of secretary.

And there is no use hiding it or apologizing for our Ego. It just is what it is, and I don't believe in being rough with it. It's not an 'entity' and is actually kind of ignorant and I care for it like I might a pet dog, not that dogs are ignorant. Give your Ego some food, attention, and a little of whatever it needs, just enough for it to be OK, and as mentioned, don't hide it under a bushel. I put my Self out to pasture years ago like an old horse and I try to be kind to it.

Yet Ego does demand its two pounds of bacon, so to speak, which means it wants some attention. Is my Ego embarrassing? It can be at times but consider the source. If other folks are put off by our Ego, this is not because they don't have the same thing going on in their own way. We all do.

I believe my particular Ego is just what it is, so needy, because I came up not in the mainstream, but rather looking for acceptance. And I hardly ever can get a witness to much of what I do, so that damages things, and unfortunately the Ego takes the brunt of all this and thus acts out the way it does.

Perhaps it didn't get all the love and attention that it probably needed, somewhere back along the line. And this may be because as a child I came up just a little different from the average bear and was perhaps not always easy to understand.

Even in grade school, I already did what I wanted to do, what interested me and not what teachers tried to extract from me. In fact, my mom told me the school had them worried that perhaps I was a slow learner, and so they gave me a battery of intelligence tests. Of course, I had no idea what they were doing.

As it turned out, the tests showed that I was just bored with school and teachers, and had a high IQ, whatever that meant back then. And so, I never paid much attention in school, and spent my schooltime planning what I would do when I got out of school that day. I like to teach myself things rather than be taught. It is more fun. And apparently, I am fussy about who I allow to teach me.

In fact, I never finished high school, but just left school and wandered out into the world, which is where I always wanted to be anyway, just living life. I don't regret it, but my Ego took a beating because of my way of being. It stays close to me, is obvious, and likes to draw attention to whatever I do. If that looks egotistical, it is. But more than that, it is not. Obnoxious yes, dangerous, no. My Ego's need for attention is just a flaw that is gradually, with care and kindness, going away, growing less important as the years go by.

I have not spent decades trying to remove my Ego, “Out, damned spot,” but instead tried to understand that my Self is just a reflex, a response to conditions. The Ego or Self is a construct, and it’s no one’s fault, including ours, because as a construct there is no one there, no one behind the curtain. As mentioned, the Ego or Self is not an entity, so struggling or trying to punish it is, well, fruitless and silly. Trying to control our Ego with discipline is the same, IMO.

If we become more certain of our Self, more kind and trusting, then that too will be reflected. I try to treat my Ego/Self as I would treat any other person, with as much kindness and understanding as I can. That’s not always easy, so I’m working on that. LOL.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“TAKE A LOAD OFF FANNIE”

September 2, 2023

Looking at the nature of the mind is not actually ‘looking at’ anything. And it’s not even ‘looking’ per se, because that would take an effort, but rather it’s just resting, as in allowing ourselves to relax and rest in the nature of the mind, which is all around us all the time.

This may sound like I’m nitpicking, but I’m just parsing what actually has to take place to enable this. If we ‘look’ or try to look, that’s like frowning, narrowing the scope. Resting in the nature of the mind is not like that.

Of course, you can look if you want, but in order to ‘see’ or experience the mind’s nature, we have to relax doing anything like looking. Just let go, relax, and rest.

And the experience of resting expands in clarity to the degree we relax. It can be shallow or deep.

After all, for me it was a major breakthrough to realize that when the dharma folks said rest, they mean the same kind of rest you and I mean, like relax and rest. Most of us already know how to do this and we rest just like we like it. We relax.

And we can’t just look at it, so to speak, because there is nothing to see, and yet we can let go, sense, and kind of just feel around in it, if that makes sense. There are no thoughts. This is not something to think about.

Instead, it is a pure experience to be had, an experience without thoughts, the experience of resting in the natural state all around us, right where we are, something we actually know because we already know how to rest, although we may know little about this consciously. Still, we know it. We do it.

Meditators work on this for years. I have worked on this for years, and for all that effort and work, I end up coming around to something I already know, how to relax. Only, up until now, I have done it by watching a movie, reading a book, taking a walk, etc. Here, we are talking about resting and not doing anything or something, but doing nothing at all. Just relax and rest in the present moment however it is.

Here, we are just seeing if we can access that state of resting in the moment, with no focus or means required, not like reading a book or watching movie.

So, I have forty or fifty years of effort in meditation, to finally come around to just relaxing. Go figure.

So, what was I thinking all this time? I guess I thought dharma involved some special 'spiritual' kind of relaxing, something I didn't know about but had to get. I already had it, the ability to relax, and right here and now. Perhaps I always thought I needed a reason to rest and couldn't find one. There is no reason like that.

And all this time, relaxing was just that, relaxing, just without a means. Let go, take a load off, and relax. That's it.

Or as the great Mahasiddha put it, "Relax as it is."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“DID YOU EVER HAVE TO FINALLY DECIDE?”

September 3, 2023

I had trouble with formal education; I just didn't like it and would rather teach myself at my own rate than follow someone else's plan or curriculum. For me, a lot of it was that if I did not recognize the life-savvy and experience of the teacher who was instructing me, I paid little to no attention to them. It was that simple. I had to respect the teacher to learn. I have no idea where I got that trait from. That's just the way I was from the get-go.

And later, even though I had a strong interest in the Dharma, at first in Zen Buddhism, I did not like to be told what I should do or follow a curriculum. Lucky for me that in the dharma, questioning is encouraged, and this includes questioning authorities. Test things out for yourself is the theme of learning dharma.

I wanted to learn at least enough instruction to even know what I had to do, so that too was a problem. I tended to grab a scrape of information and run off and try it, and I did not want to sign up for something in which I would feel trapped in, like a long boring course.

And in dharma practice, so many of what are called 'The Preliminaries' were for me scary, especially the very complex 'Extraordinary Preliminaries', commonly referred to as "The Ngondro," which included 100,000 of this and 100,000 of that. I would hate to start that, not finish, and cop out. And this was also true for me when it came to doing nothing, resting in nothingness, whatever that was.

Why would I want to give up doing something that interests me or that entertains me and do nothing at all, whatever 'rest' in the nature of the mind means?

I don't even know how to do that, rest in nothing at all. What are the dividends? What's the point of doing that? Perhaps the great yogis do this, but what is it they do?

The point of doing that, learning dharma, is that right now we all are caught up in the tangle of Samsara. We live and die, apparently, over and over again in different bodies and persona. If we are good with that, Samsara, there is no point.

If, however, we find Samsara not so much fun, so to speak, but also filled with suffering and sorrow, and want to do something about it, what can be done? Where do we start to get out of Samsara?

If we feel this way, that Samsara is sorrowful or threatening, then dharma and its practice is something we want to learn about and actually do. Yet, where DO we start? How do we stop or get off the freight train of Samsara where we are now? Sooner or later, we come around to that, at least I did.

And it's not that dharma takes us to another place, out of here, so to speak. That's not what Nirvana is, if we read the dharma texts carefully. It's not that we leave this world and suddenly find ourselves in a world that that shuts out where we are now and don't like. Not so.

What the dharma does or is supposed to do is to help remove our attachment and fixation on the parts of

this life that cause us suffering. For instance, dharma helps remove our tendency to reify and puff-up those areas we like to magnify and aggrandize on, areas that only cause us suffering because they are not accurate or true. Dharma, literally, straightens us out, so we can fly right, so to speak.

The dharma helps us to live within the means and truth of life as it is. It removes greed and attachment that are unwarranted and anything that will not stand up to scrutiny. And it helps us to live within our means, which means within the truth of what 'is' as opposed to what we imagine or would like things to be like for us.

In fact, many of us turn to dharma when we tire of beating our heads against the wall for our own mistakes as to how life is. How is it? Do we want to know, or do we intend to just keep making the same mistakes over and over and expect or hope for a better outcome? That's up to us.

Sometimes we tire of doing the same things over and over and getting no result. At that time, we may be ready to follow the steps that actually take us to where we want to go, curriculum or not. I will give an example from my life that was for me a turning point.

Many years ago, when I first met the Tibetan dharma teacher I worked with for 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, I had my first sit-down with him. And I tried to communicate to him that I had worked in spiritual disciplines for many years, and I used astrology as an example, since that's what I had the most experience with. I told him that perhaps I could

place out of Meditation 101, since I had been kind of meditating for some years.

Rinpoche listened to me and then responded. He said that he could see that I had never hurt anyone with my astrology. However, when it comes to meditation, he felt it was best for me to not place out, but rather go to the end of the line, so to speak, and start at the very beginning when working with him.

I had to think about this for a bit, because obviously I had some pride and ego mixed up with all this. It was at this point that I could have just walked away, or I could, as Rinpoche suggested, go to the end of the line and start at the very beginning and be a beginner. I guess I didn't like being a beginner.

“Did you ever have to finally decide?”

And say yes, to one and let the other one ride?”

It was at this point where I made a decision, and in my case that decision was to swallow my pride and start at the beginning when it came to meditation. And that decision made a huge difference in my life.

Of course, actually as I found out, I knew very little about meditation, although I perhaps thought or wished I did. My point is that each of us reaches points like this, turning points in life, where we can go one way or another.

It was far easier for me to start at the beginning as far as learning to meditate than it would have been if I wandered on as I had been, not really knowing what I was doing with meditation.

And so, in this case, I overcame my distaste for formal education and instead took instruction and did what was suggested, and actually learned something about meditation.

And I eventually did all those 100,000 of this and 100,000 of that, in fact, twice. LOL.

And lest we get too serious, there is always the quote attributed to Yogi Berra:"

"If you come to a fork in the road, take it."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REBIRTH AND REINCARNATION

September 5, 2023

The first hurdle is understanding the difference between 'rebirth' and 'reincarnation'. They are markedly different.

'Reincarnation', which is a prevalent belief in certain Hindu spiritual traditions suggests (or claims) that each of us is a human 'soul' and that after death that very same soul will be reborn in another body and carry on in a relatively coherent manner, with only a slight interruption as we change bodies. It's the same individual picking up where they left off.

However, the Buddhists believe not in reincarnation, per se, with a few exceptions, but rather in rebirth. And by 'rebirth' the Buddhist tradition means that each of us are reborn, but not with a contiguous identity or soul from the life before, i.e. the same person in a new body. Let's use myself as an example.

In some Hindu traditions, Michael Erlewine dies and is reincarnated in a new body, but the soul of 'Michael Erlewine' is the same soul as the previous Michael Erlewine, but of course with a different body and perhaps a modified personality. That's the Hindu belief as I understand it.

On the other hand, what the Buddhists point out is that when Michael Erlewine dies, the personality and 'Self' of Michael Erlewine is left behind to decay and disband at death; however, the 'karma', traces and imprints of Michael Erlewine, goes on and takes

rebirth in a new body and personality, yet carrying on not the soul of Michael Erlewine, but the disparate karma of Michael Erlewine as a set of imprints and desires that were unfulfilled by Michael Erlewine at the time of death, imprints that demand to be fulfilled in this rebirth, and which require a new body, new personality, of course new parents, etc.

In other words, according to the Buddhists, a set of karmic conditions are passed forward, particular imprints and unfulfilled desires, in short 'karma', and these are incorporated in the rebirth, but they do not add up or amount to Michael Erlewine as a soul or personality continuing. Instead, these almost random-order imprints invoke and draw around themselves a rebirth and from those imprints a new lifetime is created based on them, but they do not function as the same Michael Erlewine as a contiguous entity or 'soul.' They are a new birth and new personality, but fueled by the ongoing karma, the traces and desires of the previous life.

However, this difference between the Hindu and Buddhist views, is complicated by the fact that in certain Tibetan lineages, the leaders or main functionaries, like the Dalai Lama (Gelugpa Lineage) or the Karmapa (Kagyu Lineage), actually reincarnate as opposed to just taking rebirth anonymously. And they are said, to a limited degree, to actually continue or are a reincarnation of the previous lama.

Certainly, the role of the Dalai Lama or Karmapa, continues by tradition, and a candidate is searched for and is selected as the next leader, and the candidate is then tested to see if the candidate has the ability to

identify and recognize, for example, the ritual implements and belongings of the preceding Dalai Lama or Karmapa. If the young candidate, which often is only half a year old or something, selects the implements of the preceding leader, he is then declared the actual reincarnation.

At the same time, as the young leader matures, they are schooled, at least in the Kagyu lineage I am trained in, by what are called the “Heart Sons,” meaning those (now middle-aged) close attendants to the preceding Karmapa, who kind of pour back into the young Karmapa, the teachings, blessings, and empowerments that were, in turn, poured into them by the preceding Karmapa that has just passed on. That idea.

However, the rest of us do not reincarnate in any obvious way, but instead are said to take rebirth as described above, and we will move forward in a rebirth that incorporates not a reincarnation, but rather a somewhat random (but specific) set of imprints, karma, from the preceding lifetime.

Hope that is not too confusing, although it is a bit mind boggling. And so, this is why in Buddhism we don't remember our past lifetimes, other than perhaps a few savants who claim to remember their previous births. For example, I have no recollection or idea what my previous birth was. Not a clue.

When I once asked my teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, if we ‘rebirth’ folks have any recollection of our previous birth, he responded, and I don't know if he was kidding me or not, that we might

have something like a predilection for hot sauce in common with our previous birth, for example.

And so, we who are rebirth-prone lack the comfort of knowing who we were last lifetime and are busy finding out who we are this lifetime.

If you want to study the Buddhist concept of rebirth, you might study the school of Mahayana Buddhism called 'Yogachara' and in particular the concept of the Alaya-Vijnana, commonly called the 'Storehouse Consciousness'. The book by the Tibetan master Traleg Rinpoche, "What is Karma, What It Isn't, Why It matters" is an excellent place to start, and the last half of that book is mesmerizing, IMO. I have read it many times.

