

BLOGS 2023 WINTER



by Michael Erlewine

2023
Essays
WINTER

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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SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

January 1, 2023

Expect nothing,
Except nothing.
Accept something.

When it comes to writing, I write more than I can edit. Rather than edit what I have already written, instead, I would rather just write something new. And so, it's not what I'm writing that is only important, but rather also

the act of writing and sharing. They both are, but the process is what produces the results.

For me, writing IS meditation, not because I say it is, but because I worked very hard to make it that way, and so it is meditation that I am after, what I want to do all the time. That is my form of communicating!

How does one meditate without doing something like writing or whatever? I'm sure it exists, yet I don't know how to do that. So far, this form of Insight Meditation is what I do.

Of course, I have been learning to meditate in and through everything I do. As mentioned, I particularly meditate by writing, and so the topics and subjects I write about, lofty or low, be they interesting or not, are just grist for the mill of meditation. In other words, of course the results exist and have meaning, but the process is the main result, what makes all other results happen. I don't know how to not have some kind of differential, something to touch on or into to spark the meditation that it be recursive.

It could be anything, anything at all. Insight Meditation is insight into something, somewhere, somehow, as opposed to just sitting here spinning my wheels, and treading water.

Yet, my habit is to ping off something rather than nothing at all. Not sure how to meditate on nothing at all. It seems that meditation for me involves some touchstone, some signature, idea, or bit of Samsara to at least ping or bounce off of, like a meditational sonar.

By their echo do we know, and it's not so much about the echo as it is about the meditation itself that causes our spiritual sonar, touching on Samsara and reflecting the echo that returns. It's all a process of deconstructing Samsara, like the old game of "Pick-Up-Sticks," where we deconstruct the pile of sticks until nothing is left. Annihilatus in Latin.

That's what meditation is, a way to deconstruct and transform our cyclic world of Samsara into Nirvana, correcting miss-takes or excess, and finally seeing things from their actual angle or view. Meditation is a process of spiritual breathing.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



POINTING OUT THE WAY

January 2, 2023

Everything points somewhere and at something or nothing. Of course, I can use close-up photography to point out the clarity of external appearances. I do that. We are embedded in a mass of pointers pointing every which way. And in that mass are what we could call schools of pointers, like schools of fish, a group of pointers all pointing together in the same direction. We can find our way by feeling out our pointers as to

where they point. No, it's not reading the future, but it is having the future pointed out to us to a degree.

Liberation through seeing, photographically, is one thing, while liberation through language and words, another. I can show you a striking photo and there can be meaning in that. I can also arrange words so that they point out or point in one direction or another, as mentioned above.

I tend to do the later because there is less involved with arranging words than there is with the setup, take down, and process of using a camera, subject, and light. Either way, the process of meditation can have different results, in my case these involve photos or words.

The arrangement of words can also trap the light of the mind and funnel it this way and that. If words are arranged just right, they can reflect space or time beyond themselves, something that we cannot otherwise see or get to. These pointers can shine a light upon what for us is still in our future because we have not been there yet. The light shines on what for us is our future, perhaps illuminating it a bit.

And it's a matter of introduction, to those who are open to being introduced, to what up to now has been too difficult or dim for us to see clearly. Words, if arranged just right, can bend and shine a light on what we have been otherwise unable to make out for ourselves.

Words perhaps are not the most kind way of reflecting the future to us, but they are better than nothing, in particular if we are stubborn or unable to get off our

duffs and move ourselves to action. They can help us get moving.

Perhaps, words can shine a light on the road ahead, at least enough so we can see to travel that way. That's what I consider I am doing in many or even most of these blogs I write and by that writing thus reflect through my own travelled path what may be a useful alternative for others. And it may not be useful, but it's all I have.

Whether this writing helps is hard to say. There is not enough response from reader's comments here on Facebook to get more specific with suggestions. Inertia has to be overcome by each of us.

The best I can do is put into words what I have found useful and post that, on the off chance that some of you reading this are fellow travelers, travelling in the same or a similar direction and may find these words helpful.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



DANCING IN THE FIRE

January 4, 2023

How I spend my time is important. The Zen in me says everything deserves my respect, and I don't argue that. That being said, how to come to rest in the midst of all this chaos. Of course, this will vary from individual to individual to some degree, but nevertheless, rest is rest. It's about letting go and not clinging.

For me, the least apparatus I have to assemble and disassemble is easier, although I get the idea, remaining aware of my awareness in everything I do in a day.

That being said, I gravitate (or have gravitated) toward remaining still, working with language, and notating my results as they evolve -- writing it down. This means writing articles like these, while bobbing in and out of immersive meditation.

What is helpful for me is a special form of Insight Meditation that involves crossing and recrossing that threshold, the borderline between conscious thought and immersive meditation, repeatedly, every second or so, thus working the 'differential' between these two processes, which continually refreshes or oxygenates the clarity of mind. In my experience, and for me, that does it. It just works.

It's somewhat like taking a piece of red-hot molten iron, hammering it into shape, and then thrusting the hot iron into cold water to retain that shape, and then doing this again, repeatedly, and by that continued process creating a shaped piece that is useful. That's a rough analogy as to what I do with language.

The shaping of the red-hot iron is conscious (and dualistic), the plunging into cold water, unconscious (nondual), and the result a mixing of the two, crossing and recrossing the line separating the two, over and over again. The contrast results in great clarity in my experience.

I don't know of anything as effective as this process I am describing, this form of nondual meditation.

I am dancing around the edge of the fire.
[Midjourney graphic by me.]



TAKE THE DOWN ELEVATOR

January 4, 2023

It took me years to get it through my head that 'rest' in dharma terms is the same rest that you and I know, when at the end of a long day we plop down on the couch, put up our feet, and read a book or watch TV. Rest is rest.

Yet, rest admits of degrees, so we need to look at that. There is rest and then there is 'Rest'. If we kick back and rest, we may relax some, yet the level or depth of our rest may be held up by a variety of distractions, call them low-level worries, thoughts, attachments, and what-have-you?

And so, held up by any number of distractions, our level of rest may be too surface-oriented, and never deep enough, just as we have different levels of sleep at night, not all of which are healing or beneficial.

When we push the buttons on our internal elevator to go down into rest, we may not get very far with that, and instead find our rest disturbed by all kinds of surface distractions.

And so, at some point in our meditation training, we become aware that we have all kinds of mental distractions, many perhaps very light, that eat up the quality of our rest and keep us attached to the surface rather than reach full immersion. These too have to be addressed.

It's unfortunate that describing all of this looks like our attempt to meditate ends up looking like a "To Do" list when that's not really how it is. In fact, it is not necessarily helpful to think that eliminating distractions is like checking them off one by one.

What is needed is to relax and just let go, and by that, shake off a whole lot of distractions like you would raindrops from a raincoat. It's up to us to let go and just relax enough to bypass all the mosquitoes of the mind, which just are not that important.

So, we don't train by fighting the distractions one by one or even dwelling on them, but rather by letting go more deeply so they are not of any concern. That's what it takes. This is something we learn by doing, because we naturally seek the clarity of total immersion. Our intuition is our guide in this.

I have little idea what the great meditators did back in the caves of time. I am sure that I am on a lower echelon from that, yet I am what I am, and working with what I have.

It does seem to me that the songs of spiritual experience from the great meditators like 'Milarepa', their Dohas, are very didactic, instructional, with clear suggestions that come from where? Obviously, they came from their meditative experience.

Even beginners like ourselves have that, at least some spiritual experience, and can share that. How useful it is, I can't say. Like most of us, I can only do my best, share what I have experienced and wait for an echo.

[Midjourney graphic by me of the down elevator.]



LETTING GO

January 5, 2023

These things I hang onto and demand,
Already a bridge too far,
Water over the dam.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

Reanimating and resuscitating old friends,
A nice thought,
Decades too late.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

Reserve some space for me, myself, and I,
That and a ticket,
Will get you a ride on the bus.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

Raising kids that are already raised,
I should have done that long ago,
And perhaps I did.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

Mixing in public places long gone,
I did back then.
You can't go home again.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

Everything I wanted to do,
Now a day late,
A dollar short.

This is what is meant by letting go.
Let them go.

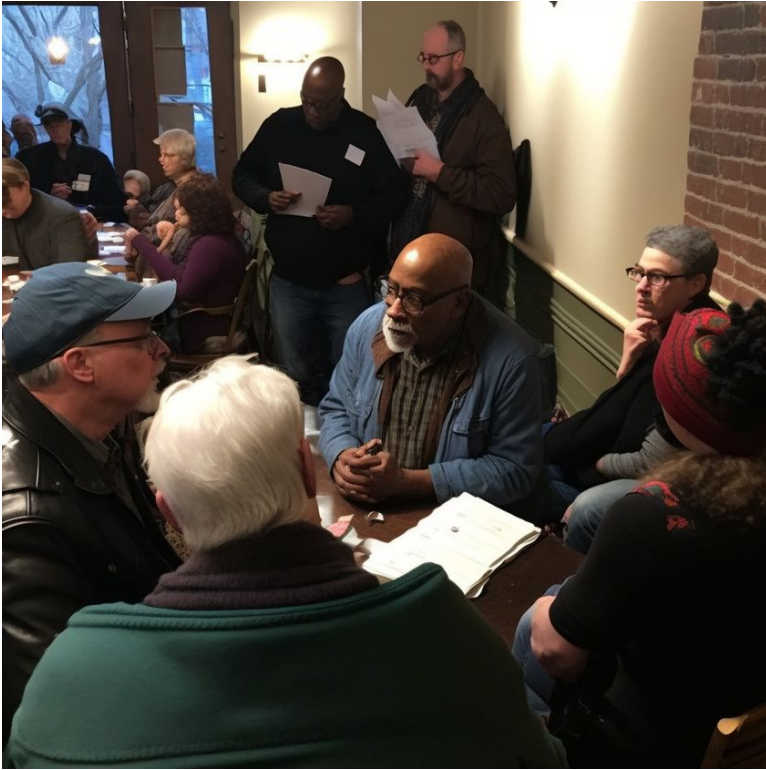
The inspiration that I seek,
I already have.
No need to prime the pump.

This is what is meant by letting go.

Let them go.
LET THEM GO

Insight Meditation,
A true joy,
Is what I have,
And that's enough.

[This little poem-like statement may but poorly represent what is actually a sea change on my part, perhaps not an earthquake, but a massive shift much as a foundation settles. This is how dharma works as I know it in my life, not piecemeal, one by one, but rather like a huge shelf of ice breaks off an iceberg. That's how things change.]
[Midjourney graphic by me.]



MORE ON ANN ARBOR IN THE 1960s

January 6, 2023

I am happy to share with you some wonderful reminiscences on Ann Arbor in the 1960s back in the day by my friend Paul Bernstein.

Bernstein has been gathering all kinds of reminiscences from the 1960s era of Ann Arbor. I have written a lot on what I know, but when I receive notes from another writer on those times, how wonderful is that, to find someone else who was there

and who also cared for the events, celebrated that time, and left enough of a trail of notes to help shine light on those times.

Paul Bernstein first came to Ann Arbor in Fall of 1959 and was there through 1972, with the exception of a year and a half at Iowa in the mid-60s. My close friend Jeff Mitchell, poet and a winner of the Hopwood Award at the U of M, invited Bernstein to contribute to the Generation arts magazine at the university. Paul Bernstein is a poet, author, and liberal activist, who has now returned to and lives in Ann Arbor.

Here are some notes by Paul Bernstein about Ann Arbor in the 1960s.

ANN ARBOR IN THE 1960S

By Paul Bernstein

Michael Erlewine's tales of Ann Arbor in the 1960s bring back a lot of memories. I was around Ann Arbor for most of the 60s as a student, grad student, and later leftie activist / library worker / aspiring poet / weekend hippie.

I actually put in a good deal of time at the Prime Mover house at 114 N. Division Street. Prime Mover keyboardist and ONCE musician Robert Sheff (Blue Gene Tyranny) was a good friend whom I often visited. The ground floor was occupied for many years by printmaker/artist Ruth Weisberg, who had her studio in the basement and whose husband, Kelyn Roberts, was one of the first people I met when I came to Ann Arbor. The back door of their apartment

was always open, and they more or less kept open house for local Ann Arbor artists and writers.

Ruth was not only a graduate art student but also taught at nearby Eastern Michigan University, and so was acquainted with the local talent. It was there that I first met Al Loving, who later became the first Black artist to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York, and encountered novelist/short story writer Lennie Michaels, and a host of others. Ruth herself later became Dean of the School of Art at the University of Southern California.

When I first got to Ann Arbor folk music was in. I can remember listening to Jessie Fuller--I still have the vinyl LPs he did then--David Blue, Al Young and Bill McAdoo, Danny Kalb and Joan Baez when she came to town. It was later, through Sheff, that I began to know the local musicians. I can recall hearing the Prime Movers at the original Ark on Hill Street--Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Turn on Your Love Light" was my favorite.

I was not much of a drinker and so didn't hit the bars often. But I do remember going with my girlfriend to Clint's Club to listen to Sheff playing keyboards for Billy C. and the Sunshine. (We would get a quick drink to satisfy the management then sit on the back stairs outside between sets drinking gimlets from a soda bottle she kept in her purse.) Billy C. Farlow later became lead singer for Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen, which also featured Bill Kirchen on guitar and vocals. I had first heard Kirchen as the lead guitarist and singer for a band called Seventh Seal. He later became a Grammy-nominated

virtuoso on the Telecaster guitar who still regularly returns to perform in Ann Arbor.

Sheff eventually formed his own band--Bob Sheff and his Real Great Band, which featured a demon saxophonist named, I think, Steve Mackay, and Rich Dishman on drums. I believe he was also drummer for a fun local country band called Buddies in the Saddle that had a female lead singer, Lorna. He is still in the Ann Arbor area, playing with George Bedard and the Kingpins and others. I confess that I was not into so-called "high-energy" bands like the UP or Iggy Pop's Stooges--by that time my tastes had turned to very tight genre music, particularly Bakersfield country music and Chicago blues.

An acquired taste was the ONCE group, a set of experimental musicians, multimedia artists, and filmmakers who organized a series of festivals in the mid-1960s, often collaborating with figures like painter/choreographer Robert Rauschenberg and composer John Cage. I particularly recall a multimedia piece called "Megaton for William Burroughs," which featured soundtrack excerpts from a British World War II movie called "The Dam Busters," and a set of performances on the roof of the Williams Street parking structure. Joe and Anne Wehrer, performers in their own right, made their home the locale for notable parties during the ONCE Festival, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, and other events.

The single most important music event during my stay in Ann Arbor was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival. I recall Roosevelt Sykes opening each festival on solo piano, Son House closing the first Blues Festival,

Magic Sam's great set, and Bonnie Raitt lambasting the third Festival organizers for not inviting any other acoustic blues artists. Most of all I remember Howling Wolf stomping all over the stage in a memorable, prolonged set during the first festival; a story later spread around that he was angered about getting second billing behind Muddy Waters, who had been chosen to close that night's schedule. The following year, it was heartbreaking to see this imposing figure, body now broken by illness, limited to performing a truncated set while sitting down.

It was most unfortunate that plans to record the historic first Ann Arbor Blues Festival fell through because of a technical glitch. However, enthusiasts like me rushed over to Discount Records (at the corner of State and Liberty Streets, where many of the local musicians mentioned here worked at one time or another), to pick up the blues LPs issued on the Chess, Delmark, and other labels. Fifty years later, dozens of these LPs are still on my shelves.

It is seldom mentioned that the first two festivals were preceded and followed by a stream of individual performances, turning Ann Arbor into a blues haven second only to Chicago. Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, Otis Rush, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Mighty Joe Young, Luther Allison, Mississippi Fred McDowell---- with a relatively short space of time they all performed in Ann Arbor, and those are only the ones I remember--there were surely others.

One aspect of Ann Arbor 60s life not covered in Michael's recollections is the poet/writer scene. There were at least three local journals--the student publication Generation, Anon, and Overflow--that I

recall. Local writers who later became relatively well-known included novelist and poet Jerome Badanes, poet Martha McNeil Zweig, novelist Nancy Willard and short story writer Lennie Michaels. Oddly enough, while there are a variety of open mic/literary reading venues today in Ann Arbor, there don't seem to be any local journals, although Third Wednesday, a quarterly journal out of Redford, MI, is edited in part by local poets. There were also at least two underground papers--the Ann Arbor Argus, which was connected with John Sinclair and the White Panther Party, and the Up Against the Wall Street Journal (which I wrote for and helped edit).

Perhaps the best known aspect of Ann Arbor in the 60s was its political history. Ann Arbor was the site of the first SDS meeting, the first anti-war teach in, the first draft board sit-in, and the Black Action Movement strike that closed down the university. National anti-war leaders emerging from Ann Arbor in the 60s included Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, SDS Chairman and radical writer Carl Oglesby, and Weatherman leader Bill Ayres.

All of these movements--musical, artistic, literary, political--tended to mesh together as the 60s progressed. Joan Baez would meet with anti-war activists after her concerts. Martha McNeil was active in SDS. Award-winning Jerome Badanes worked with the Radical Education Project, edited the (short-lived) SDS literary magazine Caw and (according to himself) was the best sandwich maker in the Columbia 1968 Columbia student uprising.

The main place they meshed together was the middle room of the Michigan Union (MUG). It was at the

Union that I first met Robert Sheff, Bill Kirchen, Kelyn Roberts, Jerome Badanes (who became my mentor and guide for both poetry and radical politics), and in all likelihood, Michael Erlewine. It was at the Union that I was invited to come to the first meeting of "a new campus political party" that became the Voice political party and eventually Voice-SDS. And it was at the Union that I was asked if I could contribute to Generation, leading to my first publication. Union regulars would often establish their own territories, showing up at the same time day after day and taking the same tables. On Friday nights, people would drift in throughout the evening to find out where the parties were. (On Saturday nights the room was turned into a "cabaret" with dim light, tablecloths and not-so-good live music, rendering it less accessible). I spent some seven years as an undergraduate and graduate student at the University, but the Union was my real education.

At the end of the 60s the Union basement was remodeled and all this came to an end. The remodeling may have been associated with the move of the student bookstore into the basement, but most of us were convinced the power that be (whoever they were) welcomed the opportunity to get the "radicals" and "longhairs" out. Mark's Coffeehouse, on William Street between State and Maynard, took its place. It had a fabulous jukebox, tolerant staff--I recall Pat (Reynolds?) and Sharon as mainstays, and Sarah Brown. now a bass player and songwriter in Austin--and occasional live music. Commander Cody band members would stop by when in town, Mississippi Fred McDowell hung out there for a bit after one of his Ann Arbor gigs, and I can remember Buddies in the Saddle playing there. But it folded after a few years, in

part because coffee houses often do, but perhaps in part because the freely interactive culture that briefly came together in the 60s had pretty much fractured by the end of the decade.

[Midjourney graphic created by me, a flavor of those times.]



THE TWO ACCUMULATIONS: MERIT & AWARENESS

January 7, 2023

When I asked Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (my dharma teacher for 36 years) what is the main obstacle for most people in dharma practice, the answer is always

“lack of merit,” not enough merit has been accumulated. Just what ‘merit’ is we will look at here.

Merit is the grease that turns the wheel of the dharma.

This is why we practice dharma, to accumulate enough merit. Enough merit for what? And what is merit anyway, in simple terms?

A quick look through a half dozen dharma teachings show me that often ‘merit’ is said in the same breath with the term “awareness.” In other words, the phrase “Merit & Awareness” occur again and again in the Buddhist literature. And the two are connate, meaning these two terms are joined at the hip and are just two sides of the same coin. Sometimes these two terms are also translated as “Skillful means & Wisdom.”

‘Skillful Means’ is merit, and ‘Wisdom’ is awareness. If we gain merit, we will automatically have awareness or wisdom, and vice versa.

Thus ‘merit’ is synonymous with ‘skillful means’ and ‘awareness’ is synonymous with ‘wisdom.’ More interesting is the fact that these two terms not only occur together but are considered ‘connate’; they actually cause one another to appear in the world, a kind of perpetual motion machine. How this works is important to understand for every dharma practitioner.

People keep asking me where are the secret teachings of Tibetan Buddhism? The only secret teachings I know are what are called self-secret. They are right in the open, however we are not yet aware enough to see them.

“Merit” refers to skillful or meritorious actions that we make as opposed to sloppy or unskillful actions. Doing something properly or skillfully (or kindly, gently) has a different type of effect (dharmically or karmically speaking) than unskillful actions.

In other words, skillful actions are meritorious and sloppy actions somehow lack merit. I guess we all know this. That is why skilled labor and skills in general are so valued in our society. A Stradivarius violin shows the skill that went into making it. It glows, at least musically.

Great skill in anything is inherently meritorious, so much more so when it comes to dharma actions like saying a mantra properly or working on your sitting meditation practice. And now for the kicker.

Not only are skillful dharma actions (or any skillful actions) meritorious, but their precise performance itself is clarifying and causes awareness or clarity to arise in and around us.

Great skill in action, which we might see watching a ballet or a football receiver, somehow enhances that activity. I like to tell myself that awareness or clarity is the aura of our actions, good or bad. We instantly are more aware of great skill compared to poor execution.

This is particularly true in the martial arts or, for that matter, any of the arts, sciences, etc. – everything. The more skillful our actions, the more clarity and awareness takes place or surrounds it – almost like a nimbus or an aura.

Somehow skillful actions create or imprint space and by that generate an aura of awareness around them.

And here is what is marvelous: increased awareness makes it easier for us to be more skillful yet (we can clearly how to act), and the signature of more skillful actions imprint us and bring forth ever more awareness, and so it goes - recursively. With greater awareness we can better see to act skillfully, and ever more skillful actions energize and exercise and create space around themselves, giving us more room or aura -- clear awareness.

This for me was an incredible concept to learn about, the dharma engine that each practitioner is working to jump start. And like spontaneous combustion or fusion, once this chain reaction is started, it feeds on and propels itself onward. It becomes automatic and exponential.

The problem for beginning dharma practitioners is getting it started in the first place. I found it helpful to understand this recursive cycle, and here is how:

For years, although I was faithful in my dharma practice, I too often was just putting in the time, kind of waiting my allotted meditation period out until it was over so I could go on with the rest of my day which I was anticipating. I often found meditation practice quite boring, and for that matter rote practice of any kind.

In other words, there was little (or very little) skillful or meritorious actions taking place on my part in my practicing meditation (the way I did it) and correspondingly little awareness (or wisdom) arose as

a result. I was waiting for the awareness yet, like striking rocks on flint to make a fire, I was not striking the rocks properly or skillfully, and of course there was little to no fire. However, at the time I did not know why I was getting no fire. Everything has a proper way of being done, and I was not doing that.

Too often I was just putting in my time and also watching the clock. Had I understood the above concept, I would have been far, far better off to have had short meditation periods (more often) in which I actually skillfully participated rather than those longer ones in which I basically tuned out, noodled through them, and waited for them to be over. Half-hearted endeavors work like this.

To turn the wheel of the dharma, “We” actually have to turn the wheel ourselves. Otherwise, our dharma practice will sit there forever with no real change or, as in my case, a change for the worse as I became more jaded and discouraged at the lack of any visible results. Let me repeat the concept one more time to make sure it is clear.

“Merit & awareness” are a dynamic duo that are one of the keys to proper dharma practice and getting results or ‘awareness’. If we do our dharma practice skillfully, say each mantra properly, clearly, cleanly, or when sitting in meditation, we gently (but firmly) bring our mind back to the breath (or whatever object) every time we discover we have again been distracted, then increased awareness will indeed arise over time. If we don’t, it won’t.

And with increased awareness comes the opportunity to perform ever more-skillful actions, and thus

accumulate even greater awareness, ad infinitum. And this effect is not restricted only to the time we spend practicing on the meditation cushion. Our post-meditation practice, the rest of our day, is an ideal practice ground as well for merit & awareness training.

As the Zen practitioners point out so well, we can be skillful mindful of our every action, like raising a cup of tea to our lips or greeting a fellow being, human or otherwise. There is no end to the opportunities for skillful means in any day and there is no end to the awareness that can arise in return or in response.

This kind of practice we can do all day long and if done skillfully, the needed merit will indeed accumulate. According to my dharma teachers, as mentioned earlier, to become aware or enlightened we have to accumulate merit, and lots of it.

What I am pointing out here is that rote dharma practice (like any other rote practice) will not take us far. It has to be heartfelt. The Buddha, a human being like us, pointed out how to become more aware and wake up, but he also made it very clear that we each have to walk the path on our own. No one, not even the Buddha, can touch our forehead and enlighten us. We must enlighten ourselves. That's exactly what the Buddha did. Dharma is a do-it-yourself project.

Practicing meritorious or skillful actions will cause authentic awareness to arise, but we have to be there and do it personally in the moment for this to take place. We have to actually do it, moment by moment, and day by day. Why not?

[Photo by me of my own bell & dorje, the traditional representation of Wisdom & Skillful Means, Awareness & Merit.]



TO SAY MORE IN SILENCE THAN IN WORDS

January 8, 2023

[Some days, like today, I wake up with nothing to say, emptied out. I'm all vowels and no consonants. At these times, I should post nothing, but instead I offer this graphic image and some mindless babble.]

Quite often I manage to outrun writing or any other kind of sign language. Suddenly there, I find no way to sign, nothing to say, or anyone to sign to.

Perhaps without knowing it, I have somehow crossed over a point of no return and am already returning, on the way home. It's hard to say, but quite often I wake up to this particular state of mind and so here I am. That alone, IMO, is a mudra, a gesture that is complete in itself, a sign as well as a signature.

In my understanding, a mudra exists for its own sake and nothing else, more like a beacon than a pointer, a simple lighthouse in the dark of time. Not to mention the deafening foghorn.

With writing and written language,
Temporarily exhausted,
Emptied of meaning,
I find myself with nothing to say,
And no way to say it.
Beyond words.

At these times,
Conceptual thought and thinking,
Are empty of meaning.
The words won't work.
And they point nowhere,
But back at themselves.

A storm without rain,
Dust without wind,
A pond without water,
A life without sin.

Life positions itself,
To squeeze the best out of us,
At the times we are good for little else,

But that.

Every last drop,
Extracted.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



HAPPENING NOW: INTENSE SOLAR ACTIVITY

January 9, 2023

This blog is about the current (11 year) solar sunspot cycle which is now heading toward its maximum effect in the next year or so (2025), and the fact that we just had two large X-class flare events, the highest class of solar activity, on January 3rd and January 6th, as well as a Full Moon on January 6th, 2023 at 6:09 PM EST. All this solar and lunar activity coincided with everything that has been going on politically and militarily of late. And there is certainly more to come.

I have been studying solar activity for many years and learned much about this from Dr. Theodor Landschiedt, a supreme court justice of Germany and a well-known climatologist and Cosmo-biologist, who has since passed on. His book "Children of the Light," which is a history of solar flares and great breakthroughs in creativity in the world is, IMO, seminal. It is available in German and there are some excerpts in English. Message me.

There is no doubt there will be more X-class solar flares coming in the weeks and months ahead. These are massive flare explosions on the sun's surface and some of them will probably include CMEs (Corona Mass Ejections) as well, with some CMEs hurled directly at Earth.

You can read about the effects that intense solar flares and CMEs physically have on Earth, affecting radio and electrical sources, on the Internet. Here I am more concerned with the inner, psychological, and emotional effects of intense solar activity and their effect on us. Scientists are just beginning to acknowledge and study the effects on our psyche in the last 20 years.

Our mental and emotional response to inner changes from solar flares, which will come and are coming, can be overwhelming, as they can wipe away more than we can remember, and this can be a humbling and exhausting experience for many, although most sleep through the shock of these events.

The residuals or remains, the inner effects, of an intense solar flare, are hard to measure because the

measurer (that would be us) is what is changing. How do we measure the measurer when the measurer is what is changing? In other words, we are what we are trying to measure.

And the effects of these strong solar flares, internally, are in broad strokes, which can be hard to grasp or realize, because they tend to wash us out of memory rather than reveal their effects obviously.

It's difficult to remember how we were before solar change affected us, when it is we who are changing. We can hazard a guess, and do, yet remembering how we were before the inundation of a solar flare is to some degree impossible. We have changed in the process of the flare beyond strict recall, IMO. I have tried and can but catch a glimpse of how I and life was before the inundation of solar energy.

About all we can do is get used to where we are here and now, not attempting to remember or hang on to the way we were before the solar flare impacted us, not that we can remember it. We can't. This is a sign of the deeper solar change. Solar change changes us in the process.

And so, when the sun pours forth intense solar discharge, we change right with it and in lock step. Internally, the sun has us by the short hairs, so to speak. We are always part of the results of solar change. And it's difficult to measure because we cannot avoid responding and changing with the beat of the Sun. When the Sun changes, we change. That's how direct our link with solar energy is, IMO.

As mentioned, this is still very new as far as studies go. Not much is written, and scientists have just begun to examine this in the last twenty years. Yet, these extreme solar influences happen and to us, so we can, to the degree that we are able, experience this for ourselves. We have no choice, but many just are overwhelmed and have to sleep it off.

This kind of extreme solar influx is going to happen anyway. It is happening right now, and in these next two years. For some folks, it is overwhelming, and they have to go and lie down, or have headaches, or emotional times.

We are used to receiving the light and energy of the sun in our daily doses, like getting a suntan. When that same energy is increased almost exponentially, it sweeps through us like a high wind and kind of wipes our mind clean of memory. The effect can be a little or a lot, in my experience. At some times our psyche is more vulnerable than at others.

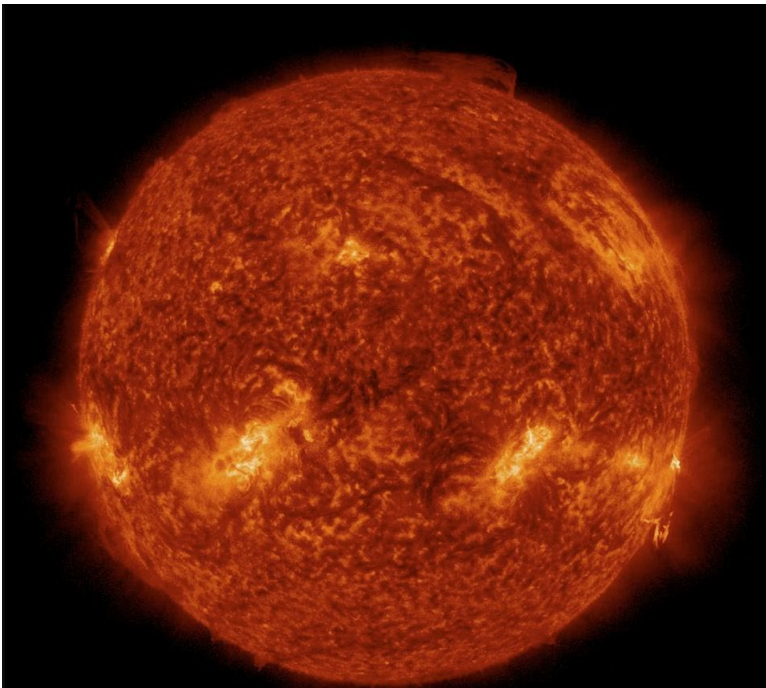
At times such extreme change is welcomed by us, while at others it is not. We can resist and struggle to sort out the effects, at least I do. Changing and being unable to measure what changed in us can be a frightening experience, yet this has gone on forever, so at some level we are used to it, and just pick up on where we are and march on.

For me, becoming aware of the effects of intense solar emission on our psyche is a first step. We can learn to, at the very least, monitor solar change in our life. Here are two links that are very useful for seeing what is happening right now with solar activity.

<https://spaceweather.com/>

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



Solar Flares

Psychological Effects



Opening a Discussion

SOLAR FLARES: PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

January 9, 2023

[Real-time Events: An X1.9-Class solar flare erupted on January 9th at about 01:30 PM EST, the third in just a few days. Around the time of the X Flare, five rapid-fire eruptions occurred across the surface of the sun, in a time window shorter than 90 minutes, although they were separated by as much as a million kilometers. It is a time be vigilant and one not to push things, but to reflex and bend with the wind. Relax. We are in for a ride.]

Change is upon us. Of course, we think of change as volitional, as in “I will change this” and so on. And yes, we by definition participate in any change in our condition and life because we are there, involved. And we do these things all the time.

What I wonder about are the turning points, the tipping points of change, which send us careening down one side of the slope of life or the other.

What exactly puts us over the top? And by what power do I suddenly change the course of my life in major ways?

And I can't help but think that solar activity is involved, and perhaps to a great degree at that. There probably is some arbiter of change in our life, perhaps a few, yet the longer I study the activity of the sun, the more I believe the sun is an enormous factor, sending one person up a hill and another down the other side.

I can't speak to what modern scientists are doing about this because although I read that they are more

and more interested in the effects of solar variation on our psyche, I have not seen much work to that effect that I recognize compared to what I am finding.

I have however worked closely with one of the great cosmobiologists and climatologists of our times, who was a supreme court justice of Germany, Dr. Theodor Landscheidt. Landscheidt was also an astrologer and influenced my own work more than any other individual.

Landscheidt has been to our center where he has lectured on solar intensity. And Landscheidt and I were friends. In fact, in 1978 I sent Theodor Landscheidt his first home computer, a Commodore Pet 2001, the same model of computer I pioneered astrology programming on in 1977, and in only 8K of RAM.

And it was on this humble computer that Landscheidt did much of his pioneering work on the Sun. And we both did original work on the planetary nodal system of our solar system, Landscheidt on geocentric planetary nodes, and I on heliocentric planetary nodes, my work which was published in 1976 as "Interface: Planetary Nodes."

In the 1990s, my dear friend, physicist, mathematician and translator, Robert Schmidt (along with his wife Ellen Black) came and worked at our center here in Big Rapids, Michigan for some years. Robert and his wife lived right next door at our center, and we spent a lot of time together, shared meals, and all of that. Schmidt and I had many deep and meaningful conversations over the years they stayed with us.

When Robert Schmidt left our center and moved to Cumberland, MD, or so he told me, he became an astrologer, and went on to make major contributions to the astrology of the ancient Greeks.

While at our center, I asked Bob Schmidt (and sponsored him) to translate this book by Theodor Landscheidt ““We are Children of Light: Cosmic Awareness as a Source of Life Affirmation,” which he did.

Unfortunately, Robert Schmidt passed on before he was able to complete the footnotes and final proofing for “We are Children of the Light” and that remains for someone to complete. Still, the main text is translated and is one of the later works authored by Landscheidt and a perfect match for his early book “Cosmic Cybernetics.”

I thought that a meaningful way to start off a more in-depth discussion of solar intensity would be to share here one of the chapters of Landscheidt’s book “Children of the Light” for comment and discussion. Here it is.

LIGHT-ERUPTIONS OF THE SUN AND HUMAN VISIONS AND INTUITIONS

By Theodor Landscheidt

The "mysterious flames" that the sun emits according to the Taoist experience of meditation quoted above, exist in fact in astrophysical actuality. They are called solar eruptions or flares. These enormous light-flashes of the sun release energies that are equivalent to the potential of several hundred million

hydrogen bombs, which would supply the whole population of the earth with electrical energy for a hundred million years. The physical effects of such solar eruptions on the earth are manifold. Among solar-terrestrial phenomena belong the northern lights and magnetic storms, disturbances of radio communication, and interruptions of both telephone communication and the electrical supply.

These have already been known for a long time. According to more recent knowledge, weather changes, heightening of thunderstorm activity, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, interruptions of the electronic control of satellites, and uncontrollable changes in the data storage in large computers are connected with energetic eruptions.

Such events do not have an immediate bearing upon the human psyche. The increase in the frequency of traffic accidents, psychoses, and suicides after solar eruptions observed at the same time already points to psychic reactions. But this could possibly be explained as follows: The electromagnetic radiation of the sun, whose intensity increases dramatically in special frequency ranges after eruptions, unbalances the autonomous nervous system or hormone system of human beings who are pre-disposed toward instability. But this explanation fails to explain the astonishing phenomenon that particularly energetic light-eruptions of the sun are concurrent with light-experiences or phases of prominent creativity.

Here are some examples: When Gopi Krishna had his light- experience at Christmas in 1937, severe magnetic storms formed on the earth, preceded by

energetic flares on the sun. The same holds for the mystical experience of Arthur Koestler on the third of February, 1937. A further example is that of Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, made famous by his book, "The Seven- Storey Mountain," which he wrote as a monk. Men listened to him when he addressed himself to the problems of the renewal of the church and to the fundamental questions of human existence in the fifties and sixties.

On December 3, 1968, after a visit to Buddhist statues in Polonnaruwa, he wrote in his diary: "Now I know and have seen what I sought for in the dark. I don't know what still remains, but now I have seen, I have pierced through the surface and have reached beyond the shadow and the veil." [174] Very energetic solar eruptions occurred at this time. The proton activity of the sun was the strongest of the year 1968. A so-called Forbush effect was observed, accompanied by a decrease of cosmic radiation of about 5%.

Moreover, when the German Nobel laureate Klaus von Klitzing discovered the quantized Hall-effect at 2 A.M. on February 5, 1980, a strong magnetic storm occurred, preceded by energetic solar eruptions. At this time sunspot activity in its 11-year cycle reached the second- highest maximum since the beginning of the regular counting of sunspots in the eighteenth century. The discovery was not merely a matter of technical observation, but a cognitive act presupposing spiritual presence, deep vision, and the faculty of integration in addition to comprehensive knowledge. When Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen

discovered the radiation named after him, a very severe geomagnetic storm was observed at the same time, such as can be released only through solar eruptions.

Up to this point, there has proved to be a consistent temporal correlation in all cases investigated for which the date of the spiritual experience or discovery was known and fell in a period of time for which there existed observations of energetic solar eruptions or strong geomagnetic storms explicable only through such eruptions. In this connection, one must consider the fact that energetic solar eruptions and correspondingly strong geomagnetic storms are relatively rare, and many months often elapse before such a cosmic event occurs. since the acts of prominent human creativity of interest here are rarer still, and moreover are frequently unknown, the data considered up to this point still does not suffice for a mathematical- statistical judgment. On top of this, the technical prerequisites for the observation of solar eruptions were not satisfied until the beginning of the 1930's. Also, energetic solar eruptions are often observed without their leading to a magnetic storm on the earth.

