

HIDDEN TREASURES

Paul Levy

I've always loved finding hidden treasures, particularly when it feels like a wide-ranging co-incidence of factors have conspired behind the scenes to help me stumble upon them. The ecstasy and draw towards uncovering a hidden treasure feels like a deep, archetypal experience that is built into everyone's psyche. Discovering something precious, of great value, hidden in the phenomenal world can momentarily lift me out of my temporal, earth-bound self, making me feel connected to a deeper, more expansive, abundant, and multi-dimensional part of myself. The treasures I am referring to are not just super cool, one of a kind things that I find in thrift stores or garage sales, or a buried treasure hidden underground, but "spiritual" treasures: objects, events, teachings, and messages from the waking dream itself which reveal deeper orders of a previously hidden reality. Discovering sacred treasures in my life helps me feel in alignment with the universe and inspires me to further heights of lucidity. I treasure experiences where it feels like a timeless, higher-dimension of our being is synchronistically divulging itself through the medium of our third dimension. When these meta-physical treasures manifest, it reminds me that I am on my path, in the right place at the right time, right where I am supposed to be.

One day a couple of years ago I was offered a very special gift, as if a sacred treasure had spontaneously unfolded out of the dreamlike universe onto my very doorstep. I was walking back home in the rain with a friend, and yet the sun was out, and lo and behold, there was an amazing double rainbow right over my house. As we approached the house, there was a single beam of sunlight shining right into the one second story window. When we got closer, we noticed that leaning against the front door was a tube that someone had left for me to find. Before looking to see what was in the tube, we turned around to look at the rain, and split right down the middle of my house was the edge of the rain – on one side of the line it was not raining, and on the other side it was. It was as if nature itself was setting the stage, supplying the pomp and circumstance to create the necessary "atmosphere" for the discovery of what was inside the tube. When we got into my house, we were amazed to find that the tube contained a beautiful thangka (sacred scroll painting) of Green Tara.

Green Tara is a savior and liberator, a Buddha of enlightened activity who embodies compassion in action and protects from fear, danger and suffering. Catalyzed into lucidity through this dreamlike and synchronistic series of events, it was clear to me that the external, physical "appearance" of the thangka under the rainbow was a symbol reflecting what was happening meta-physically, in a higher-dimension of my being, deep inside of myself. The whole event felt truly numinous, and made me feel protected, loved, and even blessed. It was as if the universe itself wanted to remind me of its support by giving me a present, gift-wrapped with a

“bow,” to treasure. I was glad to have my friend there to share this experience with, so that when I would tell the story to others, I would have a witness to show that I wasn't just imagining or dreaming. Or maybe I was, in a deeper sense. There was no one who could convince either of us, however, that something really magical and meaningful had not just happened. An auspicious co-incidence of factors had synchronistically come together in the same moment to create a shared experience which had a very powerful effect on us. We were both speechless, overwhelmed with deep feelings of awe, gratitude, and reverence. I never found out who had offered the sacred gift. Sometimes I imagine that the holy work of art just materialized out of the void, which from one point of view it did.

TERMA

We all receive gifts in our lives, as life itself is a gift, and so are we. Discovering meaning-filled and inspiring spiritual treasures in our own personal life is an individualized iteration of a profound collective process in which liberating spiritual treasures unfold out of and into the field based on a synchronization and co-operation of a number of individuals and factors. Each one of us finding spiritual treasures in our lives is a reflection of a deeper process that is happening, both in the collective unconscious and in the world at large. The spiritual “power and influence” of these sacred treasures becomes magnified when people who value them come together to share in their wealth. Over the course of many centuries, the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism has developed a unique, extraordinary, and amazingly psycho-activating (i.e., activating the psyche) tradition called the “terma” (“hidden treasure”) tradition. The Tibetan terma tradition is a distinct approach to spiritual awakening which insures that the blessings of realization don't disappear, fade, nor become adulterated.