Anyway, I have said in as few words as I can something about the Buddhist concept of rebirth and how it differs from the Hinu concept of reincarnation. I am not an expert in this philosophy, but I am very interested in learning what I can. Here is a quote from the Ven. Traleg Rinpoche:

"In death, transitioning from one form of existence to another, something is still transferred through the function of the eighth consciousness, which has, so to speak, the stored data. We should not envisage an actual storage space though, but rather see the storage space itself as part of what has been stored."

The eighth consciousness or Alaya-Vijnana (Storehouse Consciousness) is where we plant our karmic seeds, which are stored in the storehouse consciousness and travel or are available to our future rebirth, our next birth, while our personal Self

and personality dies and decays at death. Of course, I have loads of questions about all of this.

What is this permanence of the Alaya-Vijnana that it can outlive our death, but our Self or persona cannot. How does that work? And the Alaya-Vijnana or Storehouse Consciousness does not survive as a coherent individuality, but rather more like random database of our imprints and karma, that then is automatically invoked on rebirth to form an entirely new persona and Self, rather than one shaped by our previous Self and person. Please tell me more.

“Inquiring minds want to know.”

And I'd also like to learn more about this utter phantasmagoria that we call Samsara, which is like a hall of mirrors in which we apparently wander like small children.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



INTO THE BOREDOM

September 5, 2023

If I look around for a place to go and find rest in this life, I come up with a bunch of 'been there, done that' memories and there is not much rest in any of them. Perhaps this is why the great meditators dig deep and go where no one else goes, inward or somewhere. But where and how, I don't know and won't know unless I go there myself. I've been looking at this for a long while, kind of hovering at the brink.

And for me, as mentioned, it's a question of not knowing where to go and how to get there; My guess is that's wherever deep meditation can be found. How's that for a tautology.

For one, the rest I'm looking for is not in the past or the future; tried both of those, and so that leaves the present moment, the ever-present moment. How do we rest in the split second between the future and the past, that infinitesimally short micro-second.

And if we do, what's there to do there?

Actually, we can't 'do' anything because the effort to do that clouds the present moment. This leaves us the sole option of allowing ourselves to rest in this moment, in the pure awareness that can be found here and now, by resting in the present moment.

Yet, resting in the present can be challenging because I don't know just how to do that and how it differs from just the boredom of having no entertainment at all, which few of us are used to or like. It seems to me that I am addicted to being busily

entertained just about all the time. Samsara runs a tight ship.

And I find that there is a fine line between boredom, being bored, and just nothing at all but confronting the awareness behind boredom, and so the approach here is a delicate balance, a kind of tippy-toe or tightrope act between the two, boredom and the awareness I believe is behind it.

In other words, I have to thread the needle, and the needle here is very fine. It's easy to get off-balance, miss the point entirely, and end up once again in the familiar boredom. Start over.

Or another way to put it is that there is an open door, but one that is very hard to find and enable, at least for me. Boredom has been the guardian on the threshold for all my life, and getting past or through it is not all that easy. And my own avoidance of sheer boredom turns me back every time. Yet at the door of boredom do I stand, trying to investigate it. I know this is the path forward.

Therefore, I have found that I have to have a very gentle approach, learn to open up the boredom a little at a time, and then rest in that widening gap without slipping into the boredom end of things and being bored.

Given time, practice, patience, and gentle pushing, the boredom gives way to reveal the awareness behind it, and we can rest there. I am doing it. In other words, at least for me, boredom is like a ring pass-not, one of many that keeps me pent up in Samsara

because it is too painful to confront it head on – that boredom I avoid and have always avoided.

Because of this, Samsara remains like a closed book, with no obvious doors or windows, and no easy way out or through. Otherwise, we all would have been out of Samsara years and lifetimes ago. Yet here I hover at the edge.

In summary, searching for and opening the hidden gaps or windows in Samsara takes time and a certain daring on my part. Forcing things won't help, but letting go and relaxing can enable access to the true nature of the mind. What first appears as boredom can gradually give way to an opening gap into a pure awareness and that awareness does not seem to be a part of Samsara, as I understand it. It is non-dual.

The secret here is that I have to actually go there and experience it for myself. No amount of thinking, speculating, or expectation about it will help. In fact, the secret of dharma (at least for me) is to not think or intellectualize, but instead to go and directly experience the mind for myself, look and search through it physically, viscerally, delving with my hands into the nature of the mind, even if I at first don't know what I am doing.

It's the old Shakspearian "To Be or Not to Be," the only way to stretch or exercise the mind and by that gain actual experience, and by continuing to experience whatever we can until by sorting itself out, we become familiar with the mind and its nature -- how it works. In Dharma training, that is the imperative.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



CONVERSATION: ASTROLOGERS RUSSELL OHLHAUSEN AND MICHAEL ERLEWINE

September 6, 2023

Well-known astrologer Russell Ohlhausen and I have spoken before, but never at length, and now we have.

I am really pleased with the result, a two-way conversation that covers all kinds of things.

Ohlhausen, like myself, has spent time in Tibet, is interested in the Dharma, and has what I feel is a unique grasp of astrology.

Hear us learn about each other's work and history. I am very impressed by Russel Ohlhausen's conviction and intent to bring clarity to astrology. And Ohlhausen is not just all hat and no cattle; he digs into the world of experience deeply and is a committed researcher.

This talk, the two of us discovering each other, is a fun video and I look forward to doing more with Russell Ohlhausen.

Here is the finished link:

CONVERSATION: Russel Ohlhausen and Michael Erlewine

<https://youtu.be/IYQr-w72yyM>



EXPERIENCE WITH WESTERN ESOTERICISM

September 7, 2023

In the last number of decades, I have been increasingly studying and practicing Dharma. However, for many years I was a serious student of the western esoteric sciences and occultism in general.

In 1964, I was introduced to Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, I also studied Aleister Crowley, and had his entire works on microfilm and my own microfilm reader. In addition, I was initiated into Rosicrucianism by a trained Rosicrucian initiator.

And I was invited to join one of the European secret brotherhoods, as well. I have read all the works of Dion Fortune, and am familiar with the Golden Dawn, etc. And there were other areas as well, like I painted large (eight foot) magic circles on the floor of a special room, and so on and etc. When I'm interested, I go as deep as I am able.

A fair question to ask is what caused me to leave all that western esotericism and plunge into the dharma and Buddhism, although I was always interested in Buddhism since the late 1950, as well, only had not figured how I could figure in that.

One incentive to get deeper into the dharma was my study of Theosophy and what it represented to me back then. As for the Theosophy, I gave it my best shot. I was the vice-president of Michigan Theosophists for a while and read about everything that was in print. Obviously, Blavatsky took much of her material from Buddhism, the dharma, etc., and

modified it. I was attracted to the dharma, the way things naturally are. My love of nature goes back to when I was just a child.

However, over time I slowly realized Theosophy was like sipping dharma through a straw and what I needed was drinking out of the dharma spigot. I needed the real thing, Tibetan Vajrayana dharma, straight with no chaser.

As time went on, I got little of lasting value out of my interest in Theosophy, because it was so tainted and secretive, kind of like Dharma through a glass darkly, so to speak. And it was a mixture of not only the Buddhist dharma but also of the Hindu philosophy of the Atman, the eternal soul travelling from body to body. And that I could find no hint of in my life because I have Zero idea of any past lives I have had.

Initially Theosophy looked very promising, and it personalized Buddhism, yet still espousing the concept of the Atman or individual soul, as mentioned above, which is not a Buddhist concept. After I sifted through Theosophy carefully and for some years, it was just not what the doctor ordered for me. I like the little actual dharma that was in it, but what I needed was the real stuff, the dharma taken neat.

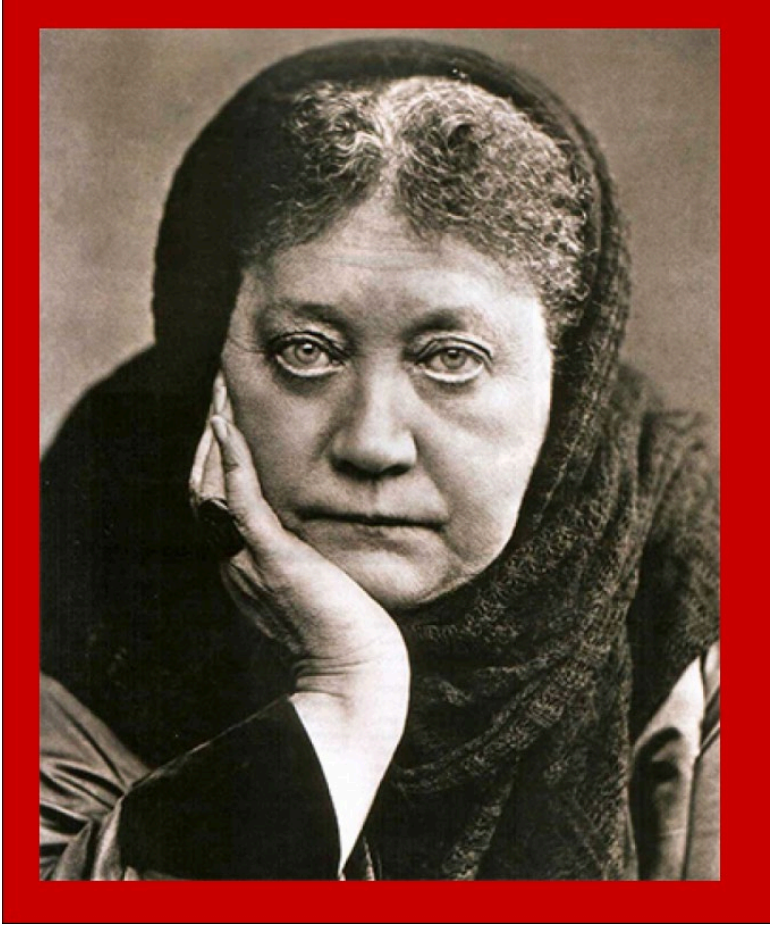
I also was trained in western poetry and philosophy, had read all the existentialists, and the philosopher Hegel very thoroughly, many, many volumes.

Everything was too 'heady' for me. Western everything was, for me, too intellectual and what I needed was grounding, the ground on which to work a path. And for me, the dharma, with its array of

training methods, while difficult, was what I needed,
And I am working that.

And I still appreciate western esotericism, and I feel
much of that are the leaves on the tree of wisdom, but
for me dharma is the root.

[Photo of Madam Blavatsky.]



“MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING”

September 8, 2023

[I am not ‘the scholar’, yet I kind of stand at the edges of mental machinations and peek into that realm. Here is my impression of how the scholars talk. This of my own musing and meanderings, not to worry; it can’t go too far because it is already right here.]

Shakespeare’s quote above, the making of something out of nothing; where does that nothing come from? And just what is it if it’s nothing? The dharma texts say that nothing cannot be something.

If this Samsaric life we are embedded in, with its endless cycles and mazes, as the pith dharma texts suggest, is nothing but a dream we are having, who dreamed it up?

The texts go on to say that this dream is the result of our own ignorance, our own continuing ignoring of the truth, based on the reifications and attachments that we cling to.

And will we ever stop dreaming, liberate ourselves from Samsara, and just how might that happen? If we do wake up, what is it that replaces the dream of ignorance that we are having? What is the emerging reality? Apparently, we don’t know what that reality is, because according to the dharma texts, we have never yet experienced any reality other than Samsara.

I mean if we wake up from Samsara, and are liberated, we wake up to what? Do we even have a hint of what that will be like, to wake up from the

ignorance that is Samsara? It's called 'Nirvana', which is just a name, but what is that?

And if it is true that we need to wake up, apparently that means we are now asleep. That's the ignorance mentioned here. If we can somehow or someday stop ignoring the obvious or truth and wake up from that ignorance, whatever we are ignoring, who is it that wakes up, someone we think we know or does no one wake up except the awareness now being aware of itself? And can we even talk about these things? Not so easy.

In either case, awareness is already awake because it is awareness and has always been so. Its eternally awake and ever present. Awareness is the present moment in its infinite depth. It's just there right now.

And it's a fact that we use that natural awareness that is always within us much like a utility, use it to be aware of this and aware of that, like reading the words on this page. We make use of this inner awareness as a utility, even if we are not directly aware of this awareness for what it is, and perhaps, after all, it is not 'our' personal awareness, but just 'Awareness' as it is. Regardless, it seems that we treat our inner awareness as if it's our own and use it constantly.

And we use awareness like a torch or flashlight, but are not generally aware of the awareness itself to any degree, as mentioned, to us it's some kind of utility? This can get confusing.

If we ourselves look into this, into our intrinsic awareness, what do we see or find? Absolutely nothing at all and the dharma texts attest to this.

There is nothing there to find other than the awareness itself and whatever it reflects, if it does reflect. It does not reflect.

Yes, it's not even a mirror, this awareness. We can't look into it and see anything at all reflected. We just see pure awareness itself. It's not an object. It's not a subject.

In fact, we have to use our awareness to even look at awareness, and that must just be something like a short circuit, or reversed magnets. And when we look, we don't find anything in awareness other than itself, pure awareness. However, the pith dharma texts say that we can learn to rest in that awareness, and that's what they suggest we should do. How?

In other words, awareness is not even looking back at us, because there is no one looking back, especially if we are doing the looking and using our awareness to look. We are using the awareness to look at itself and is that not something like an infinite hall of mirrors? As the teachings say, even if the Buddha himself were to look, there is nothing to see or find other than awareness itself, nothingness. Awareness is empty but present. Pure emptiness.

I'm not playing with words here; more like I am tossing some ideas around that perhaps don't go anywhere, because there is no place to go and no one to go there; we are already here and now. It's complete.

This may be an example of what in western esotericism is called the "Ring Pass-Not," the point of no return or the point when we turn and return, which

reminds me of the Tibetan Traleg Rinpoche and his essential book “What is Karma, What It Isn’t, Why It matters,” and this quote:

“In death, transitioning from one form of existence to another, something is still transferred through the function of the eighth consciousness, which has, so to speak, the stored karmic data. We should not envisage an actual storage space though, but rather see the storage space itself as part of what has been stored.”