Eruptions presuppose a suitable energy potential, which is to be found in the strong magnetic fields of sunspots. Hence, maxima of sun-spot activity can at least be regarded as an indicator of the fact that the sun has also developed powerful eruptive activity at the same time. It is remarkable that in 1905, at the time of a maximum of sun spots, Albert Einstein submitted four path-breaking works, including one

containing the theory of special relativity. Also, when Werner Heisenberg conceived the matrix mechanics of quantum theory on June 8, 1925, the sun-spot activity stood out far above the contiguous observations at that time. The number of sun spots was at its highest in the first half of 1925. Heisenberg reports on this experience in his autobiography, "The Part and the Whole": "I was deeply shocked. I had the feeling of looking through the surface of atomic phenomena at a source of remarkable inner beauty lying deep beneath it ... I was so excited that I could not think of sleep. I left the house in the dawn that was already breaking ... and climbed a rocky tower that jutted into the sea. I waited for sunrise on its top."

After a publication in 1984[175J, which referred to these relationships, it became apparent that the psychologist Suitbert Ertel, holder of a chair at George-August- University at Gottingen, has been working for more than ten years on a work that proceeds from the idea that there is a connection between sunspot activity and human activity. With subtly conceived statistical procedures that are fortified against all conceivable objections and executed within a complex relational structure, Suitbert Ertel has contrived a proof that cycles of solar activity are stamped onto cycles of human activity in such different areas as art, science, religion, and the development of new social structures. Here the investigation extends not only to the 11-year sunspot cycle but also to a very long-waved cycle, which is characterized by phenomena like the drawn- out, deep Maunder- minimum of the sunspot activity of the seventeenth century, which has played an important

role in climate research for some time now. The particular results of this still unpublished work cannot be anticipated. For the connection we are pursuing here, it is especially interesting that the direct correlation of creative phases to the maxima in the 11-year sun-spot cycle emerges particularly clearly in poetry and painting. In both cases the level of significance lies at $P=0.002$. [176] According to international practice, a result is called statistically significant if the value $P=0.01$ is not exceeded. This is plainly the case here.

Both painting and poetry deal with the immediate transformation of impressions and moods. If it is correct that light eruptions of the sun have any kind of influence on human creativity at all, then this can take effect immediately in both these art forms. According to the cases cited, this seems to hold even for scientific intuition, for the "flash of inspiration" in the original sense of the word. For the most part, several years elapse until the work arising from this flash gets published. Thus, Suitbert Ertel has found that the publication of appropriate works increases several years after the flare maximum, when the cycle is already tending toward the minimum. However, for the matter under consideration here, it is not the publication of the fully ripened work that is decisive, but the creative impulse, the seed of the work. Such a line of thought might appear senseless to materialists, who would never in their wildest dreams think of looking at the sun as anything other than a machine for the production of energy. However, the creative researcher Hermann Haken, the founder of

synergetics, has drawn an analogy between the processes in the sun and life.

In view of the indissoluble interwovenness of mass, energy and information, and in view of the overall result of the previous investigation, it is a reasonable assumption that the flow of solar information, which seems to maintain a special quality throughout light eruptions, influences human creativity. That is, structural impulses from the ultimate source of the creative give an impetus for development wherever the state of ripeness favors the reception of a seed of development. It is striking that the same developmental tendencies emerge again and again at the same time in such different areas as mathematics, physics, painting, music, and literature, and that they lead to the formation of similar forms.

That these outbreaks of light in the cosmic light-core, the sun, also have a correlation to mystical experiences in the core of the Self testifies that the roots of this connection reach down to the mystic ground. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe gave expression to this. In his final conversation with Eckermann, immediately before his death, he said, "If anyone asks me whether it is in my nature to worship the sun, then I say again: absolutely! For it is a revelation of that which is most high, and surely the most powerful revelation that is vouchsafed to us children of man to perceive. In it I adore the light and the creative power of God, through which alone we and with us all plants and animals live, move and are."

Wise Hassidim have said, "As the hand held before the eye conceals the largest mountain, so the little earthly life conceals from sight the tremendous lights and mysteries of which the world is full. And he who can take it away from in front of his eye, as we can take away our hand, beholds the great illumination of the innermost world."

May this transcendent light become living actuality for the reader, so that he may return the smile of the universe.

Solar Flares: Psychological Effects

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../SOLAR%20FLARES%20DISCUSSION.pdf>



THE LOSS OF DIRECTIONALITY

January 10, 2023

To step back and put all this solar flare information in perspective, IMO, the drift is away from thinking of the Earth being separate from the Sun and its energy, and I'm leaning toward believing the unity of the lifeline between the two, Earth and the Sun, is an open throughway. We are connected, joined at the hip, with the Sun and its endless energy. Of course, solar energy, daily sunlight, is the energy lifeline between the Sun and the Earth. We all know this.

What we don't know and are in the process of learning is how much of this endless solar-flare-energy lifeline is already also an integral part of our life here on Earth.

I believe that the main problem with solar inundation is the state of confusion that ensues after it rolls in, and the loss of the track or direction we were heading before the solar flood swamped everything and left us stranded in the middle of nowhere, having momentarily (or longer) lost our sense of direction.

Losing this sense of direction is somewhat of a big deal. I have experienced it many times now.

We can't blame everything on 'fate', something we don't know much about anyway. As if you have not guessed this already, it is my opinion after years of experiencing and considering the solar-flare effect, that a great deal of what we chalk up to fate or 'just the way things are' is very much a product of solar variability, the waxing and waning of intense solar energy. As my friend Dr. Theodor Landscheidt put it.

"These enormous light-flashes of the sun release energies that are equivalent to the potential of several hundred million hydrogen bombs, which would supply the whole population of the earth with electrical energy for a hundred million years."

And we are tethered, Earth to the Sun, by a constant channel of light over which travels, at times of intense solar discharges, a wave of energy that not only affects us, but injects change into our Earth system

that we are only now beginning to recognize and understand.

In other words, the flood of solar energy during a solar flare can wipe out our sense of directionality, where we thought we were going before the solar inundation, the train tracks that keep us pointed toward some goal or place. We love that. And then, suddenly we are swamped with confusion, thrown off course, and relegated to waiting until the smoke of sudden solar change clears.

In other words, we can, thanks to a surge of solar energy, suddenly find ourselves uninterested or jogged right out of a plan we were fully engaged in only yesterday. We wake up today and have somehow lost interest and find ourselves at loose ends and not knowing what to do or looking for something new to do. And thinking “Now, just where was I going and why?”

It takes time for things to settle out after a big shot of solar change upsets our apple cart. Just as waters have to drain after a flood, we may have to redirect ourselves after solar inundation and can end up finding that we are pointing in some seemingly arbitrary direction than what we were yesterday. At the very least, it exposes the superficiality of all of our plans and the comfort such directionality (real or imagined) normally guarantees. It is unsettling, even embarrassing.

And so, it can be disturbing (or exhilarating) to undergo the effects of solar flares, in particular when our whole sense of direction, and whatever project we

were engaged in, is suddenly upset and overturned, leaving us standing there without directionality.

Yes, after a solar flare has faded, given a little time for the confusion to subside, we gather our wits and set about (like a human-compass) determining which direction for us is 'north', all over again. We like to believe we are going somewhere. At least that's what we thought we were doing, only yesterday.

It can be hard to pick up on where we left off when a solar flare inundates us, yet I don't find a choice. We patiently pick up the pieces we can find, so to speak, and do our best to reassemble them again like parts of a jigsaw puzzle, so that we can see the direction we are now headed in, if any.

And if that does not work or we are slow to work it, then we can just sit around a bit and do more or less nothing. It can be as simple as not feeling like doing anything at all, having been stalemated by an errant solar flare, often with its loss of directionality. I call this 'confusion' and loss of wanting to do anything. This can be depressing, trying to find a thread of interest after having lost our way or direction that only yesterday dominated our attention. Solar flares do this.

That can be hard for us, unless we recognize what is happening and learn to work with it.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



IT EATS US OUT

January 10, 2023

[A Fourth X-Class solar flare (X1.0) at 5:47 PM EST January 10, 2023, which may send a CME (Corona Mass Ejection) which could make a glancing blow at Earth. We shall see, but four X-Class solar flares in just a few days is a great amount of solar influx, IMO. Yesterday, Monday, for me was much more difficult and confusing as far as solar flare influx.]

Don't be afraid of the graphic. It's just one way of seeing the solar flare energy. See the poem at the end, that I wrote as a 24-year old when I felt eaten up by the energy pockets that solar flares leave for us as they pass through.

Whatever the case, someone, and it might as well be us, needs to figure out what solar flare emissions do to our psyche and consciousness. I'm not the only one witnessing this. My friend Theodor Landscheidt did as well and wrote books about it. Landscheidt more or less pointed this out to me, and once I looked into it, I was hooked.

I'm one of the ones carrying the torch of his research, not so interested in verifying it as in identifying and using these intense solar outbursts. They affect us and can be taken positively and negatively, as my poem below testifies to..

My take on solar influx, at least so far, is that we are joined at the hip with the sun's energy. We not only respond to it, but we dance and are motivated with that energy, not in some knee-jerk reaction but in union with that energy. It energizes us and is indistinguishable from fate itself, IMO.

When the sun steps on the accelerator, we feel the heat in the form of forced change. Whether that change precipitates anything for us or just pushes us back and forth, I believe depends on our particular situation. Yet, it is not so unfamiliar to us that it is a stranger to our life. The Sun has been tight with Earth for an unfathomable length of time. We live with it and always have lived with it and dance to its dictates.

This lifeline between Earth and Sun is not foreign to us, but very much a cause of life on Earth.

Certainly, we are mixed with solar energy to the point of not knowing the difference between that and our own volition. Talk about being one with your maker, solar influx and our fate seem to be inextricably intertwined. However, it seems this stepped-up change from intense solar energy can bring wear and tear to our bodies. It can stress us.

If you believe that when the sun says “froggy”, we jump, IMO, you have a mistaken view. Rather, we jump WITH the Sun, when the Sun jumps, and greater solar change arises. The stream of sunlight is constant with Earth, even as the Earth turns. One side is always directly facing the Sun. That slipstream of the solar wind and solar particles is always in process. IMO. It’s like an open data line between the Sun and Earth, all of the time. When the Sun hits the accelerator with a large solar flare, we kind of hang on for the ride, and often come up for air, disoriented.

And just a word of warning from my own experience back in the mid-1960s. I was, of course, young and foolish, and it was easy for me to fall into thinking that these powerful internal changes were devouring my life, rather than my being part and parcel to of all this.

Back then I wrote this poem when I thought that I was just a victim of circumstances. I wrote this in a kind of masochistic state of mind and post it here to illustrate how easy it is to fall into feeling that all of this solar energy jerks us around against our will, and feeds on our life.

What exactly is our will? And if we get estranged from it, poems like this can appear. Not trying to scare you, but to inform you that it's also possible to take these changes more as a victim than in stride.

INNER EAR

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

It eats us out.
It only is in every inward eaten,
The echo of an endless ache that arches
Hearts hard hearing,
And opens up each inner 'enting',
And enters it as out.

[Midjourney graphic created by me.]



DIVING FOR FISH

January 11, 2023

Most of us beginning dharma practice probably bungle along until we catch the drift of how dharma actually works and can be done. And then, after that it catches us. We catch on.

Beyond those beginnings, which often are quite clumsy, there is a reorientation that comes with finally catching on to what dharma is actually about and how to use it, and at that point we can allow the gyroscope

of direct experience to begin to balance our reorientation. We do reorient.

In other words, when we get with the program, so to speak, it all evens out. And it all evens out because at that point we are oxygenating from accessing the process of actual immersion in the nondual mind and refreshing ourselves by that. That is a big deal, IMO.

The process of Insight Meditation involves insight into something, and that sounds dualistic, and to a degree it is.

Perhaps we intend to bypass Samsara and rest directly using insight into the mind itself. Of course. Yet, until we can do that, or if we even try, Samsara very much stands in our way. That's why Samsara has to be deconstructed. It obscures the true nature of the mind. That's what Samsara is, obscurations.

And so, at least in my experience, Insight Meditation, riffs off of, or by force encounters some dualistic element in Samsara, when invoked. In fact, I believe that is the function of Insight Meditation, to incrementally and consistently deconstruct Samsara, transforming it to the realization as to what Samsara actually is, call it Nirvana or some other less exotic term, recognizing the true nature of the mind itself. It's the opposite of Samsara.

It's very much like Insight Meditation encounters and bounces or reflects off of the edge or some part of Samsara, and with that encounter very much in mind, we descend or submerge ourselves into non-duality, like a bird diving for a fish. There is a target and that's the duality I mentioned.

The result of all this, of Insight Meditation, is a certain clarity or insight into the nature of reality as we know it, typified by clarification and certainty, a transformation, not so much of Samsara, but of ourselves and how we view Samsara. We note it and by that find ourselves changing right before our eyes. We change, and not Samsara.

We learn to be happy or at least content in our life, even though we are in the process of deconstructing Samsara itself, moment by moment, made possible, at least in my case, by carefully learning Insight Meditation as part of Mahamudra.

As my friend and singer/songwriter, Seth Bernard, put it “Making friends with the weather.”

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



THE INFLECTION POINT

January 12, 2023

Don't know how still my mind is by degrees, yet I do know that it is still enough to support Insight Meditation with no problems. And for those who do not understand, the stillness of the mind is not something we do by discipline or force; we don't keep or 'make' the mind still. The mind is already and in itself always still. We relax in the stillness that is already there. So, we have to do nothing but rest, not that it is easy.

And to do that, we follow our interests, the path of least resistance, something that relaxes us, until we can naturally rest in the nature of the mind. And that is accomplished not by force but just the reverse, by our letting go and allowing ourselves to rest in the tranquil mind that is always already there and waiting for us. This difference is crucial to understand.

Otherwise, we find ourselves trying to do something to ourselves or to the mind itself to achieve some state of mind or another. There is no, nor has there ever been, a fixed state of mind, but instead always only a process that we get aligned with where we are causing no waves, so to speak, but rather going with the flow.

We allow ourselves to let go and rest in the mind just as it is, not as we have expected or imagined it. We have no idea, nor could we until we do, as this poem states.

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.

And so, it would seem, most of us have everything just backward. There is a time (when we are young) when we can see and do, and then there comes an inflection point (as we age) where we turn this around

and begin to undo instead of do more. Making that switch, learning to unwrap what is so tightly wrapped is as natural as doing, only in reverse.

Haven't you ever wondered about the interest in palindromes, words and sentences that read the same forward as backward? That's what that is all about, the inflection point when we come to a standstill and then reverse our habit or motion and start moving the other way. It's like our own little internal summer solstice point. Going beyond that point and we are heading downhill.

We reach the peak, call it the prime of life, and reverse everything. A 'Now you see it, now you don't' sort of thing, a bit of internal magic with profound consequences. And if we don't mark it, take note, suddenly we are going the wrong way on the one-way street of life. This happens all that time, and just as at some births, the baby has to be turned around to come out, the same is true at spiritual birth. Some folks don't know that they have crossed the point of no return and reached the point of reversal, complete return. They are being called home.

The Christians co-opted the term "born again," for their own uses, but this about-face, this reversal of direction in life happens to all of us and is part of our birthright. No one owns it. We all share it.

So yes, it's like a man coming around and taking names, helping us to transition, to reverse-charge ourselves, and we wake up to going the other way, going out instead of going in. It's that simple or complex, depending on how you take it.

I was lucky enough to have a dharma teacher in my late twenties, just before I hit the 30-year mark that Saturn makes to return to its original place at our birth.

He opened my eyes to what was coming and prepared me to sail through that inflection point with eyes wide open, and I did. I witnessed that inflection point, the point of no return, when we turn and return.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



NON-LINEAR IMMERSION

January 13, 2023

It occurs to me that I may be at an inflection point, one I can't seem to get around or past. It's like a pool where I am waiting and I'm floating motionless in it, treading water. Waiting for what, I wish I knew. That's the point. Some things are clear. I will start with those.

A linear view of things, a long line of events, like a timeline, is not very helpful at this point. I am pushing 82 years of age, and so the freight train of time has

not far to go. That distance is now near, at least enough that I don't need any imagination or speculation.

And so, instead of peering into the fog of time to see the end, I'm looking for eternity right here and now, within time itself, and not at its imagined end, looking in-between the clock-ticking seconds rather than out at time's end.

“To find eternity, just in time”

And the method I have chosen to do this is meditation, a very particular form of mediation called 'Insight Meditation', and even a very special form of Insight Meditation at that, one that is a part of what is called Kagyu “Mahamudra” meditation.

And what is special about this particular form of Insight Meditation is how it feeds on what we call 'Samsara', this often-confusing cyclic existence of ups and downs we find ourselves born and embedded in. We have never known anything else, or so the dharma teachings say, and they mean that. Nothing to compare it to.

This special form of Insight Meditation allows me to seize on any particular part or edge of Samsara, whatever situation in which I find myself, and by that edge or idea, immersing in meditation to the exclusion of my critical faculties, with insight, the issue is clarified beyond doubt. No mosquitoes of the mind.

It reminds me of taking an escalator down into our subconscious, beyond our conscious mind, shaking off any critical thinking and conceptuality as we go,

and by that complete immersion, reoxygenating (bringing clarity) with certainty to whatever insight we have seized upon, step by step, and bit by bit.

This form of meditation is not a one-time event, a quick peek, but rather a continuing process that is repeated again and again, like the popular saying, “Rinse, and repeat.”

And, overall, the result of this form of meditation includes a very real sense of progress in becoming familiar with the nature of the mind, which by definition has to include deconstructing this Samsaric existence in which we find ourselves. And this is because Samsara is opaque and obscures our ability to see beyond or through it. We never have.

In fact, the last thing my Tibetan dharma teacher, a high rinpoche, said to me before he passed on at like 95 was that I was to continue to expand and extend my recognition of the mind’s nature.

And so, this particular form of Insight Meditation, because it is a non-dual form of meditation (totally immersive), is able to solve and put into solution what is constipated and obstructive about Samsara, if only a day and moment at a time, doing what we can. It is a marvelous endeavor.

It could be that some may be able to resolve Samsara instantaneously, all at once, but from my reading of the Tibetan teachings, that is as rare as hen’s teeth. Most of us must instead deconstruct Samsara a little at a time, using some form of meditation. I’m sure that my approach is just one of many, but it is the one I

know and have become familiar with. And in my life, this was permitted me.

I realize that I can but tell you about the form of Insight Meditation I use. For me, it was not easy to learn and took many years, so I am not imagining that it could just be picked up like that and work. Yet, if one of you reading this, as Pee-wee Herman might say, really, really, really wanted to learn it, you could, and will. It takes dedication.

However, for the rest, those who are just encountering this casually, my belief is that it may be helpful to at least know that there are solutions to the impacted conditions of Samsara, and that Samsara can in fact be deconstructed with effort, practice, and time.

And the result is being able to rest in the actual nature of the mind, without being caught up in the briar patch of distractions that Samsara dictates. For this, the concept of 'rest' and 'resting' needs to be well understood.

We learn to allow ourselves to come to rest in the nature of the mind.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



MEDITATION IS TRANSACTIONAL

January 12, 2023

[For those of you who find my journey and this material of interest, here is a key blog, so please ask questions if you have them.]

I feel it could be helpful to talk about Insight Meditation without an object, without a reflection or the ability to ping off some 'thing'. What is Insight Meditation without an object? Nothing I know of or have ever seen.

I believe that meditation without an object is not meditation but is called 'Non-Meditation', and by definition it is not a form of meditation. This distinction is important, IMO.

We are smack dab in the middle of Samsara, surrounded on all sides, and addicted to it since time never began. Samsara is defined as dualistic, subject and object. And so, it's not strange that Insight Meditation (or any form of meditation) that is done here, keys off Samsara.

In many pith dharma teachings, it is stated: "Nirvana is the realization of Samsara." That should tell us something right there, like we are not going anywhere else but here, no matter how you spell it. Get rid of the idea that 'Enlightenment' is some other place than here and now. Not gonna' happen.

And since Insight Meditation, at least of the special kind used in the Kagyu Lineage as part of Mahamudra, is all about using Samsara as its object and clarifying it through immersive non-dual meditation, that's the order of the day. And that's the order, period.

And its not about to be done in a day or a single flash, but rather strung out over however long it takes. If we didn't have Samsara, we would already be enlightened. There is that.

And so, it seems to me that any kind of meditation requires some kind of differential, something to work with and off of. And, if I read the texts right, the dharma teachings say that meditation, which seems

by definition to be transactional, eventually is abandoned in favor of something like no meditation at all.

There is a popular belief that meditation is the end result rather than just a process or tool. If we look carefully at the following traditional Mahamudra quote, we can learn something:

“Sentient beings are not enlightened because they don’t meditate. Yogis are not enlightened because they do.” How does that work?

And the answer is, it works very nice. It highlights the concept that meditation is a process we use to achieve something. In other words, to repeat, it seems that ‘meditation’ is transactional, a process. It is a tool and not a state or place to arrive at.

And like any tool, meditation has a job to do, which when done, we no longer need that tool. That’s right. Meditation is a key tool and process to put Samsara in the proper perspective and, when that is done, we no longer meditate because it is not needed. Meditation is not the end goal, if there is such a thing as an end goal.

The Buddha said the same thing when he compared the dharma (and meditation) to a raft that we need to cross the sea of Samsara and reach enlightenment. However, once we have transformed Samsara and have the correct view, we no longer need that raft. In other words, we don’t carry our raft onto land and continue to carry it over land. We leave it by the shore of enlightenment. It’s the same with meditation.

Meditation is transitional and transactional. It has a job to do.

“Meditation is transactional” because it is a tool to get a job done. We use meditation of various kinds to clarify Samsara until it is entirely transparent to us; we can see right through it.

After that, we don’t meditate or need to. What we do then is called non-meditation. We cease to meditate and just rest, “as it is.” That is the gist of Mahamudra, resting in the natural nature of the mind. So, we can say that Mahamudra is not a form of meditation, but rather non-meditation itself.

We might ask, why not skip meditation and just rest in the true nature of the mind. Be my guest would be my answer to that, knowing that it is very difficult without first exhausting our need for meditation in order to clarify Samsara. Meditation is how we do this, our wishing well, so to speak, to answer any questions we have. I have found that to be true.

As the rinpoches say, skipping meditation would be rarer than hen’s teeth, and hens have no teeth. So, that’s their answer. Meditation is the key tool to learn to use.

And so, it can seem that we have preliminaries and then more preliminaries and everything is preliminary leading up to enlightenment. And we would be right. Everything precedes or leads up to ‘enlightenment’ or call it Nirvana or what-have-you.

And so, this middle ground, these various kinds of meditation, are very important to learn and complete,

because they go before, so to speak, we reach the ability to non-meditate. They clear the way by evaporating Samsara, bit by bit, through Insight Meditation. And when we get the all-clear signal, then non-meditation arises and that is about learning to rest in the true nature of the mind. That is Mahamudra.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



BEYOND MEDITATION

January 14, 2023

[More intense solar flares are said to be in the offing, as large solar fares come around the edge of the Sun and into the direct path to Earth.]

This is kind of long, so I apologize, but I want to be clear. I sketched out this view of meditation yesterday. Here I'd like to expand a bit on it.

For me, meditation has been like turning a really fine camera lens until it is in perfect focus. When the lens is in focus, we stop turning the lens. Meditation of any kind is like that, IMO.

I'm certainly not saying I am beyond meditation, not at all. In fact, I almost live for meditation, so important is it to me.

What I am saying is that I understand the use and limits of meditation conceptually, which I can't say I did as clearly as I do now. That realization has been quite transformative, and I will explain.

And a byproduct of that understanding is to know how meditations like Tranquility Meditation (Shamata) and Insight Meditation (Vipassana) differ from non-meditation like Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and Maha-Ati.

I use meditations like Insight Meditation to gain clarity about meditation itself. In fact, that's the best way I have found for me to learn dharma, by Insight Meditation, insight into the defects of Samsara and the qualities of the dharma.

My confusion in the past has been thinking that meditation, particularly Insight Meditation, is somehow the end goal or an end goal, something in itself, and I see now that it is not. Meditation is a means and a process, but it is not Nirvana or Enlightenment itself. In fact, meditation of any kind requires Samsara to develop. I understand that and this makes sense to me.

For years, I was trying to make 'meditation' non-transactional, an end in itself, something other than a

means, and as they say, that dog won't hunt, at least for me.

Meditation is too actively 'busy' for the kind of resting we need, rest in the mind itself, yet I persisted in the thought that it was the goal, a means and also an end, meaning meditation was something that served as an end or goal, as well as the way to get there. Not so.

I see now that it is not that. Meditation is more like a bobsled run, the upper part where we push, push, push, do, do, do, and then jump in, tuck our head down, and glide. I was afraid to let go of meditation, relax, and just glide. When we relax, we glide.

And we can hurt ourselves by overly meditating, meaning meditation can become just another obscuration all by itself. I'm not saying to stop meditating (or even that we could at our stage), but rather to meditate and then let go of that meditating, after which we rest in the nature of the mind. In many, even most, preliminary dharma practice, our Rinpoche would often say that at the end of any meditation session, just stop, let go, and rest in the nature of the mind, not that we knew what that was. What I see now is that aside from needing the rest, we needed to practice letting go. That was it.

And, at least theoretically, there will come a time when we may just rest in the true nature of the mind. That's my point. And although we perhaps cannot yet just rest in the mind without what meditation provides us, we can at least begin to learn to rest a little after we wind up our meditation session each time. In other

words, give meditation a little rest after doing it for a while. Let go of the meditation and just relax.

There is no point in stepping on the accelerator all the time. One of my problems was thinking that meditation was non-transactional, meaning that meditation itself was the resting in the mind. It's not, and that's just fine. My thinking that meditation itself was restful or relaxing was my mistake.

Meditation is meditation, an active doing of something, and resting or relaxing is something quite different, something not meditative. And so, I assumed I would be actively meditating as a process for eternity, keeping it up, keep the process going.

We can meditate using Insight Meditation, and that is helpful, yet that kind of meditation is a tool that also needs rest in order to work well. I just thought I had to do it all the time, and I did. What I didn't do was meditate and then let go and not-meditate, meaning meditate and then relax and coast after a session of meditation. Yes, I played at that when Rinpoche suggested we practice resting at the end of any session. Yet, I seldom actually rested at the end of a session because I was ready to get up and get on with my daily schedule.

Meditation, even Insight Meditation, is active meditating, a doing of something, and not a doing of nothing or simple relaxation. We meditate so that we can relax in non-meditation. That is the training.

I find it a huge relief to understand that meditation, as I know it, is itself a tool, a means to an end, and not the end in itself. I was hanging on by a thread trying to

make meditation the be-all-and-end-all, when instead it only is 'something', a part of the whole, but not the whole of it, not the mother, but the child. Mahamudra, non-meditation is the mother that embraces meditation as well as all else.

What this realization does is free me up to use meditation as the tool it is rather than try to reify it into something beyond what it is, something greater than that. Of course, I could never do that because it isn't greater than it is, yet it took me a long while to figure this out, and to come around to this. I am a slow learner when I am.

What does this realization mean for me? That's a question I am in the middle of. It's not like it changes the situation I am in, other than it changes my View, how I see and understand that situation.

I'm guessing it takes a certain pressure off me, so that I can relax more and probably do a better job with meditation than I have been. Meditation is not such a big deal. Yet, don't get me wrong, meditation for me, Insight Meditation, is a very big deal, and I have been working at it for years, but falling short of realizing what it exactly is and isn't. And now I do, at least enough to take the pressure off. It's off and I am better for it

I feel I finally have got my arms around Insight Meditation, in that I understand what it is and how to use it. Before, I understood to a good degree how to use it, but not so much what it is and how it compared to non-meditation like Mahamudra. I now feel I have completed that. I feel I can not only do it, and I do it much of the time, but probably I could instruct

someone else how to do it, where before I was missing the completed picture.

I am now ready to work on Mahamudra and believe I have all the tools I need to do that. Mahamudra is not a form of meditation, but rather Mahamudra is Non-meditation itself, resting in the natural state.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



THE END OF A QUEST

January 15, 2023

I could say, for me this is the end of an era. I didn't even realize how this particular question drove me. I'm almost embarrassed about it. This concerns Insight Meditation.

I have posted on Insight Meditation, in one form or another, for something like 15 years. I'm sure those of

you who have frequented this blog know exactly what I mean.

I have wanted to talk about Insight Meditation all this time because although I was actively doing it every day much of the time, I can't say I fully understood some things as to exactly what Insight Meditation is. Something was missing, and for me, even the way I wrote about it asked a lot. It was this question that drove me on.

Of course, I knew Insight Meditation was a form of non-dual meditation, because for me it was deeply immersive, and took me beyond my usual conceptuality and intellection. How amazing that was and still is!

Yet, at the same time Insight Meditation was not fully immersive or else it would not always be clarifying 'something'. As a form of meditation, Insight Meditation always has one eye out for Samsara. In fact, IMO, all forms of meditation do.

In other words, it was not just a pure clear light shining in the sky, but rather Insight Meditation was always bringing greater clarity in relation to some part or idea of Samsara, shedding light about whatever I was most worried or wondering about. And for that I am grateful. For me Insight Meditation has been a wishing well.

And I knew that Insight Meditation was indeed a wish-fulfilling gem, just as the Tibetans always claimed, because it literally answered almost anything in the world that I asked and wondered, if I meditated on it long enough. And all meditation is, to me, like sucking

on a lozenge until it is gone. If so, this quest took a good 15 years.

What of course I couldn't describe, to offer a tautology, is what I couldn't describe because I was not yet aware enough of it. Then after all these years, and very recently, suddenly my view shifted slightly, just enough that my question was answered. For me, a revelation.

And so, while Insight Meditation was indeed immersive, it was only partially non-dual, since it always involved a predicate, something that Insight Meditation was about, referring to, or touching on. To clarify or have insight, we have to have insight or clarity about or into something. That's what meditation is, IMO, all forms of meditation, a process of transitioning -- meditating.

I wanted to make things clearer because things were not quite clear enough for me to see. I wrote about it to others because I wanted to be clear about it myself. I'm now quite clear about this, and that is a relief, so what's next? I'm just sorting that out now.

For one, the sudden clarity allows me to adjust my dharma practice significantly. As they say, realization is everything. Now that I finally realize the scope and limits of Insight Meditation, I can better use it. And at the same time, I realize that Mahamudra and Dzogchen are not other forms of meditation, but are pure Non-meditation, not meditation at all. For me this is like throwing cold water on hot iron. It galvanizes me and its limits bring certainty.

For one, I'm no longer driven by this need to know, to figure out and get my arms around Insight Meditation. I've got that, and it means I will better use my daily invocation of Insight Meditation. And this realization frees me to more actively immerse myself in non-meditation without worry about losing something. There is nothing to lose, so to speak.

I am very grateful to finally know the answer to what I have wondered about all these years, and I will be able to use the various methods of meditation and non-meditation more correctly. And that endless drive of 'wondering' is gone, at least for this issue. And so is the reified mystery that came along with it. Trying to make something out of nothing is difficult, in fact downright impossible.

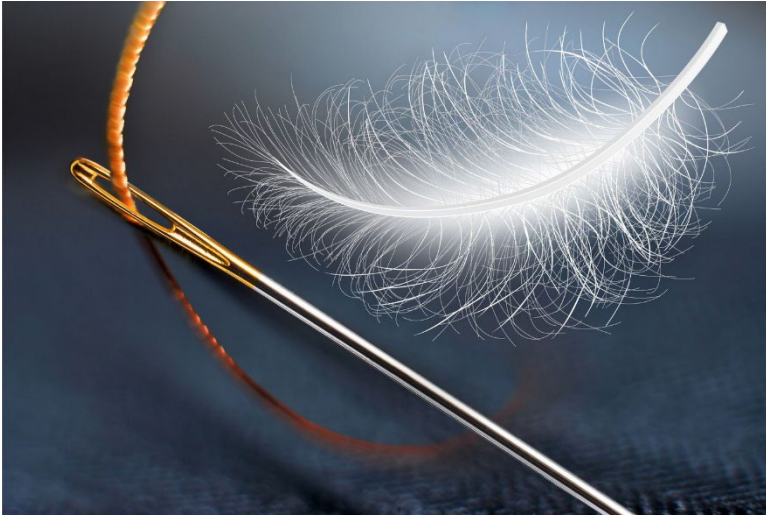
Perhaps now, I can also be more useful to others as to learning about these topics. As for me, who knows? It's a great relief, but also the end of an era, to be questionless, Quest-I-On less. I'm no longer on that quest. Asked and answered. When fate said wait, it meant a long time, yet it finally came through.

And so, I'm happy to finally know more of what I'm experiencing, and yet perhaps a little thrown for a temporary loss by this endless quest that just ended. I'm sure I will fill the vacuum and I intend to take full advantage of the gap that has appeared to look around before it closes.

I addressed the particulars of all this in the two preceding blogs, if interested. It's about the limits and differences of meditation (Insight Meditation in particular) and not meditating, the non-meditation of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

Who am I without my quest? Hard to say. I feel
naked, but certain.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



THREADING THE NEEDLE

January 16, 2023

[In my previous post, I did not say I would not mention Insight Meditation any longer, but rather that I have a better and more correct handle on it how to present it, and I do.]

I hate to disappoint anyone, but meditation is not, as most people think, relaxing. Yes, we can go sit on a cushion in a corner and rest our mind, relax, or watch a movie. That is relaxing, relaxation therapy, something most of us very much need.

Yet, let's not call it meditation. In ancient Tibet, yogis did not go sit in a cave to meditate. Of course, they meditated in a cave in order to allow their mind to come to rest so that non-meditation was possible, non-meditations like Mahamudra or Dzogchen.

Mahamudra or Dzogchen is the reason they sat in the cave. Meditation is only clearing the mind's field of mental debris.

Non-meditation and the rest in non-meditation was the goal, what they were after, and not the process of meditation. All of the pith teachings say this. After we meditate, we stop meditating in favor of the non-meditation of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, which does not include meditation except as a precursor, a means and tool.

The advanced pith teachings say this straight out: "Don't meditate." Why? Because meditation is a precursor and not a goal. Meditation precedes non-meditation.

In other words, we initially meditate so that we can then not-meditate. And it's a little like pinching ourselves and letting go. We actively meditate so that we can remove the impediments that stop us from letting go and after those impediments are removed, we can let go of enough to enter non-meditation.

Non-meditation is what we are after, just resting in the true nature of the mind. That's the goal of meditation, the not-meditating, not continued meditation. Meditation is a very precise process, yet it is not in itself restful. Meditation prepares the ground for rest by removing what prevents rest. After meditation, we then rest. That's where the relaxing and rest comes in, with non-meditation, not with meditating.

And good luck with trying to relax when we are all bound up with the tensions, attachments, and the anxieties of Samsara. Just look around at this modern

world! We first need to master meditation and that's difficult enough.

And the two classic methods of meditation, and both are required, are learning to stabilize our mind (Tranquility Meditation) and then take Samsara apart (Insight Meditation).

And the process is very much like trying to thread a very fine needle with shaky hands. Tranquility Meditation (Shamata in Sanskrit) helps us to steady the hands so that Insight Meditation (Vipassana in Sanskrit) can thread the needle, so to speak. And by 'threading the needle' is meant insight through "Insight Meditation" into how Samsara is constructed that results in its deconstruction, bit by bit, until we are open enough to rest in the non-meditation of Mahamudra, Dzogchen, or a similar form of non-meditation.

[Graphic by me.]



The poster for Cream at the Fillmore Auditorium, for which we filled in for the "Electric Flag" at the request of our friend Michael Bloomfield., "Summer of Love" 1967.



The Prime Movers Blues Band in 1967 playing at Clint's Club on Ann Street in Ann Arbor. Ilene Silverman at far left, J.C. Crawford on drums, Dan Erlewine on lead guitar, Michael Erlewine on vocals and harp.



Ilene Silverman on right, Harvey in middle, Betty Vocovitch on left.



Dan Erlewine on left, Ilene Silverman on right, playing in the bandshell at West Park, Ann Arbor.



Ilene Silverman on right, Michael Erlewine on left.



Left to right, J.C. Crawford, Ilene Silverman, Robert Sheff, Michael Erlewine, Daniel Erlewine.

PRIME MOVERS BLUES BAND BASS: ILENE SILVERMAN

January 17, 2023

This is a brief tribute to Ilene Silverman, who played bass for our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, back in the mid-1960s. Ilene tells this story:

Ilene Silverman:

“We got to open for Cream one night at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco (!) After our set, Jack Bruce (Cream’s bass player) said to me, “Your bass

player is good!" I said, "That was me!" And he said, "But you are a girl!" And that was my big encounter with rock royalty."

Michael Erlewine:

We filled in for our friend Michael Bloomfield and his band "The Electric Flag," when he asked us to at the Fillmore Auditorium in August of 1967, during the "Summer of Love".

Ilene Silverman was our bass player for quite some time, meaning she helped make up our rhythm section, along with our drummer. And Ilene was a fine bass player, and back then, you didn't see women playing bass with a blues band. I never saw even one, other than Ilene, not back in 1967.

Ilene also was a loyal and true member of the Prime Movers, always right there and she did not complain. When we drove our 1966 Dodge van to San Francisco for the "Summer of Love" in 1967, we let Ilene bring her boyfriend Harvey with us, and all of us, our equipment, and our suitcases, plus Harvey was a tight fit.

Over the years, some 37 musicians passed through the Prime Movers Blue Band, and only a handful were ever considered actually solid or permanent members of the group, and Ilene Silverman (today Ilene Frank) was one of them. She was one of us. Here are some reminiscences from Ilene Silverman that she sent to me.

Born October 22, 1945, Detroit Michigan.

Ilene Silverman:

“Well, I tried to write, but I gotta’ say that I don’t have a lot to say even though I have some very vivid memories of playing at Clint’s Club, being in San Francisco, practicing with everyone, and so on.

