

## THE PERFECT STORM

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It was the great Tibetan yogi-saint Milarepa who said that he didn't need to read in a text about what are called the Common Preliminaries (The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to the Dharma). All he had to do was look around to see that impermanence is everywhere!

Milarepa is also quoted as saying "I do not study what is written in black ink," but rather he studied everything just as it is. He looked around at nature and found the dharma clearly enunciated everywhere.

Mother Nature is a straight shooter who never blinks when we look her in the eye. It is all right there in front of us if we will just look.

I learned this on my own, but my dear friend Lama Karma gave it a name. I was learning from, so he said, what is called "The Lama of Appearances." Written dharma texts and physical lamas are not the only avenue to enlightenment. The dharma is also written in nature, perhaps more clearly than in books. There is only one edition and it never goes out of print. The pages of Nature's book can be as easy as those early-morning walks we take. However we do have to look.

And what did I see when I looked into nature? I didn't see anything but clearly. I saw more clearly. Somehow the "seeing" cancelled out the content, which simply means that of course I saw the mini natural worlds at the end of my macro lens. But more important was the pristine clarity of my mind. I saw that too and that is what I had never seen before. This was a special time for me, but let me back up a bit and here comes the story.

Remember the old chestnut "How do you like your martini?" I can make it very dry or I can throw an olive or two into the mix and tell a story. This will have some story to it. And you beginning meditators don't panic. What I am writing about here is not the traditional basic meditation, but what is called Vipassana or insight meditation, actually a superset of that called Mahamudra.

I was 67 years old at the time and suddenly without a livelihood. And no, I didn't have a lot of money. I had made a lot and lost it, like so many others. Suddenly I had no job and no income.

It was a time of intense pressure in my life because these events had thrown me for a loss, leaving me outside of what I knew (and was comfortable with), and with no clear direction known. What was to become of me? I had become a non-sequitur in my own life, suddenly shoved aside by circumstances. I know, many of you have had something similar happen, but just because it is a general condition does not mean that we don't each take it personally. I certainly did.

And as devastating as that time was in some ways, it brought about a profound change in me. Suddenly I was listening again to what nature had always been whispering. As a child I could hear, but as I became an adult I had stopped listening, fascinated instead by the kaleidoscopic display of time.

Perhaps I am a case of "shake before using." I had to be really shaken before I could see. And it was in this time of real upset that I first realized something like actual clarity in my dharma practice. And that was no accident; the two are linked.

The closest analogy I can imagine is that of a woman in labor. I have watched all four of my kids being born and have seen how women turn inward, and go deep inside and on their own, to have that baby. They are just 'gone' as far as the outside world is concerned, totally occupied. I know, because I remained present at those births, sticking out like a sore thumb. I was so "not-occupied," except for my awareness of feeling useless – a great lesson in itself.

Anyway, in the late spring of 2008 I was like that. Driven by events beyond the edge of my known universe, I found myself standing in the void, just staring. And I got there without knowing where I was headed, and was so humbled by life events that I fell out of line with the program I was in and just wandered off into the meadows and forests. For sure it was some kind of intense purification.

It is true that I was undistracted as I peered through pristine camera lenses at the perfect tiny macro worlds I found in nature. My own personal world (and career) was no longer a distraction (having proved undependable), leaving me stranded and just out there on my own. Talk about "revulsion of samsara," the fourth thought that turns the mind toward the dharma!

Outside of my family, I was revolted by everything in my mundane world, tired out and sick at heart. I was not even distracted by the thought that I was not distracted. I just didn't care. All of that held no meaning for me. Everything was empty but still right there, going on. It is somewhat of a revelation that at times like these, the world just keeps

going on without us, or worse, with us.

And we can't simply engineer life-changing or tragic events in our life. We have to start where we are and take advantage of what we have been given, good, bad, and indifferent.

I have written about this period in my life before, that in those stark times I was up before dawn with my camera and out in the very wet grass and dew of early morning summer in Michigan. In the beginning it was an escape. This went on (almost every morning it did not rain) from late May until long after first frost, all the way to the onset of winter. I watched the sun rise each morning for half a year.

And I mean I got ringing wet crawling through the grass, staying out long enough for the sun to slowly rise and dry me out again. I kept going. I was giving nature a good long look after decades of turning my head. And I was being purified by all the chaos going on in my career, so it was with real joy that I sought solace in those early foggy mornings in the meadows, and it went on for like six months straight! God knows what the neighbors thought as they drove by and saw me crawling through the weeds at the edge of the local cemetery.

[TO BE CONTINUED TOMORROW – If you want to read it all now, here is the link:

<http://dharmagrooves.com/Blog.aspx>]

Over the years described above I have taken many hundreds of thousands of nature photos. If I got better as a photographer it was because in the beginning I had to photograph if I wanted a clear mind, thus I was photographing every day. ]

