

DHARMA: THE LIGHT JUST BEFORE DAWN

The jury is still out as to what I'm going through internally lately and the fact that there has been no conceptual resolution starts to look like my answer. No answer is also an answer and that can be conceptualized.

As they say, "Coming events cast their shadow" and I have been gathering the signs for some time now and they are starting to line up and make sense at last. It's like when lightning strikes and you wait for the sound of the thunder-clap. The longer you wait, the farther away the strike, but in this case it's the reverse. The longer I wait for a change to make sense, the greater the import of the change.

Since I have been waiting for many weeks now and, if I think about it (that is, if I look), the signs are already there that I have been waiting on for months and they seem to be aligning themselves with signs I've been tracking for some years. That is, if I look at it that way, I believe a pattern is forming that I can get my conceptual mind around. It's like driving in the rear-view mirror.

And such a slow-moving change amounts to some sort of more massive reorientation. It's as if my mental and psychological space capsule, like a huge gyroscope, is slowly rotating in the deep space of my dharma. Of course, these are just words. However, the natural discerning intelligence within me has started to be revealed and function on its own and the results are (at least to me) very interesting. You might ask: what am I seeing?

I don't want to drag everyone through what is quite a long story and yet I have to leave enough breadcrumbs that you can follow along if you want to. It involves my photography and photographs.

I have been taking nature photographs since about 1955 when I was 14-years old. Over the years, my interest in photography was, well, reasonable. However, some dozen years ago, my photo-taking was vastly accelerated when I stumbled upon Insight Meditation (how to do it) not on the cushion as I always thought I would, but rather out in nature taking photos. I have written about this many times, so I will just post a link for those who actually want the chapter and verse.

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Mahamudra%20-%20A%20Story%20Version%203.pdf>

And, because I awakened to realizing Insight Meditation through photography (and not by way of the usual method of on the cushion), for quite some time after that awakening, if I wanted to practice Insight Meditation, I had to take my camera and go out in nature and take photos. Consider that please.

Insight Meditation is, IMO, so powerful that (for the first year) I was out watching the sun come up at dawn every morning (and taking nature photos) when it was not raining, from late May until the frost made it too cold to go out outside in late fall -- every dawn. That's how important Insight Meditation can be.

With the help of a lama friend, I eventually understood exactly what I was doing, but nevertheless, I was stuck only being able to practice Insight Meditation

while doing photography. Sitting on the cushion back at home, which I tried, there was no Insight Meditation happening. How confusing is that? The only method or technique, as mentioned, that worked was photography, and a particular kind of close-up nature photography at that.

Anyway, after the arising of Insight Meditation, it has taken me many years of actual exploration and effort to expand and extend Insight Meditation from photography to other areas of my life. It is axiomatic that any realization has to be expanded and extended. All the pith teachings say this. I found that totally true, but had no idea how difficult it was.

To make a rather long (and arduous) story short, like a spider crawling across a web, handhold by handhold, I very, very slowly was able to extend my practice to include other areas of life and interest aside from photography. It is exactly similar to having a serious illness and the time it takes to rehabilitate or get your body to do what you need to have it do again. It's like learning to walk all over again. It's very difficult and the difficulty is mostly a matter of confidence. That's a great topic for another blog: Confidence.

The bottom line or end-result is that, after many years, I can now (kind of) perform Insight Meditation doing most anything. It's like I have adopted a more Zen approach to everything I do: take it to the path. Yet, there is an interesting casualty in all this progress and it's too early to tell whether it is permanent or not. My interest in photography, which all these years has been driven by my absolute need to do Insight Meditation, has been waning to the point of not being

as important to me as it once was. Push me, pull you.

I now can do Insight Meditation by writing things like this blog and other areas of life too. I no longer need to take photos in order to practice Insight Meditation and, as you might imagine, I haven't been doing that as much. Of course, this is winter and there is very little to photograph as far as flowers, etc., so that could be a factor as well. Still, I feel a shift. This type of meditation is now more portable.

What I have learned is that it was the Insight Meditation in the nature photos that interested me more than just taking nature photos – the baby and the bathwater. This is good and bad, of course. It's not that I did not take hundreds of thousands of photographs, mostly of flowers. I did. I had little choice. LOL. And I got good at it.

However, now I feel that I have been turned loose and freed from being restricted to just one technique or method of performing Insight Meditation (photography). I can now meditate in that manner doing many things, so to speak.

As mentioned, what this means for my photography is too early to tell. I don't feel the impulse to photograph as I have for all these years. I do feel that same impulse to write things like this and so on, so the impulse lives on. I also have enough photos to post one each day until long after I leave this planet. LOL.

The moral or import of this story is that to me the dharma and the driving force of Bodhicitta are stronger than any other force I have known. It is perhaps unusual that I got caught in photography as

where I first learned Insight Meditation, rather than in on-the-cushion practice. However, I have worked my way back to “normal” or near-normal (dharma-wise) for the most part.

One thing I learned in this process is that the dharma best works with what we love in life and can be quite natural. It seeks the path of least resistance, whatever is most familiar to us by nature. In my case, that was Mother Nature. This gives me hope that other folks like me could find their way to dharma realization through what they best know or love and not only through the prescribed techniques from textbooks. Techniques are just to get us in the ballpark. It’s up to us to hit a home run.

In fact, the whole process of discovering Insight Meditation reminds me of a live birth and I have been to a half dozen live births. It’s an enlightening experience, for sure, but it’s a little messy too. LOL. And, above all, it is 100% a natural process, just as a stream or river always finds a way.

That being said, I felt that old photography urge yesterday, not for flowers, but for photos like this of the Mahasiddha Tilopa. LOL. This statue is from my little shrine in my office, where I practice.

[Photo by me taken yesterday.]

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

For those of you who would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are my links:

http://traffic.libsyn.com/spiritgrooves/Links_to_Michael_Erlewine-V2.pdf