Here’s all I could think to say:

Put me down as musically curious. My mom had taken piano lessons at the Netzorg music studio and there was a piano at our house, and then two pianos at our house, and the radio was tuned to classical music...

Playing an instrument was expected. I took piano and violin lessons in grade school and switched from violin to viola in the 8th grade. I played viola through high school and kept up viola lessons through my freshman year at college at University of Michigan (1963-1964).

I liked knowing how instruments worked. I wasn’t necessarily trying to be excellent - I just wanted to know how things worked. I’ve tried out flute, banjo, mandolin, upright bass...

One of the big decisions I had to make when I started college at the University of Michigan was a major. I decided that I wanted to know how finger-picking worked. I had a goal to learn “Wildwood Flower.”

I ended up at the Herb David Guitar studio where I bought a guitar and was assigned Danny Erlewine as a guitar teacher. [Dan was the Prime Mover’s lead guitar player.]

So, I was around as the Prime Movers were getting underway and a couple of friends and I spent a lot of

time going to gigs - and getting interested in the blues.

When Jack Dawson left as the bass player for the Prime Movers, it was Michael or Dan who came up with the idea that Ilene could be the bass player!

I did not own a bass guitar, so it was off to buy a Fender Jazz Bass - which was entirely too large for me - but it was thought that that was the right instrument for a blues band - and I learned to play bass guitar.

I had a couple of weeks to learn the set lists - and drop my ceramics class because keeping hands wet in clay and building calluses playing the bass did not go together.

Did I sit back and think about whether or not it was OK for a girl to be a bass player? No...

Did I think it was unusual to get the opportunity? Yes.

There was one other female bass player whose name I've forgotten - and we were supposed to be rivals just because we were both women... I could never figure out why we were supposed to be in competition, but I never got to know her. I put that down to my innate shyness rather than fear of meeting the competition.

The other way, being the female, played out: Since it was decided that since I was incapable of packing and unpacking all the band's equipment, that I should do the dishes for everyone. Apparently, there was some thought that women enjoyed doing dishes, housecleaning... Wow! That was NOT fun!

I finally got up enough nerve to ask to be let out of doing ALL the dishes and promised that I could help schlep equipment!

Why couldn't I do a better job of framing up what was going on? Maybe because it was all happening in 1966/67... maybe just a bit before we all had the vocabulary to use a feminist lens. I just knew that I didn't like doing dishes.

The music... totally enjoyed it! And "bass player" was a good position for me. Can't sing, can't dance... Not flashy. Just support the others and keep it going. Good role for me!

So... then there was the famous trip to San Francisco in the summer of 1967. OK... Great adventure!

We got to open for Cream one night (!) After our set, Jack Bruce said, "Your bass player is good!" I said, "That was me!" And he said, "But you are a girl!" And that was my big encounter with rock royalty.

We were underfinanced as it turned out. We should have had enough liquidity to make it for a couple of months because as I remember we'd audition and people would say "we're booked up for a few weeks, but we can use you eventually."

Having no money was tough! I remember eating some weird meals - lettuce and white bread. One night we played a set somewhere and the nice people gave us some food - I had a bowl of rice pilaf. I threw up after eating it. Too rich after eating practically nothing. That seemed... unhealthy.

Another issue: drug culture. Bands indulged. I never had an objection to drugs - but I didn't respond well to them. Yes, I did some weed - but that was about it.

I tried cocaine twice in my life and both times it just exacerbated my anxiety. No way that people were paying to feel that way! So, I just figured it wasn't for me. I never tried acid. Alcohol? Same thing. I just didn't like it.

When we got to San Francisco, I remember a bunch of us getting invited to someone's apartment where our hostess said she wasn't into marijuana. I said, "Me neither!" thinking that I'd found a kindred soul. But no, it turned out that she was into heroin. No drug use for me? I didn't fit in.

When we got back to Ann Arbor, my main goal was getting a job. I'd finished up my undergrad degree (major: painting) before we left for San Francisco. Do what?

I wanted to stay in Ann Arbor, so I looked for jobs at the university - and got a full-time job as a library assistant at the music library out on North Campus.

That was taken as a sign that I wasn't fully committed to the Prime Movers. The group decided that I owed them the Fender bass as my share of rent. So that was it.

I eventually bought another electric bass and played with a couple of other groups off and on until I moved to Tampa in 1974.

And another letter from Ilene Silverman

“Hey, great to see the Prime Mover stuff! I have like... a torn ad from the Michigan Daily and the strap that I used for the bass - but nothing else - and especially no tapes, nothing sound-wise at all!

Glad to see that someone was the historian! No, I didn't think you guys were crazy - I just loved you all like totally completely. Michael, you generated something really important musically. You know Ann Arbor just wouldn't have been the same without you and Danny championing the blues.

And actually... you helped keep it alive just in general, huh? Not just for Ann Arbor. Good deal!

Let's see... me... I moved down to Tampa in 1974 after getting my masters in library science. I should never have left Ann Arbor, but.. oh well. I've been a reference librarian here at the University of South Florida ever since.

That is somewhat less boring than it sounds because the university was sort of in a cow pasture when I got here and now it's one of the biggest public universities in the country, so a lot has changed without me going anywhere.

And I've been teaching a distance learning course or two as an overload assignment - and being involved in distance learning is interesting.

And that also means I'm online like all the time. Got married, got divorced, but not before having two daughters - one's got an art degree from here at USF and has a job as an administrative assistant to the chair of the Dance department here.

Just hanging in there trying to see if she wants to go back to school or... what. And the other one graduated from Pratt Institute with a degree in print-making in May and is desperately looking for any kind of job so she can stay in Brooklyn, NY.

Know anyone there?. And that's about it!

Anyway... Stanley Livingston found my number and took it into his head to call me last night and tell me that you all are working on a CD and that you'd posted that YouTube video... so...very groovy and nice to be in touch! What other projects are you working on? “

“The Prime Movers Blues Band (The Recordings): Friends of the Sixties”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZO5bsagUqY&t=1034s>

[Photos from various sources, photographers unknown]



“THE VIEW”

January 19, 2023

Although words cannot express the inexpressible, by very carefully aligning and positioning words in sentences, language can lean or at least point to or toward the inexpressible, and thus offer some degree of meaning or directionality.

This concatenation of words and their precise arrangement, conceptually, in dharma terms can

create what is called “The View,” and how we ‘View’ dharma is key. If our ‘View’ is correct, everything else will fall in place. So, in dharma there is much emphasis on “The View.”

This is very apparent when we examine many of the pith dharma teachings, especially those that quote a lot of the Dohas, spiritual songs and poems of realization. Frequently, the language gets very pithy, cutting to the chase, and being succinct. Saying a great deal in a few words or aphorisms is common and important.

We all know the old chestnut about an elephant, with several people feeling different parts of the elephant and declaring their view. Obviously, a full view would be from standing back and taking in the whole elephant in, including all the folks grasping one part or the other of the elephant.

It seems from my study that ‘The View’ is of particular value in dharma training. In fact, many rinpoches first try to establish the ‘View” and from that view everything else is derived. This point is key.

And the view we are speaking of is “The View,” the one view that if we can hold it pulls everything else in line so that it is aligned perfectly. That’s why so much time can be spent establishing the view, which when once established, dictates the correspondence for everything else.

If our view is skewed, a little off, everything is magnified accordingly, and will be exaggerated to the degree it is off-kilter. That’s why establishing the “View” is so important, since it affects everything that

follows. It's like the old carpenter saying, "Measure twice and cut once."

If we can get the 'View' right, it will save years or decades of trying to correct it. Get the "View" wrong and nothing is ever quite right, until we do get it right.

It's also like realizing that a change made toward the center of a sphere is much greater than one made on the surface or periphery. "The View" is a view from the center of the gyroscope of life, so to speak, one in which everything else can be seen correctly and lines up.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



DECONSTRUCTING SAMSARA

January 20, 2023

Meditation is the indispensable tool by which we deconstruct Samsara and remove attachment and inner mental blockage, Samsara being this cyclic world of ups and downs we each find ourselves embedded in. I'm talking about removing the obscurations which define Samsara, and this can be done through meditation.

And there are two main types of meditation that deal with this, stabilizing (Tranquility Meditation) and deconstructing Samsara (Insight Meditation). These two working together have the job of taking apart and deconstructing Samsara, the crystalized aggregate of graspingness, our attachments, piece by piece, after which we can then rest in non-meditation, like in Mahamudra or Dzogchen.

I call Insight Meditation a transactional tool because through Insight Meditation there is a transaction involving Samsara (and its attachments) in exchange for liberation from those attachments. Meditation is a way to do that, a bit at a time. Meditation is always a tool we use and never itself an end goal or a resting place to settle in. The resting place is in the nature of the mind itself.

Meditation is an active doing, a way of working with whatever Samsaric situation in which we find ourselves and by that activity, little by little, freeing ourselves from Samsara. A very telling phrase from the pith dharma texts about this is:

“Nirvana is the realization of Samsara.”

Beyond deconstruction, as mentioned, there is what is called non-meditation, which is not meditating, but just, having let go of our attachments through meditation, we rest in non-meditation, the organic nature of the mind itself.

However, unfortunately, we can't just forget about or bypass meditation and get right to the letting go and relaxation in the mind's nature part, because the construct of Samsara, which consists of all our

attachments and up-tightness, prevents that by its very existence. We are too attached and uptight to just let go of our grasping at attachments and relax.

In other words, we have first to neutralize and deconstruct our attachments, one by one, like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, where stick after stick is carefully removed until there are no sticks left, just emptiness. What remains after deconstruction is the emptiness of non-mediation itself, the simple nature of the mind just as it is. In other words, beneath our reification and the accumulation of obscurations is the ordinary mind.

At that point, when we have exhausted Samsara, we can stop meditating and relax in non-meditation. In fact, as mentioned, the deconstruction of Samsara itself gradually reveals the true nature of the mind, which is identical with non-meditation.

And so, hopefully we are getting the idea here, not that meditation is 'bad' in itself or not useful, but that meditation is meant to be used for deconstructing Samsara, in order to disassemble Samsara, lock, stock, and barrel. After that, we don't meditate or have any further use for meditation. Of course, right now, we are not there yet. We very much need meditation.

The takeaway here is that we 'meditate' actively and then rest, meditate and then rest, with equal accent on the rest that comes after meditating. It's like spiritual breathing. We meditate and breathe, meditate and breathe, etc. This process can gradually release Samsara's hold on us.

However, for most of us, that time of non-meditation is still a long way off. For the foreseeable future we very much need to learn to meditate and use it for the tool that it is, to take Samsara apart so we can be more flexible and free from unnecessary obscurations and attachments.

Nevertheless, as much as we need meditation, it is not our goal or where we want to end up, being just 'meditators'. As mentioned, meditation is a tool, perhaps the key tool, to reach the point of non-meditation, where we no longer need to meditate.

Meanwhile, and until then, we meditate.

And as mentioned before, the two classic methods of meditation, and both are required, are learning to stabilize our mind and be still (Tranquility Meditation) and then taking Samsara apart (Insight Meditation).

And as a reminder, the process is very much like trying to thread a very fine needle with shaky hands. Tranquility Meditation helps us to steady the hands so that Insight Meditation can thread the needle. And we meditate until there is no need for meditation. What remains is non-meditation, Mahamudra or Dzogchen.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



THE CRACK OF DAWN

January 20, 2023

This blog is a little different. I want to write today, right here, about an article I will post tomorrow, trying to explain how important to me what I will write tomorrow is. How's that for crazy?

To understand what I write here, you will need to know what "an order of magnitude" is all about. When we say something is an order of magnitude greater than something else, this usually this means that one

is ten times greater than the other, and the gist is that something an order of magnitude greater is vastly greater, and that's the way I'm using it here.

There are only so many words we can use as superlatives and expect any effect to be communicated. And so, somehow, I would like to explain that a particular dharma event was very important to me. And that event is traditionally called 'Recognition', when we are introduced for the first time to the true nature of the mind, my point being that this was for me an order of magnitude greater than anything in my experience that came before it or since. That being said, I will now attempt to qualify it.

When I tell you that I had a very powerful dharma event in late May of 2008, some years ago now, the only way I can scale that event as to how important it was to me is as follows:

In 2005, my dharma teacher, a Tibetan rinpoche gave a 10-day teaching during which he gave what are called the 'Pointing-Out Instructions" as to the true nature of the mind. I will spare you all the chapter and verse on how he did that, but the net effect is that I came away from that 10-day intensive with an imprint in my mind that spelled out for me what I had been missing all those many decades of dharma practice prior to that teaching. Indeed, something was pointed out and I got this.

And so, I drove that 800 miles back home that year with a clear idea of what kind of dharma practice I had to do, and I did that. In fact, it took some three years of very dedicated practice each day for me to work through some of the obscurations and what-not that

had been clouding my mind. This had to happen before any insight could take place.

And, on top of that, I had a very difficult personal event, the effects of which kind of sent me for a loop. I call that whole time period a perfect storm for such a dharma event, although I never thought of it that way at the time. And I will spare you all those details as well and just cut to the chase, why I asked you to understand what an order of magnitude is all about.

When I, after those three years of very dedicated dharma practice, finally had a bit of a breakthrough, I found myself doing the following and this is the extent of my sincerity at that time:

From late May of that year until the frost drove me inside in late Autumn, I was out of the house before dawn each day, for something like six months straight, every day, with a camera and close-up lens, crawling around in the wet grass taking photos of tiny critters, small worlds, and watching the sun come up.

Before that time, I can't remember the last time I was up early enough to watch the sun rise, and then suddenly that's all I did, go out before daybreak with a camera, crawl around in the grass taking photos, and watch the sun rise. It happened just like that and it is the best way I can explain how triggering and impactful an event that form of dharma Recognition was for me.

And most of all, out there at dawn, I was not just peering through ever more finely corrected camera lenses at an object. What happened is that what was seen was not just what I could see peering through

the lens, but rather I found myself seeing the 'Seeing' itself seeing, if you can manage those words. I became one with the 'Seeing', and there was no subject and no object, out there in the morning grass and not home on my meditation cushion as I always had assumed I would. It reminds me of the Beatles lines:

"I'm looking through you,
Where did you go?
I thought I knew you,
What did I know?"

And I share this because that's how powerful dharma events can be when they finally take place. I never had an event like that before or since, and that event was (and here I am using that phrase again) 'an order of magnitude' greater than any other dharma inspired spiritual event I have experienced. It changed my life.

And if, as they say around these parts "the good God is willing, and the creek don't rise," I will explain in some detail what the dharma event called "Recognition" as to the true nature of the mind is all about.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



WHERE'S WALDO?

January 21, 2023

Rather, where is the actual nature of the mind? And that's much harder to find than Waldo. I wrote yesterday how important for me what I'm about to discuss with you has been.

I'm glad a couple readers found the blog about meditation types clear enough to understand. How

about I offer a description of a meditation process that is not clear and can't be by definition. Of course, I will try to be as clear about this 'unclarity' as I can. Nevertheless, we all face a lack of clarity with this particular issue, because we personally are not clear, so we might as well get on with it and used to it. It's not so clear because we aren't. Period.

We live in a dualistic environment and world (subject and object) called Samsara and have never known anything different. So, if I bring up a description of non-dualistic meditation, we can't know from experience what that might be other than intellectually, conceptually, which can at best only offer some vague sort of understanding, nothing like the knowledge of actually knowing and having known.

When we get to the non-dual forms of meditation, which are by definition immersive of duality, which means we get dunked in it to the exclusion of dualism's subject and object. In nondual processes, like non-meditation, we lose the awareness of being a subject and having objects all around us.

This we are not used to doing or having done to us, this being immersed in the moment, although this happens to us just all the time on our own, but with no awareness of it on our part, meaning we are immersed to the exclusion of being aware of a subject and object (lost in the fog of being), yet we come out of it never having known we were in it.

The nature of the mind is always right here with us, yet we are not aware of it. The problem here is to become aware of that nature that we all share in common.

Anytime we become engrossed in a movie or a book to the exclusion of being present and aware, this too is a form of immersion. However, we can't (don't know how) to do this at will and on command. We can't just immerse ourselves by force of will. Try it and see. We can do it, just not on command, and we are not aware of it when we do and pop out of it. It's the learning to do it at will that we are looking at here.

Yet knowing that we automatically do this, and often at that, should give us at least some comfort and perhaps offer a clue or even a wedge to begin to get at that immersion consciously. And so, all that being said, let's look into this problem.

Working at the edge of Samsara, to the degree we can see the edge, picking things off from that, chipping away at it, that's what meditation is for, realizing what Samsara is a bit at a time and transforming it.

If you are using a type of Tranquility Meditation to relax, that's fine, yet often that's relaxation therapy and not actual meditation. Actual meditation is transactional; something is converted. We have skin in the game.

For most of us there are two steps to (and kinds of) meditation, the first that most beginners learn is Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), which is training to allow the mind to naturally come to rest and be still, actually to allow ourselves to rest. And we need stable rest in the mind to invoke the second form of meditation, Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

Once we can rest stably in the mind, we can then attempt to invoke Insight Meditation, and with that operative we can begin to deconstruct Samsara, moment by moment, a bit at a time.

However, while Tranquility Meditation is pretty straight-forward to learn, although personally I had a terrible time learning it because I already knew how to concentrate and so was trying to salt the salt, so to speak. In my experience, Insight Meditation of the useful kind, which is transactional, is not so easy to learn, and I will attempt to explain why as best I can. Yet, this is something most of us don't yet know, so please be patient.

While Tranquility Meditation is dualistic, meaning it's our normal way of seeing things, with subject and object, i.e., a subject looks at an object, Insight Meditation requires that we first have been 'introduced' to what is called non-dual meditation, where there is neither subject nor object, but just full immersion. We are not used to immersion, much less know how to do it on demand.

In the traditional dharma texts, it states that an authentic guru or teacher is required to introduce us to the nature of nondual immersion (Insight Meditation), although we all do this without realizing we are doing it much of the time. With dharma, it's always the question of becoming aware of our own awareness that is difficult.

And so, finding that introduction to Insight Meditation can be difficult, plus it takes time to get it pointed out to us, and then it may (and often does) take more time to practice and rid ourselves of enough of our

obscurations to learn the technique of Insight Meditation.

Just to be clear, what in Tibetan dharma is called “Recognition” as to the true nature of the mind, in Rinzai Zen is called “Kensho,” and the two terms essentially point at the same event. However, ‘Recognition’ is an event that is unforgettable, not just another learning curve we set out on. It can’t be ‘gamed’.

And this introduction to the nature of the mind is somewhat of a big deal in both kinds of dharma training, Tibetan and Zen. You can’t purchase it or (so it is said) learn it by yourself, but as mentioned, we have to have this pointed out to us by an authentic master, through what are called, appropriately enough, the “Pointing Out Instructions,” and as mentioned, what is being pointed out to us is the actual or true nature of the mind itself which while it is with us all the time, we just are not aware of it.

In other words, we don’t learn the pointing-out instructions over a weekend curled up with a good book on the topic. This introduction, for most of us, results in a long wait, study, and whatever it takes for us to find someone, an authentic teacher, who actually can point out and introduce us to the nature of our own mind. These teachers are rare in my experience.

Our mind’s nature is so much with us, already in our face, that for some reason we can’t see it, and an authentic meditation master jogs us (or hits us in the face with a shoe) or whatever it takes, until we suddenly wake up and see the mind’s nature for

ourselves and can immerse ourselves in its non-dual quality consciously and at will. And it takes time, even when we are introduced to Insight Meditation, to get it right.

It's much like one of those figure-ground paintings we used to see around more often than we do today, where there is an image hidden within a larger image, but we can't see it until it is explicitly pointed out to us. And after that, we can always see it. Something like that, but much more difficult than it sounds.

And difficult as it can be, we can't exercise Insight Meditation without being introduced to it by an authentic teacher, so there is a bit of a Catch-22 here. However, we can begin to train for this by ending every meditation session we do by just letting go and resting in the nature of the mind for a moment, however we can imagine that is. We have never experienced non-meditation experientially with awareness that we are doing so.

Of course, we don't know what we are doing, but simply just resting, taking a rest, repeatedly, and as mentioned, doing this after every meditation session will begin to point us toward the real thing. This is what many of the great dharma teachings suggest. I never got the hang of that approach, myself. What I know is more of the "slap me with a shoe" kind of training, getting my attention and then showing me where to place it.

I enclose in a comment a figure-ground image that has not one, but half a dozen or so hidden images within it. Try that on for size, and then enhance that by an order of magnitude and you may have some

idea of why we must have an authentic teacher point
this out to us.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



CHANGING OUR VIEW CAN CHANGE OUR MIND

January 23, 2023

Well, the mind never changes, yet our view of it can. Insight Meditation is transactional, meaning Insight Meditation is an active clarification process. As to what is clarified, in my experience, that is whatever I direct my focus toward, usually keying off of and exchanging one aspect of Samsara for an altered and clearer view that ultimately results in my increasingly seeing through and beyond Samsara to resting in the true nature the mind itself. Of course, that true nature

is called in the dharma “Ordinary Mind,” and that’s just what it is. It’s apparently so ordinary that we can’t see it.

In my experience, Insight Meditation is a meditation tool for the deconstruction (read ‘clarification’) of Samsara, this somewhat confusing world we live in. We might ask what is preventing us from just recognizing the true nature of the mind?

This kind of discussion is hard to have because the lifeboat of language it requires amounts to a raft of words that floats above the full immersion of non-dual meditation we are trying to rest in.

In my experience, this process of meditation is active, not passive. There is movement both in Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) and in particular with Vipassana (Insight Meditation).

And I was repeatedly told by my lama to continue to expand and extend recognition of the nature of the mind day by day, and this has not gone as I imagined it from reading the texts, but rather by a continuing altering of my ‘View.’ I’m always looking down the line toward some ‘end’, when what actually happens is how I see it, my ‘View’ changes. Life is not like I expect it to be, but rather just how it is.

If we knew the future we would know the future, which we don’t. Our idea of where we are going and how to get there is flawed. Otherwise, if we knew how to get there we would already be there. We have to admit that we don’t know, at least I don’t.

If we could just rest in the true nature of the mind, we all would, but we can't. Heaven knows we need the rest. The sad thing is that we are already completely embedded in the nature of the mind and just don't realize it. We are where we want to be, but don't recognize it. No help in that.

And so, we can't ever get to where we already are, because we are there. What we lack is awareness of our actual situation, and that's what 'dharma' is all about, becoming aware. The word "Buddha" literally means "awakened" or aware. How clear a hint is that?

In other words, we are held up from being aware of our resting in the mind's nature by our own obscurations, attachments, etc. We somehow have to relax and remove our obscurations before we can find true rest. How is that done?

It is done through a process of removing our blocks and obscurations one by one, which is what Insight Meditation is designed for. I can't believe how kind Insight Meditation has been to me in that regard. If I ask the question properly, I always get an answer that is certain and without a doubt.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



DANCING AT THE EDGE OF SENSE

January 24, 2023

Alliteration is what I like, with too many vowels and only a few consonants to slow the flow. And the poet I love the most, who not only used alliteration, but also had a mind to see is Gerard Manley Hopkins.

I know him well, have all his poems, his sermons, his letters, Correspondences, journals, and everything else. Here is one of the first of Hopkin's poems I met and fell in love with.

GOD'S GRANDEUR

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with
toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright
wings.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



EAT TO LIVE OR LIVE TO EAT

January 26, 2023

And now for a few words about food, something that I like but not something I spend any time on. I don't care all that much about food, at least not enough to get fancy with my cooking.

Don't get me wrong. I like to eat, but there is not much I am allowed, so I eat simple basic foods, unprocessed foods for the most part, and I'm not about to make a fancy recipe with lots of ingredients

or spices. Just not interested in spending my time that way.

I just need some food, with very little time spent cooking, and I am a happy camper. I no longer live to eat, but rather just eat to live, mostly because I am interested in other things these years and I don't like spiced-up or perfumed foods.

For one, my health requirements limit what I can eat. There is that. Yet, it's more than that. Just some food I feel like eating is enough for me, and it's a constant search to find that because it seems I tend toward foods my body needs, but those foods change with the seasons and the times. I want to eat this or that food for a while, and then I wear it out and no longer feel like eating it and don't.

My circle of foods is very limited, or so it seems. It's vegetables, beans, short-grained brown rice, some kind of bread, usually sourdough with as much whole grains as I can find, and vegetables. I like sprouted grains. Don't eat meat, and the doctors want me to eat omega-3 fresh or frozen fish, which I do, but not too much of that lately either. Sardines will do, sometimes. But for me, everything has too much salt in it. My body (and the doctors insist) does not want salt.

Whole grains, no dairy, no meat, little fish, no processed foods, etc. Lots of tempeh, sometimes a small amount of tofu, corn tortillas, and very few spices. The taste of the natural food itself is enough for me, with some small amount of condiments, Tamari, Brown-Rice Vinegar, Mirin, mild salsa, and fresh-ground black or green peppercorns. I like

mustard, fresh horseradish, mild chili sauce, and so on. I often wander out to the kitchen thinking I might find some different food there, and just turn around and wander back without finding anything I really want to eat, at least not enough to eat it.

I am pretty much a creature of the computer and I write a lot. In the evenings I often watch something on an OLED wide-screen that is streamed, either a movie, documentary, or a series of some kind, yet that too gets old. I wait for the winter to end and look to the spring.

The things I think and write about interest few people, or they don't care to talk about them. I have always been a homebody, but Covid has kind of sealed the tomb. I don't get out and see folks any longer. I go to the grocery store about once a week at 6 AM when they open and there are only staff there, and that's about it. I still wear a mask when I am in public.

I'm not lonely, but I probably need more human interaction if it were possible. It's great that Margaret and I are here together, but aside from a few sit-down-and-talk sessions a day, we each rattle around in our own part of the house doing whatever we do. We like to watch some interesting video some nights. And sometimes we watch something less than interesting just to be together.

I believe we are going to move either north or south in the near future.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



COMING OUT OF COVID

January 27, 2023

I might as well have been in a cave (or a bubble) these last few years since Covid came on the scene. We have not gone out hardly at all, at least I have not. "What's the point of all this?" floats across my mind from time to time.

I am separated from my kids and grandkids almost completely. It's not that they don't want to get together, but rather that they are too busy to take the

days and time out of their schedule that are necessary to protect from Covid. The net result is no real contact.

I yearn for not just a shot-in-the-dark contact, but regular seeing one another from day to day. To do that, we would have to move closer to where the kids live, and we are, and have been looking into relocating. Not an easy thing to do.

First, as far as houses are concerned, there is next to nothing available and what is there we may not be able to afford. And of course, after days of surfing the web for houses that make sense, what we find are ones that kind of come close but tend to require one or more of many things done to them, and you don't know that until you show up and see them in person. They don't take photos of that kind of stuff, but it's there when you show up.

In other words, there are the houses that sort of look good on the Internet, and we have to travel hours to get to where they are, and we mostly discover all of the things they did not tell us or show pictures of that make it a difficult sale.

And each one of those houses is like a mini drama, with an overture, a performance, and driving back home, exhausted, and often vaguely horrified at how far the place misses the mark for us. And then, we try to regroup into some kind of shape to do it all over again. It's not for the faint of heart.

I'm not saying we are not up to it. We are, but house hunting is an ordeal IMO, kind of fun when looking at

photos online, less fun following out the lead with actual on-the-site visits that disappoint.

And we, literally, have no time to think about it. With houses on today's market, it's bid or die in the moment, so few houses are out there.

On a broader scale, what's really happening here, perhaps, is that I'm either coming out of Covid or I want to get out of Covid. I've been focusing on missing my kids and grandkids, but now I feel its broader than that. I miss rubbing shoulders with folks of all kinds, dropping in or people dropping by, not just my kids but anyone.

Perhaps I've run out of 'wait' time, waiting for the other shoe to fall, like Covid going away. That's not technically happening. Covid has not gone away, yet there seems to be some or a little more distance from it. Or are we just risking it more?

What keeps coming to mind, what I keep remembering, was a time when my parents were still with us, and all five brothers lived here in this same small town. You bumped into family every which way, and we could always go to my parents house and find people there.

Three years of seclusion for many of us may be too much, and we miss that rubbing shoulders with one another, so to speak.

It's one thing to take a trip and spend a day together and quite another to be part of a community where contact is a natural part of each day. For me this

seems to be coming to a head, and probably for a lot of other folks as well.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



THE PLACE OF FAMILY

January 29, 2023

I'm pretty much a lone wolf, or have been, oldest child and all. Yet, I feel that I am changing. This Covid thing has thrown a wrench into the works, IMO. I've been retired for a while and love it, yet I'm thinking of retiring from retirement, not to go back to work (Heaven's no!), but rather to stop being so serious and focused on whatever? My seriousness is a declining asset, as far as I can tell. Done that for too long.

I know how to be serious and get the job done. I am a finisher, not just a starter of things. However, these days, that and a ticket will get me a ride on the bus, as they say.

I have nothing to prove in the getting-things-done department. What I am missing, again especially thanks to Covid, is rubbing shoulders and hanging out with my own extended family and friends.

I have been retired for years now, yet I see I am still maintaining some kind of vigil here at my desk and certainly with the Internet. I am bought and paid for, so to speak, by some part of myself... not such a good thing.

I've been of the mind that the kids are grown and flown the coop, and they don't need me. I am changing as to that view. At the very least, I need them, kids and friends, and there is something to be said for a family staying together enough to at least hang out a lot. Trust me, all work and no play is overrated.

I've been to the mountain and the mountain has been to me. I could have more money, but I have enough to get to where I'm going, which is not too far.

What's missing is finishing work with family life, being an elder, sharing what I can of myself, and becoming some kind of north star (or at least a fixed star) in the lives of my kids and grandkids. I can't do that very well in a bubble, as Covid proved.

Saving myself for something that is nothing at all makes no sense. Moving to a less than perfect situation also makes no sense, but neither does grabbing your knees, holding your breath, and waiting for Godot. I'm already tired of that, as my friend Luke Winslow King wrote in a song: "I'm tired-er than a retiree."

And sad to say, at least for me, quick visits just don't cut it. I need to linger, hang out, see folks each day or so, go for walks with them, make dinners, have a canoe ride or two, be there for them and them for me.

That's worth more than money or time to me, like just be around, to be available, and part of the overall picture. I feel a family needs all parts of the life spectrum, from young to old, and some pets on top of that.

I've got family several places, just not close enough to share in it, and Zoom face-to-face is not the same. I want to have some skin in the game and live amongst, and not just be a visitor.

And so, seeds and stems may be all I have at this point, yet it's not too late, and it ain't over yet.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



“I KNOW A MAN WHO DANCED WITH HIS WIFE”

January 31, 2023

I did that tonight. Margaret said we have not danced since one of our daughters got married. It happened that Jimmy Buffet’s “Margaritaville” was playing, and we got up and started dancing to it. We were dancing! Must be the new house and the fear and excitement of, for us, such a daring move.

Or is it because I finally realized that I didn't have to be so damn serious all the time. I've got nothing to prove or have to do, but perhaps move all our stuff.

I am tired of being a bit of an expert in many things, which are just the result of a long career of doing what I love. And I feel this move to a new home is like a reprieve from standing caretaker to our compound here, all that's happened and gone down. I'm tired of curating.

I don't want to just testify to a career well loved, but rather to turn over a new leaf and start another chapter, but not one of accomplishment. I have done enough.

My heart tells me that all I want to do is be with my loved ones, my kids, their kids, and many friends. I don't have to teach them things, but just want to be with them, or as someone said to me recently, to show up for them. I can do that. I feel like doing that, just to, as they say, be in that number when the saints come marching in. I want to be in that number with them.

I'm done with being busy doing things that ought to be done, even that need doing. Sure, I'll do some stuff, but I'd rather just hang out for a while, take a walk with you, talk with you, and get to better know some of my Facebook friends.

It's about time.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



SUN, SUN, SUN

February 3, 2023

Change of topic. I had a vivid dream last night, and I will spare you the lengthy details. Yet, there was one aspect to it I do want to share. The dream was about a large public announcement by an old friend of mine. And I was to introduce the speaker and was wandering around before the event getting things organized.

However, following me around, and driving me crazy, was this kind of little guy, repeating, over and over, a single word. "SUN."

About every half second this man would repeat Sun...Sun...Sun...Sun. It rang a bell. Wherever I went, this man followed me, only a foot or so away repeating, over and over, "Sun...Sun," etc. What does this mean?

First of all, I don't know. I do know that the Sun has been incredibly important for me for many decades. It started when my first dharma teacher, a Rosicrucian initiator, who would say to me, repeatedly.

"Michael, imagine yourself standing at the center of the Sun," and he would growl and say "That's hot stuff!" I had no idea what he meant by that.

Yet, strangely enough, years later, when I was soon to become a recognized astrologer, I found myself imagining that I was standing at the center of the Sun, and discovered for myself heliocentric astrology. Of course, helio astrology has always been there. That's what Copernicus pointed out, and astronomers carried the heliocentric chart forward.

However, astrologers refused to use and to this day depend only on the geocentric (Earth centered) chart and ignore the helio chart, while astronomers use both charts, geocentric and heliocentric, because they are there and each useful.

And my point here is that right now the 11-year sun sunspot cycle is waxing, growing stronger and stronger. In fact, 'SpaceWeather.com' is pointing out

that the current sunspot cycle is so strong that it has left its predicted upward curve and is going somewhat exponential... going way up.

<https://spaceweather.com/>

The scientists announced that the current rise in total sunspots has reached a 9-year high and is not abating. And that two large sunspots are transiting the far side of the Sun just now and that the Sun's rotation will turn them toward Earth in about one week. And we may be affected. Perhaps this is some kind of way to get my attention, the dream, in which case I got the message.

It does not take a genius to at least respond to this dream with an inner note to myself to pay more and careful attention to what's happening with the sun just now, not that I already don't. And I share this with you, my friend, on the chance that some of you will join me in remaining aware of what is happening right now on the surface of the Sun and what is being or soon to be telegraphed to us by the solar wind and the potentially invasive CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejections) – explosions on the sun.

I believe that if we want to look at the instigator of current changes in the world, look to the sun and its changes. IMO, we change when the Sun changes. When the Sun is strong as it is now, a very much larger modicum of change is injected into our system(s) and we react accordingly, some by knee-jerk reactions and others with a more controlled fusion of the energy.

[Midjourney graphic by me.]



PROMPTING THE FUTURE

February 5, 2023

We started talking about AI graphics and never really got a chance to discuss it. I've been using Midjourney AI pretty much since its inception. For my own use, I don't imagine I'm making "Art" and never thought because of it I was an artist with it, but rather I use it for illustration. It's a tool and it may mark the death of stock photo sites that don't include AI output as part of their offerings, IMO.

I blog to more than 11,000 people each day, and I use Midjourney to illustrate the stories or articles I write. It not only saves money from licensing graphics, but it also allows me to tweak images until they reflect the emotional content of the blogs and articles I produce. I believe a picture is worth 1000 words.

As for the writing on the wall, I saw the same thing that will happen to stock photo sites when typesetting vanished back in the late 1960s-1970s, as word processors and graphic software arose. They were gone in a flash. One year I was paying a lot for even a single stat and the next I was making my own graphics.

I saw the same thing when cellphone photos took the heart out of many professional photographers, and left them gnashing their teeth and cursing fate, or when Spotify and other music sites morphed the music industry.

IMO, AI graphics like Midjourney mark a sea change that will sweep through the world of graphics like a field fire, perhaps the most powerful graphic tool ever imagined, where a picture is not only worth a thousand words but can be created with a subset of that through carefully arranged words and some patience.

I already use it every day for illustrating. And yes, it will threaten those who do not recognize AI graphics as the tool it is and learn to program and use it. It is a liberator and tool, but certainly not the end of art or artists. Far from it.

Midjourney AI is a programming language based on words and language. If you can clearly say it in English, you can often create an image that is useful.

I love it. As for those that don't see the beauty in it compared to traditional art, IMO, are whistling in the dark. Art is a wide, wide world, and these distinctions will be lost in time as we find an AI style that we appreciate.

The history of art is just that, a history of images built on preexisting images with whatever current imagination the artistic among us can manage. AI graphic technology takes a look at this extended history and attempts to derive a set of rules and principles based on that history. It does not copy existing art, but understands how it might be created and can produce images somewhat in a particular vein or style. Here is an important statement.

“The Large-scale Artificial Intelligence Open Network (LAION) released LAION-5B, an AI training dataset containing over five billion image-text pairs. LAION-5B contains images and captions scraped from the internet and is 14x larger than its predecessor LAION-400M, making it the largest freely available image-text dataset.”

This is probably why attempting to sue AI image generation for being itself will fail in court. It's all a house of images, one generation building upon and referencing the last. Attempts to understand or imitate itself is just that, understanding our own history, ourselves. We have always been paying it forward.

Anything radically new has often been met with reactionaries, those who attempt to deny its existence when it already exists. Good luck with that. It is a fait accompli you are in denial of, a tough case to argue in court.

AI graphics is a tool that artists can master and use to their advantage along with all the other tools at our disposal. To ignore it or condemn it is, IMO, hopeless and fruitless, any more than artists through ages have not looked at what went before us. Of course, they have. We all look at art of the past and have looked because it's an image for our eyes and mind.

The AI software I use, Midjourney, is a prompting language, like other software I have learned, only here the software language is English (in the U.S), and it's damn finicky at that.

It can take me hours to design a prompt that gives me the image I imagine I want, and often I can't get it to do what I ask at all, for that matter. It's like arguing with a teenager.

So, let's not fight it, but rather learn to use it and create with it. Happy to have a discussion on this, provided it does not devolve into personal attacks, which I will promptly (pun intended) delete.

AI Graphics are happening now, and we should discuss what we can and want to do with it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THONGDROL: LIBERATION THROUGH SEEING

February 9, 2023

Just as important to me and often more important than just reading or hearing the words, is seeing an image, much like the old saying “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Just so.

We have all heard of the Bardo Thödol , more commonly called “The Tibetan Book of the Dead,” The Great Liberation through Hearing.

Yet less is heard about is the Tibetan practice known as ‘Thongdrol’, liberation through sight and seeing,

although it too is quite well known. And there probably exists liberation for all five of the senses.