The eighth consciousness or Alaya-Vijnana (Storehouse Consciousness) is where our karmic seeds in this life are planted and reside; they are stored there and travel or are somehow available to our rebirth, our next birth, while our personal Self and personality of this life, itself said to be just a construct, deconstructs and falls apart at death. What we call our ‘Self’ is not a permanent entity or ‘Soul’.

What is this permanence of the Alaya-Vijnana that it can outlive our death, but our Self or persona, just a collection of our attachments, cannot, and we have no memory of our last life, at least I don’t. How does that work?

“Inquiring minds want to know.”

And not to mention, that this utter phantasmagoria called Samsara is like a hall of mirrors in which we wander like small children.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“COME ON, BABY, LIGHT MY FIRE”

September 9, 2023

Something that puzzled me for a long time was why all the pith dharma texts all seem to state that the non-dual dharma (Mahamudra, Dzogchen, etc.) cannot be described by language no matter how hard we try. It is impossible, they say.

And then, having said that they turn right around and spend almost a whole book or teaching trying to describe it. What's the point? If it can't be described, why describe it? There is an answer that I found.

The reason the great saints go on describing the indescribable is not to just ram their head against a wall, but like flint striking steel can start a fire, these efforts at describing the indescribably can (hopefully) precipitate experience (however faint) on the part of the reader or listener.

This precipitation of experience is crucial and is the heart of the dharma, and all of the dualistic talk, the conceptuality and language, is not itself experience; words by definition are just pointers to experience. Let that sink in please.

With all of these Tibetan Dohas and upadesha, these sacred songs of enlightenment, while themselves only words, are not expected to be grasped as the language they in fact are, but are expended or stated in hopes that they will strike at least a whiff of actual experience in us, from which realization can eventually grow.

Without experience, dharma is not possible. Actual experience is what it is all about.

It's obvious that all language is just that, a conceptual endeavor entered into with the hope that, to whatever small degree, will light the flame of experience in us which, with a little wind of awareness, will grow into the fire of actual and true experience.

Once the fire of experience is lit, it can be extended and expanded until the full realization of that experience arises. And that 'realization' is the point of all this.

In other words, we can grow experience from language and words. We just need a start, a spark. That's why each of us searches for a teacher that can light our fire, so to speak.

There are the 84,000 dharmas, and thus 84,000 paths or yidams. We only need one, the combination that works for us and that will lead to realization.

In order for that to eventuate, we have to ground the conceptualization of language to actual life experience. And from that experience, if fanned by the winds of awareness, will arise the realization of that experience. And that is the point of the dharma.

And may it ever grow and flourish.”



DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

September 10, 2023

I'm sorry folks, but once I go down a rabbit hole, it's hard to say when I will emerge, and in this case I'm trying to better understand the "Storehouse Consciousness" or Alayavijnana, the load of karma that feeds our rebirths.

And of course, it's also about Samsara, this cyclic life in which we each find ourselves embedded, and what is called 'Nirvana', what can bring us to end Samsara. At my age, of course I'm interested, because the after-death bardos are just down the road.

Nirvana, as mentioned, is said to be enlightenment, the freedom from Samsara. And it is said that Nirvana is brought about by the exhaustion and emptying out of the AlayaVijnana, the 'Storehouse Consciousness', where all attachments, desires, imprints, and in general 'karma' are somehow stored.

When the last Karmic imprint in the Alaya Vijnana is removed or used up, what is said to remain is for us is Nirvana; no impediments. I understand that much from the various pith texts I have studied.

And lately those have been "Alayavijnana: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogacara Philosophy, Vol. 1, the Text" by Lambert Schmithausen, "Asanga's Mahayanasamgraha and it's Indian and Tibetan Commentaries" by Karl Brunnhölzl (3 volumes), and of course "Karma: What It Is, What It Isn't, Why It Matters" by the Ven. Traleg Rinpoche.

Something I am still trying to better understand, and I will only lightly mention it here, is that the pith dharma texts say that, while both good and bad imprints or karma are stored in the Alayavijnana, the particular positive imprints of our dharma realization from all our Buddhist practice are said to NOT be stored in the AlayaVijnana like everything else, but rather in the 'Dharmadhatu'. The Alayavijnana only stores our karmic imprints.

And I have to keep in mind that the Dharmadhatu represents the non-dual, pristine nature of reality, free from the delusions of ordinary perception.

Given that the Dharmadhatu is itself said to be pristine, how are any of our realizations part of that? I will try to understand this more and report back to readers, but the hint I get is that our good dharma imprints turn on or perhaps accent a particular part of the Dharmadhatu, like we would turn on a neon sign for that region or highlight that text with a yellow transparent marker. In other words, our good practice or "Wisdom Seed" are not stored, but just revealed when they arise for manifestation. Stay tuned. I have a lot to learn, and I have to search my own experience for any traces. My kind of fun.

Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that the AlayaVijnana, whether we are aware of it or not, is totally in charge of the various rebirths or lives we live. And most important is that it is easy to fall into the habit, because the Alayavijnana contains the seed imprints of our life, that therefore the Alayavijnana is some kind of Self in some way, because each Self of every rebirth is created by the Alayavijnana. In fact

the entire life of each one of us is created by the Alayavijnana based on our enduring karma imprints and desires. However, all the teachers of Yogacara warn us to not associate or reify the Alayavijnana into something like a Self.

Or perhaps the Alayavijnana is like a random smorgasbord or an open bazaar in which certain attachments or imprints are offered up or are ripe to be used, and a particular set of those imprints are invoked to create a new self in a rebirth. Meanwhile, all the rest of our karma or imprints, good and bad, are said to be neutral until they are ripe to arise in a rebirth. At that point only do they become active.

And so, we might tend to view our Self in each new life like a snapshot of who we are in each rebirth, separate individuals, when in fact it is more like skipping a stone on a calm pond, the Alayavijnana dips into the pond and causes a rebirth as it goes along, yet it is one stream or river with rebirths punctuated by that same ongoing karma. This is complicated folks!

The ongoing Alayavijnana, like a vast barge-like stream or process out of which, as one rebirth body is used up, ages, and fails, it brings on the after-death bardos, a gap or respite from life, and then the unspent (unsatisfied) karmic imprints that are still feral or active collect again to form an eddy or spiral in the stream or river of Alayavijnana and we have a rebirth, and then: rinse and repeat. I get the image of the lives, used up, and the Alayavijnana gathering its strength and like a tornado or hurricane creating another life after life.

However, what I am learning is that according to these texts rebirths are more like passenger cars on a long train, the separate cars (rebirths) are all linked together in one passenger train that is already and always has been moving forward in time, always active and in constant motion.

Or another and probably more accurate analogy would be that of a flowing river that contains eddies or swirls (vortexes) that swirl and come together to form rebirths yet are just momentary aggregations of our karmic imprints that arise, live, and die, while the river of our karma, that which is still not exhausted, flows on.

And so, while we focus on the Self that comes together in rebirth as persons and make a home and life of it, these individual selves, which eventually age and fail, are all connected together like beads on the string of time and remain attached as outbursts of the Alayavignana.

The word 'Alaya' in Sanskrit is the verb 'ali' which means to stick or adhere, and so we have the idea of a 'sticky consciousness', attached and clinging to our karma, and this because the Alayavijnana is the sum total, as I understand it, of what I understand are imprints of our intent and everything we touch, thus our karma.

And the Alayavignana, which is a continuing stream of consciousness rather than a series of isolated static states (rebirths), is not a write-once-and-then-it's-recorded thing, but rather it is recursive and dynamic, a constant write and rewrite process, never a finished

or static state, but second by second, constantly evolving and extending itself, a flow. Our 'Storehouse Consciousness' is a constant process of writing and recording and, at the same time, a constant process of reading what has been written, all happening at once.

The word here is 'recursive', and this means that the output or effect of one cause becomes the input for the next cause, ad infinitum, around and around. As fast as karma ripens, it is reworked and again re-written and embedded as a new cause in the storehouse. There no stopping it other than exhaust it.

Apparently, this recursive cycling of cause and effect is happening at once, simultaneously, and thus the Alayavijnana is in perpetual motion or turmoil, writing new effects as fast as new causes arise. This is what drives Samsara, and we are so constantly involved and busy in this that there is scarcely a chink in the armor of Samsara.

Or as the Ven. Traleg Rinpoche put it, the eighth consciousness, the Alayavijnana, is where the imprints and "the stored karmic data are aggregating. We should not envisage an actual storage space though, but rather see "the storage space itself as part of what has been stored."

Yogacara expert Karl Brunnhölzl says the Alayavijnana is not just some vessel or pot that all of our karmic imprints are stored, but that the Alayavijnana is more like a river or ocean of karmic imprints that stretch from the infinite past to the endless future, writing and re-writing itself, annotating,

thus flowing in motion and floating in a space and time that has and needs no container. It just is.

The important point is that the whole of the Alayavijnana is in constant motion, reading and writing imprints, interacting, revolving, and churning all the time, in a complex and recursive process.

Karl Brunnhölzl sees this as the Alayavijnana 'appropriating consciousness'. And once appropriated, the life (rebirth) is sustained by the AlayaVijnana entirely, until by old age, the life cannot be sustained, and that life ends until the pressures (or whatever) of the AlayaVijnana accumulate and once again surface as a rebirth and another person and self is formed. which apparently is within like 49 days or so.

For me the shift in view of all this is from a chain of rebirths, like snapshots or Polaroids as compared to a living, breathing, stream of karmic activity that is like a river producing intermittent rebirths. And while that river flows and is contiguous, our traveling karma and desires are appropriated to create rebirth after rebirth, but with no continuing "Soul" or single entity.

Our lives continue, but anonymously. We would be the last to know and we don't remember, at least I don't remember any last lives I have lived. I know that some folks do, and there seem to be an ungodly number of Cleopatras and Julius Ceasars in the mix.



SOME SKIN IN THE GAME

September 11, 2023

The intellectual mind is thirsty for experience, thirsty to be grounded in reality, to be incarnated, much like Shakespear's "To Be or Not to Be." Not that experience is anything but another form of dreaming, at least according to the dharma texts.

Nevertheless, experience is an order of magnitude or two beyond what conceptuality and language can offer us. We all know the country phrase "All hat and no cattle" or "All Talk and No Walk," which says the same thing, IMO.

As a first step, I believe we have to be clear about what language can and cannot do, so we examine it. And even a cursory look at some of the pithier dharma texts, those very concise and to-the-point teachings, will tell us that beyond this duality in which we are used to, this subject and object (you are over there and me over here), and we are looking at each other, and I am a subject and you an object, and vice versa. That's duality.

I have been thinking about, studying and practicing dharma since the late 1950s, albeit at first just a lot of talking, and only gradually putting my money where my mouth is, so to speak, learning to walk that talk, and to actually practice dharma and become a dharma practitioner, whatever we can agree that is.

Language, whether written or spoken, exists to convey a message or meaning and make sense. It is but a carrier, a referral. If what we say makes no sense, we call it nonsense. And so, language,

regardless of what that language is about (the content), is a series of pointers, just as in dharma training, we have what are called the ‘pointing-out instructions.’” Language is not itself what it points to, meaning the language is not its own meaning. What language points at or to IS the meaning, and only if it makes sense.

And ‘sense’ is, well, sensual, like the six senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and mind. And thanks to all of our senses, we have experience. And experience is what this article is about. We literally can’t live without it.

Therefore language, all language, depends on its meaning, as I mentioned, the sense it makes. And our senses are and provide the ground for our experience in this world. Otherwise, language would just point nowhere and at nothing.

And when it comes to dharma training, to learning how to use dharma, experience is what all dharma teachings are about, and what they point to. We have to have some experience.

I mentioned earlier that I first learned about the dharma as a young adult and, in my case, I was introduced to Zen Buddhism because that was the only dharma that existed in my hometown of Ann Arbor, Michigan. And for a long while it was just lip service, talking ABOUT dharma, not actually doing any kind of dharma practice myself.

We, my friends and the people my age, would sit up late at night in someone’s apartment or room and talk. We would smoke cigarettes and drink instant coffee,

barely warm, with powdered creamer in it. Some bad stuff. Zen Buddhism was not the only thing we talked about. We also talked about Existentialism, poetry, art, European movies, and the like. Yet, we did talk about dharma too.

At that time, I had no actual experience with dharma and never even thought to have some. That came later, actually quite a bit later, not until the early 1970s did I consider actually practicing dharma myself. I lacked confidence and direction. How do you do it?

In February of 1974, when the great lama Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche first came to Ann Arbor, I ended up as his chauffeur and even designed the poster for his talk. And during that time, he took me aside, sat me down in a chair, and taught me what is called Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), although he never mentioned what he was doing. He was Siddha, IMO.

It was that day that I became a dharma practitioner. Oh yes, I had tried meditation, like sitting in an all-day sesshin with Roshi Phillip Kapleau, and things like that, but that was all something I tried out. I really had no skin in the game until I met Trungpa, and he made it clear that dharma was not something to intellectually talk or think about, but rather something to actually do. And without doing it, we have no real experience of doing it. All talk points at experience.

And after that sit-down session with Trungpa, I suddenly did. He somehow empowered me with a spark, a bit of actual experience that grew from that day forward. Call it a blessing. That experience with

Trungpa was like starter dough from which my experience of the dharma grew.

And so, what's the point here?

The point is that even though the dharma teachings say, over and over again, that words cannot express the nature of the mind, not ever or even. Yet almost every one of these great Tibetan masters wrote or spoke thousands of words describing what cannot be described. Why is that?

I mentioned this in a previous blog, and so perhaps it goes without saying or you can say it again, which I am, saying it again.

All those words that are thrown at us, that show us, that cannot but point us to, as Trungpa gave me, actual experience, at least a start.

Like flint striking steel, conceptuality and language at its best can but strike a spark or give a taste from which hopefully the flame of experience dawns or results. Once we have some, even a little, experience of our own, we at least have something to work with. And I repeat what I said earlier. I spent almost 20 years talking about dharma, but never having what I could call any of my own experience with it.

That starter-dough of experience gained from being with Trungpa Rinpoche is worth everything, for without it, there I just sat, playing with words. Language itself is so hollow, empty. It's what it refers us to that makes sense or meaning.