Discovering spiritual treasures is certainly not unique to Tibetan Buddhism; the revelation of spiritual treasures occurs in many spiritual traditions. But the terma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in particular, which has been deeply informed and inspired by the phenomenon of spiritual treasures manifesting into the third dimension, has remarkably mapped and uniquely articulated this archetypal process in a way that is revealing for all of us.

Termas are spiritual treasures that are “planted” in the radiant luminosity of [nonlocal](#) mind itself. Termas, as well as the clues for their discovery, are sometimes discovered outside in the physical world, and sometimes are found within the substance-less substance of mind itself. Though terma are ultimately reflections of, related to, and found within the vast expanse of nonlocal mind itself, they also sometimes externalize themselves in the seemingly outer world in the form of sacred objects and teachings. Terma are boundary collapsing, in that their very existence makes the distinction between the inner and outer very fuzzy and open for question. Terma reveals to us that we are living in a “twilight zone” (a Tibetan “bardo”), where the polarities of day (lucid consciousness) and night consciousness (the unconscious) are

indistinguishably turning into each other. Manifesting and imbued with living, enlightened presence, terma are the real priceless “gems” of the universe.

Termas are true miracles. The revelation of a terma is an atemporal, higher-dimensional process materializing itself in solid-seeming form into linear, historical time. Termas are a vehicle through which the enlightened sphere is able to insure the propagation of its realization with the utmost purity, as its “doctrine,” which is nothing other than the text of this living universe as a revelatory oracle of itself, continually re-freshes and re-vitalizes itself based on the circumstances of the moment. Termas are considered to be imbued with the warm, fresh, moist breath of realization itself, as they are a direct, unmediated crystallization of our own wakefulness taking on form. Termas are “lucidity stimulators,” as they are manifestations of the waking dream which literally catalyze our awakening, helping us to recognize the dreamlike nature of our situation. Like psychic alarm clocks secreted away in this waking dream of ours, waking us up at exactly the right moment, terma are like time-release vitamins that the universal dream-field organically secretes when needed. Just like different diseases need different medicines, the spiritual malady afflicting humanity today calls forth novel, embodied iterations of creative revelation to precipitate out of the field. Terma are like yeast which leaven the bread of realization. When we connect with a terma, it is as if a sleeping, unconscious part of ourselves awakens. Our spiritual inheritance, termas are like charms that break spells, or like keys that open locks (please see my article [“As Viewed, So Appears”](#)). Termas have the power to unlock the mind to its true, changeless nature. Inexhaustible by nature, termas will continue to manifest until samsara, the endless, suffering-filled cycle of death and rebirth, is empty of beings.

PADMASAMBHAVA

The Buddha himself prophesized that an even greater incarnation than himself would soon be born, a second Buddha, whose name would be PadmaSambhava, the Lotus Born. Spontaneously self-arisen during the ninth century in an innately pure physical body directly from the womb of origination itself, PadmaSambhava, who is considered to be the Buddha of this very age we live in, was the actual-ized figure who, besides founding Tibetan Buddhism, engineered and started the terma tradition for the benefit of future generations such as ourselves. Known as the tantric Buddha, he is the self-originated display and full-bodied incarnation of the nonlocal mind of enlightenment itself. The em-bodi-ment of the dynamic and atemporal process of spiritual realization in-form, PadmaSambhava was, and is, able to engage with this world in such a way so as to transcend time and be able to creatively conspire with us, in the present moment, in our own awakening. Having decoded the software of mind itself, PadmaSambhava mystically concealed sacred power objects (statues, images, ritual artifacts), healing, medicinal substances and liberating teachings throughout the many dimensions of this universe: in the earth, sky, water, and in his disciples’ dreams, visions, hearts, and minds. PadmaSambhava would then inspire his disciples and emanations to discover these terma centuries later, at exactly the right

moment in history when they were needed. Termas collapse time, as if in the lineage of its transmission there is no one between PadmaSambhava centuries ago and the one who discovers the terma in the present moment. Termas are PadmaSambhava's enduring legacy and activity in tangible form in our modern world. Termas are PadmaSambhava's deathless, rarefied, subtle body of realization taking on whatever form is needed in accord with the perception of beings so as to serve their liberation.