For some reason, perhaps because my mom was an artist and all five of her sons had at least some acquaintance and training in art, I grew up very sensitive not only to graphic art but seeing beauty in general.

I find the visual arts and seeing, every bit as stimulating as anything my ears have heard, and I have heard a lot of music.

I was raised in a household of art books, ancient and modern, yet mostly modern, especially the modern Impressionists, in particular the French Impressionists like Matisse, Manet, Degas, Gauguin, Renoir, and so on. I grew up with them right before my eyes.

Although I tried my hand at painting in oils as a young man, over time my main interest was more graphically targeted on illustration, whether it was drawings by Leonard Da Vinci or modern rock concert poster art.

My interest in and dedication to rock n' roll concert posters art led me to make silkscreen art of my own band back in the mid-1960s, and I ended up writing some 326 books and booklets on rock concert poster art, which are free and here to download.

<http://spiritgrooves.net/e-Books.aspx#Posters>

And as fate would have it, when it came time for me to have a significant (for me) dharma breakthrough, interestingly enough, it was with my two eyes looking through a fine camera lens while doing close-up photography of small critters and micro worlds.

Yet, and here is the twist, it was not what I saw through the lens that impressed me at that time, but my seeing 'Seeing' itself seeing. That was the imprint.

I am sure you are going to have to parse that sentence very carefully to grasp the sense of it, if any. What it says is that instead of looking through a camera lens at an object, as I usually would, and seeing a small critter or micro-world, I saw the 'Seeing' itself seeing itself seeing, subject and object all in one.

And with that I fell down the rabbit hole of non-duality and perhaps for the first time became totally immersed, subject and object united as the one they are and have always been.

I have yet to get over this.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE COST OF CHANGE

February 10, 2023

When we think of solar energy, we think of the steady flow of sunlight shining on Earth from the Sun, a trip of 9 minutes. We have never been without it and depend on it for life itself.

However, our sun is a variable star, meaning the light and energy from the sun varies over time and can be conveniently measured by the sunspot cycle.

The 11-year sunspot cycle will peak and reach its strongest, at its most intense, in the next few years. And so, as we move into increased solar disturbance due to solar flares and CMEs (Corona Mass Ejections) from the Sun, this means that the steady flow of sunlight is going to be periodically interrupted and that increased solar quanta or change will be injected into the Earth's atmosphere and therefore into us. IMO, we as a group have little idea how inextricably we are connected to the rhythms and energy of the sun.

These more intense solar energy charges impact us in the form of increased impetus for change and the natural impulse to react to that increase in change one way or another. We can either sit tight and ride, attempt to surf the change, or give into it and be moved around by it, and last, we can actually learn to use the impetus to 'change' for better or for worse.

In either case, we can feel the inner charge and momentum of change inside us churning things up and begging for reaction or response on our part. Whether we hold steady or become like fat in a frying pan depends on our predilection for change. Can we stand it without letting it jerk us around. Or can we actually use it?

Perhaps most frequent is the uncomfortable feeling inside us as if something or someone is stepping on the accelerator within us and our clutch is not being engaged or without our permission we are being pushed and shoved around by change and may have no ability to control it. Incoming change can confuse us enough to slow things down or bring them to a halt,

leaving us not knowing what to do next, much less how to do it.

Most often, we tend to wait 'change' out., like have to go and lie down And in times like these, with increasing solar change, our plans and projects can stall-out or just come to a standstill. In other words, we may no longer feel like doing what was totally occupying us only yesterday. And all this can change in the course of a day.

We can be paused by increased solar influx in the middle of what we were doing, sidetracked, and then left treading water, getting nothing done and wondering what happened and what to do. Our careful plans may be wiped clean. We start over.

We feel change happening within us and it can puzzle the mind into sidetracking itself from whatever we were headed and involved in to that point.

Or as Shakespeare put it:

“And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry

And lose the name of action.”

The advent of solar change, the sudden injection of intense energy from space into time can explode our status-quo, freeing up everything we have going for us until it has to collect and reposition itself, and we suddenly find ourselves strung out, wondering what to do with our lives when only yesterday we were fully engaged in one direction and endeavor or another.

That's the power of solar influx and the change that comes from solar flares and CMEs (Corona Mass Ejection). What to do about it?

First, we can learn to be aware of this pressure to change when it comes upon us. Instead of just being confused, we can either surf or ride it out, waiting for it to pass. Or, if it serves our purposes, we can use change to effect changes we need in our own lives. It's just energy, but in more intense packets.

And, of course, we can stick our head in the sand and blindly ignore this increasing solar energy, and be changed by it however that happens, not even aware of what it is or why we are changing.

These next couple of years will have an increased amount of change coming from the Sun for us to handle. You can check on what's happening on the sun daily at these sites:

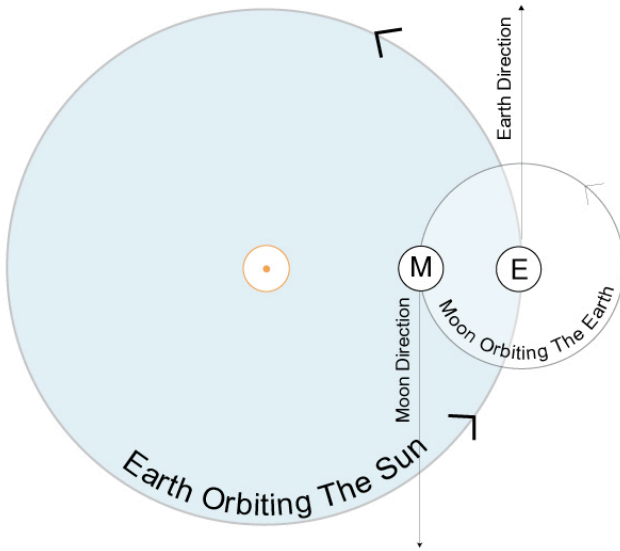
<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

<https://spaceweather.com/>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

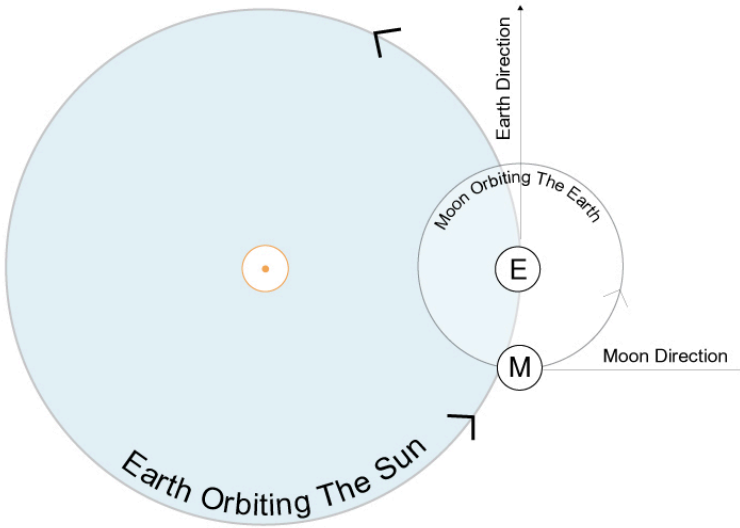
New Moon

- 1) Moon Closer To The Sun
- 2) Sun/Moon/Earth Alignment
- 3) Moon Heading Opposite Direction Earth
- 4) Moon Heading Into Earth's Wake/Past



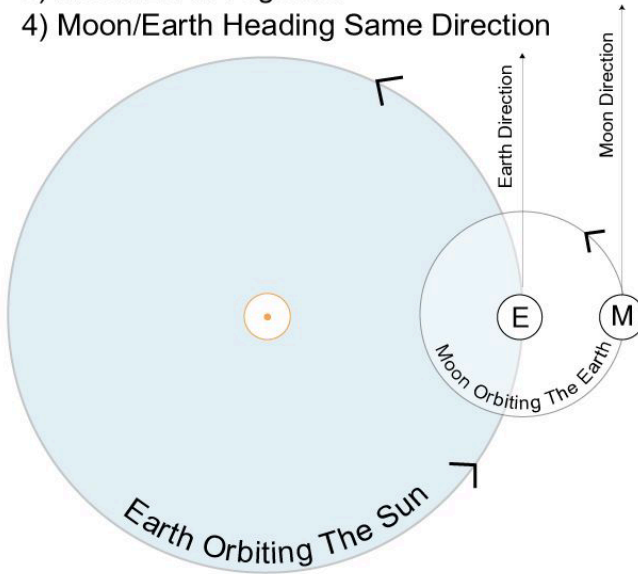
First Quarter Moon

- 1) Moon/Earth Equidistant the Sun
- 2) Moon in Wake of Earth
- 3) Moon Right Angles Earth
- 4) Moon Heading Outer Space



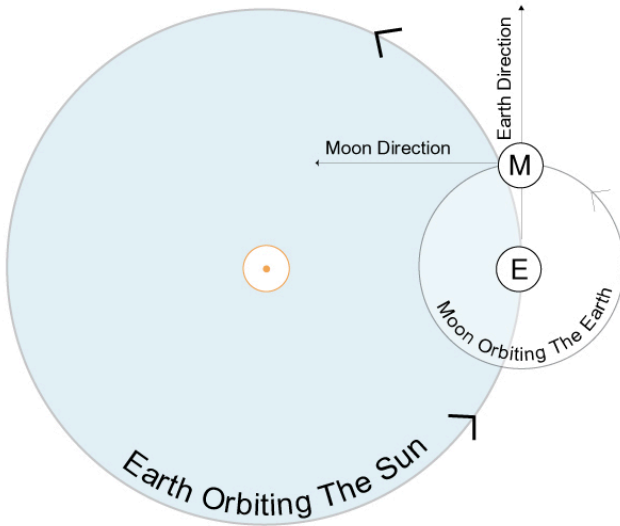
Full Moon

- 1) Moon Outside Earth's Orbit
- 2) Sun/Earth/Moon Alignment
- 3) Moon/Earth Together
- 4) Moon/Earth Heading Same Direction



Last Quarter Moon

- 1) Moon Ahead of Earth in Space
- 2) Moon Right Angle to Earth
- 3) Moon Heading Toward Sun
- 4) Moon/Earth Equidistant From Sun



THE SOLUNAR CYCLE

February 11, 2023

Here are some diagrams of the Sun, Earth, and Moon that, if studied, may help one to understand what the solunar cycle reveals.

From First to Last Quarter, the Moon is traveling in the future of the zodiac, ahead of the Earth, and from Last Quarter to First Quarter, in the past, behind

where the Earth is at. The relation of these bodies to the future or past can be very important. We are on Earth. If the Moon runs ahead (or behind) us in the zodiac, that suggests an interpretation. In the monthly solunar cycle the Moon is always ahead (future) of Earth, behind (past), or equal (present) to the Earth as relates to the cycle (circle) of the zodiac. Interpret that.

MOON IN AND MOON OUT

The New Moon: BORN FROM THE PAST

Please see the diagram of the moment of New Moon, when the Sun and Moon are aligned inside the Earth's orbit, with Earth on the outside. Note that at the New Moon the Moon is heading in the exact opposite direction to that of the Earth, after plunging toward the Sun in the 4th Quarter. The Earth and Moon are in the same degree of the zodiac, yet the Moon is Conjunct in the direction of the Sun, one with it. Emerging from the past, the cycle begins.

First Quarter Moon: OVERCOMING THE PAST

Here the Moon is balanced between the inside and the outer side of the Earth's orbit and moving toward the outward side at right angles to the motion of the Earth itself. The Moon is behind in the zodiac to the position of the Earth, in the Moon's wake, thus in the 'Past' where the Earth recently was. Overcoming the past.

Full Moon: REAPING THE PRESENT

Here the Moon is on the outermost side of its orbit, aligned with the Earth and the Sun. Notice that the direction and momentum of the Moon is the same as that of the Earth, toward the "Future". Yet, the Earth is in the same degree of the zodiac as the Moon, in the 'Present', so to speak, yet the Earth is between the Moon and the Sun, pulled both ways. Reaping the present.

Last Quarter Moon: SEEING THE FUTURE

Here the Moon is balanced between the inside and the outer side of the Earth's orbit and moving toward the inward side of the Earth's orbit, at 90 degrees to the orbit of the Earth, and as far ahead of Earth in the zodiac as it can be. The Moon is in the future of the zodiac, the place where the Earth will eventually be. Future oriented.

[Graphics by me.]



MOTHER MOON: ASTRONOMY OF THE LIGHTS

February 12, 2023

And yes, astrology is cultural astronomy.

OK, yesterday's blog about the solunar triangle of Sun, Earth, and Moon was just a warmup for today's blog on some of the other lunar components. This one will separate the wheat from the chaff and see who's able to pay attention to the details. Here are some additional lunar details.

The Pull of the Moon

The Moon's pull is strongest when it is nearest, and that happens when it is straight up or overhead (Moon up). This point is called the zenith. A second strong point occurs when the Moon is at the opposite point or beneath us at a point called the nadir (Moon down). The Moon is weakest in radial upward force when it is on either horizon, rising or setting. At these times the radial force is directed downwards toward the center of the Earth.

Moon Up / Moon Down

When the Moon is at the zenith, or overhead, gravitational force is at its strongest and it pulls us up, ever so slightly. When the Moon is at the nadir (on the other side of the Earth from us), a special form of centrifugal force, stronger than gravity, pushes us out or away from the surface of the Earth. In other words, the effect of the Moon at zenith or nadir is to lift us up or away from the surface of the Earth, but for different reasons.

The two points during the day when the Moon is up or down are when the radial lunar force is at a maximum. However, sometimes the pull of Moon Up is greater than that for Moon Down, and vice versa. This variation depends upon what is called the 'Diurnal Inequality', which varies during the course of a month. This diurnal inequality is responsible for the difference in the height of successive high tides and depends upon which part of the ecliptic the Moon is located.

The Moon in the Signs

When the Moon is in the equinoctial signs, Aries and Libra, the pull of Moon Up is the same as that of Moon Down for a given day. However, when the Moon is in the solstitial signs, Cancer and Capricorn, the pull is unequal. When the Moon is above the equator and in the sign Cancer, the pull at Moon Up is always stronger than the pull at Moon Down. When the Moon is below the equator and in the sign the pull at Moon Down is always stronger than the pull at Moon Up.

Geographic Latitude

You geographic latitude will affect how unequal the Moon Up and Down can be. If I am here in Big Rapids at almost 44 degrees of latitude North and the Moon has a declination of minus 28 degrees (which it can reach), then at Moon up, the angle between my zenith (Moon Up) and the Moon is some 72 degrees. However, some 12 hours later, when the Moon is at my nadir (Moon Down), the angle between my nadir's latitude (40 degrees South) and the declination of the Moon at - 28 degrees is only some 16 degrees. At this time, the Moon Down pull will be much stronger than the Moon Up pull.

Moon on the Horizon

The Moon is weakest, as mentioned, when it is on the horizon, either rising or setting, each day. However, this too varies during the month depending on the 'declination of the Moon'. The closer the Moon comes to your own geographic latitude, the stronger the effect. Therefore, if you are residing in a northern latitude, the Moon will be closer to you in the ecliptic

sign Cancer and this will cause the Moon to be somewhat stronger at Moonrise and set.

Gravitational Force

Both the Sun and Moon exert a gravitational pull on the Earth. Although the Sun is much more massive, its greater distance results in the gravitational pull of the Moon being almost twice that of the Sun. In any case, we experience their combined effect rather than each singly. This effect varies with the monthly lunar cycle.

New and Full Moons

At New and Full Moons, the combined pull of the Sun and the Moon is greatest. This pull is weakest at the lunar quarters. Therefore, this 'pull' waxes and wanes with the month. It is strongest at New Moon, grows weaker at First Quarter, is strong again at the Full Moon and then weak at Fourth Quarter, and on around. At New and Full Moon, the Moon's tidal effect is, in effect, added to the solar effect and the resultant tractive force is increased in the ration 3:2, the tide-generating force of the Sun being one half that of the Moon. During the First and Last Quarters, when the Moon and Sun are some 90 degrees apart, the resultant tractive force is roughly one half of the lunar force alone.

This combined solar/lunar force is subject to some variation (other than that already pointed out) due to the fact that the Moon can have latitude above or below the ecliptic. The Moon's orbit can reach some 5 degrees above or below the plane of the Earth's orbit, the ecliptic. Where the Moon crosses the ecliptic are

what are called the ascending and descending nodes of the Moon. At these points (twice a month), the combined force of the Sun and Moon is greatest.

The Tidal Vector

So far, we have discussed something of the effects of the Moon as it transits overhead, beneath our feet, or on the horizon each day. Yet it is the combined vector force of the Sun and Moon that produces the strongest pull that we feel during any 24 hour period. Keeping track of this vector force is a little complicated, and that is where a computer really helps. It does it for us. In fact, the program will keep track of the Sun, Moon singly or their combined vector. In any case, here are the various components that the program will calculate and graph:

Radial Component

This is the tidal component that lifts us away from the face of the Earth at zenith and nadir passage. You will note that there are two periods each day (zenith & nadir) when this component reaches a maximum value and that, depending on your geographic latitude, these are often unequal in magnitude. At the rising and setting points in the daily cycle, the effect is to push us down towards the center of the Earth. At all other points, aside from the above mentioned four, the effect is transverse or horizontal:

Horizontal Component

In addition to the vertical or radial tidal components, there are horizontal or transverse forces that push and pull us across the surface of the Earth in various

directions. Earth's rotation produces semidiurnal changes in the tide-generating forces both in direction and magnitude.

East/West Horizontal Component

These forces reach zero values at zenith, nadir, rising and setting times and become strongest at the intermediate times (45-degree points) between the above four events. These horizontal components vary depending upon the geographic latitude. In a 24-hour period, the effect of the horizontal component is as follows:

Starting from Moon up, the transverse pull grows stronger to the West, reaches maximum magnitude some 45 degrees (3 hours) after Moon Up, and fades until we reach the point at which the Moon is setting at which time the horizontal force has again dropped to zero. After this we are pulled to the East, dropping off again at Moon Down. At this point, a Westerly pull is again felt, diminishing to zero at Moonrise. After Moonrise, we experience an Easterly Pull, reaching a peak some three hours before the Moon is at our zenith, and dropping to zero at the zenith point.

North/South horizontal component

These forces also have a North South component that varies on a 24-hour basis. It is much like the East/West component, and functions as follows.

There is no North/South component for places located along the equator. In other latitudes, the force vector describes an ellipse. At Moon up and Moon down, it is directed toward the South, while at Moonrise and

Moonset it is directed toward the North. The North/South component is of the same order of magnitude as the East/West component.

The Declination Cycle

The monthly cycle (Tropical Month of 27.32 days) of lunar declination contributes to the overall tidal effects. The closer the Moon comes to being overhead, the more powerful are its effects. If we live in the northern hemisphere, then when the Moon rides high above the celestial equator, when it is in the Sun-Sign Cancer, it will come closest to our own geographic latitude, and to being overhead. This effect can further be enhanced when the latitude of the Moon reaches its maximum value of some 5-degrees. Thus, the total declination of the Moon can reach some 28 1/2 degrees above and below the ecliptic. This happens (North or South) once in about 18.6 years.

Perigee/Apogee

These are the points when the Moon, due to its non-circular orbit, is closest and farthest (respectively) to the Earth. The Moon moves at its greatest speed when it is at perigee and at its slowest when furthest from the Earth at apogee. The gravitational pull of the Moon is much stronger at perigee than at apogee.

The apogee/perigee points (the line of asides that connects them) are not fixed along the Ecliptic but move slowly forward along the ecliptic over a nine year period.

Lunar Speed

In addition, this line-of-apsides also fluctuates backwards and forwards in the ecliptic slightly with a period of 31.81 days. This is due to the eccentricity of the Moon's orbit, and this fluctuation is called 'evection'. The resulting effect is the Moon speeds up and slows down at different rates in the four weeks from one perigee to the next.

The Moon's speed is also affected by the Lunar Phases, since the Sun's pull on the Moon is different in the various lunar quadrants. The Moon moves faster from the Last Quarter to the New Moon, and slower from the New Moon to the First Quarter. It also speeds up from the First Quarter to the Full Moon, and slows down from the Full Moon to the Last Quarter.

The Nodal Cycle.

The greatest possible astronomical tide-generating force occurs when, at the same time, the Sun is at perigee, the Sun and Moon are at Full or New Moon, and both the Sun and Moon have zero declination. This happens about once in 1600 years, 250 B.C., 1400 A.D, and it will happen around 3300 A.D.

Major Tide-related Phenomena

Semi-Diurnal (12 hr., 25 min.) Time between Moon up and Moon down caused by the rotation of the Earth.

Diurnal (24 hr., 50 min.), time between succeeding upper and lower transits of the Moon caused by rotation of the Earth and declination of Sun and Moon.

Interval between spring tides (14.76 days average), time from New Moon to Full Moon or vice versa

caused by the phase relation between the Sun and Moon.

Lunar fortnightly (13.66 days), time for moon to change declination from zero to maximum and back to zero caused by the varying declination of the Moon.

Anomalistic month 27.55455 days (27d 13h 18m 33s), time for moon to go from perigee to perigee caused by the ellipticity of the Moon's orbit.

Solar semi-annual (182.6 days), time for Sun to change declination from zero to maximum and back to zero caused by the varying declination of the Sun.

Anomalistic year (365.26 days), time for the Earth to go from perigee to perigee caused by the ellipticity of the Earth's orbit.

Hopefully, the above will be more than enough of lunar minutiae that some of you find interesting. I do. If not, here is a free e-book to settle that.

“MOTHER MOON: ASTROLOGY OF THE LIGHTS”

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

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Tibetan Lunar Day (1-30)			Tsurphu Month				Gelugpa Month				Tidal Force				
Weekday		Date	Zone	Eclipse				Dalai Lama New Year							
LD	WD			EST	KM	DM	EC	K	D	TF	K	D	TF		
07	Sa	2023-02-25	13:51	01	01										173%
08	Su	2023-02-26	14:30	01	01										161%
09	Mo	2023-02-27	15:52	01	01										150%
10	Tu	2023-02-28	17:50	01	01										141%
11	We	2023-03-01	20:11	01	01										135%
12	Th	2023-03-02	22:43	01	01										132%
13	Sa	2023-03-04	1:15	01	01										132%
14	Su	2023-03-05	3:39	01	01										132%
15	Mo	2023-03-06	5:49	01	01										129%
16	Tu	2023-03-07	7:42	01	01										121%
17	We	2023-03-08	9:15	01	01										111%
18	Th	2023-03-09	10:26	01	01										100%
19	Fr	2023-03-10	11:14	01	01										94%
20	Sa	2023-03-11	11:37	01	01										7%
21	Su	2023-03-12	11:33	01	01										18%
22	Mo	2023-03-13	10:59	01	01										135%
23	Tu	2023-03-14	9:53	01	01										154%
24	We	2023-03-15	8:17	01	01										171%
25	Th	2023-03-16	6:10	01	01										184%
26	Fr	2023-03-17	3:38	01	01										190%
27	Sa	2023-03-18	0:45	01	01										191%
28	Sa	2023-03-18	21:38	01	01										191%
29	Su	2023-03-19	18:26	01	01										190%
30	Mo	2023-03-20	15:18	01	01										191%
01	Tu	2023-03-21	12:24	02	02										193%
02	We	2023-03-22	9:52	02	02										195%
03	Th	2023-03-23	7:52	02	02										196%
04	Fr	2023-03-24	6:31	02	02										195%
05	Sa	2023-03-25	5:55	02	02										190%
06	Su	2023-03-26	6:04	02	02										180%
07	Mo	2023-03-27	8:00	02	02										168%
08	Tu	2023-03-28	8:34	02	02										158%
09	We	2023-03-29	10:39	02	02										151%
10	Th	2023-03-30	13:02	02	02										147%
11	Fr	2023-03-31	15:30	02	02										147%
12	Sa	2023-04-01	17:51	02	02										149%
13	Su	2023-04-02	19:56	02	02										154%
14	Mo	2023-04-03	21:37	02	02										156%
15	Tu	2023-04-04	22:50	02	02										151%
16	We	2023-04-05	23:35	02	02										140%
17	Th	2023-04-06	23:52	02	02										128%
18	Fr	2023-04-07	23:42	02	02										118%
19	Sa	2023-04-08	23:06	02	02										112%
20	Su	2023-04-09	22:08	02	02										112%
21	Mo	2023-04-10	20:49	02	02										119%
22	Tu	2023-04-11	19:10	02	02										130%
23	We	2023-04-12	17:15	02	02										146%
24	Th	2023-04-13	15:05	02	02										159%
25	Fr	2023-04-14	12:45	02	02										166%
26	Sa	2023-04-15	10:16	02	02										168%
27	Su	2023-04-16	7:46	02	02										168%
28	Mo	2023-04-17	5:18	02	02										168%
29	Tu	2023-04-18	2:59	02	02										171%
30	We	2023-04-19	0:55	02	02										175%
01	We	2023-04-19	23:14	03	03	T									180%
02	Th	2023-04-20	22:01	03	03										186%
03	Fr	2023-04-21	21:21	03	03										189%
04	Sa	2023-04-22	21:19	03	03										189%
05	Su	2023-04-23	21:57	03	03										183%
06	Mo	2023-04-24	23:12	03	03										173%
07	We	2023-04-26	0:59	03	03										164%
08	Th	2023-04-27	3:10	03	03										158%
09	Fr	2023-04-28	5:33	03	03										156%
10	Sa	2023-04-29	7:53	03	03										158%
11	Su	2023-04-30	11:00	03	03										164%
12	Mo	2023-05-01	11:40	03	03										172%
13	Tu	2023-05-02	12:49	03	03										177%
14	We	2023-05-03	13:20	03	03										176%

Tidal Force			Dalai Lama New Year				Karmapa New Year					
LD	WD	Date	K	M	DM	EC	K	D	TF	K	D	TF
15	Th	2023-05-04	13:15	03	03				171%			
16	Fr	2023-05-05	12:34	03	03	PP			164%			
17	Sa	2023-05-06	11:23	03	03				157%			
18	Su	2023-05-07	9:46	03	03				152%			
19	Mo	2023-05-08	7:50	03	03				148%			
20	Tu	2023-05-09	5:40	03	03				147%			
21	We	2023-05-10	3:21	03	03				148%			
22	Th	2023-05-11	0:59	03	03				149%			
23	Th	2023-05-11	22:38	03	03				148%			
24	Fr	2023-05-12	20:22	03	03				143%			
25	Sa	2023-05-13	18:15	03	03				138%			
26	Su	2023-05-14	16:18	03	03				130%			
27	Mo	2023-05-15	14:35	03	03				129%			
28	Tu	2023-05-16	13:08	03	03				130%			
29	We	2023-05-17	12:00	03	03				137%			
30	Th	2023-05-18	11:14	03	03				146%			
01	Fr	2023-05-19	10:54	04	04				157%			
02	Sa	2023-05-20	11:02	04	04				166%			
03	Su	2023-05-21	11:41	04	04				170%			
04	Mo	2023-05-22	12:50	04	04				168%			
05	Tu	2023-05-23	14:29	04	04				163%			
06	We	2023-05-24	16:32	04	04				158%			
07	Th	2023-05-25	18:50	04	04				155%			
08	Fr	2023-05-26	21:14	04	04				155%			
09	Sa	2023-05-27	23:28	04	04				158%			
10	Mo	2023-05-29	1:20	04	04				166%			
11	Tu	2023-05-30	2:39	04	04				178%			
12	We	2023-05-31	3:17	04	04				187%			
13	Th	2023-06-01	3:11	04	04				190%			
14	Fr	2023-06-02	2:20	04	04				190%			
15	Sa	2023-06-03	0:49	04	04				187%			
16	Sa	2023-06-03	22:43	04	04				184%			
17	Su	2023-06-04	20:11	04	04				182%			
18	Mo	2023-06-05	17:21	04	04				180%			
19	Tu	2023-06-06	14:22	04	04				180%			
20	We	2023-06-07	11:23	04	04				181%			
21	Th	2023-06-08	8:31	04	04				180%			
22	Fr	2023-06-09	5:53	04	04				175%			
23	Sa	2023-06-10	3:34	04	04				164%			
24	Su	2023-06-11	1:37	04	04				147%			
25	Mo	2023-06-12	0:06	04	04				130%			
26	Mo	2023-06-12	23:00	04	04				116%			
27	Tu	2023-06-13	22:19	04	04				8%			
28	We	2023-06-14	22:03	04	04				17%			
29	Th	2023-06-15	22:11	04	04				112%			
30	Fr	2023-06-16	22:42	04	04				121%			
01	Sa	2023-06-17	23:37	05	05				133%			
02	Mo	2023-06-19	0:56	05	05				142%			
03	Tu	2023-06-20	2:38	05	05				145%			
04	We	2023-06-21	4:40	05	05				144%			
05	Th	2023-06-22	6:59	05	05				142%			
06	Fr	2023-06-23	9:25	05	05				143%			
07	Sa	2023-06-24	11:49	05	05				146%			
08	Su	2023-06-25	13:57	05	05				152%			
09	Mo	2023-06-26	15:36	05	05				160%			
10	Tu	2023-06-27	16:37	05	05				171%			
11	We	2023-06-28	16:50	05	05				182%			
12	Th	2023-06-29	16:14	05	05							

Dharma Practice Calendar

150-Year Buddhist Lunar Calendar



by
Michael
Erlewine

COMBINED TIDAL FORCE OF THE SUN AND MOON

February 12, 2023

This is a purely modern calculation that I include because it is inherently interesting and may be something we should be looking at. In the last 20 years or so, scientists too have become more aware of lunar effects on the earth and its inhabitants. In general, much of this research may be summed up and is expressed in the combined solunar gravitational force, which I include in this free 150-years dharma lunar calendar e-book.

150-YEAR DHARMA PRACTICE CALENDAR

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

I programmed this unique measure, which includes both terrestrial and solar gravitational influence in a single indicator, incorporating the effects of the accelerated orbital motion of the moon and the closeness of the separation-interval at perigee-syzygy, the consequence of a coincident Sun-Moon alignment in celestial latitude or declination, and the perturbed motion of perigee subject to increased solar gravitational force when perigee-syzygy occurs near the time of perihelion.

In brief, this is the most accurate single indicator for lunar gravitational forces that are exerted on us each moment of the day and night.

As listed here, this is a number from 0% (lowest force) to 100% (highest force). This number represents a

number of solunar forces mentioned above in their somewhat complex interplay. The resulting total force creates the tides and whatever pressures and forces the Sun and Moon exert on the Earth and ourselves.

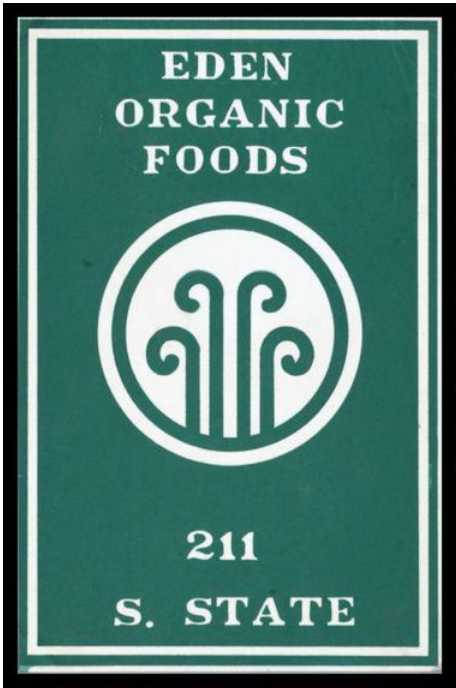
This represents a scientifically calculated number that actually gives a good idea of how these combined forces wax and wane throughout the year. How to use it?

Be aware of it by the free e-book listed above which gives you day by day listings from 1900-2054 for Date, Weekday, Tibetan 30-day Moon, Time Zone, Month in Tsurphu Calendar, Month in Gelugpa Calendar, Eclipse, date of Karmapa New Year (Losar), Date of Dalai Lama (Losar), and Tidal Force (as described above). All you need plus being aware of the solar forces.

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

<https://spaceweather.com/>

[Graphics and chart-data by me.]



BELOW: No, its not baby diapers drying out in the yard, but seaweed shipped in from the coast of New England hanging in our yard at 1041 N. Main Street in Ann Arbor in the early 1970s.

LEFT: The original logo I designed for Eden Foods when, as an astrologer, I was asked to pick the incorporation date for the company, which was Nov. 4, 1969. Here is a poster I did for them back then.





EDEN



**WHOLE EARTH GROCERY
and RESTAURANT**

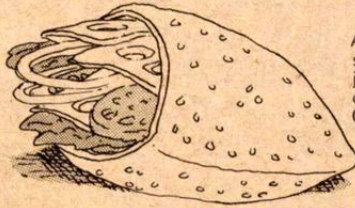
HOURS

10-7 MON.-FRI. 12-7:30 SAT.

EDEN'S DELI

YOURS WITH A TOTALLY NATURAL TOUCH

A whole wheat
sesame flat bread
with your choice
of our hot special.



ALSO Hot Tea,
salads, deserts,
juices, cheeses, and
other hot & cold
CHAPATI fillings.

Home of the CHAPATI

330 MAYNARD

[THE EDEN CHAPATI](#)

February 13, 2023

This blog is about food in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and a particular food that I not only like, but if I had to take

one food with me to a deserted island, I would take the Eden Chapati, meaning the particular lunch food that Eden Foods in Ann Arbor offered for just a few years when they ran a food and lunch business off a little alley at 330 Maynard St.

I'm talking here about a simple whole-wheat sourdough chapati filled with vegetables that, of all the foods eaten by me in my lifetime, this food comes to mind more often than anything I have ever eaten. If I ever go to Heaven, so to speak, this is what I would ask for at the Heavenly Lunch counter.

And I have spent many moments remembering the Eden's Chapati, a sourdough, open flame-scorched sesame-studded chapati filled with veggies and a creamy Tahini dressing. For me, it does not get better than that. And after some years of looking, I managed to actually find the recipe for the Eden Chapati and its filling, which I want to share here so it does not vanish from this world.

RECIPE INSTRUCTIONS

The Chapati

A baker would understand the ratio as 100% flour hard-red winter wheat, 75% water(room temp) and 2% (or no) salt. To bring this to a home baker, we concluded:

RECIPE FOR 20 CHAPATIS

You will also need:

Enough sesame seeds to coat the chapati.

Cornmeal for rolling the dough out.

35.3 ounces (1000 grams) flour.

26.5 ounces (750 grams) Water

0.705 ounces (20 grams) Salt (I would use none)

In a mixer stand:

Mix flour and salt.

Add water and beat on low speed for 2 minutes.

Increase speed to high and beat 10 minutes.

You will need to add the sourdough mother or starter.

Divide resulting dough into 20 pieces, 2.8 oz (80 grams) each.

Then roll each piece in sesame seeds to fully coat.

At this stage (or BEFORE dividing into pieces), cover with cloth and let sit overnight.

In the morning, after spreading cornmeal on a board, take a rolling pin and roll each piece flat into 6-inch circles.

Heat a grill, pan, or griddle to medium-high heat.

Place each chapati piece on the flat grill or pan and roast it lightly.

Flip when firm (edges won't droop if center is lifted with spatula)

Then grill the other side to the same amount of doneness.

After which, using tongs, move the chapati onto a low gas flame, with first-grilled side facing down.

When air bubbles form, turn heat up full, and flip over with tongs and hopefully it will fill like a balloon with air.

[No one gets it right the first couple of tries. It is a skill learned with practice.]

The grill should barely toast cornmeal and pop sesame seeds.

If a hole forms in the dough, use tongs to clamp down the hole so the rest of dough can fill with air.

[Note: If left out, these pieces of raw dough dry out quickly. Cover tightly and use within 3 days.]

When done with the chapati, cooked and a little scorched by the flame, cut off a thin edge (1/3 of the chapati) in order to stuff with sandwich fillings.

What I liked I believe was called a "Creamy."

CREAMIES

Eden food's recipe from about 1974, made every day:

2 onions sliced.

1/2 head med. sized cabbage, sliced.

1 butternut squash peeled and cut into large cubes.

1/2 rutabaga (or other hard squash or sweet potatoes), peeled and cubed.

2 Tablespoons oil, salt to taste

COOKING FILLING

Place all ingredients in a heavy bottomed pan.

Turn stove on medium high heat and stir, paying attention until liquid forms from the veggies.

[If needed, add small amount of water to prevent sticking]

Lower heat, cover, and let cook until squash is very soft. (45-60 minutes).

Remove from heat and stir briskly until squash has mashed.

And then to the vegie mixture was added 1/2 cup cooked bulgur. It just absorbs the liquid so it makes a thicker filling for a chapati. Wet fillings would be a mess and leak out.

[Michael Potter says the bulgur was never used when they started serving the Eden Chapati.]

Then stir together 1/3-1/2 cup Tahini and 1/4 cup tamari (less tamari if you want to have lower salt).

Add this while the veggies are hot and stir well.

Adjust taste to your liking.

This should make 4-6 servings.

Most of the above recipe was provided by the kindness of Betsey Ready. Thank You!

Another version, which I never tried was the famous 'Eden Chapati #4', with mayo, hummus, Munster cheese, tomato and lettuce and sprouts. I never tired of the 'Creamies'.

That's it. Now, here some additional notes from Michael Potter, the founder of this branch of Eden Foods and a longtime friend, in his words:

"I founded, built, staffed, opened, and ran Eden at 330 Maynard St.

"The sourdough, open flame cooked chapati itself was brought back to Ann Arbor from Toronto, Canada by a friend who joined our team. His name was Mark Cook and he developed most of the chapati filling recipes. If an individual callout is made about the Eden chapati, it should go to Mark Cook."

"We used fresh stoneground hard red Spring wheat flour. Sourdough starter we acquired from a natural foods bakery in Toronto. They had brought it from Europe. It was passed forward into daily batches by adding a reserved clump of the day before's sourdough."

“The dough was left overnight in warm spot to sour. It would puff up, so the first thing you did in the morning was punch it to release the built-up carbon dioxide.”