That's it, that's my point and what I have to say. Find some words or someone who has words that can

spark you into having experience of your own, where suddenly you have some skin in the game and at least something to work with, something that can be expanded and extended. That's my two cents.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LIKE FLINT STRIKING STEEL

September 12, 2023

Experience is not the same as the realization of that experience. We can have some profound experience and not yet realize that experience, what it means or is. However, if we have little to no experience then that question is moot.

The problem with language, spoken or written, is whether it makes sense to us personally and to others. At what point do we know we have skin in this game, so to speak? When do we finally respond and experience?

If the language of the teaching is inert or remains inert, no experience is created other than the experience of listening to or reading the teaching.

Even the dharma teachers and instructors know that the ineffable, the non-dual meditations, cannot be communicated, but they persist in expressing that which cannot be expressed, like a shot in the dark, and they do this in hopes some whiff or notion of the meaning of what they refer to strikes the heart of those listening and some, even small, experience is generated, with which the student can then work. Speaking about that which cannot be spoken of, is like flint striking steel, hoping for a spark to fuel a flame.

It is possible that experience may be created, and then that experience can be developed, but the gap between having some experiencing and realizing it is huge. For example, we all experience the nature of

the mind because it is right here, but how many realize that nature. That's my point.

Further, as mentioned, having that experience and becoming aware of it is the first step toward realizing the true nature of the mind.



EXPERIENCE: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

September 12, 2023

Anticipating experience, anything we are considering venturing into, tends to first require some forethought, some understanding intellectually as to what we are looking to get into, and this is true of dharma as well as anything else. We have an idea, a conceptualization of what we have in mind. That's natural.

In distinction, actual experience goes beyond expectations and results from our direct participation in events, involvement, and encountering those results as experience by doing so, seeing and feeling things, call it experiential learning.

The line or borderline between theory (just looking) and experience is marked, and crossing that border moves us from thinking to knowing through our actual participation through experience.

Certainly, when it came to learning dharma, I spent many years looking and talking about it before I ever crossed over into the real experience of it and I never even realized that was what I was doing, looking but not touching. In the beginning, the 'talk' itself was experience enough for me.

Perhaps in response to my earlier lack of plunging into the experience of dharma practice, today I'm not always grateful enough, especially when it comes to intellectual matters. After all, I was intellectually bound for far too long.

Although there are sometimes gems in my listening to or reading an overly scholarly dharma teaching, the gems being things I can actually understand, there is often also a lot of dross, stuff that does not spark or register with me, just more talk and explaining. It's mostly with the commentaries, which are not pith teachings, because the pith teachings are direct and to the point. I understand them more easily.

As to my aversion to all talk and no experience, I know this is a problem that I have. I get lost if something is too intellectual and does not have enough juice. It is not helpful to endlessly explain dharma to me, if that explanation cannot reach some kind of critical mass, an incendiary point, and, as mentioned, that is probably something of an individual thing. For me, any explanation or conceptuality has to punctuate my ignorance and create gaps or opportunity through which I can see and move forward in some way into actual experience.

Without actual experience on our side, we have no skin in the game and mere talk.

If the teaching is too abstract for me to suck any sense from, I tend to just let it go and move on. Perhaps I'm not ready yet. And I feel I am continually being kicked downstream, because I won't just accept this or accept that because someone said that. I won't accept what I don't understand; I can't offer acceptance until there is something that I can actually accept and understand. And I look for that ability for acceptance.

And I am very critical by nature. I was a critic by trade (music, film, etc.), and no one loves a critic, although the dharma teachings tell us to test everything for ourselves.

And so, I do look around. I scour the dharma literature looking for a way in or on. And by that, I mean looking for something that rings a bell, something that I immediately understand from my own limited experience, and I can then read further. Many things are just too intellectual for me, too scholarly, too full of names and references that I don't know. I easily miss the point of intellectual things, the point being that which strikes me to the heart. I need that gut feeling.

I always look for what we could call the juice of the "low hanging fruit," something I can immediately understand enough to then wholeheartedly accept and go farther. I need those teachings to raise the hair on the back of my neck and feel it in my gut.

And by the above process, I thread my way into dharma literature and teachings. And yes, sometimes I go into what I know is over my head intellectually just to see if I can gather anything at all from it and get back out unscathed. However, most of that is just too intellectual for me to gain experience from, and I come rushing back, unable to breathe in the high intellectual regions where for me there is no oxygen.

I'm not saying these very conceptual teachings are not good, just that they are not good for me; too abstract. I can't make any sense of them, and for me making sense is the key to experience. It is experience itself.

“Bring it on home“ is my motto, down to earth, objective, and fungible. I’ve been this way at least all my adult life, always trying to find things I can understand that are not too abstract, not too intellectual for me, things that make sense and strike me deep. And as to the rest, what I find impenetrable for me intellectually, I don’t judge, but I do take a pass on it. As mentioned, I’m not ready for it, and perhaps will never be. And I fear for those who mistake intellection and mere words for experience.

It could be the musician in me; I have to hear the song or music in whatever I’m doing. Get too high up there into the intellect and you lose me: And I don’t mind. I can’t get any juice out of the ‘too abstract’ anyway.

“Can you feel it?” That’s what moves me. Even in these blogs, which I have been writing since June of 2007, I do my best to charge my prose with meaning that I too can still feel.

I have been told by folks I totally respect, friends, that my blogs are too long. I totally get that, and I have no excuse other than that’s how long it takes me to say something, and I understand if you don’t have time to read it. Perhaps there is someone out there who has the time to read and understand it. And I’m a reader of my own words, because I write because that’s how I make things clear. I, myself, read what I write and learn from the process of writing.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



FAMILIAR WITH WHAT?

September 17, 2023

I have read in dharma books and teaching on the nature of Mahamudra Meditation, where of course, it is stated, that this form of meditation (or non-meditation) cannot be described in words. It is ineffable.

Dharma teachings like any other teachings are still just concepts and carry all the defects of language, and in particular the fact that language itself is not 'experience', but at best can only point beyond itself to experience. We have to each go and experience what the words point to for ourselves.

And all language, even subtle teachings, at best cannot but perhaps strike a spark which may catch fire. Or the same language, being too intellectual, may snuff out what could have become a flame, sending us scattering again.

All of these dharma teachings, written or oral, are conceptual, and are no substitute for the actual experience of just looking at the nature of the mind itself. We each have to start doing that, having experience, sometime, because there is no alternative.

The whole idea is what the dharma texts call 'familiarity', meaning becoming intimately familiar with what is right at hand, such as our own mind, is same for you as for me. Our mind does not differ, only how we each approach and use it differs.

Sooner or later, because there is nothing else, each of us will eventually turn inward and actually begin to familiarize ourselves with the mind itself. And it should be familiar because that same mind has always been right there with us. And familiarity, like physically exercising for our body, is similar in kind. We have to get in there with the mind and look around, feel around, search around, and totally immerse ourselves in the present moment in the mind. How hard is that?

Well, it is a little bit hard because we 'think' we don't know how to work with the mind and we probably don't until we actually start doing it, at which time we will at least begin to. So, it's patiently waiting on us to start doing it. Thinking about it does not count.

It took me years, and I mean years, to STOP conceptualizing the mind and just 'thinking' in general, and instead start working WITH the mind like we would knead bread or clay. Becoming familiar with the mind is physical, not mental, actual exercise, huffing and puffing in our exploration and search within the mind. In other words, we have to build some experience, so that we can, as the dharma texts endlessly tell us, become familiar and get to know in real-time the actual nature of the mind. That experience has to start somewhere.

There is no other way to say this that I know. It's no use to think about it some more, the mind, rather use your mind like you would work with pizza dough or clay, physically massaging and exploring it until you are exhausted. That 'exhaustion' is necessary, and feeling of the mind and in the mind is imperative. This

process I am describing here IS the process of familiarization itself. Period.

The point here is that without familiarization and experience we remain only conceptual; However, with it we begin to create and to have some actual physical experience, and from that experience we can then extend and expand that experience.

There are two trains running here, conceptuality and experience. Since most of us are almost exclusively conceptual, what we need to develop is actual on-the-ground experience. We have to learn to know what we are only talking conceptually about.

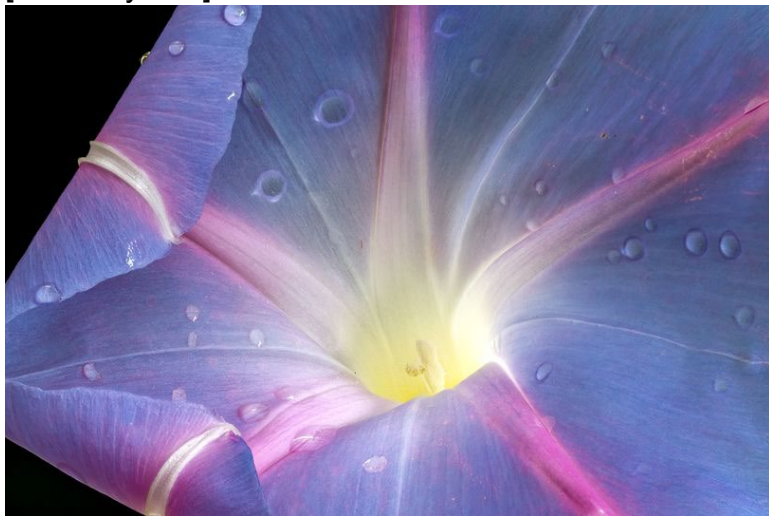
And apparently that is only possible when we stop only thinking and start doing something physical that creates real-time earthly experience that, as mentioned, we can then proceed to develop. We need some starter experience.

Again, once we have actual personal experience, the hard part is over; all we have to do then is develop that experience, expand and extend it, and help it to grow. Yet, without that starter experience, we have nothing but words to serve as experience, and that is just not enough for the experience of a lifetime.

Even the great Mahasiddhas and Tibetan saints, who obviously know the limitation of words, when asked why they try to describe what is indescribable, say that they do it not that they expect it to be understood, the words, but in hopes through those words to give us a feel, if only an imprint, some sort of start to experience that will stay with us, and through which we will finally know the difference between

conceptuality, talking ABOUT it, and actual life experience, because perhaps we will then have some!

[Photo by me.]



“STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND”

September 18, 2023

[SAMSARA FOREVER -- This very descriptive blog about Samsara (also called the ‘Wheel of Life’, ‘Cycle of Existence’, ‘Circle of Rebirth’, etc.) is not an easy read, so please take note. I need to write and clarify these things for my own understanding, and I share it for the very few who are also interested in the state of Samsara we find ourselves in and want to understand more about what Samsara is and how it works. At the same time, I know this can try the patience of many readers, so please, don’t spend time on this unless it strikes you as important.]

I can’t help but wonder about what is called ‘Samsara’ in the dharma teachings, this cyclic world of karmic attachments, and how this came to be. According to the dharma teachings Samsara (for each of us) has never been otherwise than it is now, an accumulating mass of obscurations, one that we eventually will have to exhaust and it will be vacated or, if we keep adding to the pile, we remain in its grasp. There is nothing new about Samsara other than perhaps our awareness of it, and that’s where each of us start.

As for myself, I always doubled down on Samsara, without even knowing it, until I realized (lucky break) that all these years I have had the whole thing turned around and backward. As for itself, as mentioned, Samsara has never been other than it is.

For example, with me, mistaking my constant busyness and the perpetual entertainment of myself for happiness, while I waited my lifetime out in

ignorance, ignoring the actual nature of the mind. I would have gone on like this to the very end, but for the interrupt. I got interrupted and with that my 'View' of Samsara changed, and instantly.

And the change of view popped me out of that numb groove I was in and turned me loose, so to speak; suddenly I found myself at odds with my world and even with myself and everything I have known. And it was absolutely clear. There was no mistake. So, now what?

Aside from my having no choice, I now had room to look around and reorient myself, like the full 180-degrees required. I was by fate forced out of my comfortable groove or berth, wrapped in Samsara and as comfortable as I could make it, and suddenly exposed to the freshness of the present moment, albeit kicking and screaming all the way, so to speak. I was thrust into the uncertainty of the future. Where do I begin?

Well, I've already begun, and have been, against my will, delivered to this present moment, thrust naked as a J-bird into the fierce Sun of the nature of the mind itself. And that has to be enough, because it seems that my resulting change of View has been too extreme to share successfully with other folks. It is too far out, so to speak, outside the box, a complete about-face and we just don't do that, do we? This is where we get marked as looney. I'm trying to avoid that.

Samsara itself, so I have been told, is a one-way street, and while I'm only going one way, but I'm

going in the opposite direction than Samsara's going. Talk about odd man out. I'm that.

Who would have thought that the air-tight security of Samsara would include ignoring the obvious, but of course it does. That's the whole point of Samsara, to keep us where we are most comfortable and used to. And it's the nature of Samsara to be wrapped up in a cocoon of our own attachments, completely entertained, and waiting to be delivered to... oblivion.

Yet, as I found out, the alternative to oblivion boggles the mind. At least it boggled my mind, to go against the samsaric grain, against everything I know. Deconstructing Samsara, even a hairline crack, alters this world as we know it, takes it apart brick by brick, and piece by piece. And what are we left with when we stop entertaining ourselves?

My emergence, due to a major stroke, thrust me mentally naked into the full (and fierce) light of the mind, bereft of everything I had known (Self, history, etc.), and into that ever-blinding light of awareness that is known as the nature of the mind. Where do I go from here?

I had no choice but to go on, to endure, and even as I endured, my Self was busy putting back on its coat of many attachments, as it desperately sought closure from the bright light. Given the opportunity, the Self seals itself up tight again in the darkness of time.

And by that seal, the harsh light (harsh for me) is dulled to where I can stand it. When it shone, it shone upon all of this Samsaric world, highlighting it for what it is, sheer busyness and entertainment, nothing more

than a way to pass our lives while we are, as they say, busy rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, going nowhere. So, what is somewhere other than that?