Termas are not make believe, like some sort of fairy tale—the terma tradition has been deeply studied and highly venerated by both scholars and practitioners alike (see [Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingma School of Buddhism](#) by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche). The well-known Tibetan Book of the Dead, a misnomer for the more accurately named, [The Great Liberation by Hearing](#) (in the “Intermediate State,” i.e., the “bardo”), is an example of a terma. It was composed and mystically concealed in a cave by its author PadmaSambhava, where it was “invisible” to anyone until it was discovered by Karma Lingpa in the fourteenth century. The moment of discovery was the moment when, in a synchronistic act of creation in time, the terma emerged into our third dimensional world. Like “Schroedinger's Cat” (a famous thought experiment in quantum physics which showed that the universe can't be said to exist in a “particular” form until there is an observer to experience it), terma are a quantum phenomenon, not taking on definitive and incarnate form until its moment of revelation. Being a terma, the “voice” of PadmaSambhava comes through the text and is, in essence, reminding us to recognize right now that everything we are experiencing is our own thought-form, our own projected energy, our own mind appearing to us in seemingly full-bodied, reflected form, which is to say that our experience is very similar to a dream.

A key to the innermost recesses of the human mind, [The Great Liberation by Hearing](#) is not merely pointing out the dreamlike nature of our situation, it itself is a manifestation of the dream at which it is pointing. [The Great Liberation by Hearing](#) is reminding us that we are dreaming up its words, which are the projection of our mind, to appear before us so as to awaken us. According to [The Great Liberation by Hearing](#), making any connection with it in any way, even simply hearing the “sound” of its words, initiates within us a process which ultimately results in liberation, hence the title. This is why [The Great Liberation by Hearing](#) says of itself, “To meet with this is great good fortune.” The words of the terma are an atemporal echo of the awakened aspect of ourselves, as if the part of us that's already liberated sends a care package to catalyze our awakening.

The real treasure, of which terma are unmediated emanations, is the unsullied, pure nature of the mind, our Buddha nature, which is ultimately found within us. The pure, indestructible, and unchangeable nature of our mind is not acquired or produced, but rather, like a form of terma, uncovered. Seen symbolically, the discovery of terma is a reflection of the inner process of remembering and discovering who we are.

TERTON

The person who is destined to find the terma, the “terton,” or “treasure-revealer,” is a key piece in its revelation. According to the terma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, the figure of the terton has, in a past life, been commissioned and empowered by PadmaSambhava himself to re-collect, re-member and reveal the sacred treasure at the very moment when it is most needed. The power of PadmaSambhava’s prophecy and intention combined with the aspirational wish, sustained over numerous lifetimes, of the terton to discover the treasure for the benefit of all beings, results in the auspicious coincidence of factors whose fruition is the revelation of the terma. The terton discovers the terma when they are able to re-access the pristine state of radiant light which they were in when they received their appointment from PadmaSambhava. Sometimes the main purpose of the terton’s life is the discovery of the terma, which is sealed in the memory code of the terton’s spiritual DNA.

Sometimes an intuition in the terton’s mind will help him or her find the terma in the form of an object or a text in the outer world, and other times, an object in the world will stimulate the discovery of a terma that was hidden inside the terton’s mind. The terton sometimes will just experience a written syllable, or a sound, whether in physical form or in visionary imagination, which will serve as a support and catalyst, a mnemonic cue, to trigger and shake forth the memory of the hidden treasure, which was stored in the limitless expanse of the pure, essential nature of the awareness state of the terton’s mind. The clue for the discovery of the terma, be it a single letter, syllable, sound, or some other means, will materialize in the same form in which it was concealed and encoded in the terton’s mind-stream.