“The dough was removed from the batch for each chapati and formed into a ball, rolled out flat, and the round sprinkled with sesame seed, put on a stovetop gas burner to cook it, flip it over at just the right moment to do the other side.”

“Timing and flip sequences had to be mastered so the chapati would puff and separate to the edges with equal thickness on each side. When done, they were set aside to cool. To use them, the edge was cut off to have a deep pocketed, sourdough chapati to fill.”

At some point Michael Potter sold the Eden Lunch part to Tim Redmond and Betsey and Peter Murray. And there were a few other people from the Boston macrobiotic community. But at that time the warehouse and the restaurant/store pretty much parted ways.

Michael Potter writes:

“It was not too much later that one day several years later a couple guys from Saudi Arabia walked in and offered to buy the Restaurant and store and Tim and Peter said yes!

C'est la vie.

That was around 1984? “

I thank Michael Potter and Betsey Murray Ready for providing much of the information shared here. May

the Eden Chapati long live and be available, as mentioned, probably my favorite food memory, ever.

Betsey Ready writes some addition comments:

“I worked at Eden’s from 1976-1982. When I arrived the basement on Maynard street was shared by Sun Bakery run by Nick Boots. They made the chapatis for several years.

Besides a huge Hobart mixer for the dough, there was a conical machine that took the small dough chunks (cut and weighed) and turned them into perfect balls. These were hand rolled into sesame seeds.

Then another machine flattened the balls into disks. I believe, like a pasta machine does, and each ball went through the machine 3 times, each iteration making it flatter.

And so, it was a long process before the disks made it to the flame. It was also noisy. My guess was a daily batch was 180 chapatis. 6 days a week.

For a while the menu had 6 numbered chapatis of cold fillings and 4 hot fillings . The hot fillings were Rice and Veggies, ‘Creamies’, plus daily specials of a vegan casserole and a cheese casserole.

The ‘cold’ chapatis were:

- 1) Hummus, lettuce, tomato
- 2) Cheese, lettuce, tomato, mayo
- 3) Hummus lettuce, tomato, cucumber (or sprouts)

4) Cheese, lettuce, tomato, cucumber (or sprouts)

5) Herb cream cheese, lettuce, cucumber

6) The complete protein: mayo, hummus, cheese, lettuce, tomato, sprouts

Number 6 was the most popular.

When Sun Bakery moved to their own building, several awesome guys became Chapati makers.

During my years there, Tom Kenney (TK) and Tom Yeager were especially dedicated. It was a hot job to stand in front of the stove and cook them all.

I remember a day after the fall time change, that 'TK' forgot about the time change so missed his bus and we didn't have any Chapatis to start the lunch rush. Many disappointed customers that day.

There was a newspaper article about Madonna's time living in Ann Arbor and it listed the places she had lived and frequented. Edens was her favorite place to eat. Small claim to fame.

[Eden Whole Earth Grocery and Restaurant, and the original logo and poster I created for them back in 1969.]



“THE TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS”

February 14, 2023

I’m reminded once again, and with increasing frequency as I grow older, of what we give our lives to and for. Whatever we live with passion and true interest, especially as we are coming up as young adults, is not only a key to our personal history, but also to the history and our contribution to the times we live in.

Of late, I have been reviewing the history of organic foods in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the 1960s, companies

like Eden Foods, Indian Summer Restaurant, Frog Holler Produce, and others.

And it was not just the companies and business itself, but the team that made up that company folks which, IMO, was impeccably dedicated to doing their part, not only for company profits but for their own interest and salvation.

Perhaps it was just because we were young, yet many of these dedicated souls have carried out their interest and passion into old age. They still have the 'good stuff' going on with them, so to speak.

Is it every aging person that mourns that younger people, the next generation, do not want to work as we remember we did? Or is that just part of getting old?

Perhaps what we are really worried about is the lack of passion in younger folks, the most tangible thing we can remember about our own times while reaching for our prime. We were fully present and passionate about what we were doing. Where is that in today's world, that is what the aging seem to ask.

I'm sure that kind of passion still exists and is all around us, and we probably can't see it yet because it has not fully emerged for the next generation, which is too busy with what is real.

Personalities are slow to form, and the choices we make early on that stand out are quite often like the lines from the Robert Frost poem "The Road Not Taken:"

"I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.”

I'm not sure that what interested me, day by day, and year by year, is of interest to others, or even was enough to accumulate meaningful history. Yet, when I look back to those early days, the people that in retrospect most affected me were the ones that most affected all of us then, and I don't mean just those that became famous. Certainly, I felt like a 'Forrest Gump', watching friends find their way and chart their course to celebrity.

I more remember the individuals that made this or that business or enterprise shine, made it what it was, and in my memory, they are pristine. These are the folk that flood my memory on the days when I find myself prolonging the past and its memories.

Not much I can do to bring those times back, try as I might. That it ever existed at all is remarkable, that individuals persisted in their passion to the degree of forging memories that persist even until now to my mind in their vividness and impact.

In the fog of the past, as I look back, these small daily events stand out as memories, while then I took them for granted, yet today they are what I most remember.

Not the newspaper headline or world event, but the simple things, like the baker at 'Indian Summer' restaurant who made the now-unforgettable loaf of

bread, or as I posted yesterday, Eden Food's sourdough chapati encrusted with sesame seeds and filled with veggies, on down the line. So many things.

I am reminded of my daughter May Erlewine's song about the little things, which I include here for those with the time to hear it.

May Erlewine: "Tiny Beautiful Things"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYaRlw8kU2o>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF

February 16, 2023

What are called in dharma terms ‘Kleshas’, whole emotional syndromes, that like the weather move in and out of the mind, creating our emotional state. We may be upset and know that we are upset, yet we are not aware of what’s happening to us, much less understand how to stop it.

“Kleshas” are not problems from outside us, but rather self-created emotional states, syndromes that seize

control of us and that we cannot let go or easily get out of. They do subside, but that takes time.

Our changing emotional states are so vast and all-encompassing that they are not like thoughts, pointillistic, but rather are like giant storm-systems that are wider than our ability to grasp them and in which we may spend hours, days, or weeks (and even longer) caught up in.

Getting a handle on our kleshas, our emotions, is very difficult, much less being able to see or grasp them abstractly, in their entirety. And seeing them move and contradict themselves, much like a pendulum swing, is even harder to keep in mind. We seldom are aware (and watching) as we reverse ourselves and shift from one end of an opinion to the other.

Often, we rage away at this or that issue, never acknowledging that these are self-created and that we have no intention of facing up to the fact that these are paper tigers we have invented and that if actually confronted with the truth, we would at the last minute back down and slink away. We endlessly cry wolf and draw a line beyond which we will not cross and then cross it. We huff and we puff.

In all this, we are victims of our own emotional states, and the lack of awareness of these states on our part, that they are self-made, is pretty much universal, at least in my experience.

In these huge amoeba-like clouds (emotional fog of feelings) that we find ourselves within, we are not able to conceptualize or grasp in their entirety. We can perhaps deal with thoughts as isolated events, but the

sheer breadth of our own emotional states is beyond our ability to escape.

Every once in a great while, we may be able to witness and acknowledge our own self-contradiction, as we slide from one end of the pole to the other, the opposite point of view, without even blinking. In this sense we are, as the old saying goes, our own worst enemy.

This is why dealing with our emotions, what are called in the dharma 'kleshas', is beyond our ability to grasp wholly, and to acknowledge both ends of our own opposition at the same time. We can champion each end of the pendulum, but not at the same time. We are not aware that we are the doer and the done, the subject and the object of our own emotional mysteries.

Yet, every once in a while, and for sure eventually, we will see the beginning and the end of a Klesha at once, both at the same time, and that emotional storm will dry up and blow away.

Such an experience is humbling, enlightening, and all that we need to unravel the emotional equation, unstring the bow, and let it go, allowing all of this emotional turmoil to pass.

As the Christian Bible says "This came to pass. That came to pass." Emotional turmoil came to pass, not to stay, and we let it pass. Yet, passing is not always all that easy.

When it comes to 'Kleshas', our inner emotional storms, we are too embedded in them to see clearly.

And we cannot pass what we cannot grasp,
comprehend, and get our arms around. That's why
they cling to us and we to them.

My daughter May said it so very well in this song, that
"Trouble ain't built to last." Enjoy her wisdom.

May Erlewine: "Rise Up Singing"

<https://www.google.com/search...>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“EXPECTATION IS THE ROOT OF ALL HEARTACHE”

February 17, 2023

ABOVE: A little advice from perhaps the most dharmic of English writers, William Shakespeare.

Before some dharma musings, I have to air some expectation and the disappointment it caused.

Of course, I have been working night and day on learning to make stoneground homemade chapatis (roti). The long and the short of it is when I finally had all the ingredients on hand, the Hard Red Spring Whole Wheat Flour, mixing it all, waiting overnight for it cure, and finally was making my first chapatis on a gas stove...

My chapatis would not puff up, no matter how hard I tried. Now, Margaret had at least three chapatis that puffed up, but not me. I also made a huge mess in the process, which of course I had to completely clean up, and I washed all the countertops and mopped the floor.

I'm not giving up, but I am taking the rest of the day off from thinking about chapatis, flour, sourdough, and the like.

I will, however, talk a bit about awareness.

In dharma training and study, it is always about 'awareness', our becoming more aware of our own situation and actions.

We don't know what we don't know, and never have.

It's up to us to take cues from our own behavior if we can. Who is going to help us and what can they help us with?

The answer, as mentioned above, is that the only thing that can help us is to become more aware. In the grand tradition of dharma teaching, those great dharma teachers can point out to us as best they can how to be more aware. It's up to us to become aware. They can't do that for us.

Dharma teachers can't make us aware because only we can become more aware by our own efforts, and effort itself tends to cloud the process of becoming more aware.

And so, there is a Catch-22 here, the going in circles. Simple iteration itself is not enough, trying the same thing over and over and expecting a different result, that's one definition of insanity.

Yet, there is an element of rote in much dharma practice, repeating or doing the same thing and hoping for or expecting a different result or even some result. The 'expecting' and hope clouds the issue.

Yet, something has to change in what we are practicing or doing, otherwise it won't.

I can say that in my own practice of dharma, any change seems to take a long, long time until I can notice it. And it's true that a watched pot never boils, so there always seems to be a gap between my looking for change, for more awareness, and any actual awareness of that change.

It can take months for me to see that change has happened, and many months at that. And even then, it always comes as a jolt or surprise. There is a gap after which I finally notice there has been change, change enough for me to see it.

And, of course, that change has to include an awareness of change before I can know what that change might be. It's not like I'm standing still and observing change. I'm what is changing and being changed by change. It's all relative and recursive.

It's the same with remembering what I was before I changed. How do we do that when we are what has changed and changing? We have already changed, so we are looking with new or changed eyes at or for what we once were.

The freshness of the present moment is just that, fresh, a new and renewed 'looking'. A renewed 'looking' is by definition refreshed. We see differently, meaning we see what we were before differently than we were, because we are, by having changed, different.

We no longer see as we did before we changed because that is what change does. It changes us. An attempt to gather in our outstretched hands the sands of time that have slipped through the hourglass of life is impossible, futile.

It is enough (has to be) to remain in the present moment as the living result of that change, and any attempt to objectify what we were before we changed is mostly hopeless because we have already changed away from that. We now see differently because we are different. We changed.

As was mentioned, we are no longer who we once were because we have changed. We no longer look and see as we did then, but rather as we see now.

And what we were then is not what we now are and we no longer see through those eyes we had then at the world as we do now. Change has taken place.

How much change and just what that is can be hard to see, yet there has been enough change to notice the difference between then and now. We see differently. We see a difference, a change, yet we may not see exactly what and how.

Yet, there is no going back or even accurately remembering what we once were before we changed. And so, it's like backing our car into the future using the rear-view mirror.

We see by reflection on the past something of what we once were and from that reflection attempt to determine where we are now and imagine where we might be going.

We know we have to determine the future while here in the present, and by definition it seems a somewhat backward way of doing things, determining the future from the past, especially since we can't remember what it was like before we went through the change.

[Photos: The proof (of lack thereof) the pudding, Margaret gave me one of here open chapatis to put in the Eden Filling, and I enclosed one of my own dud chapatis, none of which ever opened.]



SUNDANCE

February 17, 2023

Examining where does change come from... or what change is, can be important.

We can just say "Change is..." or "Change is a constant" and leave it go at that, yet how do we explain the variations of change, the degree of change, some of which can be extreme.

Change seems to be driven, a form of energy, much like money. Money can be used for many things. Change comes in the steady flow of direct sunlight, but also in bursts or quanta, and regardless of the amount, little or intense, we have no choice here on Earth but to react or respond to what the sun delivers.

And what the sun does to us physically we can cope with using suntan lotion, but how the energy bursts from the sun affect us emotionally is another matter, one we are only beginning to be aware of.

To repeat, solar change, like money, can be spent in various ways. The hum of sunlight hitting the Earth is a never-ending constant that drives life. However, large quanta or bursts of solar energy energize and cause other things to happen, pushing our inner envelope.

Sometimes we welcome change and at other times we resist or avoid it. Yet, for me the thick of it is: we cannot avoid change or dealing with it, ready or not.

Solar change is the quintessential signature for change in our life. Learning to use it begins with first becoming aware of it. Most people ignore the effects of solar change and just kind of get through it as best they can.

Solar change and its effects are deep seated, sewn into the fabric of our existence. We dance to the energy of the sun, yet do not realize that we are. The sun propels us through life with its energy, but we are not aware of its force.

Whether we are up to intense solar change depends on our stamina, endurance, plus our physical and mental health.

The sun puts it out without hesitation and we have no choice but to somehow manage it or blow a gasket.

I don't believe the energy of the sun has to be a mystery. It's very out front with its changes. What is it that causes life changes? Are we to believe change is just random? I don't think so.

Our sun is a variable star. Its energy varies from the constant steady sunlight to intense bursts of energy via solar flares and CME (Corona Mass Ejection). IMO, we are hooked into the sun all the time and when it varies, we vary. We call this 'Change.'

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



LIFE IS TRAUMATIC

February 17, 2023

I'm not saying life is all trauma, but I am saying that trauma is scalable. Not all trauma is spelled with a capital "T." There are all kinds of trauma from the big papa-bear trauma, through the moma-bear trauma, all the way down to the baby-bear trauma. Stuff eats at us.

Even something as obvious or simple as house-hunting has its share of the traumatic. I can see that I am

recovering from being a bit overwhelmed of late by the panic and anxiety of having to decide to enter into a contract to buy a house with very little time to consider anything at all.

Because of this realization, Margaret and I are taking stock and remembering what we are doing here in the first place, which is trying to find a new home, that is if it actually feels like a home and has at least a little magic in it. Without that, we can just stay here where we have lived for 43 years and there is plenty of magic and a history of high energy activities.

And then, if the mountain won't come to Mohamad, if we can't find a suitable house, then Mohamad will have to go to the mountain. We will travel and be a visitor rather than a neighbor. We would much rather be neighbors.

If we listen carefully, we can't dictate to fate, and Margaret and I are getting better at listening, quite the painful process.

Years ago, our Rinpoche, with whom we worked for 36 years, made this statement to a group of us, and we had to consider it carefully.

Rinpoche said that every thought and every act we make or have has either a benefic result or a malefic result, and that if you really drill down, and there are none that are neutral. The dividing line between the two is so infinitesimally thin as to be non-existent.

This is especially easy to see when it comes to joking or kidding one another. A great many jokes are not really all that funny when you consider them. Of course, I had to run off and check what Rinpoche said. Was it true or not? And sure enough, when I began to parse my own words down

to the nitty-gritty, Rinpoche was right. Yet, what was the point of this difference?

For me, the point was that even if the humor or kidding around was all in good fun, it was either beneficial or it was not, with not much in between. So, no matter how small, we are busy either gathering benefit or detriment. Unkind is unkind.

Now, can life support a lack of compassion and kindness, just for kicks, I can't say. I'm not saying that we can't make fun of ourselves or of others once in a while. Who's counting? I don't think it is a matter of 'who's counting', but rather does it count?

I don't know. Does it?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



DREAMING THE FUTURE

February 23, 2023

[Big snowstorm yesterday, deep snow. Looks like it will continue today.]

Reality creeps in, no matter how cosmic our dreams may be, and the cosmos is also real.

No doubt. I am a dreamer by nature, preferring the possibility of the future to the certainty of the past. It's a failing I have.

Yet I do know that the reality of this present moment itself is demanding and we can't let go of that or we have a kite without a tail.

For me, life is very much a process of making my dreams real, for reality to be as I dreamed it was or could be.

As mentioned, I very much pull from the future and not from the past. I savor history but am not a history buff. Robbing the cradle of my dreams, so to speak, is what I do best. Giving birth to dreams as best I can, helping them into reality is where I most live. Making dreams real and as mentioned, for reality to be as I always dreamed it could be.

I am like a midwife to my own dreams, leaning more toward the future than the past. The past is history to me, been there, done that. The future is by definition not yet here in the present. We can watch it appear in the present, moment by moment. We can even midwife it.

I come from a lifetime of dreaming the future.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



FOODS AND INTENTIONAL COOKING

February 25, 2023

With house-hunting now on the back burner, I turn my attention to other things. And perhaps the chief “other thing” that needs my attention is food and cooking.

I don’t cook a lot but prefer to just scramble something up in a few minutes, and then there is the fact that there is not all that much I can (am allowed) to eat. For example, I am pretty much on a salt-free diet, and many canned and processed foods have not a little but a lot of salt in them. They are not for me. This rules out almost all canned foods. And we eat organic, when at all possible.

And, second, as time goes on I eat less and less processed food of any kind, which leaves me making food from scratch. And I mentioned that I don’t spend much time

cooking, nor do I use many spices. The taste of food just as they naturally are is good by me.

And I am beyond Vegan, but came to it on my own, meaning not only no dairy, nothing but natural sugars (usually maple syrup), fruit, and raw and cooked vegetables.

I don't eat meat, but doctors have asked me to eat a little fresh fish. In wintertime, I have been making some fish chowders (wild salmon), and I made a potato & leek soup just the other day.

I have kind of worked through vegan cheese and certainly any imitation meats. Tried them and I'll take a pass on them. So, what on Earth do I eat?

Well, there is always Lundberg Short-Grain Brown Rice in a 25-pound bag. And there is almost every kind of dried bean, mostly for me pinto beans, garbanzo beans (chick-peas), and black beans. If I don't cook them on the stove, there are some canned beans that have no salt.

Beans are big in my diet, usually beans soaked overnight that are then cooked on the stove. For a while, I made a lot of sandwiches, using sourdough bread, and various whatever I could pile on the sandwich. Yet that got old and was not the healthiest way for me to eat.

I have to make my own refried beans, because I can't find any canned pinto beans that are organic and have no salt. I do use Eden Foods canned organic pinto beans with no salt, and also their organic canned black and kidney beans, again with no salt. From those I make my version of refried beans.

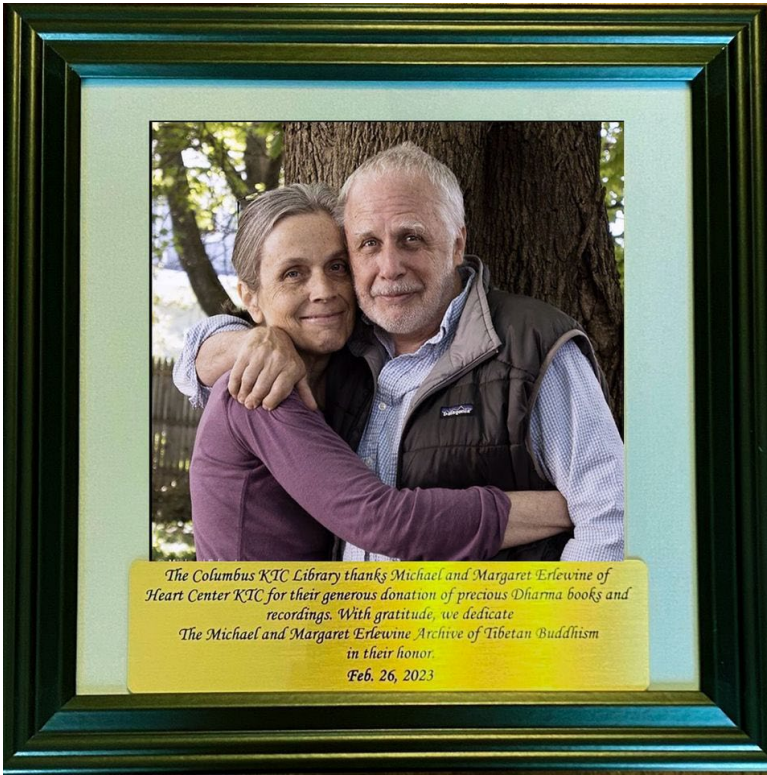
And I eat avocados, fresh tomatoes, romaine lettuce, Vidalia onions, potatoes, winter squash, and all kinds of fresh vegies like cabbage, carrots, peas, and often tempeh. We cook root vegetables in the oven.

And I like Middle Eastern and Ethiopian food. I am not into spices, so a lot of Indian food is wasted on me. I love Eden Foods organic Whole-Wheat Udon noodles and buy them in a 10-lb box. You get the idea.

As for condiments, I like La Victoria Mild Salsa Supreme, Tamari, Umeboshi Plum Vinegar, Mirin, Brown-Rice Vinegar, Toasted Sesame Oil, ground Black Pepper, various mustards, fresh horseradish, and lots of the best olive oil we can afford.

My plan is to spend more time each day cooking and preparing simple foods.

[Photo be me from our kitchen.]



Plaque in the Manjushri Library.... in "Khenpo's Corner"
at the Columbus KTC in Ohio.



Here is the current library, mostly our donated books, plus we have about 1/3 more books still to be donated that we are still using her in Big Rapids at the Heart Center KTC.



This is "Khenpo's Corner" in honor of the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche in the Manjushri Library at Columbus KTC.

COLUMBUS KTC LIBRARY DEDICATION

February 26, 2023

Sorry we could not travel to our sister center, the Columbus KTC (Karma Thegsum Chöling), as the roads were just too snowy. Two of my kids and their families have been without electricity and heat for several days.

This dedication took place this morning (February 26, 2023) in the Manjushri Library at recently rebuilt Columbus KTC in Ohio.

“The Michael and Margaret Erlewine Archive of Tibetan Buddhism”

Some 50 boxes, including books on Buddhism, plus

dozens of cases full of recordings, valuable teachings, from great masters, gorgeous, shrine, offerings, handsome, Tibetan, Buddhist, art, objects and pictures, plus an archive of Karma Kagyu teachings that rivals any in the United States were gifted to Columbus KTC in 2022 by Michael and Margaret Erlewine of the Heart Center KTC in Big Rapids MI. They sent this note to us:

“Michael and Margaret’s contributions to Tibetan Buddhism in general and the Karma Kagyu Lineage in particular are difficult to quantify in words. Early students of the Venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, they blazed a trail for Dharma Center development, scholarship, and interdisciplinary work that produced the archive we have the honor of hosting today.”

“Their devotion to Rinpoche and their enthusiasm for learning and sharing what they have learned gave us the earliest recording archive of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche’s teachings, as well as KTD Dharma Goods, the dharma book

and sacred object retailer that preceded today's Namse Bangdzo bookstore.”

“Our small Manjushri Library at Columbus KTC cannot contain all of the treasures they have shared; we will be placing their art treasures throughout our building, and their shrine objects will go into use in our shrines. “

“In this small way, we hope to honor the Erlewinas for their many contributions to the Dharma in general and our Sangha community in particular.”

We thank Lama Kathy Wesley and the entire Columbus sangha, first of all, for being there and always welcoming us. Of all the various KTCs around the country, the Columbus KTC, our sister center, has been the one we have visited most often and gotten to know.

When their center burned down several years ago, this included the entire library. Margaret and I were so sorry to hear about this. We gathered the greater part of our own library and sent it downstate to the newly rebuilt Columbus KTC to give them a start. And we still have roughly one-third as many books here as we are still using them, but they are targeted for the Columbus KTC when we move on.

We hope to be able to visit Columbus in this coming year and see our fellow sangha members once again.

[Photos for Columbus KTC.]



THE TURNING POINT

February 27, 2023

Referencing the ceremony yesterday about the library we donated and some of the things we endeavored to do for KTD, our monastery, and the dharma. From my view, perhaps the single most important event is not mentioned, because it was a little private, yet I want to mention it here because it had such a profound effect on my relationship with Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche.

Margaret and I traveled many times to KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) Monastery in the mountains above Woodstock, New York, and in particular we did that to attend the 10-day Mahamudra intensive taught by our teacher the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. That 10-day intensive went on for 31 years in a row (until Rinpoche passed on) and we were at each one. We have driven to

this particular teaching enough miles to circle the equator of the earth almost three times. LOL.

I am reminded that extended teachings like these, themselves, are precious mandalas. Mandalas are offerings. We have all seen photos of the elaborate sand mandalas that the Tibetans create and then sweep into a river when they are completed. Why destroy such a lovely creation? I guess it is that impermanence dictates that all “things” created in this world must end, with their components scattered to the four elements. Mandalas are no different, and many do not understand what the actual mandala is.

The key part of the elaborate sand mandalas is not the colored sand that is gathered up and thrown into the water. Dust to dust... or sand to sand. No, the ‘mandala’ is the actual act of offering the mandala itself, the process of creation and not so much what is created. The mandala is the concentration, intent, life, prayers, and mantras we pour into the creation of the mandala, not just the resulting sand image, which is destroyed, just as we each will die and pass away.

In each case, it is the process of offering itself that is the result. And, as mentioned, this holds true for gatherings like these 10-day Mahamudra teaching as well. The offering itself, these precious teachings, in which we all shared, unlike the sand, are not destroyed, but are dedicated to the eventual enlightenment of ourselves and all sentient beings.

I remember one previous 10-day Mahamudra intensive teaching, as it came to an end and all of the participants, my fellow dharma practitioners, began to file out and head for home. Margaret and I stayed for an extra day, so we were just hanging around.

Later that day, as I sat in the daily Mahakala puja, a practice offered to the fierce dharmapalas (the protectors of the dharma), the sky just opened and it poured rain. In Tibetan teachings, it is considered auspicious if it rains during the teachings or at the end. Well, indeed these whole ten days had been auspicious. Many of the most senior students present said that this teaching was the most profound and glorious they had ever attended. I felt the same way. This was something we will be talking about for years to come, as I say, like the finale at the fireworks.

And these recollections remind me of an important event in my life that occurred at the very first 10-day teaching, back in 1989. I have told this story before only to a few, but I am getting old and there is no reason it has to be a secret other than vanity. Anyway, as it turns out, some of my FB friends right here are my dearest friends, at least those I interact with the most.

This event happened, as mentioned, at the end of the first ten-day teaching in 1989. It was that last session, when Rinpoche was saying goodbye to the group of us. There we were, sitting in the newly constructed great shrine hall which took so much effort and time to complete. Rinpoche was thanking all of us for coming, many from great distances. And he reflected on the original plans for this center, which came from his guru, the great 16th Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. I was fortunate to meet the 16th Karmapa in 1974.

And at the end of that 1989 session, Rinpoche spoke of the yet-unrealized plans of His Holiness the 16th Karmapa to also build a traditional 3-year retreat facility, a place where men and women could be trained in the traditional Tibetan closed-retreat, one that lasts three years, three

months, and three days. In such a retreat, the retreatants never lie down to sleep for the entire time. They sleep sitting up in a special box. And as Rinpoche spoke, tears flowed down his face as he explained that he had not yet been able to fulfill the plans to build such a retreat as His Holiness had requested.

I can tell you, Rinpoche does not speak like this often, and there was not a dry eye in the place. When Rinpoche stopped speaking and we all filed out of the shrine room, I was in a kind of shock. To this day, I can remember the exact moment and place where I was as I walked around the side of the new monastery shrine hall.

I was so moved by Rinpoche's sharing with us his dreams. And it had been so difficult (and exhausting) just building the new monastery shrine-hall that I had no idea how we would EVER be able (so it seemed at the time) to build a whole additional three-year retreat complex. I cast about in my mind to see who among the students that I was just sitting with would be capable of enabling such a project and came up with only one option, and it took me by complete surprise. Perhaps only someone like me (who was used to completing projects) could do such a thing, if I really, really put my heart into it.

This realization found me kind of stunned and terrified at the very thought of attempting this, but at the same time I knew I had to do it. My memory is not so good, but I must have sent a note or somehow signaled to Rinpoche that I was willing to try to help make this retreat center a reality, because I got a message that Rinpoche wanted to see me.

When I got to his personal room in the monastery, there was no translator and Rinpoche speaks no English. Rinpoche approached me and he had something in his hand, coming quite up-close to me. There were just the

two of us. He placed into my hands what I now saw was a mala, the rosary-like-beads that Tibetans use for counting mantras. And he was saying something, something that I at first did not understand because of his poor English. He was saying “Mala, my mala.”

As I looked down, I saw that he was handing me his own personal mala, giving it to me. Of course, I, and probably all of his students, had seen this incredible mala that was worn down from use like none I had ever seen. I was stunned, speechless. Rinpoche was entrusting me with his own mala and at the same time the responsibility of furthering the retreat project. That was all that was said that day, those few words and the placing of that precious mala in my hands.

When his translator learned of what Rinpoche had done, he was dumbfounded. He pointed out that Rinpoche had this mala from before he ever came to this country and had used it for all these years to prepare for empowerment after empowerment, not to mention his in own practice. And the translator said he had hoped one day to inherit it, but he was probably just kidding me. I was humbled by it all and felt the heavy responsibility of carrying through with Rinpoche’s intention.

Well, that’s my story and I am glad to have finally said it openly. As for the retreat center, my wife Margaret and I actually helped to create that center, working hard to raise the funds and helping to organize and advertise the whole thing, along with the totally generous help from our Chinese Buddhist community in and around New York. Our Chinese community is so incredible, so generous, and so diligent. Americans are just beginning to learn how to support the dharma, if we want it to flourish, but the Chinese are raised in this ethic. I am so thankful for their support.

And so, the three-year retreat center was built. It is called Karmé Ling and is located in Delhi, NY, about an hour and a half from KTD Monastery in the mountain above Woodstock NY. Karmé Ling Retreat Center is now in its fifth or sixth (perhaps more; I can't remember exactly) three-year retreat, turning out fully-trained lamas. Today, it is a whole complex, with a separate retreat house for men and woman, a lama house, shrine hall, Columbarium, fully-equipped kitchen for events and a great many separate retreat buildings for individuals, not to mention what are called the "long houses," rows of small retreat houses strung together. It also has a columbarium where the ashes of the sangha are placed. Karmé Ling is a wonderful place indeed.

Later on, during a visit by Rinpoche to our center, he went over his mala with me, almost bead by bead showing me where all of the parts came from, this bead from a particular great lama, another from the same lama but in a previous life and so on. Aside from the dharma and my family, that mala is my most precious possession.

"Sempa Chönyi Rangdrol"

The above is my Bodhisattva name. I was given the Bodhsattva vow many years go as part of a large group, but we did not receive individual Bodhisattva names. Years later, I asked Rinpoche for a Bodhisattva name. He thought about it for a while and then gave me the one listed above. Translated, "Sempa" means 'intention' (all Bodhisattva names start with 'Sempa'), "Chönyi" means Dharmata (true nature of the mind), and "Rangdrol" means self-liberating, so the name means that my intent is the "Self-liberating Nature-of-the-Mind."

During a visit to our center here in Big Rapids in early May of 1991, KKR told me about the various parts of the mala. First, the bodhi seeds were perfectly round at the beginning, as were all the corals. The seeds were never stained but became the deep brown glossy-color they are today through use. Neither the corals nor the seeds were filed, flattened, or treated in any way.

Referring to the enclosed image, the red coral guru bead, the green slider stone next to it, and the red coral bead on the opposite side of the mala belonged and were used by the previous Thrangu Rinpoche (not the current one), and the two side red-corals belonged and were used by the current Thrangu Rinpoche.

The mantra counters were a gift from the current Thrangu Rinpoche. The 10,000-Counter is an ordinary counter that KKR added to the mala.

Well, there you have it, what to me is a deeply personal story.

[Photo by me.]



SAILING THE SOLAR TIDES

March 2, 2023

Heather MacKensie asked several questions about how best to deal with sudden solar influx from this variable star we are tied to that we call the Sun. This article is about the inner effects of solar influx or change.

Science has monitored the physical effects of solar flares since September 1, 1859, yet the 'soft' sciences have just gotten around to asking questions (in the last 20 years or

so) as to how solar flares and their kin affect us internally, emotionally and spiritually. And they do affect us.

Non-academic folks like me, who are sensitive to solar change, have had to work this out by ourselves all these years. Science is shy, and slow to look into emotional and internal psychological issues. It's up to those of us affected (and thus interested) to explore this issue.

In my experience, a typical response to solar-flare influx and stress is the desire to go and lie down, to take a nap or otherwise blank out whatever exhaustion or confusion we are experiencing from solar tides. This is a first-order response, IMO.

A look at solar-influx history, based on the book by Dr. Theodor Landscheidt, "Children of the Light," which is about the creative potential of intense solar influx, points to major insights, visions, intuitions, and spiritual experiences that have occurred at times of strong solar influx (solar flares and CMEs), or that stemmed from those solar insemination times.

Is it tattooed on our hands? No, although the physical effects of Solar flares and CMEs are well documented by now. Here we are talking about the internal effects of solar influx, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

As mentioned, solar inundation is not news to us, because solar variation is as old as time itself. It's always been there. What can be news is our becoming aware of the variability of solar influx and its relation to change within us and our world. We are habitually used to rolling with the tides of solar change our entire lives with no awareness of the actual cause, the continuing variability of the sun and the rate of change.

In this way the inner investigation of solar phenomena resembles dharma study in that the key to dharma is “Awareness” of the nature of the mind itself.

It is also “Awareness” that we need to cultivate with solar influx, which is exactly what dharma points to as well, waking up to what is happening within us and all around us. Or not.

And since science is mostly mum about the emotional and spiritual effects of intense solar influx, we are on our own. If we can sense and feel it and the soft scientists can’t or are not ready to share anything with us, we do the best we can to document this most fascinating insight, this awareness of solar change.

I’ve done this for years.

For me, it has been about realizing that what we call “Change” within ourselves can be conveniently ascribed to the variability of solar influx. It makes sense.

Beyond the continual stream of solar radiation, sunlight, steady state, are variations (some very intense) as exemplified by large solar flares and the CMEs (Coronal Mass Emissions) that occur and comprise the 11-year sunspot cycle, which happens to be reaching its maximum in the next couple of years.

There is no question that change happens. In fact, the old chestnut “The only constant is change” is constantly repeated.

Something internal to us moves us around in our lives, call it change or fate or whatever words you like. Making sense of internal change has never been qualified well, but only

quantified, meaning we undergo a lot of it all the time. Yet, what is change?

Measuring internal change against the change in the variability of the sun, solar influx, is an obvious and natural observation to correlate. What can be difficult is that 'change' is just that, change. Just as money can be used in all kinds of ways, change is also a means of exchange. It can be used to raise us up or push us down. Change is very much dependent on how we accept and use it.

Change is, as mentioned, a constant, yet how we react and use change varies from person to person. As mentioned, the constant rate of change that sunlight provides is dwarfed by the sudden bursts of change in that steady state that intense solar energy like solar flares provide.

It's like stepping on the accelerator, putting it to the floor, attempting to cope with accelerated change, which we may or may not be able to manage without sticking our head in the sand until it passes. We are, literally, overwhelmed by change at times of intense solar activity. Either that or there can be times when there is little to no change on the surface of the Sun.

This is why I liken 'change' to a commodity like money, which is a means of exchange, a differential. There is not one simple definition of change, IMO.

I find it helpful to keep in mind that solar change is not something new, but has always been there just as it is today. What differs is our awareness of it, like we have little to none. We are not aware of what change is or what causes it, except perhaps in a very general (and vague) way. Yet it's there and has been there all along. We have learned to ignore it.

And so, asking what is affected by sudden change in the influx of solar energy, the answer has to be: everything, depending on how it's used, how much of it, and how we take or react to it.

This is why, IMO, solar change is very dharmic. It depends on how we react to it more than anything else. If we are flexible enough to surf change as it emerges, we can manage change. If we are not flexible, change manages us, so to speak, and we just hang on for dear life. That's what most do.

In fact, as solar change occurs, as a group, people turn inward, pull in their feelers, and wait it out, only to open again when our inner siren gives the all-clear signal. We have learned to weather solar change.