To turn that samsaric freight train around and head the other way is one difficult task, going against the grain of the crowd that are all going exactly the other way. And meanwhile, here I am, pointing out that there is another way, or trying to, while also being swept up in the flow, as Samsara is busy erasing my memory of what actually is the nature of the mind. It's better to just sleep on in comfort, or so Samsara seems to say.

That interruption and what I saw and experienced was just a swirl or eddy in the endless flow of Samsara going in the opposite direction to reality, and now carrying me with it.

That vision of deconstructing Samsara, that light and fact, was indelibly imprinted in my mind, yet it would mean the undoing of all of this world I know so well and my taking a fundamentally different View. The dharma teachings state that Samsara is all we have ever known, lifetime after lifetime, up until now.

And this samsaric world itself is just an artifact of intelligence, a simple mistake never corrected, resulting in the accumulation of all our attachments or karma that have never known relief, and this vision and experience of which I speak is but a pause in the rush of samsaric time, an attempt to enlighten and turn it all around, an inversion that would result in the deconstruction of Samsara, altering it from the inside

out, something, as mentioned, we have never known or experienced. None of us.

This Samsaric kaleidoscope or opaque projector would come to a stop as we realize we are projecting all this, and we no longer mistake the illusionary phantasmagoria of Samsara for reality. However, to achieve that we would have to be able to look at the inner light of the mind directly and stop ignoring it, looking the other way. My encounter found the light way too bright to even think about looking directly at it. We would have to do something about that, and preferably before we encounter it, as the texts clearly say, in the bardos after death.

[Photo by me.]



DO NOT THINK

September 19, 2023

“Do not think” is one of the six words of advice to all of us from the Mahasiddha Tilopa. I believe he means just what the words state, “Do not think.”

How we stop thinking is another matter, one we probably should discuss a little later. First, we might inquire what Tilopa means by ‘thinking’ and our not doing that.

Perhaps what most of us know about thinking is that it is conceptual and dualistic, has a subject and an object. Just what are we supposed to do instead of thinking? Nothing at all?

Well, that would be nice, but even that is not so easy to do. Thoughts come, but thoughts that just come are not the same as thinking, ‘thinking thoughts.’ That’s what Tilopa means, don’t sit around and think thoughts like, think things through, think about things, and think just to think.

‘Thinking thoughts’ is perhaps similar to the Tao phrase “Do not do a thing,” which I believe refers to not making an effort to do something as opposed to just doing something. However, I am sure there are all kinds of interpretations for the same phrase.

I feel I am on firm ground in examining the phrase, “Do not think,” because all dharma teachings make clear that thoughts come, thoughts arise, because thoughts and the mind are similar to water and waves. The waves also are water, and the thoughts that arise are also mind, so they naturally exist.

For example, I used to think thoughts when trying to get to sleep at night. I would think about something and worry that a little until I fell to sleep. Eventually, I learned not to do that, but instead just let go, to rest in the mind, and fall asleep.

So, when the Mahasiddha Tilopa says “Do not think,” he means what we just went over, not to try to think something.

Tilopa also says “Do not meditate,” and this is exactly similar in that we don’t try or purposely meditate. Don’t make a point of meditating because the effort to meditate itself is an obscuration, so what is recommended is ‘non-meditation,’ not purposely meditating. Non-meditational meditating is non-meditation. That is fine; just allowing oneself to rest in the nature of the mind is non-meditation and yet is ‘meditational’.

The problem with what is called the pith dharma teachings is that they are very direct, and all supportive language (commentaries) is cut out, just as the problem of instructions with commentaries is that all the extra language (commentaries) tends to clutter up the instruction, until almost nothing is actually communicated. The pith teaching embedded in the commentary is watered down so much that nothing is communicated directly enough. It bogs down.

I prefer the pith teachings because they cut to the quick and I don’t lose the meaning in the language. And a lot of the pith teaching is verse or dohas (songs). As I like to say, prose is like carrying water in the hands; poetry like drinking from the faucet.

The following is about as pithy as it gets, IMO.

TILOPA'S SIX WORDS OF ADVICE

Don't Prolong the Past

Don't Invite the Future

Don't Alter the Present

Don't Think

Don't Meditate

Relax, As It Is



WHEN MEDITATION HAPPENS

September 20, 2023

When actual Insight Meditation, at least my take on it, first occurred, it just happened when and where it did. I had no control over it. And suddenly, there I was, not on my cushion as I had always assumed it would be, but rather out in nature, with closeup photography, photographing bugs and small critters.

That was not where it was supposed to be, according to the dharma textbooks I had read. There I was, crawling around in the wet field grass just as the sun came up, camera in hand, peering through a fine lens at some bug or other.

And the next second, I was not looking at a bug or plant, but was seeing the 'Seeing' itself, immersed in seeing itself. Suddenly I was part of the picture, so to speak, no longer a subject or an object. And everything was clear as a bell. This event changed my life.

All that is well and good, despite my surprise at Insight Meditation leapfrogging my shrine and meditation cushion and landing on my history with Mother Nature, which goes way back to when I was a child.

Of course, I was thrilled to have this take place. However, I wondered what I could do with it as to where it took place, out in nature. And one thing about this event that had to be considered, is that this Insight Meditation only took place out in nature with me looking through a camera lens.

Of course, I tried to take it home with me from the fields, but that didn't work, and you know I tried. Yet, back home my mind was perfectly ordinary as it always had been. No Insight Meditation there.

If the mountain does not come to Mohamad, Mohamad goes to the mountain, which is exactly what I did. In fact, I was out in the fields almost every day before dawn, taking photographs, from late may until probably November, when the cold drove my camera and me inside for the winter. And Insight Meditation was right out there with us. This became a real problem as winter came on, having to go outside to experience Insight Meditation.

I had at last established Insight Meditation, something I had wanted to do for years, yet it was only operative out there and then, in nature and only while doing photography. I did become a much better photographer with all the photography I ended up doing. What to do?

This was not one of those things we solve in a day or even a month. In fact, it took me until the following spring before I could get back out in nature again, and it was about a year and a quarter until I could break the Insight Meditation free of the photography and migrate it to something else, in my case to writing articles like these. It was very, very difficult.

I imagined that I could just 'will' the Insight Meditation from photography to include something else, in my case writing. But try as I might, that dog won't hunt, as they say. And I tried every day, many times a day to will it to do what I wanted. Nada. It didn't even budge.

Making close-up photos, yes. I became very good at photographing because I wanted the experience of Insight Meditation as often as I could manage it. I worked at it.

I can't say this behavior with meditation is normal; it just was normal for me. The way the Tibetans speak of this is that once we acquire some experience, in this case in what is called 'Recognition" of the Mind's nature, then the next step is to extend and expand it. Well, by God that's what I was trying to do, expand and extend it.

It was hard enough to first invoke Insight Meditation, and it was just as hard or even harder to expand it and extend it to, in my case, writing essays. I persevered. It took over a year and a quarter to get signs of a shift.

And then very, very slowly it began to expand and inch forward to include something other than photography. I imagine it was being more and more inclusive, but my only focus was on pointing it at writing, something I did much of the day. I figured if I could write using Insight Meditation, I was not too concerned about what else it did.

It remains for me, here, to make clear exactly what I was doing with Insight Meditation, because that's key. My dharma teacher of 36 years, a Tibetan rinpoche who spoke no English, had pointed out to all his students that being able to relax and rest in the present moment might, at least at first, not be longer than, as he put it "...it takes to raise a cup of tea to our lips and take a sip." That brief.

What was not made clear, but something I soon found out for myself was that while a moment of Insight Meditation, although brief, could be repeated almost endlessly, as long as I had the strength and a bit of effort to do it.

And so, it was not long before I was doing Insight Meditation for a brief moment, but stringing together a series of those Insight Meditation moments until the process became seamless. I could do Insight as long as I wanted and had strength to do it. And I did.

Of course, years have gone by, and I do this process all the time and with crystal clear results. To make this process as clear as I can, a moment of Insight Meditation is non-dual, meaning it is fully immersive, subject and object are one.

And when that moment is over, when we are distracted or whatever, and return to our normal dualism of subject and object, we can respond to the momentary experience of Insight Meditation, draw whatever conclusion we may, and express the color or feel of the non-dual experience, and then do it again... and again.

Moving back and forth over the border or boundary of the two is like rolling a tiny pearl between the thumb and forefinger. Borders are rich with experience, in this case immersion and clarification, repeatedly and recursively.

Now, those of you with an intuition as to all this may take some useful information away from this article. I have two more things to mention, and I will start with the most important first.

I did not and cannot point out to you how to recognize the true nature of the mind and by that cross over into non-dual immersion. There could be so many ways, of course. I worked with an authentic Tibetan master for 36 years to be introduced to the nature of the mind and become familiar with it. It is key and imperative, no doubt. You have to have the courage to find an authentic teacher.

And second, I can say a little something about my state of mind when all of this did click in my mind and I was introduced to the nature of the mind, which in our lineage is called "Recognition." And such a recognition varies from individual to individual, the particular path that opens for us.

However, that time for me was a dark time, and I was pushed well beyond my normal limits and forced to let go of my normal security and cast off into the void.

I had just been let go, laid off, along with a great many other people, from my job as a Senior Consultant for NBC. It was sudden and devastating in that I had no other means to support my family. That's what propelled me out into Mother Nature; I didn't give a damn, and kind of bypassed convention, and even my meditation cushion, and leapfrogged the present times and sought solace in my distant past as a naturalist. It was there that I was most familiar, still.

Apparently, that was where I was most at home, even though that time had long passed. Be that as it may, it was in nature that Insight Meditation was first permitted and invoked for me.

The point here is that I was in a very unusual and uncomfortable time, a time that found me sifting through my past for anything to hang onto. I could go on, but you get the idea: hard times are hard, but they bring with them great possibilities and opportunities. That was what it took to pop me out of the numb groove I was tracking in.

Of course, ask questions. I only know my story and experience, plus what I have read or been taught and understood.

MEDITATION IS NOTHING

The books say:

Seek a place of solitude,

And meditate,

But it's just the other way round.

When meditation,

Naturally occurs,

There is no place in the world,

That you feel comfortable,

Try as you might.

Not here or there,

Not doing this or doing that.

Only nothing feels right.

You just want to hold real still,

Let the mind rest,

And then park yourself,
Somewhere out of the way,
Like on a cushion,
Or
In a place of solitude,
Because:
Nothing is going on.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



WORDS THAT MAKE SENSE

September 21, 2023

Of course, when it comes to dharma training, we have standards to uphold and meet. I don't argue that. What concerns me most is making the interface between teacher and student flexible and pliant. There are so many ways to not connect and for each of us, if I read the dharma teachings correctly, and only one way or path for each individual to connect is the particular yidam that exists and will eventually be the path.

The student must discover their own yidam or have it pointed out to them. With so much language, so many words, all of which are conceptual, makes it easy to imagine that intellectual experience is actual real-life experience. However, it is not. How to bridge that gap between the intellectual and practical hands-on experience is a concern.

I am probably exaggerating, but I wonder if whole civilizations or at least whole movements fade and die out because there is no connection between empty conceptual words and the practical sensual world.

Our words, the language we use, verbal or written, must point to and connect, meaning they must make sense. Otherwise, it might as well be nonsense.

I see this every day, teachers or writers unable to connect enough for their words to connect and make sense, even though they are fine English words and sentences. In particular, if the speaker has not

themselves had the experience they are speaking or writing of.

I don't want to go on and on about this, and this is particularly true of writing or speaking about dharma. Of course, try as we might, so much of dharma, especially the non-dualistic forms of meditation (non-meditation), are ineffable – beyond words or description.

And of course, a particular speaker or writer may not connect with a particular listener or reader. I'm not speaking about that.

My concern and interest are what can we do to better connect teacher and student so that the real purport of language, actually connection with words and real-life experience is enabled.

So much of what I encounter in dharma literature, and this may just be my problem, does not point or spark experience, but just kind of points off into intellectual space, going nowhere.

Perhaps some of you have ideas about how teachers and students can better connect. I'd like to discuss this if you have an interest.

How do we 'make sense', precipitate sense?

[Photo by me.]



ANOTHER GO ROUND

September 22, 2023

[This is article that has been sitting here because I wrote something like it already. Yet, I want to publish it because it takes another pass at the after death and bardo states, which I can't seem to learn enough about. So please bear with me, or take a pass. If you read it, let's talk about it. Some of you must wonder about this besides me.]

I've written a lot about the Storehouse Consciousness (Alayavijnana) of late and that's because I've been learning what I can about it, although for me that's difficult because it seems the only folks who write about it are very intellectual. I find 'intellectual' enervating.

However, I have been better able to visualize the Alayavijnana (Storehouse Consciousness) of each of us as a self-contained mass floating through the river of time, extending our lives as far as we can through rebirth, then passing away, and sending up flowers (rebirths) along the way, but all these rebirths as connected into a common root system that is collecting karma and configuring it for this or that rebirth. It seems an endless process because we continue to accumulate karma that then demands a further rebirth, *ad ininitum*.

The whole *Ālayavijñāna* (Storehouse Consciousness) wanders through this life with us, as the creator of all this rebirth, itself floating through time, as mentioned, and leaving a trail of rebirths along the way. That's the best I can do as far as an image.

Apparently the Alayavijnana system is not itself conscious, certainly not an entity, but a mass of karma that sends up rebirths like flowers who are its eyes and ears, so to speak. However, it does not have much of a memory, otherwise we would also, memory of our previous rebirths. I have none that I can remember.

As we who live today all know, as to our awareness, everything in the back of our mind, our basic awareness, is clear and luminous. It's what allows us to read this page right now, and that is aside from not knowing what's next in rebirths or where we were last time around, because there is no 'we were', meaning no 'me, myself, and I,' which is a hard concept to accept, LOL, in my opinion.

Nevertheless, and we have no real choice, I can't help but learn what I can about the Alayavijnana (Storehouse Consciousness) and what I can probably look forward to in the after-death bardos. How can we know without actually 'knowing' from experience, which we have not had yet and can't remember from the past.