Sometimes the terma will be found in the outer, physical world inside of a seamlessly sealed receptacle, or casket. This container is usually the first thing found when the concealment place of a terma opens. Inside this casket, which is like a hyper-dimensional time-capsule, the terma is being held and protected, as if it is a living being. At the moment of revelation, this casket spontaneously opens and typically reveals a scroll of paper. Written on this scroll is “symbolic script,” sometimes mysteriously changing like in a dream, which, miraculously, only the terton can decode. This symbolic script is the key to awakening the mind of the terton to the words, meanings and realization of the terma. Sometimes one letter, syllable, word, or phrase will catalyze the terton to remember and channel a terma that might consist of multiple volumes of teachings. From the dreaming point of view, it is as if the field has dreamed up a hint to activate the re-remembering of what was known long ago. This is a reflection of a process that happens within ourselves.

Termas are both messengers and messages from the other side of the veil, skillful means that are “federally expressed” from the enlightened realm intended for our liberation. They are a novel form of language, and hence, one of the roles of a terton is to translate the terma in a way that can be received by others. If a teaching is involved in the terma, sometimes the terton has to

practice the teaching themselves in order to generate the power of accomplishment and blessings contained within the terma, so as to be able to transmit it to others. They then can disseminate the terma in a way that embodies its living form and carries its timeless truth onwards and outwards as a sacred signal into the furthest reaches of the nonlocal universe. The terton is a mediator, medium, and transmitter of these treasures, as if the terton is dreamed up by the field to bring forth and birth the treasure into our world.

Bringing a realized figure of the past back to life, the revelation of a terma is a form of ventriloquation, as if something that is realized in the past is retrieved from its crypt and is uttered again through the voice of another. In the revelation of a terma the sacred words and liberating speech of the timeless, primordial Buddhas becomes spoken in the present moment. When the universe speaks, its voice is always authentic. All genuine expressions of truth originate and come straight from the ultimate source, the primordial awakened state, which is always and ever present. In the revelation of terma, it is as if a former self transmits its timeless realization through the medium of time so as to wake up a future self. Or we could just as easily say an awakened future self sends a beacon of lucidity back in time so as to awaken a past self. Collapsing our idea of time itself, terma puts a whole different “spin” on time, activating a “r-evolution” of the mind. Terma reveals that past and future selves are not separate, as both only really exist right now, in the present moment. We are not a being that only exists bound in time, but rather, we exist over, through-out, and outside of time as well. Both the terton (through his or her successive incarnations), the terma (through its ever-new renditions), and ourselves as well, have a continuing existence over multiple generations, and hence, can only be seen and appreciated when we perceive our world from a more cosmic, eternal perspective which is outside of the viewpoint of linear time. Because of the way they reconfigure our experience of and relationship to time, among other things, the existence of terma sheds an illuminating light on the nature of who we are.

Termas are a genuinely “mind-blowing” experience to contemplate, in that they explode the limitations of the conceptual mind. Conventional logic can’t comprehend the existence of terma, because during their revelation the relative circumstances of the underlying fabric of space/time becomes very flexible and elastic. We can’t recognize nor relate with terma if we are still in our egoic mind, thinking we exist as discrete entities who are separate from the universe and bound in linear time. We can’t possibly see a terma if we think the world objectively exists outside of us, in solid form, and isn’t related to us. We can’t appreciate terma if we don’t recognize the reflective nature of the world, which is the very thing which terma is revealing to us.

The discovery of terma is a revelation of a novel, spiritually-enhancing form of life emerging into our world. Termas are a new life-form, and they, like us, appreciate appreciation. As termas are appreciated, they appreciate in value,

which is to say that their grace waves increase. Due to their blessing power, termas make a powerful, positive imprint upon anyone who connects with them. A collective, unifying field that is potentiated for awakening gets conjured up around a terma. Termas are a uniquely awe-inspiring phenomenon that are truly worthy of our most devoted contemplation and veneration.