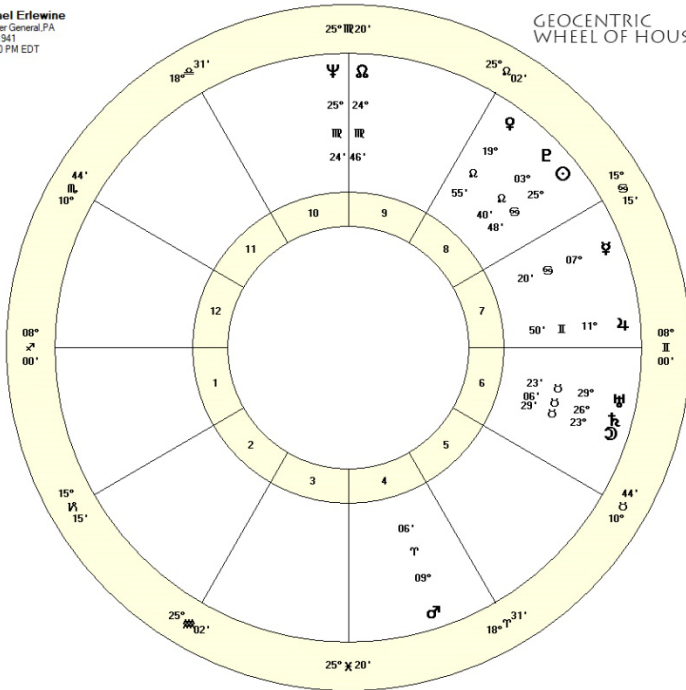
And my job here is to point out solar change so that we can become more aware of it and thus learn to better manage it. Learning to be aware of the change in solar radiation and our response to it I find crucial to navigating life's changes.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
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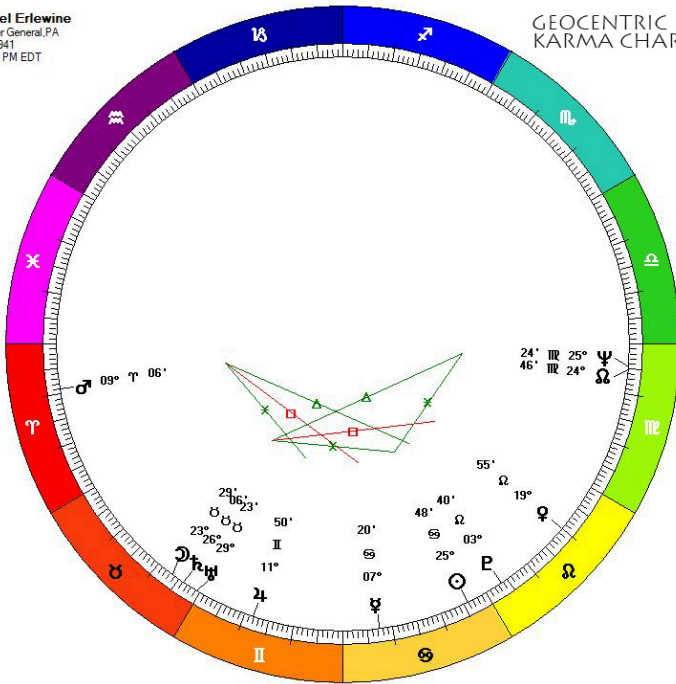
GEOCENTRIC
WHEEL OF HOUSES



My traditional geocentric natal chart and wheel of houses.

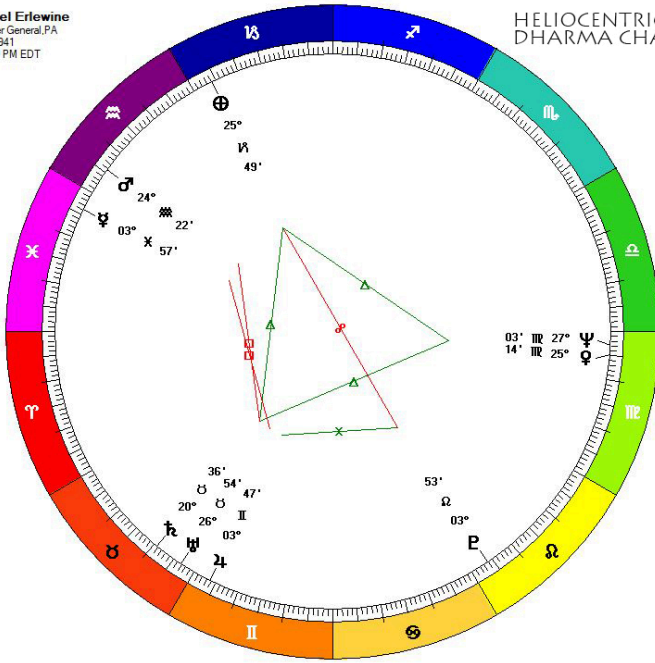
Michael Erlewine
Lancaster General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
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GEOCENTRIC
KARMA CHART



Michael Erlewine
Lancaster, General, PA
Jul 18, 1941
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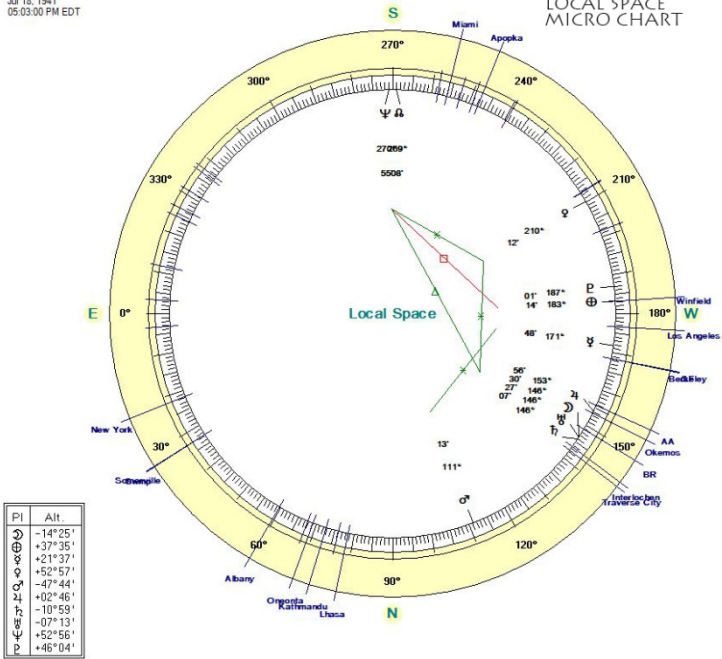
HELIOCENTRIC
DHARMA CHART



My traditional heliocentric natal chart in the 360-degree open wheel. The Dharma Chart of the tribe and archetype that is me.

Michael Erlewine
 Lancaster General, PA
 Jul 18, 1941
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LOCAL SPACE
 MICRO CHART



My Local Space chart of azimuth and altitude. Notice that Saturn, Uranus, and the Moon are all lined up in the same degree... and very close to the direction of Big Rapids, Michigan where I have lived for the past 43 years.



My Local Space chart of azimuth and altitude laid out on a map of the Earth.... it could also be laid out on a star map.

ASTROLOGY'S CRUCIBLE

March 2, 2023

Back in the early and middle 1970s, before home computers existed, I was caught up in a magnetic crucible formed by my own insight and interests. It was a melting pot into which I went and out of which I came a different kind of astrologer. As they say: "It was a time."

Yet, of all of these insightful astrological techniques, the one that most changed my life I will now describe in some detail, enough I hope to give you a taste of that dimension.

It simply has to do with discovering that there was a difference between the traditional geocentric astrology chart and its heliocentric counterpart (which almost no astrologer used then or does now). And by difference, I

mean an order of magnitude difference which is a real difference, a difference beyond any I knew or ever imagined existed at the time.

We all know that the geocentric natal chart is the universe as seen from our place here on Earth, and that the heliocentric natal chart is a chart of the entire solar system, with our Sun as the center, at the time of our birth.

Of course, Copernicus pointed all this out to astrologers some 500 years ago, that the sun Earth orbited the Sun and not the Sun orbiting the Earth. Back then astronomers were astrologers and astrologers, astronomers.

However, not all of the astronomer/astrologers accepted the fact that Copernicus pointed out, that everything did not revolve around us, the Earth. The future astronomers grasped that Earth revolved around the Sun (and not vice-versa), which Copernicus pointed out to them, and they became what today are called astronomers, moving on through time with two charts, the traditional geocentric chart and the newly-pointed-out heliocentric chart.

Yet, the more conservative traditional astrologers never accepted or adopted the heliocentric chart, much less interpreted it, and they are pretty much the same today, using the one Earth-centered (geocentric) chart. That's history.

However, the astronomers learned to use both charts (geo and helio) and they became very successful. In fact, the two oldest academic disciplines are said to be Astronomy and Botany, while astrology has become a fringe vocation, just a hop and a skip from the psychic and occult sciences. This too is history and remains so today.

As to how all this affected me, I have this story.

Back when I was computerizing astrology, actually before home computers came on the scene, when I first used 4-function calculators around 1972 or so, and later programmable calculators like the HP-97 and similar machines.

I was busy exploring astrological techniques that were not accessible to me prior to these more powerful calculators. And one of the things that I did in the early 1970s was figure out how to calculate the heliocentric natal chart, my birth chart as seen from the center of our solar system, the Sun. For the most part, this was not done.

I did this quite routinely, calculated the helio natal chart, and then set about interpreting it. Of course, the first thing I found out was that my personal helio chart was markedly different from my beloved geocentric chart, the only chart that, up to that point, I had ever seen and used. Very different indeed.

Well, that puzzled me, and I should explain why that is.

I was born in 1941, kind of right in the heyday of modern psychology finding itself. And so, as I grew up, young people like myself, instead of being described as individuals had been for centuries, as having or not having the traditional virtues like bravery, kindness, wisdom, and right on down the line... instead we were being described as paranoid, manic-depressive, schizophrenic, and so on. Psychologists were entranced with their own terminology. Not that I was any of these descriptions, but the world around me was all a-buzz about these new labels (at least new to the general public) and the heck with traditional descriptions like, truth, honor, dignity, and the like.

I feel this was very damaging to those young people (like me) who had those as appellations stuck on us, rather than the traditional descriptors of honor, truth, beauty, etc. And why I tell you this is because when I was struggling NOT to be typed psychologically, along came astrology into my life which offered me an alternate way to see myself other than as having some kind of psychological problem. I took to astrology, of course. It was liberating.

Now, when I first discovered for myself the helio chart, here was yet another view or description of myself. Not only that, but the two charts, geo and helio, naturally triangulated with one another and produced like a 3D or enhanced image of who I was and what I was here for. Young people like I was then wanted and needed to know that. Yet there was a twist of fate that appeared here that I did not anticipate.

Of course, the first thing I did with my helio natal chart was apply all the standard astrological techniques I knew to the chart. That's what I knew. And yes, they all seemed to work just fine, but there is one caveat here.

In the midst of doing all that, using everything I knew about astrology to measure this new helio chart, an idea came over me, the idea that there was something else going on here that was more important than all of my existing techniques and measurement. And it led to my just ceasing to apply my traditional techniques to the helio chart. I just stopped doing that because while they were at best interesting, but nothing compared to what was then dawning on me.

Of course, these older techniques all worked, but they were more like a lot of noise, drowning out something that

was more important, something that with the helio chart I was seeing that I had never seen before. Something I was seeing for the first time in astrology, ‘Who’ I was and why I was here on this Earth. It came over me like the steadiness of rain in a downpour. It was overpowering.

And so, I stopped doing what I had done up to that point astrologically and, instead, just listened and soaked it in. And it was not too long later that I realized that I was already in the process of transferring my identity from the traditional geocentric chart that I had always used to this new helio chart, and why?

Because I realized that the helio chart was who I in fact am and always was. I just had been trying to see it through a glass darkly, as they say, through pushing the envelope of my well-known to me geocentric natal chart. Suddenly, I was out of that body and transmigrating!

I was identifying with my helio as the main or mother chart, and the traditional geo chart as the child or secondary chart. Both charts are true, and we need to know both of them equally well. My traditional geocentric natal chart is a chart of the circumstances and karma into which I was born. I began calling the geo chart the “Karma Chart.”

However, the heliocentric natal chart is a chart of who it is I am, in all these circumstances and karma, my tribe or archetype, the one that is ‘who’ is being born into these circumstances and this karma. The two charts are like hand and glove, the helio chart the hand, and the geo chart the glove it fits in. I couldn’t have been happier!

And from that cornucopia, once opened, astrology just flowed. Is it any wonder that I do my best to point this out to my fellow astrologers while I still can?

And so, I call my traditional geocentric chart the Karma Chart, and the heliocentric chart the Dharma Chart. And for me this has been a major empowerment, and one that is available to any astrologer willing to just look into it.

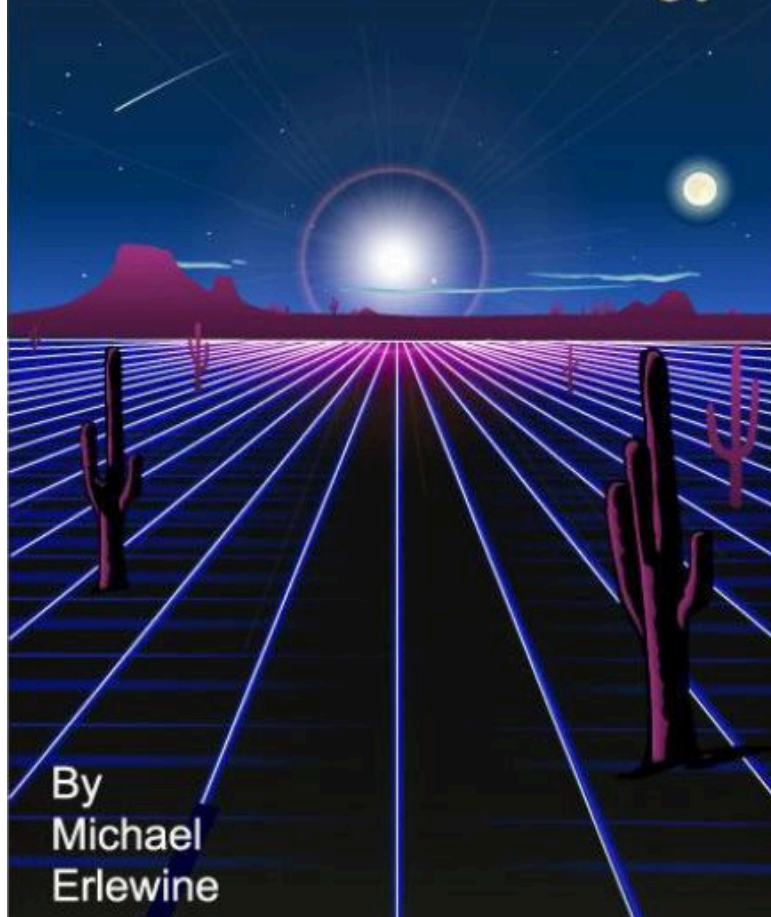
For those who would like to learn more about these two charts, here is a free e-book "Dharma Chart, Karma Chart."

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

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Local Space

Relocation Astrology



LOCAL SPACE: RELOCATION ASTROLOGY

March 3, 2023

[I will share in the next few blogs some of the astrological techniques that I developed that have proved the most useful.]

Local Space was developed as a useful relocation technique in the early 1970s. Originally, I had to do the trigonometry involved with a calculator and log tables, and it took me an entire day to do one Local Space chart, azimuth and altitude.

Of course, folks have looked at azimuth and altitude before, yet there has been no coherent story as how to use it in a practical way. Local Space is not a part of most astrological software.

My original article on Local Space was first published in 1977 in Charles A. Jayne's "Cosmecology Bulletin." Here is how I described the Local Space technique in that article.

"Local Space is no "subtle plane," but a personal landscape painted in bold and clear strokes and tailor-made to fit the psyche of each individual. Here is a world where the modern man or woman is learning to move across the face of this earth in an endless dance of adjustment and tuning of his radix -- of his or herself. Individuals driven in particular directions on a checkerboard world, unable to resist travelling toward a goal that is no particular place on earth so much as it is a direction imprinted within them, the direction of a force or planet, "There! Where Power hovers", to use Don Juan's expression. In a word,

here is perhaps the most direct astrological system, where the obvious is enthroned and the subtle unnecessary."

For those who would like to learn more, I have written this free e-book which can be downloaded at this link.

"LOCAL SPACE: Relocation Astrology"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../The-Astrology-of-Local-Space...>

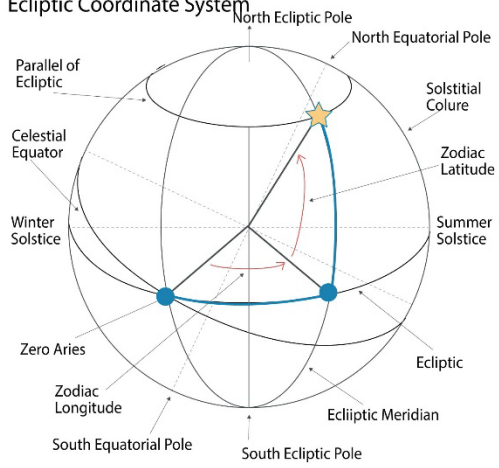
[Book design by me.]

The Astrology of Space

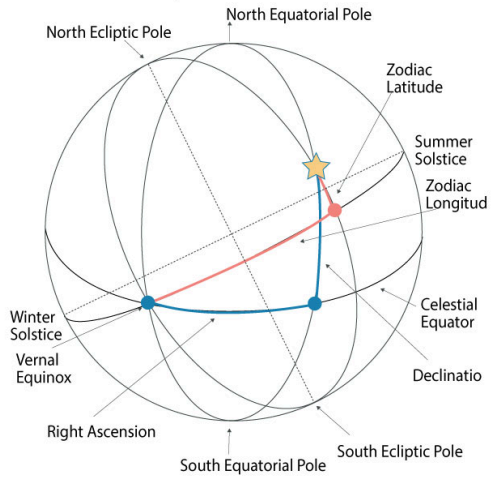
by
Michael Erlewine



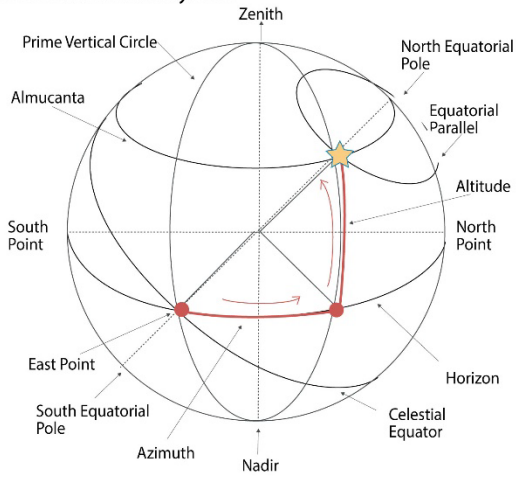
Ecliptic Coordinate System

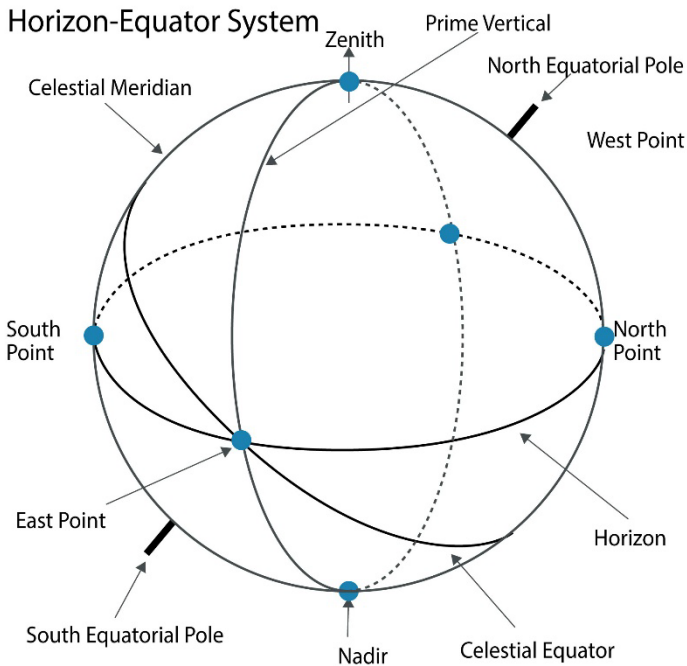


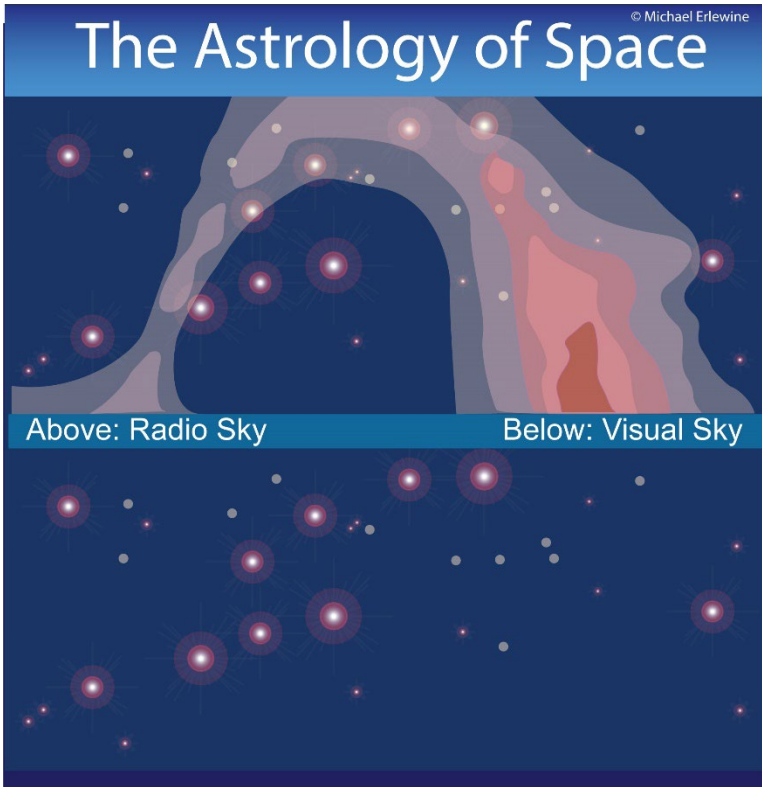
Equatorial Coordinate System



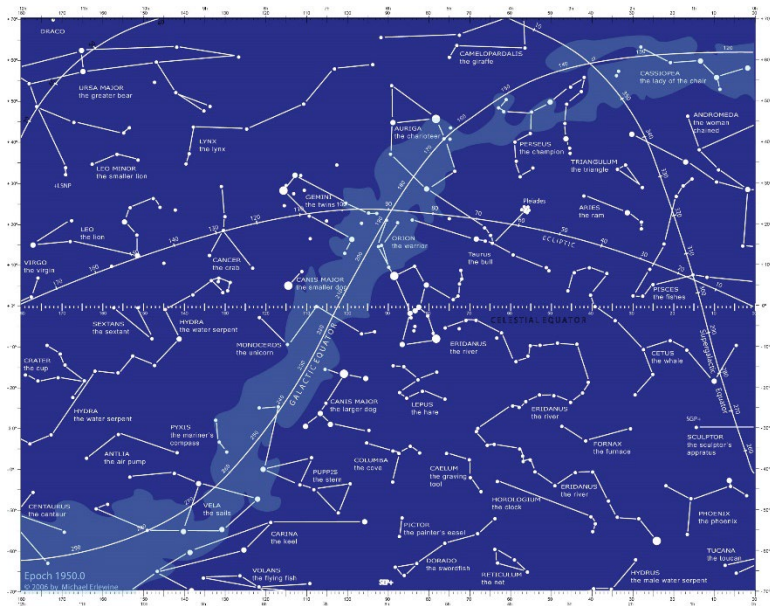
Horizon Coordinate System



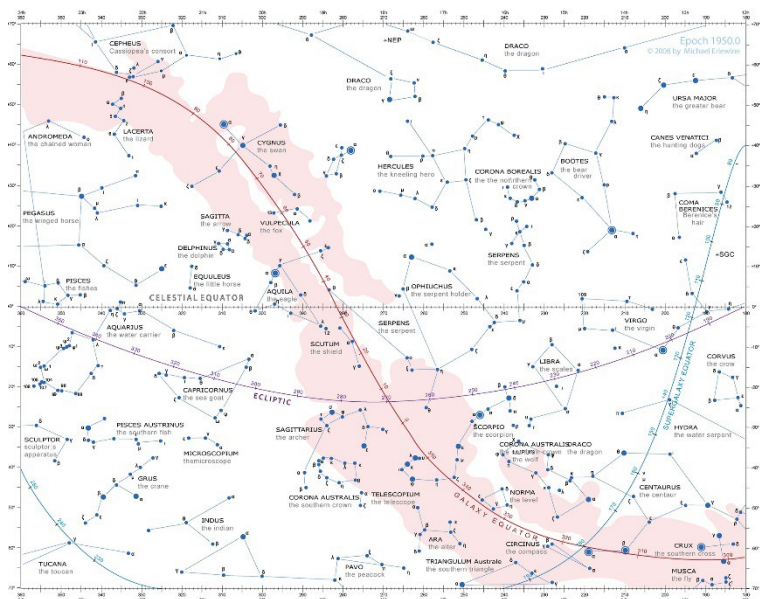




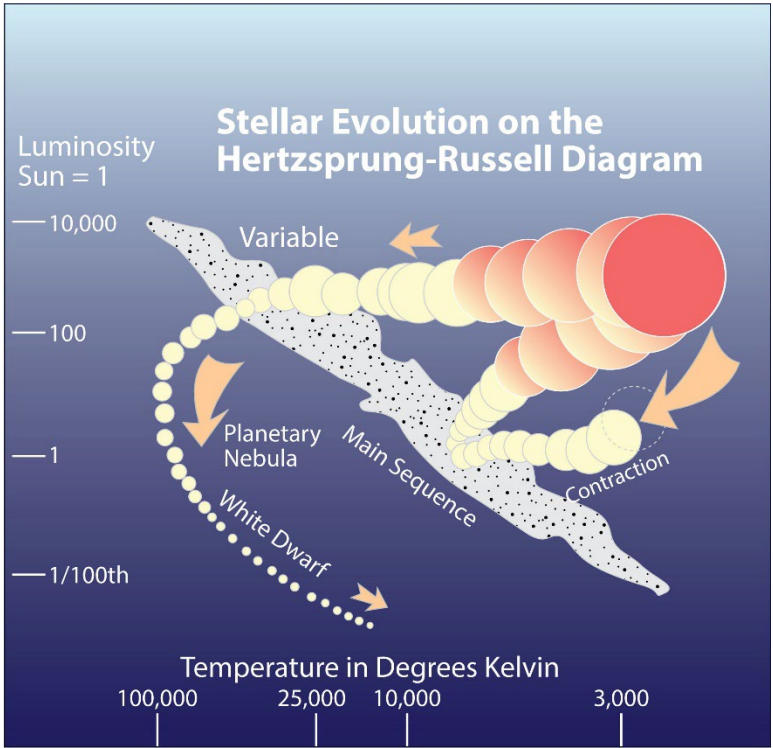
Galactic center as seen in radio waves (Above), and the same sky as seen in visual light (Below).

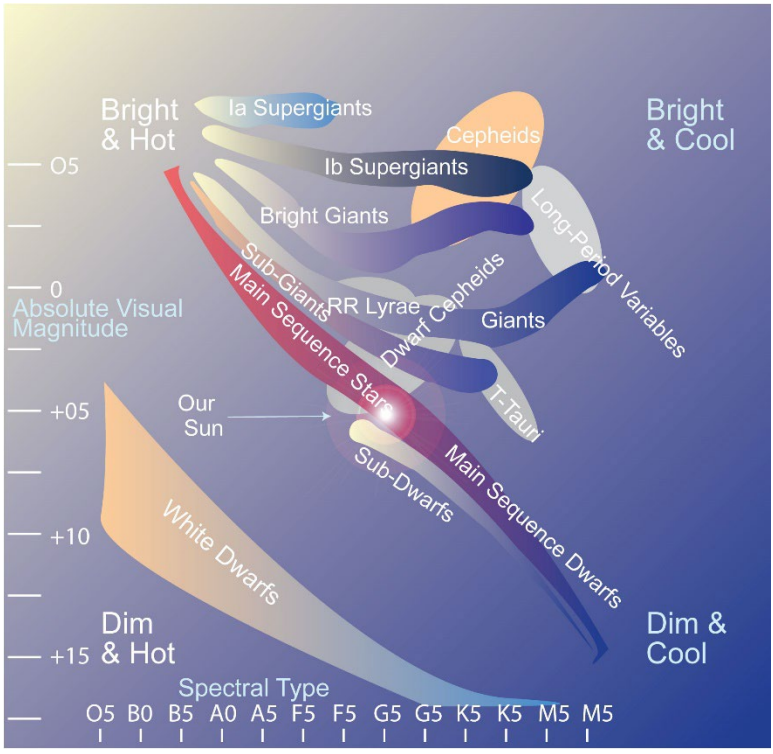


One of Seven Star Maps I laid out by hand and published 11x17" in 1976.



One of Seven Star Maps I laid out by hand and published 11x17" in 1976.

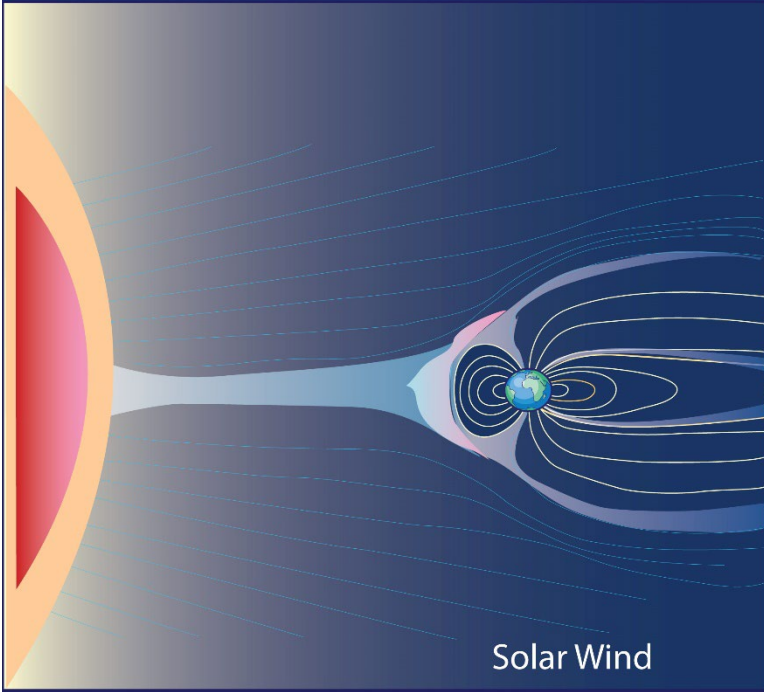




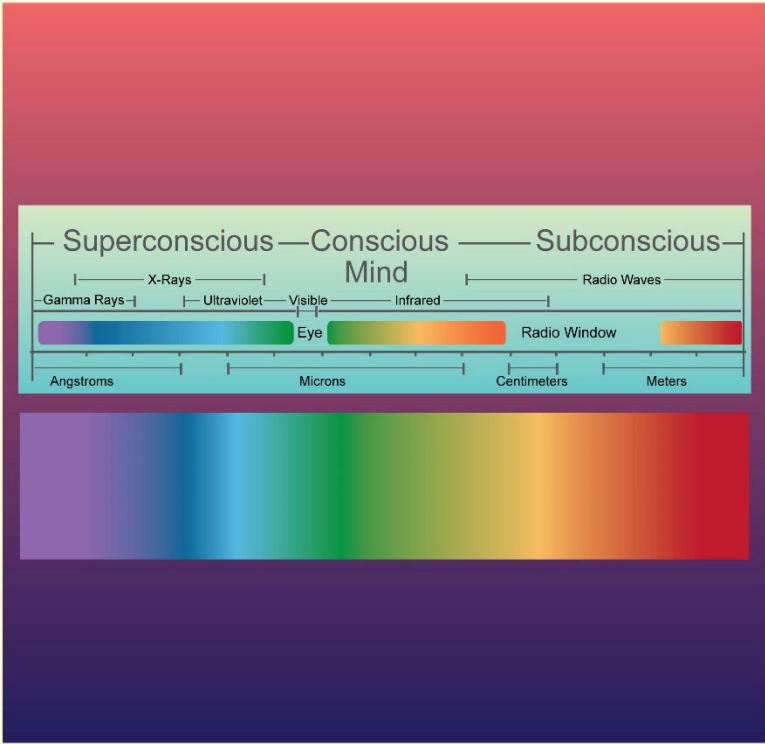
Star types.

The Astrology of Space

© Michael Erlewine

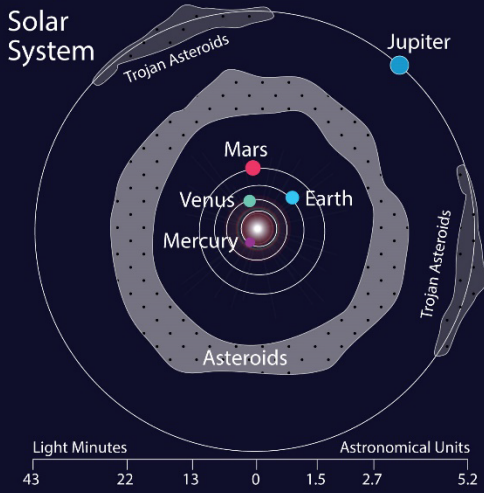


Solar Wind

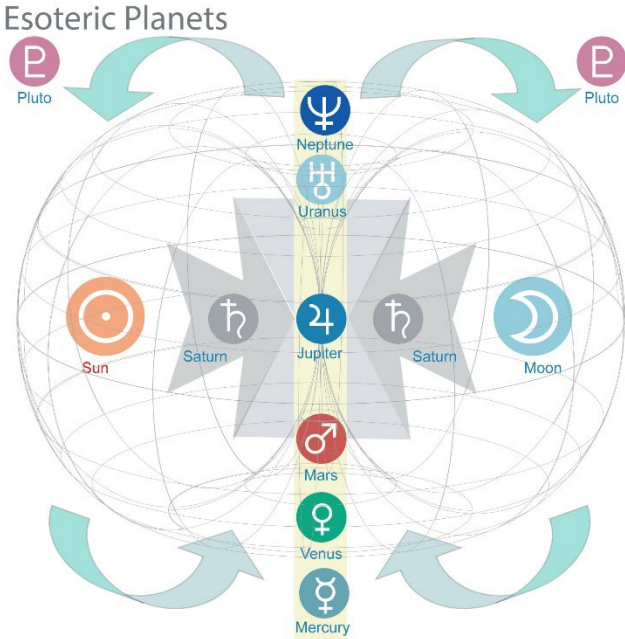


Electromagnetic Spectrum

Trojan Asteroids



The Astrology of Space © Michael Erlewine



Planetary Vortex (Esoteric Astrology)

THE ASTROLOGY OF SPACE

March 4, 2023

Published as “Astrophysical Directions” 1976

I would like to share a few experiences and thoughts with you concerning some of the structure in space beyond the zodiac and how it can be of value in individual development and growth. Let me relate a personal story as to how I first got interested in the deeper regions of space. My research, as some of you will know, has centered on

the difference and relationship between the geocentric and heliocentric ecliptic systems.

My interest in the space surrounding our solar system was minimal. I was put off by the billions of stellar objects out there and, on a more basic level, by the ideas of coldness and blackness I had been programmed to associate with outer space.

Distant space somehow represented the epitome of 'otherness' and 'foreign' to me. I was embarrassed, in terms of astrological usage, by all of the books I had read on the fixed stars with the exception of L. E. Johndro's book, "The Stars." How was I to determine the significance of these billions of stars and use them in my practice, when I had enough difficulty, as it was, using the nine planets?

And then the unexpected happened. I had a dream, a very special dream. It was not an ordinary dream, but one of those dreams that are more real than waking consciousness and that take months to understand and absorb.

In my dream the astrologer L. E. Johndro appeared to me, and his eyes were filled with light. There were rays or stalks of light coming out of his eyes. This strange being said but one word, "LOOK!" and with his arm turned and pointed to the night sky, I looked.

The sky was filled with brilliant points of light. The stars and all of this starry material was clustered together to form the great glowing arch of the Milky Way or galactic plane. It was wondrous beyond description, and, in that instant, my heart went out from me and filled this bright space.

Never again have I had the feeling of being here on earth, warm and trembling, before the cold and black of space. I became the space and light, 'Bright Hall', and reversed my polarity or attitude. Indeed, I was a living representative of this mother galaxy. I was the spaceman!

From that night forward I began to venture beyond the zodiac in an inquiry as to the nature and structure of this universe. Here, in brief form, is what I found for myself:

We are nodes or information aggregates. The universe is in intimate contact with itself through us. The manifold nature of cosmic events is represented through our self and lives.

There is not only a correlation between these seeming remote cosmic events and our person, but an identity as well. Information coming from the galactic center, carried by electromagnetic and gravitational radiation from every last star, cosmic plane, and event, passes through us at all times. We are, in some way, a node or information complex caught in a matrix or web of manifestation.

The overpowering idea that occurs when we make some acquaintance with the universe and its structure is that there is no difference between out there and in here. In fact, right now, we ARE out there! Our world and our self and relationships are a perfect reflection of what IS and what is happening out there in Deep Space. Not an analogy, but an identity. Black holes, supernovae, quasars, and the like are not remote cosmic events, but this identical story is represented, reflected, lived, and acted out each day in our lives.

Information circulates through the universe, and our Identity or sense of our self is this very process of

circulation. Identity is not a substance or state but a relationship, in fact, a circulation, and a process of communion or communication.

Not only is there a connection between our life and that of our galaxy and universe, but: WE ARE the connection.

A study of the structure of the universe, at any level, is a study of ourselves. The guidelines of cosmic structure help to illustrate the specific structure of our self.

In summary, the idea that I am elaborating here is:

Astrology is not only a symbolic system of psychological discussion. The symbol is also, in fact, real. If we say it is an analogy, then the analogy is complete down to the limits of any specific example we might chose. Here is this free e-book.

“THE ASTROLOGY OF SPACE”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../The-Astrology-of-Space.pdf>

The idea that we are a cold and shivering mass of souls huddled here on a tiny planet in a remote part of the galaxy, far out on a spiral arm, has got to be debunked.

We are, instead, representative cosmic life, not some insignificant aberration. And how do we assume that the light looking out from our eyes is not consciousness knowing itself through our bodies, and that this consciousness is cosmic and not just local. What on Earth is local? We exist in deep space.

Instead, we are consciousness looking in and through our eyes and not just our looking out of our eyes searching the heavens for intelligent life. That has to be funny!

We are that intelligent life and have been all along. The cosmos is knowing itself through us, albeit perhaps stepped down from the galaxy center, through our Sun center, and finally peering through our eyes at itself in a mirror, a cosmic reflection.

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:

[a few of the many graphics in this book by me.]



Inclinations		Disinclinations
	SUN	
Jup Ear	MER	Ven
	VEN	Plu
	EAR	Sat Plu
Ear	MAR	Plu
	JUP	Plu Nep
	SAT	Ven Jup
Mar	URA	Jup Plu
	NEP	Ura
Ven	PLU	Sat Mar
	I-P	Plu

The Interface nodal tree of a friend of mind who has an enormous of disinclinations.

