

THE TREASURES OF THE MIND

October 8, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I now get to the part that is purely personal, because it involves my own experience with mind treasures, and that is, of course, all that I finally know about and have to offer. So please forgive the personal tone, which you probably are used to anyway. And I will use my experience with astrology as an example. I am not sure exactly when I began to turn away from books in favor of using the mind, but it was fairly early on. The reason was simple.

Many of the ideas I was most interested in were not covered in the books I could find and, as an archivist, I could find a lot of books. As many of you know I curate what is perhaps the largest astrological library on the planet, so books I have.

I also had worked for some years in the 6th largest library in the world, the University of Michigan Graduate Library, so I already know how to use a library to find information. I had email in 1979, but this was well before home computers and there was no Internet or email. Do you all realize that the first readily available 4-function calculators only appeared around 1972? Think about that for a moment, please. Very few people were trained in finding information. I was.

But in my case, most of the information I sought did not exist, anywhere. Most of my questions (my dharma teacher would spell this word Quest-I-On) had no answers yet, so looking in books was no help. Reluctantly I began to turn inward and look in the mind itself. I had to find my own answers; how very different. I had little idea how to do this.

I would think and think and think on a topic. I sometimes did this both day and night. But thinking alone did not often do it. You can't take the mind by force of concentration, although concentration is necessary to focus the mind, at least in the beginning.

I soon found out that the effort of constant focused thinking on a topic (and the mental static it created), itself drowned out any hope of getting answers. The creative mind is way more subtle than that. After a while of just thinking, I would kind of collapse in exhaustion and often fall asleep while cogitating this way. And that is where my first answers came, after sleep.

I would wake up with the answer I was looking for or something at least in the ballpark. It seems that the mind offers answers best when it is relaxed, because storming the castle with force got me nowhere. I had first to learn to relax.

The inner mind speaks, but very gently. It gives up its treasures only if we can make room for them in the busyness of our thinking, if we can let the white-noise of thought die down a little, if we can relax. The mind kind of percolates ideas to the surface, gradually, and as we will allow it.

This is why, as pointed out earlier, I eventually had to give up coffee. The caffeine sped up my mind and gave me energy, of course, but it also generated a kind of low-level static or white noise that prevented me from being aware of my own internal creativity. It just drowned it out.

I found this when I would try and write. The days when I would have my morning cup or two of Joe were barren ones for writing. Sure, I would turn out page after page, but when I read them the next day, they somehow lacked life and creativity. They were the product of caffeine-static, although at the time I thought I was getting somewhere. Wishful thinking. And that is how it began.

As a sidebar, I know I must sound like a teetotaler when I speak of giving up coffee. I did it willingly and there is a trail of things I gave up stretching back into my past. I wrote about all of my “addictions” here for those interested in a booklet called “The Loss of Substance: Stories and Notes on Addiction.”

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

It was at first through sleep that I could relax enough to allow the answers that were in my mind (and waiting for me) to emerge. If my mind was clear (unaltered by caffeine or whatever), those inner answers would just be there and waiting for me when I woke up. They would just pop to mind and I would be aware of them. It seems so obvious now.

However, it took me a long time to grasp that it was my own inability to relax and let the mind speak that was holding me back. It was like driving with a jerky clutch (for those old enough to remember manual clutches). I would kind of lurch forward by jerks and stops. I had little control over it because rather than let it come to me, I would always reach forward and try to “get” it. And that never worked.

Anyway this went on for many years, two steps forward, and one step back. I was getting the answers I wanted, but I did not exactly understand how. It was like rubbing my tummy and patting my head at the same time. It was not easy to do.

Yet I gradually stopped searching through books and began to unearth treasures in my mind. These included a number of astrological techniques that had never really been found before or, if known of, not understood or used.

At that time I was piecing together a patchwork quilt of ideas that I call “The World According to Michael.” It had a lot of holes in it. Somewhere in the early 1970s I began to formally learn to meditate and train the mind. I got with the program, as awful as that may sound, and the missing pieces began to be filled in. I learned how to properly open the mind to ideas. And the ideas poured in.