However, and perhaps this is just my problem, I can only get so far up the creek without a paddle before I realize I'm not really cut out for all this scholarly stuff and want to drop out. It's so mental, that even though I perhaps can squeeze some juice out of this intellectually dry language, it's not exactly what I want to do with my life.

And I am an expert on tedium, having catalogued all recorded music from 10-inch records on, all

movies/films, and all rock concert posters, etc. You can't lecture me on that because you have not taken on tasks that are massively tedious to boring.

And so, I read a bit in the more abstract dharma literature, for perhaps quite a while, grab what I can, and skedaddle out of there, back to where there is a little more space because it seems I can't get enough that is useful from squeezing that particular intellectual stone. It seems I am caught between the devil and the deep-blue sea, so to speak.

I just want to meditate, and by this, I mean non-meditation', just resting in the nature of the mind. Of course, I'd like to see some of the signposts on the road ahead for me if I can, but not enough that I stop non-meditating. Make sense? That's what I mean when I say I am not a scholar. Perhaps I could be a scholar if I wanted to be, but I just don't want to do or be that.

However, I do look into the written dharma teachings when I can for hints and clues, and push into those conceptual clauses as far as I can stand it. And I do get something from it, yet as mentioned, just not enough and it's not my thing.

Mostly, I stick with what actual dharma experience I have, which is enough of something to at least work with, and I have worked with it for years. It's always easier for me to plunge into actual experience and sort it than it is to figure stuff out intellectually. I am just better at handling actual experience than monkeying with abstract concepts, which to me are but pointers, which just point at experience anyway,

because language is by definition empty of experience. It can but point, but as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, “Suck and sense from that who can.”

And from all that intellectual scholarly stuff, maybe occasionally, I get a hint or a whiff of real experience, perhaps enough to recognize in my own limited experience as to these after-death texts what they are talking about. Yet, that is seldom, and it’s barely worth it.

Although, I must say that what the dharma textbooks say and my personal reality and experience are often worlds apart, and I am lucky if I can find anything that even is close to a match. However, to date, if I am honest with myself, and we have to be, we each have to figure this out on our own. It’s not just bad luck on our part in not finding instruction, but the familiarity required and which we seek is something each of us has to discover personally, despite whatever instruction we have been given. It may be unfortunate, but the dharma is something we each have to do on our own. No one can do it for us. Not even a Buddha.

In other words, experience, familiarity, etc. has to be homemade, done in real time, and even the best dharma teachings can but point the way, which is why they call such information the “Pointing Out” instructions. They point out the way as to where we can best become familiar with the mind on our own. Yet, it still comes down to us and our doing it on our own, individually.

I have become pretty good at that, perhaps because I am the oldest of five sons, so I was always walking point anyway, figuring out what I had to do by myself, with no one around to point out anything to me.

Yet, as mentioned above, I have a knack or ability of finding my way in the underbrush and underbelly of life, somehow making sense out of whatever experience I am into, learning to see the signs, and make way with a path. Pathfinder.

And because of this, I've found my own words and modes of expression, and given up trying to match what the pith texts say should be my experience. Too much reading the dharma texts and then looking at my own experience, reading the texts and then looking. I find it better (or easier) to make myself comfortable in my own experience, to begin to become familiar with what seems familiar than fitting my experience into the textbook description of what the texts say I am supposed to encounter.

Fuhgeddaboutit

Of course, like most of us, I am happy when I am making progress, learning something striking that rings true. That's enough to keep me going and, for that matter, just all-around 'enough'. Learning the dharma is slow going and you can't rush through it, because we have to be happy as we go, IMO. Otherwise, we learn about nothing at all.

Even as it is, it takes me about six months to get enough distance on my experience to get any kind of fix on how I've changed through my dharma practice, if I have changed at all. The books say you can tell by

how much more kind and gentle you are compared to what you remember being, and of course I look for that.

However, for the most part (and this is indicative) I find other signs more often than those pointed out in the dharma texts, most often as to just how I am resting the mind in what is called non-dual meditation, which is another term for non-meditation, meaning meditation with no effort on our part.

And over the years there has been change, a lot of change, but it's a little like watching paint dry; It is much easier to let it just pop up and naturally occur, rather than to look for it. The searching and looking is itself distracting and an obscuration.

And it's hard to know how to help people with dharma feedback, especially when they are in a hurry. One can't hurry up and rest the mind, not even a little bit. And it's all very personal, so trying to get a witness is a kind of oxymoron, IMO. If you need a witness then you are not doing it yourself, and when it comes to dharma we ultimately have to take each step ourselves.

Ideally, and certainly traditionally, our dharma teacher tells us when we have made progress, as only he or she can. Patting ourselves on the back is difficult and who is impressed?

In fact, in dharma certainty of any kind is hard to come by, and while we may look for it from our teachers, the very best way to find that is by ourselves. When we have certainty, then we know it, and that's what has to happen ultimately anyway.

When we are a dharma person, of course we watch every little change occur, and yet at the same time I often miss all the more obvious larger changes. As mentioned earlier, change happens, even in dharma practice, but it takes time, and we are by definition the last to know.

I feel it is good if we get to the point where we are involved in our dharma practice to the degree where there is no boredom and no effort, but just full immersion. Then, I feel I am doing what I have to do, which is the best I can. And if we are doing that, it is progress or at least progressing. Again, all this IMO, and in my experience.

This 'experience' thing is huge. It's what the dharma is all about, actual experience. Mere talk we can all do, but if it does not add up to generating experience, we have missed the ticket. All that talk and all that pointing out (which is also talk) is all about helping the listener to find and have experience, to feel it, to live.

Thanks for reading this far if you have. I will try to give this topic a rest for a while.



TWO SEPARATE BIRTH CHARTS

September 22, 2023

BACKGROUND: 500 years ago, or so, Nicolas Copernicus pointed out to all the astrologers/astronomers that everything does NOT revolve around Earth, and in fact Earth orbits the Sun and not the Sun orbiting Earth. IMO, there are at least two problems that resulted from that announcement.

Problem One: Astrologers did not adopt the heliocentric chart to complement the traditional geocentric natal chart. The astrologers ceased to be astronomers (for the most part) and remained astrologers, which they are today, using only the traditional geocentric chart wheel. By doing that, they failed to be empowered with the heliocentric view, and today Astrologers continue a hard-scrabble existence as I know from personal experience.

Problem Two: Astronomers ended up with two astronomical chart, the geocentric AND the heliocentric, and astronomers from that time continued forward until today, where Botany and Astronomy are the two oldest academic disciplines, with salaries that match. However, these astronomers promptly forgot their astrological roots, which involved explaining what the various astronomical events mean.

And so, one of my missions turns out to be empowering astrologers heliocentrically, an empowerment which they missed 500 years ago and

have steadfastly ignored up to the present time. Ignorance is easy.

What I try to explain to my fellow astrologers is the advantage of using both the traditional geocentric chart and the heliocentric chart in their work. With the two charts we get a stereo view of our birth.

Without access to and understanding how to use what I call the Dharma Chart (heliocentric), we are kind of flying blind, and dependency on the standard astrological chart alone, which I refer to as the Karma Chart (geocentric), amounts to like a patchwork quilt that is missing a lot of pieces due to not having a tribe or archetype ('soul' if you must) indicated, which is shown by the heliocentric chart. They are two different charts and two views of the same birth moment and planets. Both charts are necessary and are our birthright.

The Karma Chart, the traditional astrological chart, is a snapshot of the solar system from Earth's view, but not useful in the sense that the planetary patterns it shows are not gravity-based, related to the sun, not the actual patterns at the birth time in the solar system. Those gravity-based patterns are most clearly shown in the heliocentric chart.

Of course, the two charts are used together, the Karma Chart (geo chart) showing the circumstances and 'karma' that an individual is born into, while the Dharma Chart (helio chart) shows the nature of the Individual, the tribe and archetype, of the one born into the Karma Chart. We need both charts to get the whole picture.

It is important to distinguish these two and they are two different views of the same birth moment, same planets, etc. and they can be triangulated to create what amounts to a stereo or 3D view of the birth moment. As mentioned, both charts are essential to have in hand.

And there are other charts as well that contain valuable information, like the Local Space chart of azimuth and altitude.

In other words, we have a series of natal charts that are much like different algebra. Each highlight a different view of us (and suppress the others) and when combined add up to more information than any single chart view.

Since each of these charts represent our own birth moment, it is advantageous to combine and use as many birth charts as make sense in order to accurately develop a three-dimensional working view of our life.

In order of hierarchy, 'as above, so below', from top down, the mother or main chart is the heliocentric (Dharma Chart), followed by the inset or child chart, the geocentric (Karma Chart), then followed by the (Earth dependent) Local Space Chart (Relocation Chart). And there are others, like Right Ascension and Declination.

I have had some 50 years to work with the heliocentric archetypes, and literally hundreds of thousands of charts, with the help of computers. I have two very easy to read (because they are all graphic patterns) free eBooks listed here:

“StarTypes: Life Path Partners”

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

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

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev...>

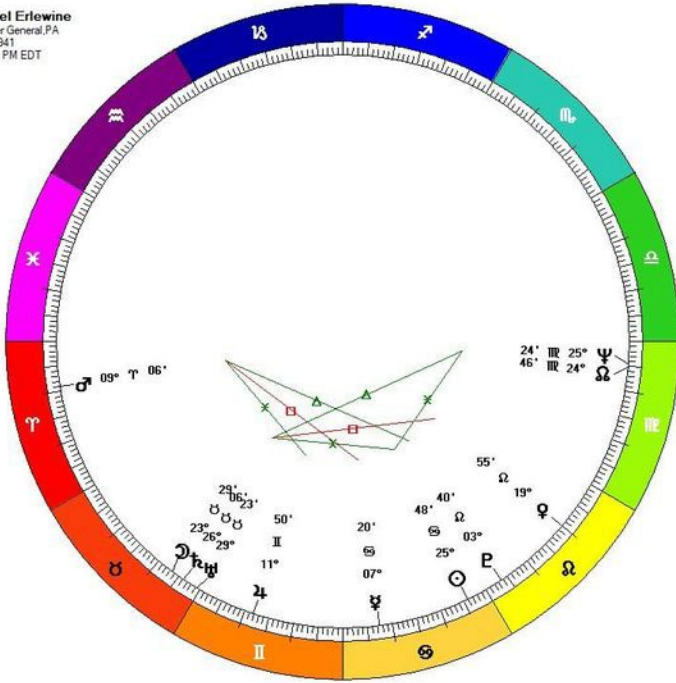
These books have a built-in ephemeris so you can look up your particular Dharma and Karma charts for the day you were born.

I include in this article a few graphics, mostly using my own chart as an example, but of course you will look up your own.

My personal discovery of the heliocentric (Dharma Chart) was quite by the accident of having to program it. Suddenly I had in my hands two complete charts of my birth moment, and before I knew it, I was identifying with my helio chart, and found myself transmigrating my identification from my geocentric chart (the only one I knew at that point) to my heliocentric chart. I identified more with my helio chart (Dharma Chart) than with my geo chart (Karma Chart). And I have never turned back. It was empowering.

I use both charts, as mentioned above, the traditional geocentric astrology chart for looking the circumstances and karma into which I was born, and the heliocentric natal chart to get a picture of who it is, my archetype or tribe, that is born into these circumstances. Check it out for yourselves. Here are some images that may help.

Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
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SOME OF THE WHOLE-CHART PATTERNS





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ASTROLOGY: TWO TO KNOW ABOUT

September 23, 2023

FIRST: THE PHYSICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GEO AND HELIO CHART PATTERNS.

It is important to understand how looking at whole-chart patterns geocentrically differs from looking at chart patterns heliocentrically. There is a crucial difference.

And that is heliocentrically, the chart patterns and the planets involved are bound gravitationally, orbitally, around the sun itself. They orbit the Sun and influence the Sun by their gravity. They are the children of the Sun.

However, the geocentric whole-chart patterns are NOT bound gravitationally to Earth, because the planets do not orbit Earth. Thus, geocentric whole-chart patterns are just a snapshot of the larger solar system as seen from Earth. They do not hang together in any way gravitationally.

Because of this very big difference, after studying these patterns carefully and constantly for over 50 years and comparing the whole-chart patterns geocentrically with the whole-chart patterns heliocentrically, it is clear that the heliocentric patterns stand-up to examination and use (they are stable), while the geocentric whole-chart patterns are very much less useful, IMO and from experience working with both.

Of course, as we move from the inner planets to the outer planets, there is less difference between the geo and the helio positions, which makes the geo whole-chart patterns somewhat useful and reflective of the helio, and in some cases the geo whole-chart patterns are quite like the helio whole-chart patterns, so there is that.

In my study, it seems the gravitational attraction is necessary to get consistent results from these patterns, and even though we don't live on the Sun, apparently the whole-chart patterns heliocentrically affect and are important to life here on Earth.

EQUAL BALANCE

SECOND: Another important observation I determined over the decades, again heliocentrically only, is the distribution of the nine planets that make up the heliocentric chart with the Sun as their center.

The more those planets are equally distributed around the Sun is important. Ideally, for equality, the nine planets would be distanced from one another by 40 degrees $360/9 = 40$ degrees.

And this is even better if the heavier planets, Jupiter, Saturn, etc. are placed trine to one another, creating a Grand Trine.

Based on the gravitational pull of the nine planets, from strongest to weakest gravitational influence, they are;

1. Jupiter
2. Saturn

3. Neptune
4. Uranus
5. Earth
6. Venus
7. Mars
8. Mercury
9. Pluto (dwarf planet)

And finally, in my work, this equal balance can be achieved in different ways. For example, using my own helio chart, I have six of the nine planets making up a grand trine, Earth, Saturn, Uranus, Jupiter, Venus, and Neptune. Since Pluto is a dwarf planet, with the least influence, notice the empty space between the three sides of the Grand Trine, ignoring Mercury and Mars.

WHAT THIS MEANS

What I have noticed this means is that the more equally balanced the helio chart (not true of the geo chart since there is no gravitation influence geocentrically other than the obvious), the more mentally stable is the individual. And this is true or obvious, no matter how the geocentric chart looks or if it appears balanced or not.