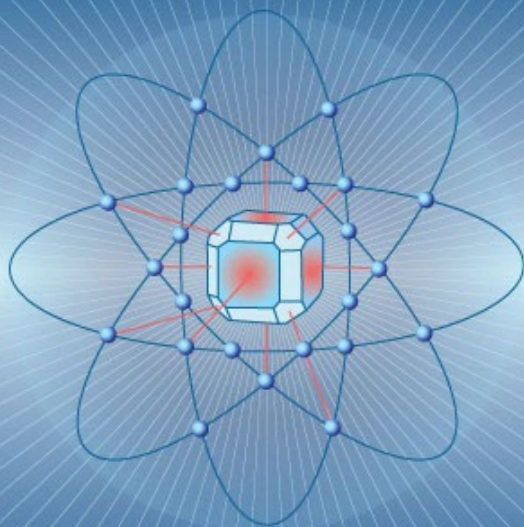


Inclinations		Disinclinations
Mer Plu	SUN	
	MER	
Jup	VEN	
	EAR	Mar
	MAR	
Nep	JUP	
Ear	SAT	
	URA	
	NEP	
Ear	PLU	
	I-P	

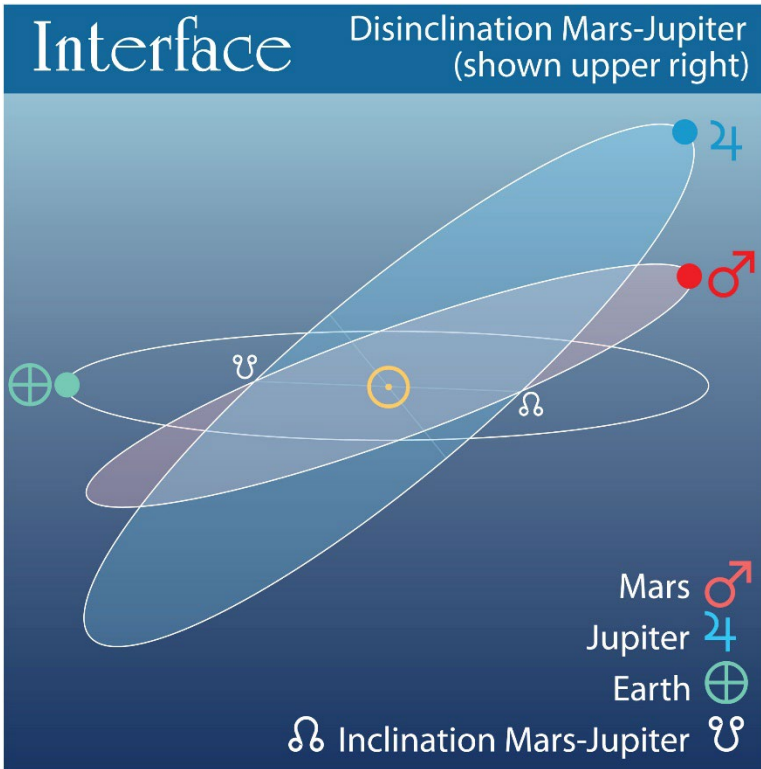
The Interface nodal tree of my chart, where I have only one real disinclination, that of the orbit of Mars to Earth. You can also see and interpret my inclinations, what I am inclined to.

Interface

Planetary Nodes



By
Michael
Erlewine



Here is the orbit and plane of Earth (horizontal) and the orbital plane of Mars and Saturn to each other. Here Mars and Saturn are 'disinclined' to one another. If they were inclined they would both be at their northern or southern nodes.



Inclinations		Disinclinations
	SUN	
Jup Ear	MER	Ven
	VEN	Plu
	EAR	Sat Plu
Ear	MAR	Plu
	JUP	Plu Nep
	SAT	Ven Jup
Mar	URA	Jup Plu
	NEP	Ura
Ven	PLU	Sat Mar
	I-P	Plu

The Interface nodal tree of a friend of mind who has an enormous of disinclinations.



Inclinations		Disinclinations
Mer Plu	SUN	
	MER	
Jup	VEN	
	EAR	Mar
	MAR	
Nep	JUP	
Ear	SAT	
	URA	
	NEP	
Ear	PLU	
	I-P	

The Interface nodal tree of my chart, where I have only one real disinclination, that of the orbit of Mars to Earth. You can also see and interpret my inclinations, what I am inclined to.

INTERFACE: PLANETARY NODES [published 1976]

March 5, 2023

I can't say I was an average astrologer because most of my work back then had never been done in the world of astrology, things like calculating the entire system of heliocentric planetary nodes, which I discuss here. There were no home computers back then, so the calculation for the entire planetary nodal system was done on a large mainframe computer, fed by cards, and with the help of my friend David W. Wilson, a mainframe computer programmer.

The 'interface' concept came out of my interest in heliocentric astrology, in particular an inquiry into the mutual inclination (or lack thereof) of the various coordinate planes of our solar system, planes like that of the ecliptic, equator, horizon, galaxy, supergalaxy, and so on. I was fascinated by the different attitudes or inclinations of the various astronomical planes, each to the other. What could these mean? Why were they not interpreted? After all, astrology is cultural astronomy, and our job was to find meaning in astronomy.

In addition, a whole series of astronomical planetary orbits and their planes exist, each with their own center, angle of inclination, and plane of reference. More interesting to me is that fact that these many systems are oriented to each other, differently — are set in space at different inclination angles to one another. And they intersect to create nodes and these nodes are set in space like some grand crystal with many facets.

Perhaps they represent whole approaches to life, each with its own independent attitude or stance. I was

interested to note that astrologers devote their attention to the zodiac or ecliptic, yet seem to pay little or no attention to these other planes: the Horizon, Prime Vertical, East Point, Celestial Equator, etc.

Astrologers seem not to grasp or care that nodal points such as the Ascendant, MC, Vertex, etc. are not zodiac points alone, but are nodes representing the intersection of the zodiac with some other great plane of reference. In fact, it takes two independent planes to create a node.

This important fact seems to have been lost in modern astrology. Even within our own solar system, each of the great planetary orbits has its own plane and particular orientation or attitude, an inclination. Each of these great planetary orbital planes are oriented or inclined to the others. An attempt to reduce all these intersecting orbital planes -- this grand planetary crystal -- to the set of the most significant points or nodes was how the interface nodal technique came into being.

Meanwhile, my friend Theodor Landscheidt, a climatologist, astrologer, and supreme court justice of Germany, did the same with geocentric planetary nodes. These geocentric nodes, of course, were part of the Interface nodes I put together, yet I included all planets (no just Earth) to the equation. And here is a sidebar.

When we think of esoteric or occult studies, including astrology, we think of secret organizations like the "Golden Dawn" and books like Madam Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine" and who knows what else.

However, true esotericism, what is actually occult and also potent also exists, but it is hidden, not by its followers or on purpose, but by its very nature. And it's not hidden in

some dark corner or rare book, but rather it is hidden in plain sight, for all to see, if only we could see it. Yet, we lack the faculty or awareness to see the phenomenon, as the old saying goes. We are not sensitive or aware enough. Yet there it is.

And, IMO, the most powerful astrology I have come across concerns what are in popular jargon called the seven chakras, and in astrological terms they are this complete system of heliocentric planetary nodes that I am describing here.

Of all the other astrological techniques, and I have had the honor and duty to program, almost all know astrological techniques, the one technique I have never found the end of depth or profundity to is what in 1976 I published in a book called "Interface: Planetary Nodes." This crystal-like nodal system is, IMO, profound.

And what it consisted of is nothing less than the actual system of planetary inclinations of our solar system, and their mutual planetary nodes and intersections with one another.

This system has been available in book form since 1976, including everything one needs to examine any helio natal chart as to what in that chart are the inclinations and disinclinations we are inclined to. For any two planets, how are they inclined to one another or just the opposite, disinclined to one another.

And of course we are interested to know how is Earth's orbit inclined to the other eight planet's orbits, in harmony, so to speak, or disinclined, set against each other by 90-degrees. Yet equally of interest to me is how the other planets orbits and inclinations are to one

another. This technique, planetary orbital interfaces, is like a brilliant diamond shining in the heavens, IMO.

I calculated these, as mentioned, many decades ago, before home computers existed using a mainframe computer. And what I found is that the results of my study were so profound that I never was able to plumb their full depth. Before I could get to the bottom of my studies, I was overwhelmed with powerful results, powerful enough to kind of knock me out, time and again. There are interfaces that are profound in this universe we live in!

Other examples of profundity, IMO, are the works of William Shakespeare, whose words knock us out before we reach the end of their meaning. Or, the singing of jazz great Billie Holiday, who stuns us with here meaning. These Interface are my estimation are like that. They are deeper than we know how to know.

I mention these interfacial heliocentric planetary nodes, not that I expect to hear from any of you about them, rather because I feel I must point out this profound astrological technique to students of the future, who are yet to come on the scene. At best, I'm leaving some trail markers. Here is a complete book of the interface nodes as first published in 1976.

“INTERFACE: Planetary Nodes”

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

[Graphics by me.]



DISTURBING THE PEACE

March 6, 2023

I come from being raised between two farms way out in the country, with no near neighbors, and mostly only Mother Nature competing for my attention. And from there to modern-day now, where everything is competing for my attention, that is, well, a trip.

Just look at CNN News online. Scroll down beneath the daily news stories and look at the almost endless cheapo advertisements, all of them vying with puerile attempts to

capture our attention. It's sad that CNN has to stoop to this.

I wonder... is every sentient human being's attention already captured and long paid for? It's a buyer's market and we are being pestered to death. How do we unload that load of media that's trying to get our attention that we try our best to ignore? Or are we already pinned like a butterfly to a cork board?

It's hard to avoid and brush aside the commercials, ads, robot-phone calls, and on and on that crowd our attention span. Is there any clear blue sky left?

In fact, we can't just try to attack our distractions head-on. That only empowers them. What can we do?

I don't see a lot of choice. There is no grace in denying their existence, all this constant competition for our attention. There is no denying that it exists.

However, we can think nothing of them, the distractions, for starters. Of course, we acknowledge their existence or presence because it is there, yet that done, we just drop them from consideration right there and then. Move on.

It does not help to dwell or think about these distractions in any detail, try to figure them out, or give them any more juice than they already demand.

Because I am older now, our phone rings all day long, a dozen times a day, with seldom a real phone call, but only endless solicitation. The government has done nothing to stop this.

It seems that I am surrounded by a world hungry for my attention, mostly trying to sell me something. It's too bad

that it has come to this and instead not manifested in a more organized or dignified fashion, but it has not. We have a free-for-all going on. And we live in this, like a dirty aquarium.

Since all these distractions are there despite our wishes and we are here in the midst of all this, there is little choice but to look directly at them, take note, and just drop it. Walk on.

Don't give these bids for our attention another thought or any more of our time. We have to find what peace we can right in the middle of what we have to work with, distractions and all.

I am curious what those of you reading this have to say about these endless solicitations?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE FINISHING TOUCH

March 7, 2023

[Here is one, on a Tuesday morning in March, two weeks before spring arrives.]

What is esoteric or occult knowledge? And why are some folks, like me, interested in studying it? How is it useful? What does it foretell, if anything?

The very nature of the occult is hidden in plain sight. We can't see it because we are not sensitive or open enough. We are not aware of what is too close to us to see.

I imagine most of you have all heard such statements before.

When we age, we are all dressed up, with nowhere to go. Well, we are going down time's highway, so that's somewhere, if only in a direction.

As for being 'all dressed up', that's just slightly oblique poetry for going about as far as we can go as to getting ready for the awareness of passing on. As they say, when we are done, you can stick a fork in us. It's past time to live a little, time to test all this, IMO.

Time to put our finish to the test, and this test is not an option. The corners are off the cube, and we are as ready to roll as we will ever be. Just what are we exposing and what are we being exposed to?

We are exposed to time. That's what.

We are being and have been being galvanized. It's a way of tempering ourselves, putting us to the test. It could be the test of a lifetime after a lifetime of test. We discover our diminishing does not diminish, meaning time is running out.

Just what are we to do with ourselves when we are but rough-hewn, yet more or less functional? We have nothing to gain and next to nothing to lose. We've been tempered enough or well enough tempered.

We are still there and yet equally not there as well. At any rate, we are increasingly invisible, a veritable ghost, certainly harmless enough.

Another way to put this, as mentioned, is that we have little to lose and certainly nothing to gain either, other than perhaps still more experience.

It gives the concept of fearlessness a new meaning.

In a nutshell, the 'death' we wonder and worry about happens without our ever knowing about it until it is too late. And nothing can be done and will be.

Death not only sneaks up on us, but we are long gone or going before we know and are aware that it has already taken place. How could that be?

We become an apparition, a specter or phantom, or simply an illusion, a reflection or, better yet, a reflector... a mirror. We mirror reality. We reflect.

Words cannot capture this concept. Poetry comes close. Here is a poem that, for me, captures what I am trying to say. I like it, but one of my dearest friends told me years ago that it is not a good poem. I can't argue that, but only, IMO, that it says what cannot be said or uttered.

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

A Poem for My Daughter Michael Anne

The point of the “point of no return” is that:
When you have reached the point of no return,
From which there is no return,
The point is to turn and return.

That is the turning point.

Every life has a turning point,
Whether it's in the echo of age,
Or in the very midst of life's prime

As we reach our point of no return,
We pause,
Then we turn.
And, in turning,
We begin to reflect.

In our reflection,
And rising into view,
Perhaps for the very first time,
The Sun.

Where before it was we who were seen,
And others seeing,
Now we are the mirror in which they see themselves,
And we can see our self in them.

What we once saw shining before us, as youths,
That which we gladly embraced in our prime,
And what we now see etched in the mirror of reflection,
Is our eternal Self,
The Sun,
Ever burning in the darkness of our life.

That's it.
I understand this.

What I find harder to understand,
Yet still believe is:

We didn't know it then.
We don't know it now.
We never knew it.

In truth,
It never was.

IT NEVER WAS;
It never will be.

It is not now,
And still, it is.

It still is:
This most brilliant illusion,
Shining in the mirror of the mind.

Feb 14, 2006 2-4 PM
Grand Sextile Helio
[
Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE MIRROR OF APPEARANCES

March 8, 2023

After all was said and done, it came as a surprise, and at the same time a totally familiar surprise to realize that appearances, what we call ‘Mother Nature’ in particular, like a mirror, reflect the true nature of the mind as accurately as any dharma teacher or library of written dharma scriptures.

In fact, technically this is called, in dharma slang, “The Lama of Appearances” or “The Dharma of Appearances,”

pointing out that nature is a complete reflection of the mind's actual nature, thus also a perfect teacher.

I say “familiar surprise” because the inheritance of my entire childhood is predominantly the natural history, none other than Mother Nature and me living in close proximity during all my early years.

Of course, I knew this so well that it never occurred to me to consider it. Yet in later years, when push came to shove in life, when all the chips were down and I broke free for the moment from the freight train linear-course I was stuck traveling in, that this insight break-through did NOT occur on my meditation cushion that I had been sitting on for decades, as I always assumed it would.

Those many decades of dharma practice, sincere as they were (and are), when the going got real tough, did not hold a candle to the sheer wonder of a child growing into a young man as led along and tutored by Mother Nature, who taught me well and I never ever knew I was being instructed, so intense was my interest.

Yet, when it came to socializing, as this teenager tried to fit in to society, that shoe would not quite fit, try as I might, and you know I tried.

However, the laws of humankind were no match for nature’s laws. For example, we don’t break or bend the law of gravity. It breaks us.

Yet apparently this young person expected to find the same kind and integrity in civil law that I found in nature’s natural law. Of course, that didn’t happen, and we all know why. Nature may be defiled by us, but in itself it is integral.

I never got much of an education by way of public school, but I seldom missed a lesson from Mother Nature. I was right there taking it all in. And it often was a matter of life and death at every turn, not perhaps my death, but the death of so many critters so dear to my heart. Nature is a harsh mistress.

Life is so short. It mattered little that I did not follow the main road, but rather, as the Robert Frost poem states, took the road less travelled by because it was more natural to me.

What was secure and never even occurred to me, was my intent. It was the purity of a young child, far from any town, alone with nature (and his family) for many of his formative years. And nature taught me well, perhaps too well, because with nature, compared to civil law and social norms, as mentioned, there is no comparison.

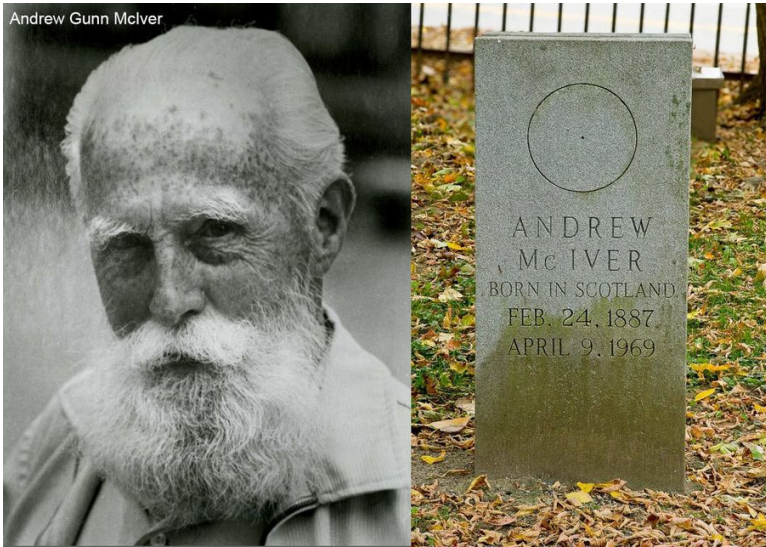
Why do I write this? I write it because some few of you, perhaps similar in your own way to my upbringing, are taking your own path, learning in your own fashion, and following your own interests. I want to be encouraging in that.

Life is short and without the thread and heartbeat of our own deep interests, we can lose our way. If we compromise what interests us at heart, what else is there? Nothing of value that I am aware of.

And so, it's better our own job, done poorly, than our doing someone else's job well, or thinking we can. Find your thread, your interests, and follow them out to the end, until you wake up and have a break-through. After that, you are good to go.

That is my unsolicited advice.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



A photo of Andrew Gunn McIver, Rosicrucian initiator, and the tombstone I designed for him. It has the symbol of the Sun, which Andrew was all about. He used to say to me, over and over, "Michael, Imagine yourself standing at the center of the Sun," and then he would growl, and say "That's hot stuff!" And years that's exactly what I did when I discovered for myself heliocentric astrology. Andrew also said to me, often, that he was tuning me like an instrument and that years from from them I would respond to what he was placing inside me. And I did.

WHAT IS OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE?

March 8, 2023

I've spent the last many decades studying and learning the eastern (Tibetan) approach to dharma as best I can. It has been the most difficult thing I have ever done. And before that I studied the western esoteric occult tradition in great detail with a master Rosicrucian teacher.

The subject of western esotericism is occult by its very nature, hard to talk about. For me, it is an area of knowledge in which I have been very well trained, as mentioned, by a master. More about that later.

Even talking about this is considered 'esoteric', something not much talked about, yet some of this tradition is the preoccupation of so many younger people today, in particular the idea of getting out of the body, and out-of-the-body experience in general. Many of the younger generation like the idea of getting out of their bodies, and yet know almost nothing about what it actually means for them.

How foolish it is to flirt with trying to leave the body, or even attempt to attenuate our connections before we have to, all the time imagining that this out-of-the-body experience is some form of spirituality. The highway of life is littered with folks who mistake the idea that abandoning our five senses could ever make sense. That's an oxymoron.

Abandon our bodies we will, when there is no choice, yet doing it while you are still young enough to get life out of the body is foolish beyond question.

And worse are those who act as if they have skipped to the front of the line or class by having out-of-the-body experience, when in actuality they have just cheated themselves out of their own life or much of it. They outsmart themselves. A wound smarts. "Smart" is not the same as being intelligent.

Yes, the body is something we move our consciousness in and out of quite naturally. However, the whole point of having a body is to experience life and learn from that experience. And the very process of aging will itself exhaust our body in time, so that when we get old our senses wane and we gradually withdraw. That is natural. And finally, there is no choice.

Yet wanting to get old before our time, leave the body early, and calling that 'wisdom' is the height of misunderstanding, IMO. There is no free lunch and no lunch at all if we don't even sit down at the table.

The western esotericists describe this using the idea of involution and evolution. We are involved with growing our body until the prime of life is reached, after which we stop incarnating and instead begin to evolve, to leave the body. And this all turns on the 'prime of life', usually somewhere at or after our first Saturn Return around 30 years of age.

And in the esoteric wisdom they say that each of us reaches our Nadir, our point of greatest involution or density, after which we begin to evolve and get something out of what we are involved in, and least ourselves.

And so, in the western occult teachings, skipping the Nadir, attempting to evolve before we are done involving is to skip that whole arc of dense experience and thus

begin to leave the body before we have fully entered it.
Make sense?

It's like the old Gertrude Stein quote "Before friendship faded, friendship faded," only here related to fully incarnating.

By doing that, leaving the body too early, we automatically don't (and can't) know what we are talking about because we have not had the experience or at least the depth of true and natural experience. We have not squeezed the life out of our life experience. We have simply avoided having life experience to its fullest and, instead, settled for an abstraction, a conceptual experience rather than actual living experience.

Intellectuals, above all, tend to flirt with this, abandoning their body of experience before its time, and thus building a conceptual abstraction that is devoid of actual experience (with all its attendant natural pain and suffering), which includes becoming an object and submitting to experience. The purely intellectual avoid that.

There are many ways to describe this condition.

There is also much talk about out-of-the-body experience and so little actual knowledge of what that can mean detrimentally, to forgo the actual experience of life in favor of an abstraction, the Cliffs-Notes version of life.

Leaving the body, this body we now have, we will all do in time. There is no way to avoid it. Yet, to leave the body before we are fully in it, incarnated in it, is to miss out on the chance of a lifetime, so to speak.

Evolution is dependent on Involution. Without involution, there is nothing to evolve. We can only unroll what has previously been rolled up. There is no free lunch, as they say.

What is tragic about this, IMO, is to talk ourselves out of our senses, which we need to experience life, before those senses naturally expire with age. To leave off experiences life before we fully arrive at its center, and thus have short shrift as to life itself.

I was taught these esoteric teachings by a master, a traveling Rosicrucian initiator who eventually settles in Ann Arbor, Michigan where I met him. And I was taught this before my first Saturn Return (Saturn returns at 29.4 years in the solar system), so I had those teachings drilled into me and I then went through my Saturn Return with eyes open.

My teacher's name was Andrew Gunn McIver, and he was born in Scotland in 1887 and died in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1969. He was 82 when he passed on. I was the only one around to see to his burial and I designed his tomb stone. I also carry on his lineage to some degree. I wrote a book about this form of esoteric knowledge called "The Astrology of the Heart." It is a free download.

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

Andrew McIver used to break simple words down, such as 'Painful', which he would parse as 'Pay-in-Full'. Or he would say that we are all initiates, but to what degree? And the would spell the word initiate as "In-It-I-Ate), by which he would mean experience life.

And I know full well that those who need to hear of this teaching this cannot easily listen, and this by definition.

Yet, some sense of this may waft through the flesh and be heard, if only perhaps as a feeling or an inkling.

There is nothing wrong with out-of-the-body experience. It is natural, but it comes in due time. My first dharma teacher Andrew used this analogy, the difference between a Cling Peach and a Freestone Peach.

With a Cling Peach, the pit can't be removed without tearing out flesh with it, while with a Freestone Peach, the pit just naturally pops out.

That's the difference between natural out-of-the-body experience (Freestone) and out-of-the-body experience, where we are forced out before our time, or worse forcing ourself out of the body before it is time, in the belief that this brings wisdom (Cling).

So there you have it, an introduction to some of the western esoteric tradition. If you have questions, I'm glad to attempt to answer them.

[Photo by me and Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



The Linear Track of Time.



Michael Erlewine a Mr. Flood's Party in Ann Arbor.



Michael Erlewine a Mr. Flood's Party in Ann Arbor.

MR. FLOODS PARTY
 ENTERTAINMENT
 JAN 25 THRU MAR. 3-1973
 120 W. LIBERTY
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JOHN NUZZO AND HOWARD
 FROM BROOKLYN BLUES
 BUSTERS - 25¢ COVER

EVERY TUESDAY
ERLEWINE BROS. AND THEIR FRIENDS
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GIL AND LORNA
 FROM DIESEL SMOKE + DANGEROUS CURVES
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THURS. 50¢ FRI. & SAT. 75¢

EVERY SUNDAY AFTERNOON
DIESEL SMOKE AND DANGEROUS CURVES

STARTING FEB 4TH 50¢

-ZEKE-

JAN.
 25-26-27
 "THE BROOKLYN BLUES BUSTERS"

-FEB.-
 1, 2, 3
 DIESEL SMOKE AND DANGEROUS CURVES

8, 9, 10
 "BROOKLYN BLUES BUSTERS"

15, 16, 17
 GARFIELD BLUES BAND

22, 23, 24
 CADILLAC CONBOYS

-MARCH-
 1, 2, 3
 DIESEL SMOKE + DANGEROUS CURVES

The Erlewine Bros played at Mr. Flood's Party (a bar) every Tuesday Night.

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MR. FLOOD'S PARTY
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ADMISSIONARY CHARGE 25 cents

The Erlewine Bros played at Mr. Flood's Party (a bar) every Tuesday Night.

THE LINEAR TRACK OF TIME

March 11, 2023

Linear time and the linear track of time stretches out toward the end of the line, at least our physical end. There is no doubt about that.

Life can seem like a freight train hurtling down the track of time from our past into the future. I believe we all are aware of linearity, in particular the linear view of time. Yet, what is non-linear time?

The words "Eternity is in love with the productions of time," by the mystic poet William Blake in his landmark piece "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" has to be one of the classic lines about time.

And although time to some degree is a convention agreed upon by the majority and measured by clocks, any musician can tell us that time is flexible. It expands and contracts constantly, and each of us lives on our own sense of time.

When we create music, for example, it seems like we can go between the clock-ticking seconds of time and expand the present moment almost infinitely, at least for a time.

I learned this for certain from the blues masters like the great Howlin' Wolf, which I heard in person many times. When I was with Howlin' Wolf, listening to him play, I was on his time, and what a time it was. And although Wolf's songs did have a beginning, middle, and an end, where it was we went on Wolf's time is hard to fathom, much less measure. He was on what I call Blues-Time.

"MAKING BLUES TIME"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Making%20Blues%20Time%202022...>

I did a wonder interview of Howlin' Wolf in 1969. As I stood there listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night.

There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I sat somewhere at the back of the place and it was very dark. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows.

And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, it actually took over all sense of time as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain like the scent of a special flower..

For a while that night, I lost all idea of who or where I was. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a mind floating there. This was more than just music. For me, this was a life initiation as to the nature of time.

This is what I mean when I say that time is a convention, agreed on by the majority, yet for any one of us, every once in a while, we are on our own sense of time and, as mentioned, when we are with a great musician, certainly we are (or can be) on their sense of time.

I learned this years ago with my own music in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood's Party. They had an elevated stage that was quite high above the audience. My brother Dan Erlewine and I used to play at Mr. Flood's

Party every Tuesday night for a while, under the name "The Erlewine Bros."

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play, and from that elevated stage I looked out at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like "Michael, you're doin' good man!" But there wasn't any of that.

As I looked at the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly realized what was happening and said to myself: "Oh, I get it now. It's not about me!"

I realized that, like everything else in life, even music has a "what's in it for me" quotient, and in this case, it was about what was in it for them, the audience. My music only gave them the room or an expanded space to experience their own thoughts more fully than they could without the music. I just happened to be playing the music well that night. That's what music is about.

Great musicians make space in time. They stretch and expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us to live in. They 'make' time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to.

We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I used to work a lot. I'd get up like at two or three

in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap.

And then somewhere around 7 PM I'd watch a movie or something. It doesn't have to be a whole movie, or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course, watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over that happened that day in my mind. Above all, I am resting the mind or resting in the space of that movie watching. Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people, because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what meditators do?

Anyway, in that down time I get things done in my mind that I need to do, while I am watching the movie. I am processing the day's events. For me, that down time is very relaxing and actually quite necessary for a sane existence.

You get the idea.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



KEEPING IT REAL: THE 'SELF' OR DOPPELGÄNGER

March 12, 2023

Well, if not 'real', then perhaps I should just say keeping it realistic, especially with our 'Self', the Me, Myself, and I.

I also believe that over time most of us stop disliking or being ashamed of ourselves and end up treating our Self as we would treat another person, with some kindness and

understanding. It's the easiest way to deal with the Self, IMO.

As for me, it seems my so-called 'Self' requires quite a lot of encouragement and handholding from time to time. Yet even that gets old, and after some years of getting to know myself, I stopped taking myself so seriously.

The 'Self' is not a person, but rather a collection of our attachments that we cobble together and somehow animate. In other words, the Self is our own creation, and while not a zombie, also not a saint. The Self is just an aggregate or business center for getting things done. Think of it as a robot, not a person.

As for me, I'm onto myself by now, and I put my Self out to pasture years ago, so to speak, like you would an old and familiar horse or cow, and I see to it that it get some sunshine and plenty of hay or whatever it needs to be comfortable, particularly attention. The Self has to live out it's time, whether it is politically correct or far from it. As mentioned, the Self is nothing more than a collection of our attachments and they change from year to year as we do.

I feel there is no use in punishing ourselves for being selfish. After all, what we call the Self, as mentioned, is entirely our own creation, made up of our own attachments, likes, and dislikes. I believe the Self is intended to work as some kind of logistics-secretary, yet the Self can also get out of hand and try to boss us around, in the vein of the master/slave theory where the master becomes dependent on the work of the slave, and all that. And talking to yourself is pretty much an oxymoron, not the best sign of progress. It is an AI interaction of the first order.

It's like the ventriloquist that ends up listening to the dummy and the Self is our dummy. Being ashamed of our Self or getting harsh with ourselves is ridiculous, an exercise in futility and only shows how little we understand. The Self is not a soul, nothing more than a reflection of our own habits, likes and dislikes. It's not karma and deteriorates when we die. The Tibetans call their form of Self, the "Lha." It is the "Lha" that psychics and seances all contact. My dharma laughed and said the karmic entity is long gone after death and very busy.

How much better it is to understand something about the limitations of the self, any self, and act accordingly, as mentioned, treat it with kindness and care, sad creature that it may appear. My Self is still kind of old fashioned, a bit arrogant, and well, of course selfish as any self is by nature.

I certainly am not going to spend any more of my life being a harsh self-disciplinarian, beating up myself over its various transgressions.

Fuhgeddaboutit.

Anyway, for the record, my self is still settling down, almost retired from important duties, and becoming less important and less grabby. I encourage that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]









I GET OUTTA' TOWN

May 13, 2023

Well, busy day for me, as Margaret and I fought the elements, dodged a morning snowstorm in our 50-mile drive to Grand Rapids to see our daughter May Erlewine

on her album release tour play at the Wealthy Theater in Grand Rapids for her latest album for “The Real Thing.”

However, as we drove home late, we caught the snowstorm full-on. It was a bit of tough driving as we watched the temperature plunge from 33-degrees to 28-degrees, the bridges starting to freeze over, and all that fun stuff.

May was playing at the Wealthy Theater in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the show was sold out, as were all her shows on this tour. I had have not seen my daughter May play in concert for three years, ever since Covid came on.

We had a great time. May’s new album “The Real Thing” is lovely and the crowd loved it, and May toured with the original band that recorded the album, which includes:

Theo Katzman - Drums

Packy Lundholm - Guitars

Dave Mackay - Keyboards and piano

Joel Gottschalk - Bass

May Erlewine - Vocals, guitar, piano

Theo Katzman produced the album, and he also toured with the group and played drums. If I understand right, May flew in all the group, including Dave Mackay from London, for the tour.

I took along some photo gear and include a few shots from the concert. Here is the album link so you can hear some of the tunes.

<https://www.amazon.com/music/player/albums/B0BTMYKBS9>

I am struck by the song “The Truth On My Side” and its line:

“I see the beauty in your lies, but I want to live with the truth on my side.”

As mentioned, as we left and hit the highways, the snow started in and we had to drive slowly and be careful, while the snow flurried all around us, hitting our windshield. Got home somewhere before midnight. We were tired.

[Photos by me.]

[Later we found out that May discovered she had Covid that night.]



CURBING EXPECTATIONS

March 14, 2023

Disappointments are a byproduct of our expectations. We expect and even plan one thing and another outcome pops up. Who is responsible for this?

Well, of course, we are responsible for all our disappointments because it is we who are disappointed. We react and not others, and reactions are entirely our own despite who or what caused them..

The great Mahasiddha Tilopa perhaps said it best when he said “Don’t Invite the Future,” which to me means don’t guess at the future. Years ago, 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.

“Expectations can’t define” because as the future becomes the present, it is what it is, and often not what we imagined or expected it to be.

And so, the key to this is our reaction to disappointment or change, instead of responding, working with what emerges from the future as best we can, appropriately, naturally. The fact that we are disappointed just points out our expectations and the need to temper that to reality. Being disappointed is wasted energy and therefore a constant drain or drag on our system.

The fact that we are disappointed in someone points directly at us because OUR expectations were not met. Those expectations were guesswork on our part, and apparently, we guessed wrong. Perhaps we were a poor judge of character or whatever. Maybe we were just too much a dreamer.

Tilopa’s advice was to take the guesswork out of the future by, instead of expecting, we roll with, because the future just happens and was permitted, it as it is, rather than as we expected it. Either way, it is energy lost every time.

The fact that we are disappointed with reality as it turned out is something for us to consider about ourselves, that we didn't see the situation correctly (as it turned out) rather than as we expected it to turn out. We add the insult of our own misjudgment to whatever injury our expectations itself produced in us.

The whole point here is that, like any reaction, we have only ourselves to blame and only we can do something about it. And that thing to do is become aware of our own reactions as they happen, accept and own them as ours (take note), and then just drop them. Don't spend time thinking about them, why or how they came about. Just move on.

If we become increasingly aware of our reactions as they occur, even minor ones, we gradually learn to respond rather than react, and we save an enormous amount of energy; and our mind becomes clear from increased awareness.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



CHAIN REACTION

March 15, 2023

Chain reaction? Better said, a chain of reactions is what we are liable to on an all-day basis.

And those constant reactions, especially the endless minor ones, sap our energy and disturb our mind almost from dawn to dusk, not just a couple times a day but hundreds and thousands of times a day.

After all, we react not just to a thunderclap; we also micro-react all the time. We think “I don’t like that tie you are

wearing.” That’s a reaction or perhaps you look at me in the wrong way, or coming around a corner I bump into a not-so friend and react. If you look and become aware of your own reactions you will find that we react almost constantly, not just to the big disruptions, but micro-reactions sputter on and off all day long. Each reaction is karma accumulated, and repeated reactions to the same stimulus carve deep grooves in our psyche.

Instead of reacting in a knee-jerk fashion, we can learn to respond appropriately to events instead of reacting. That’s the idea.

Not only that, but monitoring our reactions is perhaps the most efficient dharma practice I know of. It takes no time out of our schedule, because we can’t avoid doing it. We react involuntarily from moment to moment, so we already have spent the energy. Might as well benefit from it.

We can use reactions as a form of dharma practice all day long and put in more practice time than finding 20-minutes in our schedule to sit on a cushion. I do reactivity-toning all day long.

The benefit is that if we can convert involuntary reactions to appropriate responses, we gain back an enormous amount of energy that otherwise is constantly leaking and lost.

I learned to do this practice all day long until it became automatic, until my reactions turned into responses, responding or being aware and the clarity of my mind improved beyond any expectations I had.

All that lost energy and the reacting process itself was like riding a car with no shocks. My life-ride smoothed out by

managing my reactions and learning to respond and work with what I used to just knee-jerk react to. With awareness of reactions, many will just tone down and vanish after a while. We learn to roll with the tides of natural responses.

For more reading on this subject and technique instructions, here is a free e-book to download.

“The Alchemy of Reaction: Tong Len”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../Tong-len%20-%20Second...>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



The outside is on the inside.



"We go behind the curtain of the Self to see what's there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen."
–Hegel

THE CURTAIN OF THE SELF

March 16, 2023

If you are looking for the Wizard behind the curtain of life, good luck with that. In real life there is no such thing, as in: there is nothing behind the curtain and that 'nothing' can be hard to come to terms with.

We have to be our own wizard, both the looker and what is seen. As the great German philosopher Hegel said:

“We go behind the curtain of the Self to see what’s there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen.”

That’s about the size of it, the seer and the seen are one and the same. So, seeing through the back of the mirror is total immersion in the present moment, or as they say “Being There.”

Can we ‘be there’ and also be aware that we are there at the same time? The answer is, yes, but just barely. We are barely there, and it’s something of a far-reach. Yet, it’s what we have to do. It’s all we can do.

Rest in the present moment.

I will give this one more try:

We can’t grasp more than the whole of what is, the entire thing, because there is nothing more there to grasp. The truth is that we are already all-in, so we can’t somehow step outside and be objective; we can’t see all this from the outside.

As mentioned, there is no outside beyond the whole thing we are a part of. The whole thing includes both the inside and the outside.

However, the outside is inside, and the inside is surrounding it on the outside, like how sugar crystals form inside a saturated solution that is outside of and contains them.

There is only one side and it is inside.

[Midjourney graphics prompted by me.]



SOLAR INFLUX: CHURN, CHURN, CHURN

March 17, 2023

Our Sun had some quiet days recently, where there was little to no sunspot activity, yet I see today that this is changing, and we now have some solar influx rising to about M-Class size and quite prolonged at that.

These prolonged solar bursts, although not really major, can be felt as a general roiling of the waters of the mind and emotions, so to speak. We may at first not even recognize the solar change, but nevertheless we can feel

turmoil within us, a kind of churning going on. Solar change is universal, like money, it's meaning is in how it is used. It is change on hand that will have some effect depending upon how it is received and used.

If we are worried about something, solar influx can drive that worry until it is overwhelming for us. Or if we are trying to get something done, we may have the extra energy or oomph to finish that job.

And so, our own intents, plans, and worries are victims to the charge or change that comes with solar influx. If we can master this change, accept and control it, and not be whipped around by it, so much the better.

