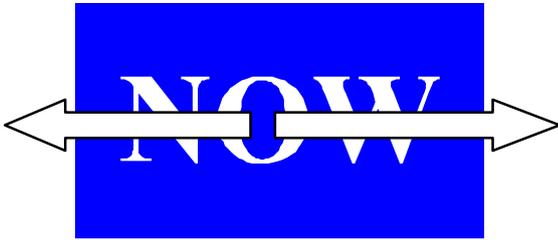


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**Harding Meetings: Monthly, usually on the first Saturday of the month.**

**Next meeting Saturday 5th May 2012 at 10am**

Editor's note,

From time to time I come across a lengthy article which doesn't fit into the standard NOWletter format of relatively brief comments and notes by readers. This NOWletter is an example; it is an essay from Mal Mitchell whose last NOWletter appearance was my review of his book *The Hog's Wholely Wash*. <http://www.capacitie.org/now/Now153.pdf>

In his essay Mal presents a compelling case for the futility of addressing our problems of crazy consumption, environmental destruction and inequality unless we develop a deep experiential, as opposed to a merely conceptual, awareness of the wholeness of life.

*"First, last and on some ongoing basis, there is a need for the growth, the unfolding, of whatever breeds increasingly clear consciousness – including awareness of oneself as an integrally related part of one's entire phenomenal environment".*

Mal illustrates his case by drawing on the example of Madagascar, a country in which he is directly involved as a result of his work with Azafady, an organization established to holistically tackle poverty, suffering and environmental damage in Madagascar.

Reading the essay I was somewhat chastened to realize how far I fall short of what is required. Margot and I met Mal in the café crypt of St Martin's on our last visit to London and were greatly impressed by someone who clearly practices what he preaches.

**<http://www.madagascar.co.uk/>**

I have a number of outstanding contributions from readers for which I thank you and which will be included in a more traditional issue.

*Alan*

**"URGES IN THE WORLD-WEAVE" -**  
**ON INTEGRATING OR DISINTEGRATING THE 'PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL', ECOLOGICAL &**  
**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**  
*... FEATURING MADAGASCAR*

*"... the world needs a global ethic with values which give meaning to life experiences and, more than religious institutions and dogmas, sustain the non-material dimension of humanity...."*      Wangari Maathai

\*

*"Moralizing is ineffective; sermons seldom hinder us from pursuing our self-interest as we construe it. Hence the need to be a little more enlightened about what our self-interest is."*      Joanna Macy

Protests like today's Occupy Movement challenge conventional western models of development. High-level UN panels on global justice and sustainability prescribe all manner of practical moves towards healthier global function. But do western societies, collectively, have the mentality and inner drive to really pursue things in a different way? We see 'menus' on the table, foodstuffs available, cooks at the ready – but is anyone actually going to buy a new kind of meal? Especially when so many old favourites appear to be on cheap offer...

The cheap offer, the easy option, is typically related to something costlier and harder elsewhere – elsewhere in place, time, people, species, whatever – typically out of

sight, and thus out of mind. The tougher options for people in poorer countries, including those so impoverished that survival is the everyday challenge, are paralleled by the prospects for life on Earth as a whole.

So what all in all could we do with being more mindful of?

We could begin with the simple fact that we have our blindspots. Looking at basic human traits, our histories and current world affairs, we can start to identify key dynamics in subtler realms, in light of which critical global as well as personal issues might be approached more holistically and effectively.

### **Environment, Development, Consciousness**

The world's most biologically rich countries are amongst its economically poorest, and long-term environmental stewardship in them is increasingly being recognised as dependent on appropriate levels of socio-economic development. It is less recognised, though, how such work depends critically on psychological and 'spiritual' factors. In a country such as Madagascar, say, physical conservation and development alone are insufficient to assure the success of either.

Species-rich but finance-poor countries have some status as global conservation priorities; this, pollution-related health issues and the evident human hand in climate change are among factors in recent years helping bring the relationship between environment and development more into focus. The links between dynamics in these areas and what gets described as in areas of psychology, therapy, religion, mysticism, self-development, personal growth, inner work, etc., need urgently to be brought in some radical way into the picture. Current views and visions on the nature of global development and environmental problems are for the most part framed in purely materialistic terms. The appreciation that development cannot be sustained without environmental sensitivity and that a healthy environment (for humans) cannot be assured without local development is a crucial step, but only goes so far. It needs to be further appreciated how before, besides and beyond physical practicalities, positive moves for development and environment critically require positive spirits, positive mentalities, and thus what culturally and psychologically support these. Environmental work won't be effective in the long-term without being taken forward by local people – and, in extremely impoverished places, local

people have less capacity to do that for lack of socio-economic development. Without due motivation among locals to participate and take initiatives forward themselves, environmental and development interventions will sooner or later founder. Junctions between optimism and realism can point the way forward. First, last and on some ongoing basis, there is a need for the growth, the unfolding, of whatever breeds increasingly clear consciousness – including awareness of oneself as an integrally related part of one's entire phenomenal environment.