I could write a whole blog just on the original insights into astrology I was privileged to encounter. They would include techniques like Local Space, a relocation technique today that is

used by astrologers all over the globe, or Interface Planetary Nodes, the basic nodal structure of the solar system and how to interpret it, and the astrology of deep space. I wrote the first book on that, and so on. My heliocentric work is the heart of my contribution, and the list goes on and on. I hope you get the idea.

The takeaway here is that somehow each of us has to learn how to let the mind rest enough for the natural treasures of the mind to be revealed to us, the treasures that only we are able and meant to find. Does this make any sense?

TERMA: HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE MIND

October 7, 2012

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The Tibetan Buddhist tradition is rich in hidden teachings called “terma,” and those who can find these teachings are called “tertöns” – treasure finders. Terma are the original timed-release capsules, crucial dharma teachings that are secreted away and timed to be discovered just when we most need them. Terma are secreted or hidden by great beings, Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) being one of the chief terma producers. He is sometimes called the Second Buddha. These enlightened beings hide the terma in various ways and places for the world to find when they are actually needed, when we can really use the teachings. There are two main kinds of terma, earth treasures and mind treasures.

Earth treasures come in many forms, such as scrolls of texts, medicinal substances, sacred images, and even various kinds of ritual instruments. They can be found hidden under rocks and inside of rocks, underwater in lakes, in statues, and so on – anywhere there is anything to place them in or under.

And terma are not always complete or even intended to be complete. Often they are just fragments, enough to act as a catalyst for the tertön, the treasure finder, who then puts it all together and experiences the whole teaching in real-time. Terma can be likened to freeze-dried ingredients. Just add awareness and you get the whole thing just when you are supposed to.

Although the purpose of most terma is to bring these hidden teachings out to the world, this does not usually happen all at once. More often there is a long incubation period, sometimes years, during which the treasure finder absorbs the terma, experiences it, is changed by it, and achieves the realization for which the terma is intended. Only then does the tertön share this precious teaching with the rest of the world. Until that time, it is incubating.

There are tons of links on the Internet about terma, tertöns, and the history of all of this. I am not going to repeat that history here. You can find all you can read in a flash on Google. I am more interested in talking about ‘mind terma’, treasures hidden in the mind itself, rather than earth treasures, those hidden in caves, under rocks, and the like.

The mind is vast, and as deep as we care to know and go. Who knows how far the mind goes? I find it sad (sometimes) when I look around me and see almost everyone I know reading a book, looking for information on the Internet, and searching everywhere except where the purest information can be found, in the mind itself. Books can only tell us 'about' something. Here is my argument; please take time to follow it.

All words, all language, depends on what it means, on the sense it makes. Does it make sense? Sense is (and can only be) an experience you and I must have for ourselves in the flesh. Books, words like these, and all 'meaning' are only pointers, simple references (referrals) to the sense world, to the sense of it all, beckoning us to experience life for ourselves, as Hamlet so eloquently put it in his "To be or not to be" soliloquy, whether it is better to observe from the intellect or actually experience life with its "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." This is never more true than for the mind itself, which is virtually UNKNOWN to most of us.

Seemingly we have (as a society) lived in ignorance virtually forever, ignoring the single most obvious fact of our existence, our very own mind. We look out, but seldom do we look in. We don't know how because we have never learned how. It is that simple. I will spare you a full rant and move on to mind terma, but please take note of what I am pointing out here.

I am not an expert on the mind, far from it. I am a beginner, but because of the almost complete ignorance of this subject by the many, I am by default already in the 99th percentile when it comes to knowing the mind. Imagine how that makes me feel? I know that I know next to nothing about the mind, but most other people know even less, so here we are, with me writing about the mind. How ironic is that?

However, I feel this information is so important to learn that I have kind of ended up as a proponent of mind training. I would never have dreamed of this in a million years, because I totally avoided meditation of any kind for the best years of my life, only to discover almost too late that it was the keystone. Most people would rather read about knowing the mind than actually to learn to know the mind. You get the idea?