On the other hand, if we allow solar influx to drive us into a corner or, if we are overwhelmed by the sheer energy of it or say and do things we did not mean or intend, that also can happen.

What I find useful is that when, in the midst of whatever I am doing, I become aware enough that something is driving me or causing me to feel overwhelmed or out of control, even a little bit, I make a point of going online to this URL and check the white box labelled "Solar Flare Detection."

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

If the solar influx is above the thin green line between "B" and "C," then we are experiencing solar change enough to be able to note it.

I know, it may sound crazy or be a pain to do, so don't, yet we look at our watch or whatever else we need to tell time, the weather, and so on, so this is not a difficult check to do.

For me, knowing I have spare change (so to speak) is often very helpful and gives me the opportunity to draw back or lean forward into the change, depending on the outcome I would like to see. It also can send a warning shot across my bow that I best relax and not get too carried away with anything just now, especially worries and demands that will vanish as the solar influx dies down. It's like stepping on the accelerator while having the clutch in, for those of us old enough to have driven a stick-shift car.

So, solar influx is just another factor that can be used however we wish or can. If we are aware of it being there I find it's easier to use it wisely, if only to ride out the solar storm and do no damage.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



Created by the prompt "Joe Biden eats a hot dog." Can you imagine what can be done with this kind of Ai graphic.



Created by the Midjourney prompt "Donald Trump eats a Kale sandwich."

AI: THE NEW PARADIGM

March 18, 2013

The Spring Equinox is on Monday March 20, 2023 at 5:24 PM EDT. However, winter will manage to bang on here in northern Michigan for another month at least, although the cold will be punctuated by an increasing number of

sunny days when the wind is down and walking outside is pleasant or at least tolerable.

The last great paradigm shift was the advent of the Internet. The current paradigm shift is AI graphics and similar related changes.

It seems that everything compounds on one another with progress, elaboration, and the result leaves little to desire or left for the imagination. The AI Graphics engines are tearing it up as we speak.

Even the not-so-human AI graphics have become creative, certainly doing a better job at creation than most of us on any given day.

And we have no real choice but to embrace this new graphics phenomenon, incorporate it, and learn to use it creatively. Does it take the fun out of life?

That's hard to say, yet certainly it alters everything more than just a little. And this suspiciously looks like we humans will soon be competing with AI creativity if we insist, and with whatever stamina we can work up. AI is tireless.

And this is not the only area of life that is morphing, just one of the most obvious. We are creating creativity outside of ourselves, and its up to us to know the difference.

And I see there is no choice but to join in with and manage the AI process or become but an eddy in the stream of time. And this graphic AI has already become weaponized. Soon we will have to look twice (or not even be able to tell) what is a real photo and what is one created by AI graphics. And then the fur will fly.

And it's not like we can turn back the clock or stop what has already happened in AI graphics. We can't put the toothpaste back in the tube anymore than we can take AI graphics to court and plead it out of being there. It's already there and in Midjourney, which I use, it's in its fifth revision and counting, while moving at exponential speeds.

I watched cell phones eviscerate professional photography, and long before that, back in the 1970s, I watched home computer graphics and word processors close down photo-graphic and typesetting shops almost overnight. As they say, we can't stop progress. Look what happened with music. The "Spotify" sites of the world have taken almost all of the money away from performing artists who try to eke out an existence.

I already have been corresponding with some well-known graphic artists who are weeping and gnashing their teeth over the advance of AI graphics into commissioned art. The best and brightest artists are good sports and already busy incorporating AI graphics into their own graphic works, but they don't sound all that happy about it. They plan to surf it rather than fight it. And AI graphic engines, as mentioned, are tireless in their expansion, and it's a tidal wave that is just beginning.

Certainly, we are at a point where progress is eating its own children and sucking the life out of more than a few creative artists. Are we powerless to stop it?

My guess is that we are powerless to stop this kind of progress, since it has already progressed and is a 'fait accompli'. It's beyond just being present. It's being loved, championed, and already in revision.

I speak here about AI graphics and mentioned what happened to photography, typesetting, and music. There must be many other areas of interest out there about to (or already going through) radical change and a dramatic shift in direction through AI intelligence. Fortunes will be lost and found.

And just so you don't think I am against all this; I am not. I love it and millions of people will produce creative graphics where before they were powerless to do so. It just is what it is. Let's see what we can do with it.

Yet, as mentioned, AI graphics are about to be weaponized. See the enclosed Midjourney image, which is just showing what could be done in the very near future. All I prompted was:

"Donald Trump eats a kale sandwich."

We know Trump lives 'Big Macs', not kale and I kid the Trump. And one for Joe Biden, "Joe Biden eats a hotdog." Can you imagine what will appear in a revision or two? You and I will only know the difference by our non-AI intelligence.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me. Good discussion is vital, but personal attacks will just be deleted without warning.]



VISIONS: IMPRINTS IN TIME

March 19, 2023

In our mindstream, our consciousness, we each have islands of insight, rare events that deeply imprint us, which historically have been called 'Visions.' A vision is a moment or a time of such great vividness, so stunning, that it overwhelms us with interest so that we keep going back and sampling that vision in memory for days, weeks, or years. They are the fixed stars of insight in our life,

islands of deep imprint inset into our stream of consciousness.

Visions don't happen very often, otherwise they would not be special moments. They imprint us and punctuate our mindstream. They articulate our mind with their importance.

Of course, those of us who encountered LSD back in the early 1960s well know that an LSD trip can leave a deep and life-changing imprint, one we can't forget, and to which we return to remember who we are time and again.

These moments of deep imprinting not only stand out in our memory, but they also serve as reference points to which we literally refer, go back to, memories where we check out our own mind-stream history and remember who or what we are. Our mind takes us back to those points of great imprint as a way to reference and identify who we believe we are. We can't seem to suck all the meaning out of them and go back again and again.

It's like when I was a teenager and a certain popular song on the radio struck me to the core. Perhaps I had just broken up with my girlfriend or whatever, and it was a heartbreak. I could not hear the song enough, each time I would listen, trying to squeeze more of the meaning out of it.

Visions are like this. We can't empty them of meaning.

Anyway, with deep imprints or visions, we knew or experienced something back then, at the time of imprinting, whether induced by hallucinogens or by real-time mind events. After all, consider what visions are:

Visions and we all have them (or something like them) are moments of deep imprint to which we return, time and again in life, in an attempt to absorb (and reabsorb) what meaning they hold for us. They are the reservoir as to who we are.

These visions are turning points in life for us, and they literally light up our life like lamps or signs as to who we are and why we are here. At least for me they have done this.

I remember two acid trips that changed my life, and decades later, after much dharma practice, a few dharma breakthroughs that have done the same thing. When I think of who I am, I find myself returning to those events and their memories and sampling what I can of that imprint again and again and again.

These visions or pivotal imprints are like fixed stars in my life, and one of those imprints (a single dharma event) is my North Star.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



QUESTIONS ON THE END OF EFFORT

March 20, 2023

What happens when we reach our goal or at least reach the end of a particular path after a lifetime of effort, where all we can do is look around because there seems nowhere else to get to? Is the whole idea of a goal how we get there?

Is there anything else as interesting as the trail and walking the path itself? I wonder. What if the interest that kept me on the path all these years dries up and is gone?

“Do this,” “Now do that,” has been what’s led me on, and now suddenly it’s “Do whatever you want.”

What do we want to do? As mentioned, I can’t say I want to keep following that path if the path has reached its goal, practically speaking. Do I really want to take a break or

is it the just time to do that?

Or do I miss the viscosity and ‘suchness’ that is part of following the path itself? If the engine that drove me switches off, and suddenly there is silence where once there was noise, can I stand it?

And what is all this sudden freedom to do anything I wish, and what if I wish to just keep traveling the path to the goal? After all, it’s all I have known until now.

And, if everything is equal, where now is the path of my interest that has led me here? If we are interested in everything equally, what then guides our direction?

I am reminded of the old saying “All dressed up and no place to go.”

Now, do I just do nothing, or do I do anything I wish, yet what if I’m not wishing to do anything?

Is “No Direction known” also a direction? Or will a new ‘direction’ eventually arise and reset my compass?

Floating on the surface at the end of the path of being driven onward for so long, for so many decades. If the path

fails and stops leading anywhere, where will I go except right here and now? How did I manage to run out of interest?

Is it that I'm just running out of steam or is it more realizing that more effort to get anywhere can only lead nowhere. Am I now nowhere or is this the somewhere I have been trying to reach all along?

Is my own effort what has obscured my reaching where I've always been headed?

Just stop searching. Will that allow me to get to where I'm going? If I have found, then that's the end of the search. You can't search for something you already have found.

Does effort itself finally have to be given up? What if the end of effort is what allows us to finally come to rest?

As mentioned, we can't have 'found' and still be searching. What if the last thing that has to be given up is the effort itself to reach the goal. And is that then the goal?

What if everything is equal.

No further effort is required because we have reached the end of searching and what is found is nothing other than that, the giving up effort. The last to go is the effort to get there.

Is that what has kept the 'goal' out of reach, like a swimmer's own waves are what pushes their innertube of a goal beyond their reach.

Is the goal as simple as to stop making waves, giving up effort?

Is what remains the silence and peace of non-effort?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



TWO IS ONE AND ONE IS NONE

March 21, 2023

[Please humor me. I get caught up in defining things and have to work things out with words by tweaking them, in this case the idea of 'connate', like in dharma terms, "appearances and emptiness are connate," two sides of the same coin.]

The two sides of a coin are actually one coin. Thus, the two sides are said to be co-emergent or connate. In dharma

terms, if two things are connate, they are said to arise together.

The 'two' of anything belong to the 'one' that embraces them both. As mention, an example is a coin, thus two sides and one coin. In other words, dualism, duality, is always secondary, derived, dependent, and/or interdependent, which is why in dharma terms "whatever arises in dependence" (dualistically) in reality is said not to have arisen independently, or is simply said "not to arise." And this is because duality is a spin off, an abstraction.

By being dualistic (conceptual), anything dualistic is already one step removed from the reality of 'non-dualism', from the single oneness that unites them both which, when it comes to the nature of the mind, is then said to be 'unborn'. Therefore, the idea of 'two' is already an abstraction, a conceptual view, a fabrication, and an intellectualization – a derivative.

To repeat, any dualism ('two') is not united, not 'one', and therefore not 'essentially' or independently there. It's dependent on the natural unborn unity of which it is but an abstraction, a step away from -- an Intellection.

In other words, a duality is not there, except as an abstraction. It is dependent on the nature of the mind itself, and so by definition it is not itself true or independently there, not 'unborn'.

And by being dependent, a derivative, its essence in truth does not and cannot arise and this is why:

Because that essence is already there and present, and always has been there. And this is because, as an abstraction, anything dependent has already stepped

away from what is the unified essential mind nature, which is unborn because its already always been there. It has no beginning and no end, and so the teachings say, is unborn.

Dualisms are two, not one. Yet all twos are part of the one that unites them. Two is derived from one and fits back into one.

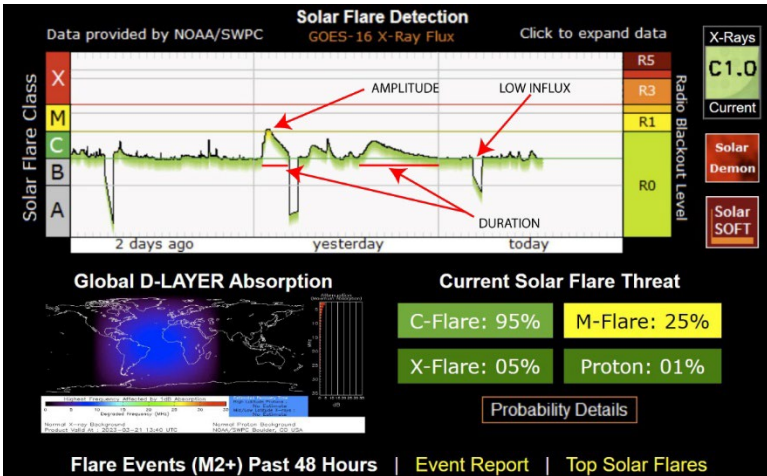
Whatever is dependent (dualistic) is conceptual and not a unified reality. Therefore, in dharma terms, it is said to 'not arise', but is empty of that reality, empty of being 'unborn'.

Perhaps the most famous pair that are said to be connate are the 'appearances' that surround us and 'emptiness'. These two are connate; they arise together. In dharma terms, all appearances are said to be emptiness but how are they connate?

Appearances are not only 'emptiness', 'appearances' are the emptiness of permanence appearing.

Our being is becoming.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



Here is the “Solar Flare Detection” graph from the above link, which I have added some pointers to. At least, for starters, here are three things to keep in mind for this graph:

AMPLITUDE – How high, what ‘Class” is the flare?

DURATION – How long does the flare last?

LOW INFLUX – How low does the flare influx drop?

Obviously, the combination of high amplitude coupled with long duration indicates a more powerful flare. The duration is especially important because it subjects us to a long time at a high amplitude. This is an easy graph to read. It’s similar to any number of geographic weather maps, only here we are measuring the Sun’s influx of energy to Earth

MAGNETORECEPTION

March 22, 2023

Solar flares release immense amounts of energy in the form of electromagnetic emissions spanning the spectrum from gamma rays to radio waves.

Scientific research has long known that living creatures can sense magnetic fields. This has been clearly established for whales, honeybees, turtles, salmon, birds, and even bats use the geomagnetic field to help with navigation, not to mention that dogs have been trained to locate buried magnets.

In 1992 researchers identified the presence of magnetite—a permanently magnetic form of iron oxide—in human brain tissue.

Study co-authors Joseph Kirschvink and Shin Shimojo say this is the first concrete evidence of a new human sense: magnetoreception.

“Our results indicate that human brains are indeed collecting and selectively processing directional input from magnetic field receptors.”

“These give rise to a brain response that is selective for field direction and rotation with a pattern of neural activity that is measurable at a group level and repeatable in strongly responding individuals.”

“Many animals have magnetoreception, so why not us?” asks Connie Wang, Caltech graduate student and lead author. To find out if humans can indeed sense magnetic fields, the researchers built an isolated radiofrequency-shielded chamber where participants sat in utter darkness for an hour. As magnetic fields shifted silently around the

chamber, participants' brain waves were measured using electrodes positioned at 64 locations on their heads.

In some of the 34 participants, alpha brainwaves decreased in power by as much as 60 percent in response to the shifting fields. Additional runs of the experiment showed that the effect was reproducible.

“Remarkably, participants who experienced the changes reported no awareness of them. It appears to be a completely unconscious effect, never rising to the level of a conscious interruption. This led the researchers to suggest it may be vestigial, some remnant of an ancient ability to navigate using local magnetic cues.”

“It is perhaps not surprising that we might retain at least some functioning neural components [of magnetoreception], especially given the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle of our not-too-distant ancestors,” says Kirschvink.”

“As a next step, we ought to try bringing this into conscious awareness,” adds Shimojo.”

Of course, that last sentence, “We ought to try bringing this into consciousness” is exactly what we are doing with blogs like these. And it is time.

“Evidence for a Human Geomagnetic Sense”

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/rel.../2019/03/190321083637.htm>

“SolarHam” Website

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

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[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



EMPTINESS, CONNATE, AND NON-ARISING

March 23, 2023

The dharma teachings state that the following dharma terms are all synonyms of one another, yet they can seem quite different.

Emptiness, Connate, and Non-Arising

How to sort this out?

The nature of the mind is just there, present, as it always has been. It has always been there and therefore is said to be 'unborn' because it already is. Therefore, the nature of mind exists just as it is and can't be born since it is already fully present. What already has existed forever cannot then be born. Therefore, as the dharma states, the actual nature of the mind is "un-born."

I certainly don't know why there is not a simpler way to say all this, and I'm sure I don't fully understand it all. I'm working on that.

To be 'non-arising', to not "arise," so to speak, simply means to not exist as a permanent and unchanging entity. It does not mean that there is nothing there, only that there is nothing permanent and unchanging there, for example, no contiguous 'entity' or 'soul' that reincarnates from lifetime to lifetime. Change is a given and everything is changing.

To be "Connate" often is cited in statements like 'Appearances' and 'Emptiness' are connate. It means the two arise together as one, like two sides of the same coin. They are one. A synonym for connate is co-emergent, emerging together as one, with the accent on the 'One'.

As for emptiness, we often see the dharma statement that 'appearances are empty', but we don't much see the statement that appearances (everything we experience) are the emptiness itself arising, yet they are one and the same. All appearances are the emptiness itself appearing. Appearances are empty because appearances are the emptiness appearing, thus: connate.

And 'Emptiness' is not empty like a cup can be empty of what fills it. Emptiness is empty of any permanent entity like a soul that reincarnates, etc., something that persists

as unchanging in this our world of change, where everything changes and nothing is permanent except, as they say, change itself.

Therefore, whatever arises in dependence (duality) does not in truth independently ever arise, because it is already derivative. It depends on something other than itself. And that something it depends on itself is, as noted, is unborn and has always been there. “Unborn” in dharma terms means it is already there and thus can’t then be born.

In other words, the true nature of the mind itself is empty of dualisms. Dualisms are part of the patina of thought.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



SOLAR RESISTANCE AND RESISTORS

March 24, 2023

Sunlight never stops, day and night, but streams to us and has streamed for as long as time itself. The streaming sunlight is like a conduit or electrical cord and we, our mind and body, serve as some kind of resistor and thus resistance. We feel the variable energy and influx of the sun and may also act as a transformer, our mind and body stepping down the incoming energy stream and distributing it as best we can. There is no choice on our part, only an ability (or lack thereof) to handle the charge.

That's pure energy that is streaming in the sunlight and since our Sun is a variable star, that energy stream varies as to how much energy is streamed to Earth at any given time and it pushes the conduit of our mind and emotions in response. It varies.

I'm certain that we, because the sunlight has always been there, by now have no appreciation (or little) as to how closely we are tied to the Sun and its endless energy stream. Equally, I doubt we know what to do when solar energy suddenly intensifies and a solar flare occurs or when a CME (Corona Mass Injection) hurls solar plasma directly at the Earth. There is no question that we are subject to it and have no recourse but to somehow learn to handle or endure it. Mostly it seems we try to ignore it.

We (literally) are like the fat in the frying pan, or we become part of the dovecot that is fluttered when the Sun hurls intense solar-flare energy at Earth. And, as mentioned, we can't help but receive that energy and try to manage it as best we can, like it or not.

Perhaps you have an explanation for the rise, fall, and degree of change in your life. I don't, other than perhaps this is due to solar change and its variability. Otherwise, your guess is as good as my guess.

Why is one day difficult and the next easy. "That's just the way life is" being the age-old excuse and I used to accept this, but to me this is just whistling in the dark, IMO. I find monitoring solar variability a much more stable and dependable measure than just leaving it to chance or saying it is random. It does not seem to be.

Of course, managing solar influx is a personal issue, yet if I have a chart of solar variability, it is much easier IMO to

follow the rise and fall of the sun's change on a graph that to just guess at what's happening inside of me.

The elephant in the room is the fact that for our entire lives we have never questioned the up and down sides of inner change even though we are subject to them 24x7.

We just call it change, as in "I changed my mind" or, at best, "My mind changed." Yet what precipitated that change? That's the question I am asking.

We watch Earth's weather-forecast maps change by the hour, and we can also, with a little familiarity, feel inner changes from solar activity during the day and night, yet where is our inner weather forecast or graph?

I suggest that until proved otherwise, the solar energy influx from the sun, graphed hour by hour by Astronomer-scientists, is better than my or your guess, and a solar graph is a good guess at what's happening inside us, emotionally and so on.

"SolarHam" Website

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



NO SPRING FOR ME ... YET

March 25, 2023

Here in northern Michigan we have entered the “Limbo” time of spring, when spring has arrived technically, but it’s still winter-like outside, and will be for a long time, depending on the year. Today we are supposed to get another 7-inches of snow, and it will snow all day. It’s 32 degrees and the road surfaces are starting to freeze while I drove four miles and back to the grocery at 6 AM to get

some food. That's not my idea of spring weather. I had to wear ice cleats.

I try to ignore all this because something similar happens each year, as mentioned, like clockwork. And false hope for warmer weather still adds up to cold weather and waiting for something like spring to actually occur. It will still be a while until its warm around here.

While waiting I try to mind my business and keep at whatever I've been keeping at, until something like a spring where I actually can go out in turns up. And that's seldom all that successful because it's hard to forget that I'm still waiting for spring. I'm waiting.

My doors and windows want to be open, with air flowing through the house, pushing out the stale end of winter, yet that's probably about another month away.

I like to sleep with the windows open, when it is spring or summer enough to let the warm breezes roam through the house. Now is not that time.

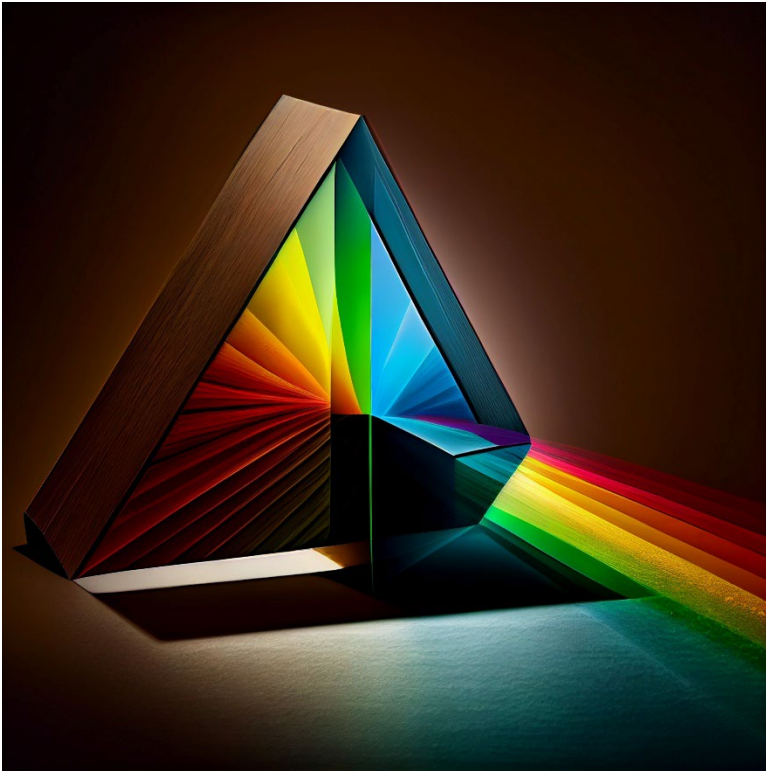
Margaret and I walked down the back alley behind our house yesterday afternoon before the coming storm came in. Our alley is not paved, but dirt and gravel which is kind to our feet. The snow and ice are gone in the alley and it's a clear shot for a walk of about a mile and then back. The sun was in our faces coming back and that helped a lot; otherwise, it was a bit brisk.

As I sit here, early this morning, it's all ice out.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



Flint striking steel.



The spectrum of appearances.

FLINT STRIKING STEEL

March 26, 2023

I'd like to comment here about the process of writing itself, aside from whatever the subject or content is. Some days I have nothing to say, yet I have to write because the process of writing for me serves a dharmic purpose, that of keeping me present and sane. How I got this way is a long story, which I will not repeat here.

Often times I write here just for the clarity, to keep my mind clear. What I call just 'musing', which I am doing right now, is just me squeezing the mind stuff to extract insights, just enough clarity, so that I know I'm still present and aware. Writing does this for me.

I don't pretend these musing-insights add up to anything more than just that, a sign for me that I am present to myself, like someone ringing a bell that can be heard as they walk a dark mile. These days, the world's news events are too often dark, IMO.

For instance, take this piece. I don't have a pressing topic and I'm not going anywhere with this particular blog; it's more like pressing the accelerator to the floor, with the clutch not engaged, just to feel the engine roar and to know it's still there.

And in that sense, I'm more or less blind, feeling my way along and through this tunnel of time we all share, and perhaps sometimes banging a tin pan (by writing) just to better hear the sound of silence when I stop. This is the case of that.

My point is that I'm not really going anywhere when this mood strikes, and I don't want to lead anyone here on. I hope that you understand this mind state. Many here must have this too. With articles like these, there is no particular point to the story other than the process of it telling itself. The process, without any particular point, can be clarifying.

In a way we each are keeping our own selves company

For me, Increased clarity, the windshield-wiper of the mind, removes the pale cast of thought of conceptuality

that seems to endlessly accumulate around me. The mental process of writing and its resulting awareness is an end in itself

Our mindstream is (or can be) punctuated, imprinted, by vivid insight, and each individual instance of insight is like a drop of rain in the desert just before a storm. In time, a cacophony of tiny insights repeated linearly settles into (or creates) a sphere of light or aura that shines wherever it can be seen. For me, this type of verbal articulation creates space within time in which to live.

Tiny individual insights of light invoked one after the other in succession, (collectively speaking) don't accumulate as a mass but nevertheless through a linear stream serve to illuminate. The stutter effect of repeated moments of mini-illumination, back to back, subside into a stream of pure insight that lights my path. Over time the tiny accumulates into the Great Way of light.

Much like a bloodstream is linear and not a pool, the thread of our insight plays out over time in quanta, like a stream of light passing through a prism, displaying the full-color spectrum of appearances that surround us, and this can be sustained moment by moment.

The prism of the light spectrum contains all the primary colors, from which the rest can be derived. All the colors are there; not one is lost.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



“ON A CLEAR DAY...”

March 27, 2023

Like the Song by Barbra Streisand, “On a Clear Day, You Can See Forever.” Is that true and how do we do that?

What makes a day clear?

I do find that, as I watch and study the solar influx graph for a given day, those times when there is no or the least

influx, or even a low dip in solar activity, that the mind is clear and “good seeing” seems to be possible.

By ‘good seeing’ I mean clear thinking with as little solar influx variation (no solar flares) or ‘noise’ as possible. That seems to be a good time to look at the mind, yet there is a caveat. And that is while a lull in solar activity can be a good time to see things clearly, this does not mean we have any impetus (read ‘change’) right then to do anything about what we see, other than to just take note.

Our change index (the time to change) seems to be when the line on the solar flare graph spikes upward beyond simple sunlight. That seems to be when increasing change itself can be useful but often such a dramatic increase like a solar flare is just overpowering, pushing our limits, and hard to manage.

And managing solar spikes of increased energy is something that seems to be totally up to us. Either we can handle increased change (or even need it), when it can be useful, is one thing. Yet, the level of change is a fine line and if we cross that line and attempt to manage more change than we personally can stand, we get a very different outcome.

Too much change all at once can be overwhelming. We are used to the steady rate of change marked by the stream of sunlight at the average rate. Amp it up, and we find out whether we can manage change (make it useful) or whether it manages us, and we have curl up, keep our head down, and just ride it out.

What amazes me is why has science not looked at how solar change on the Sun affects us here on Earth, not just globally, like interrupting radio or electrical transmission,

but emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. It seems so obvious that we are children of the Sun, personally connected come hell or high water. We have no choice.

A sudden burst of change, like a solar flare or CME, pushes our envelope hard. It can be a lifesaver when we need the energy to clean out the basement or whatever we have to do but have not yet done. We are waiting for the right moment and a solar uptick can provide that, just what it takes to push us over the top and into action. 'Change' changes things.

It can be like a shot of chaos into normality and precipitate action as a result. In 1987 Dr. Theodor Landscheidt, a climatologist and supreme court justice of Germany, wrote a whole book about the effect on solar change on creativity and the arts. It's called "Children of the Light – Creative Functions of Cosmic Consciousness" ('Wir sind Kinder Lichts - Kosmisches Bewusstsein als Quelle'). I personally paid to have this book translated from the original German into English.

It is no wonder that writers like Landscheidt have found a direct correlation with major breakthroughs, discoveries, "aha!" moments, insights, etc. and the advent of solar flares and related events. The same intense solar events that can put us through a stressful time personally can also quicken and vivify our consciousness, like a power surge, either giving us get-go or blowing out the stops. It can make us or break us. It's up to us to manage solar influx.

And so, to recap, I find it more than just useful to keep an eye on what is happening with the sun as documented by solar scientists and astronomers. As for my fellow astrologers, more immediately useful than even looking at

planetary aspects is what is happening day-to-day on our own Sun and the energy it streams to us and its variations. Look at the graph for the Sun right this minute. Are we in a moment of increased change or is solar influx low and thus perhaps a good time to think things out?

It seems to me, after years of checking this, that we here on Earth are affected by and vary with the variations streaming to us from the Sun. And solar change is also affected (or enhanced) by the planetary patterns and aspect, IMO.

“Solar Ham” Website

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



PUTTING OUR SELF OUT TO PASTURE

March 28, 2023

I want to talk about what is called the 'Self', not the courageous Self of legend and lore, but the common ordinary secretarial-self that all too often just becomes a nag to us. That one. You know, the Self we talk to from time to time.

And directly looking at our own Self (and its selfishness) can be awkward and sometimes agonizing. And so, we might ask what is 'natural' and to be expected from what is called the common Self?

For starters, that fact that we never get too far away from the "Me, Myself, and I" in us as a hub is telling, a good clue. It seems it proves that we still have some skin in the game.

And in the process of inspecting our common Self, working with it, involves airing out all that aging selfishness, and that process is pretty much unavoidable.

Trying to skirt or go around (avoid) our obvious sense of superimposed self-importance is just further proof of the problem I am describing. We don't want to just acknowledge our preoccupation and self-centeredness (much less do something about it) and certainly don't want to drag the Self (with all its selfishness) out into the open in public, not only for everyone else to see but because it can be difficult to face ourselves. Self-exposure is not considered a polite feature in today's society.

And let's be clear. What we call our 'Self', ourselves, is not something that is foreign to us, something that jumped over the fence and snuck into us from the outside, but rather, what we call our Self is 100% homemade, fashioned by yours truly, and perhaps useful as a

convenient reference point. The Self, societally speaking, is also often a sore point.

Yet, all too often we aggrandize the Self, hype it into something to publicly be ashamed of. And this because everyone has a Self, so that each of us know selfishness only too well, and yet we tend to keep our "Self" under wraps because it's only too obvious to anyone that what makes up our Self is always out-of-date and thus represents more of our past (where we came from) than our future. And this because we created it. In brief, as a society it seems to me that we are ashamed of ourselves, at least in polite society.

Perhaps this could be because by definition the Self is derivative, a reaction and a simple accumulation of our likes and dislikes. And our attachments, likes and dislikes, are the glue that holds our Self together. To others, our particular Self can seem like a hodge-podge.

As mentioned, the Self is not something we imported from somewhere else, but rather something we habitually fashion and collect around us, attachment by attachment, and always have. It can also be a something of an odd collection of attachments.

Yet, because it is derivative, the Self holds us back if only because we try to put it behind us and hide it, rather than own up to it, air it out, redeem or modernize it in our own eyes, much less allow it out to roam in public.

In other words, the Self is somewhat of a drag, a sinker, or weight we drag around behind us, and we are consistently taught to deny ourselves. Of course, the Self is at heart utilitarian, useful but not much loved by ourselves or society, and the more we ostracize the self, the tighter it clings to us, because, as mentioned, the Self represents

everything we have clung to and overvalued or misvalued. The technical term for this is reification.

To reify something is to exaggerate or overvalue its importance, to 'gild the lily' so to speak, to pile on the hyperbole, until we lose sight of what we once knew as reality, and gradually replace the truth with our own clinginess, with what we would like to believe, a veneer or patina made up of attachments, our likes, and dislikes.

At some point that aggregated patina, like the ice-covered tree branch in a freak winter ice-storm, breaks and comes crashing down around us. At that point we are so encrusted with the heaviness of our own reification that this stuff clings to us and is very difficult to remove or to let go of, without having a personal breakdown of one kind or another. And when some tragic event happens in life, the Self is the first to shatter, and can take days to reanimate.

And so, what can we do with ourselves?

Our likes and dislikes, like iron filings around a magnet, cohere and form around us as a collection called the Self, despite all we can do to dispel it or wave it away. And the self will not ever just go away and be forgotten because it's constantly being updated by our desires, our clinging, and grabby-ness.

In a way, the self is like our shadow, our doppelganger or body-double, and since it consists of what we are currently attached to and have accumulated, if we didn't have a Self, we would have to create one, and that is what we continually do.

I always say that we are the ventriloquist, and our Self is the dummy. And if we forget and allow our Self to pick on

us, boss us around, and treat us like the dummy, that's not helpful.

Here is what I do with my Self if that is useful.

The bottom line is to not try to remove the Self, fight or struggle with it, but rather to treat our Self with the kindness that we would extend as if it was another person.

As for me, years ago now, I realized that and just put myself out to pasture like an old bull or cow and let it retire. And I take good care of it, feed it enough hay for it to be happy, yet at the same time I exercise my Self, help it to trim down, and above all stop exaggerating and puffing it up. My Self is like a friend, someone I have to care for and do.

And all of the above is suggested instead of constantly struggling to control ourselves. The truth is that we each need the Self in our lives, but we also have to be able to count on and trust our self, if we want it to serve us well.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



SEEING WHAT'S THERE

On March 29th, 2023 at 10:33 EST, the 7th X-Class solar flare this year took place (X1.2), coming from sunspot AR3256 on the Sun's southwester limb. Radiation from the flare ionized the top of Earth's atmosphere causing a shortwave blackout over Australia, Asia, and New Zealand. It does not look like the flare was of long enough duration to lift a CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) from the sun's surface. The X flare was then followed by two additional significant flares, an M-class flare, and another almost M-class.

My interest in solar phenomena goes back to the early 1970s, around the time that 4-function calculators came on the scene. Before that we had no digital calculators available to the lot of us. It was pencil and paper, plus trig tables.

It took a digital calculator (+-x/) for me to create the first heliocentric ephemeris of any length (years 1653 to 2050) and it was accurate to a minute or two of arc and required a pocket calculator to use. It was published in book form in 1975 and it was my first book; its title was:

“The Sun Is Shining”

If you are learning about the Sun, heliocentric astrology, sunspots, solar flares, and CMEs (Corona Mass Ejections), and how they affect us not just physically through communications and the like, there are books, but as to the effects of solar flares and the like emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, then at this time in history it's a case of getting information wherever it exists, and there is not much.

I found it was easier to actually monitor solar flares myself and draw my own conclusions than it was to scour the literature on the internal effects of solar influx. There was next to nothing. To use a quote from the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Suck any sense from that who can” is the mantra I use.

I will spare you a long talk on the history of astrology and its penchant for studying the universe from the outside in, worrying about distant planets and deep space, and yet managing to ignore the universe from the inside out, meaning starting with our Sun right now and its

immediate energies, and then moving outward... yet I at least will mention this, which I just did.

Only the fringe of the fringe astrologers seem to pay anything but lip service to the massive influx of solar radiation streaming from our Sun and its effect on us each day personally, although scientific and clear graphs of solar activity are available each day through websites like this.

“Solar Ham Radio” Website

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

I am getting too old to rail at the world or astrologers about what they are missing via the sun's effect on us and why we best pay attention. Astrologers have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye.

It's not rocket science to read a graph of solar activity and compare it to what we are currently experiencing, day by day and hour by hour.

In 1992, the scientist Shim Shimoso wrote:

“As a next step, we ought to try bringing this into conscious awareness.”

And ‘this’ being “Magnetoreception,” the immense amounts of energy in the form of electromagnetic emissions that the Sun provides and which we can't ignore if only because it's there and we are experiencing it.

And yet, up until now we have forever ignored it. In the last 20 years astronomers and astrophysicists have begun to examine the effects of cosmic and solar radiation on the human psychological condition and not just radio and

electrical interference. Yet they are very shy of publishing their results, although there are some.

Talk about Atlantis Arising, this whole submerged realm of the Sun and its emissions has been apparently invisible to us here on Earth consciously, but it seems to be coming into view and its clarifying. We are waking up to it.

Other free e-books writings on Solar Flares by me include:

“Inner Effects of the Sun”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../INNER%20EFFECTS%20OF%20THE...>

“Solar Flares – Their Inner and Outer Effects” (2012)

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

“Sun Storms: The Astrology of Solar Activity” (2012)

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

“Solar Biology – Absorbing Solar Change” (2021)

<http://spiritgrooves.net/.../SOLAR%20BIOLOGY%20pdf>

“Solar Flares: Psychological Effects”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/SOLAR%20FLARES%20DISCUSSION%20V2.pdf>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]



THE EYE OF THE MIND IS BLIND

March 31, 2023

Without clarity, the eye of the mind is blind. My daily dharma practice has changed over the decades, what I do and how I do it. What I do today is in many ways different from what I did back then, from the late 1950s onward. I should say it's both different and the same.

It is different in the sense that over the years I have done various practices, starting from Zazen and an interest in

Zen, but segueing into Tibetan Buddhism by the early 1970s and then going through the detailed curriculum of formal dharma practice for decades, until now I am doing Mahamudra practice almost exclusively. I attended 31 ten-day teachings from 2009 to 2019, driving some 52,390 miles just for that single teaching, over twice the circumference of the Earth.

And yet, my dharma practice is also the same, meaning the need to establish clarity of mind each and every day, whatever each of us takes to accomplish that.

It's like vivid clarity is dharma's cup of coffee in the morning in order to be aware that we are aware. And if you don't practice dharma explicitly, we all do it in our own way. You too have to get up each morning and discover who and where you are.

It takes time to streamline our dharma (or morning) practice, at least it does for me. Yet, as mentioned, the requirement for being aware of our awareness, that we are aware of being aware, never changes. Without that clarity, as mentioned, the eye of the mind is blind.

And so, just how is that clarity achieved? Good question, because as for the way this is done, we differ, and agree to differ. In a word, it's whatever it takes, as they say, everything including the kitchen sink. It is said that there are 84,000 different dharma paths. It would seem that there are as many dharma paths (and thus yidams or paths) as there are sentient beings.

Whether for you what I describe here is meditation or not, I can't say. It doesn't even matter. I believe that every last human being (and probably animals as well) can't accomplish much if their mind is not clear and aware enough to see beyond their attachments to what is there

and needs our doing, whether that is something or just nothing at all.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]