Terma will sometimes be miraculously taken out from rocks, the earth, or from bodies of water by the tertön. The tertön might feel inspired by a dream or vision to go to a certain mountain, for example, and upon arriving at the place, a rock might spontaneously fall down from the mountain side, revealing the presence of a terma which had been hidden by the rock. The terma might include the aforementioned casket with enclosed symbolic script, ritual objects, statues, sacred images, rosaries, etc. Or sometimes the door of a concealment in a rock will open spontaneously upon the arrival of the tertön, revealing the terma, which oftentimes is hot to the touch, as if it is “hot off the press.” Sometimes the tertön will climb up natural steps in the mountain side to retrieve the terma, and after he or she comes back down, the steps magically disappear. Other times, as if having psychic x-ray vision, the tertön will feel intuitively drawn to a certain part of the mountain side, and will use hammer and chisel to dig out the terma. The fact that termas are being found inside the womb of the earth shows that the biosphere – life itself – is spontaneously self-generating and coming to our aid in awakening us. The universe is literally a treasure trove birthing at the seams.

At other times the terma is magically brought to the tertön, or will spontaneously materialize on the tertön’s shrine, for example, if the specific blessed object is needed for a particular ritual. If the terma somehow becomes separated from the tertön, the terma has a dreamlike way of getting back to the person to whom it belongs, who is the only one who can rightfully possess it. These sacred objects are not made of any material that has ever been found or known of before in our physical universe. The “stuff” that terma is made of is “not of this world.”

COLLECTIVE DREAMING

Termas are an expression of our collective dreaming, and as such, can be more fully entered into when we recognize that we are all interconnected, and are collaboratively dreaming a mass, shared dream into materialization. Involving the participation of more than a single, isolated individual, the discovery of terma is a field phenomenon, which is to say that in a true joint venture, all parts of the field interdependently collaborate in its revelation. The terma, the tertön, and the fortunate community of people who will benefit from the revelation of the terma, as well as the awakened mind of which the terma is an emanation, all exist in an interconnected web, the recognition of which expands our idea of who we are. This reciprocally co-arising, interdependent, and self-sustaining web is a living symbol and revelation of the inherent

wholeness embedded in the creativity of mutual dreaming – we are dreaming up the universe while at the same time being created by the universe. We are a co-operative venture.

The terma that is materializing itself is a function and expression of the field, as terma are condensations into and out of the field so as to keep the underlying, unified field in balance. The group consciousness of the individuals that comprise the field conjures up a collective karma, which determines the content and form of the terma, similar to how a symbol in a dream is a reflection, expression and compensation of the dreamer, only in this case there are multiple dreamers. This is evidenced in parts of Tibet and Nepal, where communities of people who have genuine belief and devotion towards a particular form of the divine, say the goddess Tara for example, will dream up and discover rock formations where clear images of Tara are materializing in the rock itself. A spontaneous manifestation and creation of nature, these are not forms that are cut into the rock, but forms that are emerging and arising out of the rock itself. These self-created images of Tara carry information which symbolize, re-present, and activate the realization of an atemporal, higher-order of reality within ourselves. These rock-solid images are fully informed revelations of the power of group thought-forms imbued with intention, of the ability of collective dreaming to literally change the world. If this collective field is filled with compassion, virtue, spiritual merit, and lucidity, we then attract and are contributing to the birth and revelation of the terma, for these hidden treasures are the fruition of an evolving, awakening consciousness compassionately reflecting upon itself.