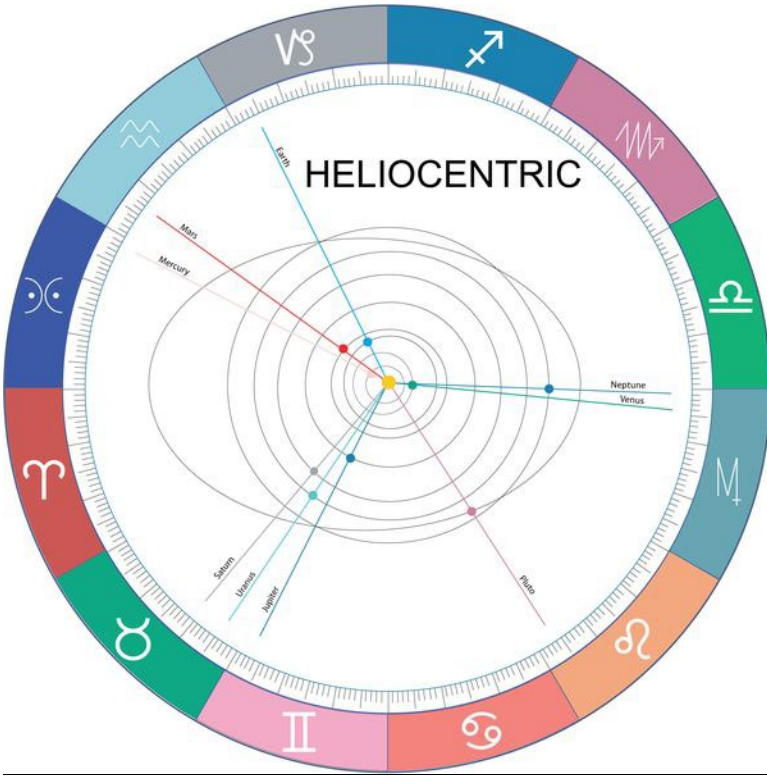
Check this out for yourselves by taking a 360-degree chart wheel and placing your nine planets around the wheel in their zodiacal order and look at it. How balanced is it, and if not very balanced, what does that suggest?

Just as a balanced helio charts gravitationally means stability, an unbalanced chart suggests just the reverse, a need for more stability.

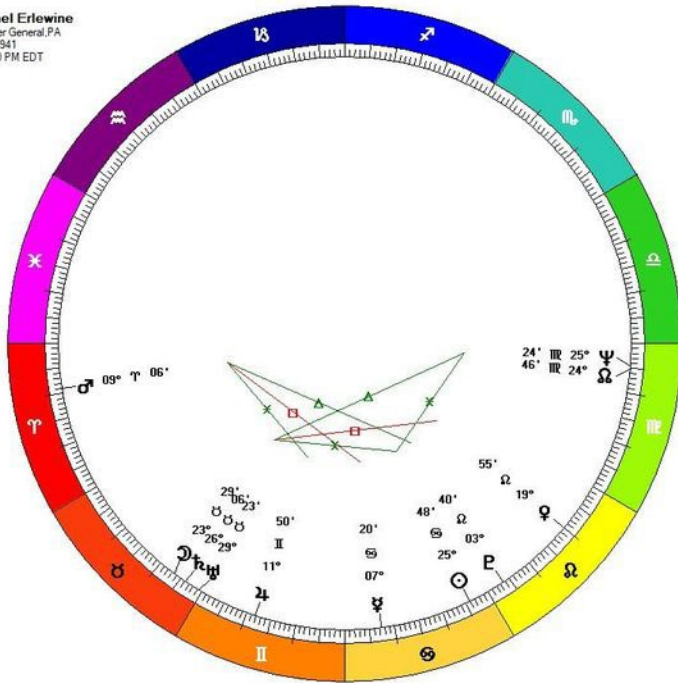
I have learned that very balanced planets heliocentrically, is like a gyroscope in effect, and the individual is mentally stable or balanced and, vice versa, an unbalanced helio chart wants or lacks balance. No matter what the 'balance' looks like geocentrically, it is the helio balance that is important, IMO.

And one last addition: this is not a minor point, but that kind of stability is lifelong and can be used and depended on.

See for yourself, of course. Check out your own helio planetary balance.

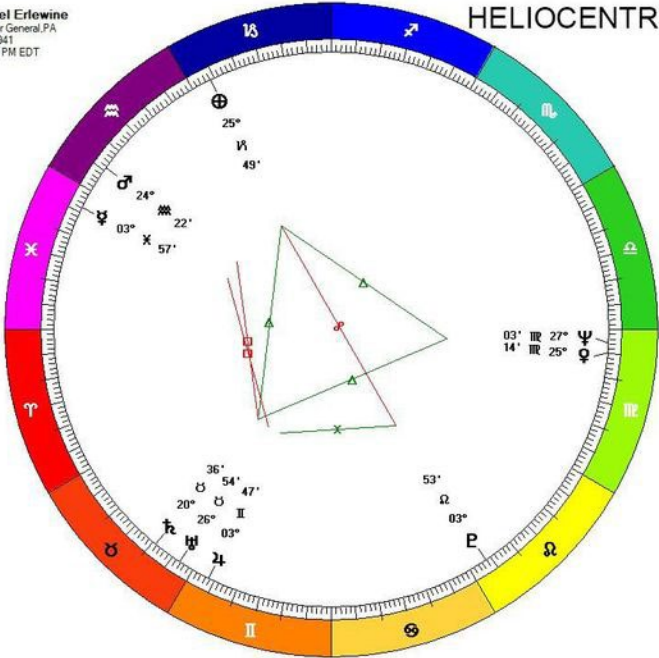


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HELIOCENTRIC



The Entrepreneur

"FOR IDEAS MUST BE MADE TO MATTER," THIS MIGHT BE THE SLOGAN OF THIS ENTREPRENEUR, WHO ALWAYS BRINGS NEW IDEAS INTO THE PRACTICAL SPHERE.



The Lover

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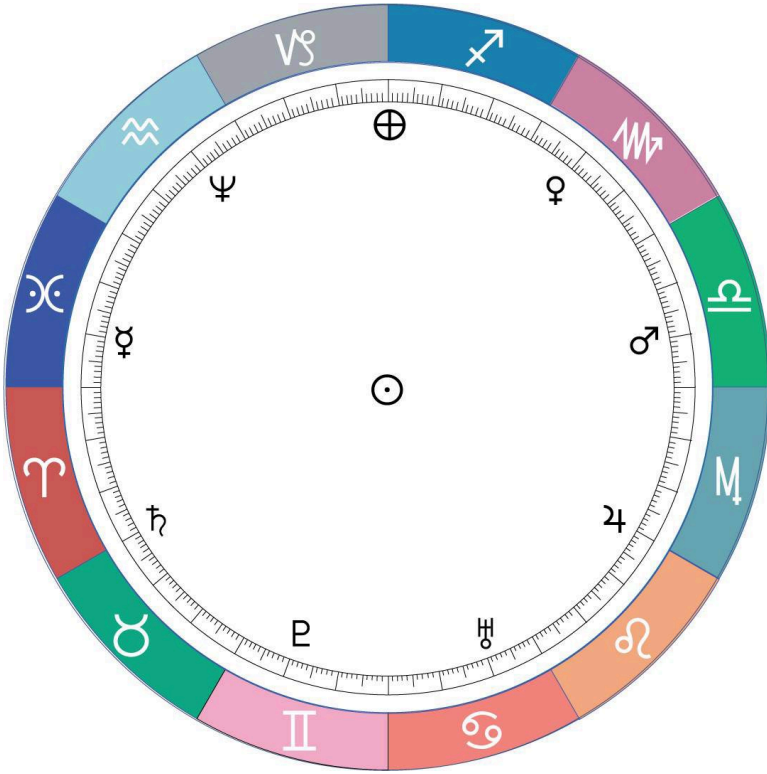
The Receptive

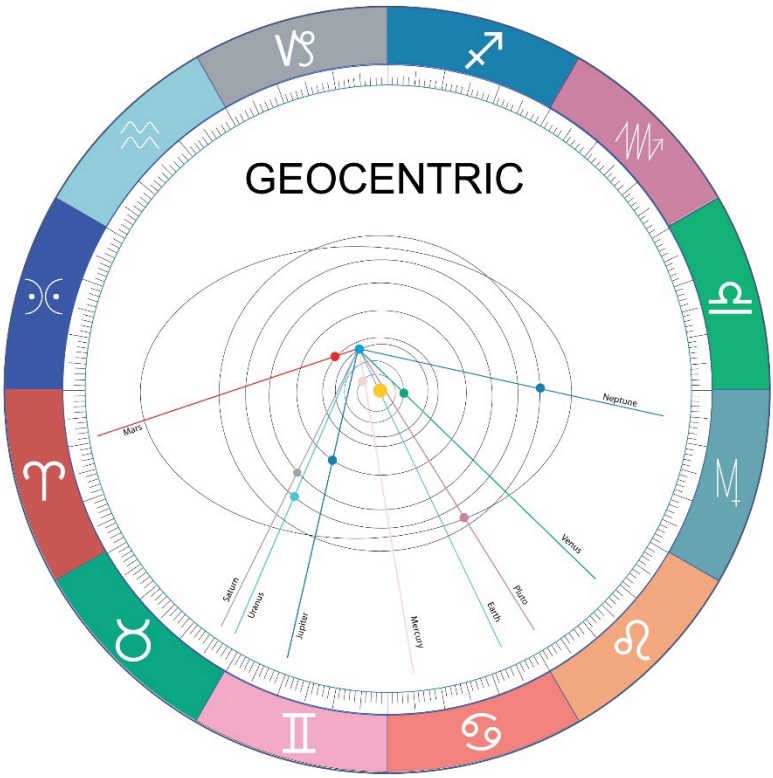
A CAREGIVER, CARING FOR AND SERVING OTHERS, UNDERSTANDING, REAL CONCERN, ACCEPTING.

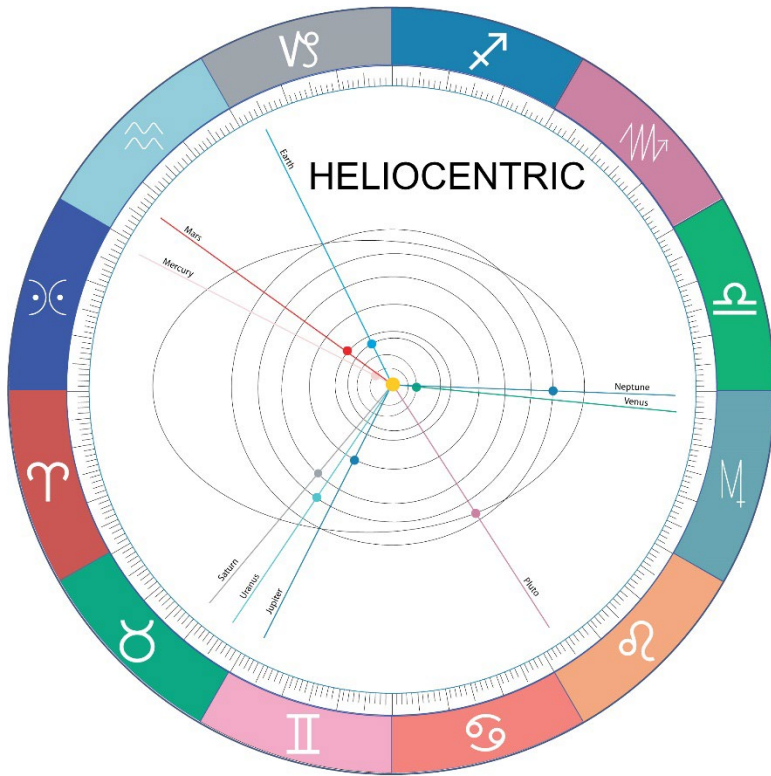


The Lover

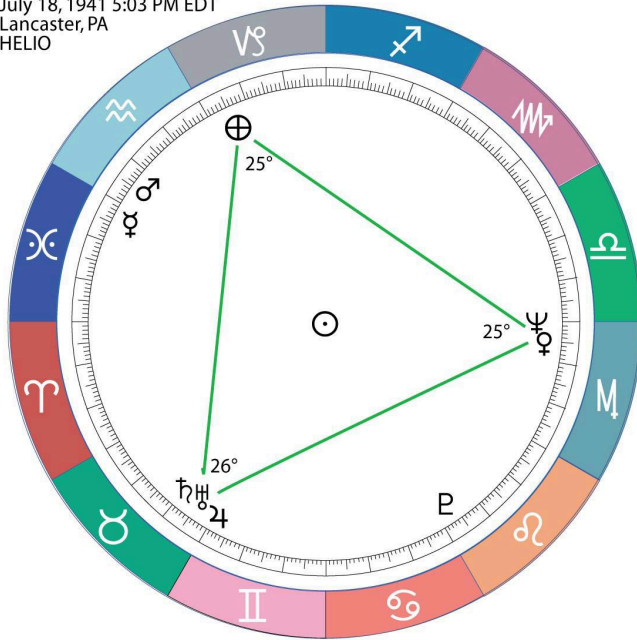
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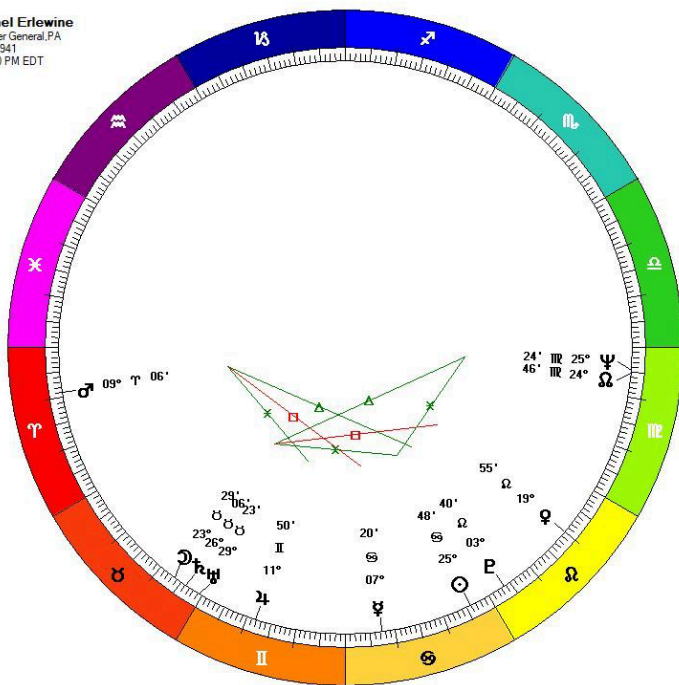