Tomorrow I would like to continue this blog with a discussion of mind terma, precious treasures hidden in the mind that anyone can learn to find, if we will but look. I find it interesting (at best) that we struggle to penetrate deep outer space, the depths of the ocean, the highest mountains, etc., declaring this or that to be the last frontier, when obviously the mind itself is the first and last frontier for all of us. We ignore the mind and our ignorance costs us dearly.

TERMA: MIND TREASURES (continued)

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We looked briefly at the Tibetan Buddhist concept of 'terma', physical and mental treasures

hidden in the earth and mind. Here I would like to look further into “mind terma,” treasures hidden in our own minds, and since I am not a dharma-treasure finder, I will confine myself to treasures (other than dharma teachings) that you and I can find in the mind and there are plenty to go around.

I must first repeat my mantra for all these mind-oriented blogs, which is “awareness, awareness, and more awareness.” If we don’t develop awareness, the mind will remain a blank for us in certain ways (as the Buddhists say) virtually forever. When it comes to awareness and deeper realization, it is all up to us. Not even the Buddha himself could do it for us, because the whole point of it is that we each have to become aware for ourselves, no matter how many lifetimes it takes. However, we can at least read it about it.

And read I have, far too much and for too long. I curate what is perhaps the largest astrological library on the planet, so at least I take my own medicine. I know for a fact that reading about something and doing it are two very different things. As my first dharma teacher always told me, we must become the book, not just read the book. So, how do we do this?

I already pointed out the need for greater awareness, so I am not going to go into how we develop that quality here. Instead, let’s look into using the mind as a treasure land, and I have nothing other than my own experience in this to share, so I will have to use that as an example, and astrology as the medium.

In the beginning there were astrology books. I read them and I read them. I learned to do charts and did what the books told me to do. I was looking for answers in the books and not in my mind. The mind for me at that time was the tool I used to examine everything else, my magnifying glass on life. I never thought to use my mind to look at itself.

And then, very gradually over a long period of time, my various attempts at meditation practices managed to free up at least a little more awareness. Ever so slowly I found myself turning away from looking always outward and I began to look into the mind itself, which had been waiting there for me. Until then I had never questioned the “tool” that I had been using all my life to look at life. I started looking into the ‘looker’, that which (or whom) was doing all of this looking and examining of everything else.

It had never occurred to me that the mind, like a pair of prescription glasses, could be focused, tuned and adjusted to see better and better, and that my own mental glasses might be dirty. When through increasing awareness of all this I actually did see better, I liked what I saw and the way I saw it. I liked seeing more clearly rather than not seeing clearly. I liked it a lot. What a surprise. I found out that the mind was workable and could be improved.

By this time I was learning to turn the mind away from just staring outward all the time, and to use it to look into itself, whatever that meant. What it meant for me was that looking inward did not require the hard focus I had learned looking outward, but just the reverse. It required that I let the mind naturally relax just as it is, which of course is easier said than done. Yes, I had to

look into the mind, but not through intensity, rather by allowing my mind to rest, which is a kind of oxymoron, like 'trying to relax'.

Meditation is the technique of trying to relax until the habit of how to relax is formed, and then we stop 'trying' and just let the mind relax. When we can let the mind rest, the mind treasures begin to appear, and they are the gift that keeps on giving. Beneath the surface of our everyday consciousness is a wealth of creativity bubbling up to our awareness. This is why I no longer use caffeine.

I doubt that anyone loves coffee more than I do, but I found that caffeine speeds me up and generates something like static white-noise that drowns out the subtle creative thoughts trying to emerge from deep within me. I value that creativity more than I do the rush and taste of coffee. It is as simple as that. Goodbye coffee, hello insights.

That is what natural detachment is all about, like the jettison of a booster rocket, letting go of what is no longer needed. It is effortless and painless. Giving things up is not supposed to be painful. We naturally let go of what is holding us back from where we want to be. As my first dharma teacher taught me, it is the difference between a Cling peach and a Freestone. With the Freestone, the pit just pops out naturally.