The revelation of a terma involves the auspicious co-incidence and unfoldment of a number of precisely linked events which have to line up in an unerring sequence. When the time is “right” for the terma’s revelation, events in the world magically configure and arrange themselves so as to participate in and support the birth and discovery of the terma. The revelation of a terma can be blocked by obstructing forces with seemingly negative intentions, however, which can serve to further illumine the archetypal nature of what we are dealing with. Obscuring forces are intimately co-related to and only become activated when there is something potentially illuminating about to happen. Sometimes termas will disappear like camphor if they can’t be discovered “in time,” dissolving back into the emptiness from which they arose.

Terma are archaeological artifacts of the awakened mind itself. There’s only terma if there’s a potential knower of terma. Unveiling the revelatory function inherent in the fabric of reality, terma doesn’t fundamentally exist separate from our own awakened consciousness. We begin to receive the beneficial effects from terma simply by considering and contemplating that terma exist, a perspective which instantaneously expands our consciousness. Realizing that the discovery of terma is not a fabricated fantasy of an overly-indulgent imagination, but is a real phenomenon, transforms our world into a place that is filled with magic beyond belief. The very existence of terma in our universe is like a mirror revealing the dreamlike nature of the universe. Terma,

when reflected upon, are reflections of how we are always dreaming up our world. Termas themselves are composed of the stuff of which dreams are made.

COMPASSION

Termas are a manifestation of what in Buddhism is called “interdependent co-origination,” which means that no part of the universe has an independent existence “on its own,” separate from the rest of the universe; rather, everything is interconnected and depends for its existence upon everything else. Transcendent to linear causality, interdependent co-origination is an expression that all of the seemingly separate parts of the universe reciprocally co-arise as a singular, indivisible, radically interconnected whole. Termas are living symbols which express, embody, and reveal the interdependently co-originating universe that we live in. The phenomenon of terma themselves reflect back to us our own creative partnership with the genius of the universe.

Termas are ultimately relational in nature, as they are part of a living continuum that is meant to be expressed and passed on to others in a “transaction of transmission.” What the tertön receives in his or her discovery of terma needs to be shared with others for the terma to fully unlock its nonlocal benefit and blessing. The tertön sometimes needs to keep his or her revelation secret, however, before it is the “right” time to share it with others. The necessary secrecy protects the newly discovered terma from obstacles, dispels negative forces, and prepares the auspicious circumstances for the terma’s revelation to others. Matters such as these can’t be forced nor rushed. Timing is art.

Terma are manifestations of our reciprocal, interconnected dreaming, while at the same time stimulating its realization. The co-operative sharing and spreading of a terma ultimately reveals to us our interdependence – we are all co-creating and dreaming up our world together. The natural radiance of this realization is compassion. Termas themselves are a manifestation of the underlying compassion of the universe. In a self-generating feedback loop which gives birth to itself, compassion feeds the underlying matrix that in-forms and gives birth to terma, which invariably express and transmit compassion, ad infinitum. Another way of saying the same thing: Compassion is the culture which cultivates the treasures of the universe to offer themselves in service.

The essential and ultimate meaning of every terma is to continually cultivate the heart of compassion, as compassion is the voice and pure, high-octane, unleaded fuel of awakening. The natural expression of lucidity, compassion is simultaneously the cause and effect of seeing through the primal boundary of self and other and becoming lucid in our shared, waking dream. Like every terma invariably re-minds us,

the best way to invest in our own awakening, as well as the awakening of the planet, is to generate compassion, which is the greatest treasure of all.

For information and teachings related to the terma tradition, please visit padmasambhava.org.

A long-time Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, Paul Levy is a pioneer in the field of spiritual emergence. Paul is a healer in private practice, assisting others who are also awakening to the dreamlike nature of reality. He is also an author, visionary artist and a spiritually-informed political activist. Please visit his website at www.awakeninthedream.com. Feel free to pass this article along to a friend if you feel so inspired. You can contact Paul at paul@awakeninthedream.com; he looks forward to your reflections. Though he reads every email, he regrets that he is not able to personally respond to all of them. © Copyright 2010.