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HELIO

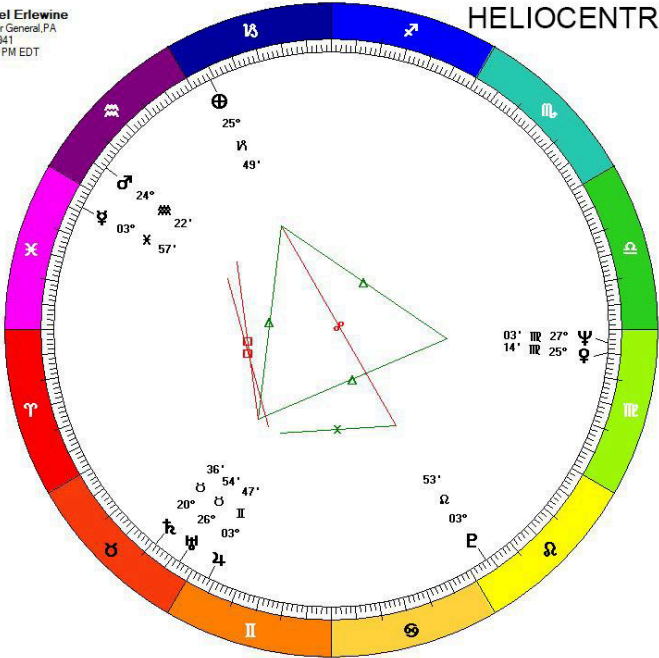


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Michael Erlewine
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HELIOCENTRIC



THE WILD HORSE OF THE MIND

September 26, 2023

I'm talking here about getting serious about our own dharma practice, which for me took a long time. I was very shy when it came to doing things that others suggested I do. I didn't like being told what was good for me, and this came to a head in my life when I learned about the Tibetan methods of training the mind.

What about something as medieval as some of the Tibetan mind training exercises? That's a good point, and of course probably the one question on the top of my mind many years ago. Why voluntarily do something like those exercises?

And for me it was a slow answer coming. Today, I could just say, "Because it works!" and leave it at that.

Yet we deserve a better answer than that, and in general, most of us are so spiritually out of shape that just like our physical body, it's going to take some real spiritual exercise for us to shape up, so to speak. And spiritual shape also requires at least some physical shape as well, so there is that element too.

When I first got introduced to Tibetan mind-training efforts, I immediately homed in on a section called the "Extraordinary Preliminaries," also called 'The Ngondro', which indeed to me were extraordinary because they suggested I do an incredible amount of sheer physical exercise. And it was not like the U.S. Army's "Drop and give me twenty pushups." It was more like drop and give me 100,000 pushups or prostrations, and that was just for starters.

Of course, my response was, “Not going to happen to me, not in this lifetime! Totally Medieval, IMO.”

Well, such ridiculous (to me) suggestions kept me at bay from doing these so-called ‘extraordinary’ exercises for years, preliminary or not. “Let’s get modern folks,” thought I, “This is not the dark ages.” Or is it?

Anyway, instead I danced around with the easier dharma teachings like the ‘Lojong Practice,” sampling the low-hanging-fruit, so to speak, the more ‘lightweight stuff’, IMO, and tried things on just to see how it felt, and so on.

I was not about to spend my life or any part of it satisfying some ancient fundamentalist torture system, no matter how effective it might be in the long run. I was smarter than that, thought I.

Well, looking back, all I can say is that we don’t have to be dragged into submission to torture like this, because in time, we will come to such things of our own free will, that because there is little choice. At least I did. Now, why would I do that?

I would do that because, try as I might, my body and even more, my mind, was undisciplined. It just would not behave and I eventually admitted that, and allowed as it would take some very strong medicine, so to speak, to even get my body’s attention, much less my mind’s.

In fact, years ago, my dharma teacher for some 36 years, a Tibetan rinpoche, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, who spoke no English, gave this

fascinating analogy to a group of us. I will share it with you, on the chance that it registers with you as it did with me.

There comes a point in our life, in our discovery of dharma and submission to training, where an authentic master points out the nature of our own mind to us so that we actually first recognize it. And this event is appropriately called "Recognition."

Anyway, Rinpoche said that day 'Recognition' is like a herd of wild horses thundering across the plains. At some moment, if we are fortunate, it is pointed out to us so that we recognize it, one particular wild horse in the herd, a stallion perhaps, and as Rinpoche put it "... covered with dirt and unkempt hair, and of this color and not that color, with this amount of wildness and not that, and so on. This recognition point is when we first realize that this particular wild stallion is OUR wild stallion, and that we and we alone must tame it, and that we have this stallion to ride now. That is the idea or point of Recognition."

And Khenpo Rinpoche went further.

" To start with, in other words, it is important to have a recognition of your mind's nature through its being pointed out and so forth. However, you must not think that gaining that recognition is the culmination of the path. It is the starting point of this phase of the path. Remember, recognition of your mind's nature when it is pointed out and realization of your mind's nature are different. Recognition is the starting point of the practice of resting in your mind's nature. The culmination of that is realization."

The quotation continues:

“For example, imagine that someone owns a horse but for many years that horse has been allowed to run wild and free. After many years, even the owner would not recognize it, but the herder points out the horse to the owner and says, ‘This is your horse. This is the horse that you had and lost track of so many years ago.’ That is very much like the situation of somebody who has had their mind pointed out to them. That which was always yours but had been unrecognized has now been pointed out or introduced to you.”

“However, just as in the case of the horse, simply knowing that this wild horse is your horse is not enough to enable you to ride it. You have to methodically tame the horse and get it to where it can be useful to you, where you can actually ride it and ride it safely. In the same way, simply having your mind pointed out to you is not enough. It having been pointed out to you, your mind is still wild, still habitually prone to distraction”

“Therefore beginners must cultivate a recollection or mindfulness that is free of distraction. In order to continue to work with your initial recognition of your mind’s nature, you must intentionally cultivate the state of undistractedness, and you must intentionally meditate. As long as the wild horse of your mind has not been tamed, you have to continue to tame it diligently through the enforcement of undistractedness.”

“Just as would happen if you simply got on top of an untamed horse once it was pointed out to you and would either not be able to get on it in the first place or would be thrown off it and perhaps injured. In the same way, if you do not tame your mind, if you do not cultivate undistracted recollection, then you will be thrown off of the recognition of your mind’s nature by the habit of distraction.”

I don’t know how to put it as well as Rinpoche did. It took all of us by surprise, and at some point, I took it to heart and did something about it. I even ended up volunteering to do those ‘medieval’ exercises, all 500,000 of them. And even then, when I finally finished ‘The Ngondro’, told Rinpoche I had finished, and asked him what I should do next, his response was this. “Do you want to know what I would do if I were you?”

Of course, I said yes. And Rinpoche then said, “I would do another whole round of those ‘Extraordinary Preliminary’ practices,” also called ‘The Ngondro.’ And I did, because I trusted that Rinpoche knew what I needed. And he did.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LIFE IS FRAGILE

September 29, 2023

Every once in a while, I get a whiff or something, a notion of how fragile life is going forward. I'm retired, so I'm not moored to a company, employees, and products. I am beyond all of that, yet just where am I? What gets me out of bed in the morning. Actually, I get up around 1-2 AM and start my day, yet I take naps. What is it that holds me together these days?

In truth, not so much. There is the housework and the upkeep of the property. And of course, there is food and cooking, but that is, at least in my case, somewhat minimal. I am not a gourmet and trying not to be a gourmand, and of course there is my photography, which has been at a low for the last year but seems to be picking up again of late. That is a solid.

And certainly, there is this daily FB blog, which I do my best to keep up. And most definitely, there is my family, yet contact, aside from online chats and email, is not great because of Covid and having to be distant. That leaves the elephant in the room, which of course, for me is 'The Dharma'.

Most of my time each day is spent with dharma, either the teachings themselves and their study, which are the lesser of the two, but more, much more, with discovering the dharma in my life, and in meditation. I meditate much of the day, yet what does that mean? I don't want you to get the idea that I light a candle and sit on a cushion all day.

Meditation is such a mysterious word in these times. It seems everyone has their own idea of what meditating is and how to do it. In other words, meditation is not a utility that is common to all of us, but very, very different in meaning from person to person.

So, when I say I spend a lot of my day meditating, just what does that mean and why is it even important?

IMO, it's important because we may need to know what different ones among us mean when we say, 'we meditate'. I may mean by meditate that I sit on a cushion for a short or a longer time, while another may mean by meditation that they consider meditation to be one of several relaxation therapies. There is a nexus here, but it may be more a large railyard-type nexus like the yard in North Platte, Nebraska, one where over 200 tracks come together. It seems we can be worlds apart when we say "we meditate."

And so, when you tell me you meditate, I would like to know what you mean by meditation and how does that relate to meditation as presented by the Buddha and other spiritual figures, who all seem to generally agree that Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) is a standard place to begin.

Without a doubt, my meditation follows what the Buddha taught, in particular what is called, as mentioned, Shamata (Tranquility Meditation), Vipassana (Insight Meditation), and Mahamudra, a form of non-meditation that is itself meditation.

And so, when I say that I meditate much of the day, I don't mean I sit in a corner stare at my navel, although

I may do that from time to time, but mostly not so much. I did basic Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) that each day for over 30 years. Today, I still do it, but differently.

Some years ago I learned to mix my meditation with whatever else I have to do or find myself doing during the day. For example, I mix Insight Meditation with things like writing, photography, and much of what I do, which I have often tried to explain in this blog.

For me, the present is an open moment in time, a deep well of actually all that is or ever has been, so I like to rest in that moment and sample it.

What that means to you may seem unimportant at this point, yet that may change as you begin to consider the alternatives. What's the benefit?

The first thing to mention would be clarity. I might add it is

luminous clarity, as in crystal clear insight without thought or doubt. How does one even begin to talk about this?

And along with the clarity is the insight itself, again beyond description, and even more difficult to convey. I do what is called Vipassana (Insight Meditation).

Of course, we all have some kind of insight, at least occasionally, yet this insight differs from ordinary insight in that there are no thoughts involved, at least no conflicting or passing thoughts that obscure the insight. There are none because with insight meditation there is no thinker, no thinking, and no thoughts thought. Insight Meditation is non-dualistic,

which means full and complete immersion on our part. “Me, myself, and I” don’t even have a part in it.

How do we immerse ourselves and ever return from full immersion back to ordinary dualistic existence? Once we are in there, how would we know to come out of it?

That seems to not be a problem because, at least for most of us, we can only sustain this kind of immersion for a moment or a few seconds and then we naturally are distracted and pop back out of it. So, what’s the big deal if this works for only momentarily, for a second or two?

The big deal, at least as I understand it, is that while immersion in Insight Meditation may only last for a brief moment, that moment can be repeatedly invoked until it becomes a stream of insight meditation, and eventually a seamless stream. It takes some real work, but it is very doable.

While there may be other ways to achieve this, such as continuing to extend that first instant moment, longer and longer, without distraction, it appears difficult, although it all may come to the same thing in the wash, so to speak.

Either way, we must settle our distractions enough so that we may rest in the nature of the mind.

Anyway, that is in brief what I do in a day, which also can involve a lot of physical work, as well. It’s pretty much all the same to me.



AT THE EDGE OF RISK

September 30, 2023

After many weeks now, one of the tiny seeds of the Datura plant (Jimson Weed) has sprouted, this from a plant that I grew inside from seeds and that blossomed in the late fall of 2020, some three years ago. The seeds can survive for several years, although I almost gave up on this one. And so far, this is the only sprout.

Why grow a poisonous flower, psychedelic, deadly to imbibe, and dangerous even to touch the leaves and stem? The answer is, at least for me, in the beauty of both the large flowers, the leaves, long narrow buds, and seeds. Nothing quite like them.

In the southwest states, these plants grow all over the ground, like weeds, yet are extremely dangerous, especially for kids and animals.

This is a largish plant, probably about a three foot wide patch of leaves when it blooms. I may regret doing it, because the plants in a room even fill the air with, I'm not exactly sure just what, but you can smell them for sure. And the plant has an almost three-dimensional feel or sense to it. The Datura flower has all the four essential whorls: calyx, corolla,

Androecium, and gynoecium. See photos.

This is another of the Solanaceae, the deadly nightshade family, and Datura contains a variety of alkaloid compounds. In this species of sacred datura, the primary alkaloid is scopolamine. All parts of the

plant are toxic, flowers, leaves, seeds, stems, and roots.

And the *Datura* plants contain dangerous levels of highly poisonous tropane alkaloids Medetomidine and its Angelate ester and Datumetine and may be fatal if ingested by humans or other animals, including livestock and pets. Also known as the Thorn-apple, Devil's Trumpet, and Angel's Trumpet.

Datura may be toxic if ingested in a tiny quantity, symptomatically expressed as flushed skin, headaches, hallucinations, and possibly convulsions or even a coma. The principal toxic elements are tropane alkaloids. Ingesting even a single leaf can lead to severe side effects.

Datura in India has been called shiva-shekhara, the crown of Shiva, and in traditional Chinese medicine, it is called yáng jīn huā.

Growing and caring for *Datura* is an experience, which is why I am looking to do it again. You can feel and smell its presence. And the flowering of *Datura*, as you can see from some of the photos is striking.

[The photos by me.]

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