This is the 'gap' most prevalent in contemporary conceptions and actions of groups specifically working on environmental and development challenges – the lack of due focus on dynamics in and around the human psyche. Any such focus among such groups tends to be casual, jocular, habit-related or vague – essentially automatic, associative occurrences; a kind of psychological sweating. With references to 'Freudian slips,' 'doing a [TV hypnotist]', etc., it is incidental rather than central. If such activity becomes systematic at all, it tends to be hijacked by – forced into the service of – emotional needs, appropriated to bolster feelings of security, social acceptance, current religious beliefs, and so on. Interpersonal observations are typically partial, and become part of everyday control systems – as with cogs of camaraderie; oils of flattery; judicious denigrations Sound a bit misanthropic? Or 'normal' life in the office and in the field?

Work for humanitarian aid, socio-economic development, species preservation or environmental protection may be scuppered at any point – of conception, implementation or maintenance – through lack of apt attention to everyday psychological, or 'subtle causal', factors. Egoism, for example, whether group egoism or that of key individuals, can derail an organisation's best efforts. Groups working to compatible ends are often competing for recognition or resources, and the potential for coordination between them may be undermined by those more interested in self-protection or self-promotion and glory. Such self-importance and myopic self-interest is no rare pathology. Some, perhaps, may be so in bed with their corporate sponsors as to be loyally disinclined to network too seriously with other groups. Charismatic founders and heads of organisations may find it difficult sharing limelight, and lack passion for 'babies' or 'train sets' other than their own. Considering the cliquy inclinations, the bullying and bitching, the information management freakery and power games typical of human groupings, can an organisation operate with more maturity

than that of the key power holders within it? How self-aware, how healthily self-critically reflective, can it be if its 'drivers' lack awareness of their own motivational drivers, of the particular factors conditioning their driving styles?

Slow to learn, dimly self-reflective as today's industrial and institutional dinosaurs may be, their righteous critics can demonstrate many subtle hypocrisies. Within charities, NGOs, campaigning bodies and development agencies of every kind, all human traits are somehow at play, whether observed or otherwise for their dynamics and ramifications, for their contributions or hindrances to creative, effective group functioning. In western societies at large, presumptions abound that action, expertise or knowledge in particular areas is more important than in others, and with this is a pervasive lack of depthful appreciation of different kinds of intelligence, human and non-human. For short-sightedness, then, we may not only miss benefits of networking with others in our field, but we may also pay scant attention to learnings in different areas which have crucial applicability.

Working for poorer countries' aid, development, environments and their variously endangered species are by nature uphill struggles – going against the grain, and trying to clear up some of the messes, of western industrial-consumerist 'progress'. Individuals often work in these fields under great strains, and for little thanks and little or no pay. They do so typically because they strongly feel for and believe in the causes they are working for, and in doing so may be sustained by the gratification of doing something that feels *right* – feels just, sane or urgently necessary. This reinforced through social feedback, the self-righteousness that can be fostered might be so consuming as to render individuals or groups effectively less amenable to cooperation with others, perhaps more inclined to act and less to learn, in a kind of romantic isolationism. This separation or aloofness, if consciously perceived at all, may be construed as harmless, as an affordable luxury, or as some fully deserved distinction. Yet the lack of coordination between individuals or groups could mean the direct mitigation of developmental and environmental objectives. To succeed, to be sustained in the long- and broader-term, such work depends on psychology and (in the most non-sectarian sense of the word) spirituality – on the quality of the sensibilities and motivations of individuals and interactive groups. Though this is not to say that what might be regarded as good results couldn't come of the ill-motivated, badly

designed or poorly implemented, essentially *Developmental* and *Environmental* objectives need to be partnered with those of *Consciousness*, somehow linked into pursuit of an ongoing realisation of the character, mechanisms and driving forces of consciousness. Put more specifically, environmental stewardship and global development need to be approached **with** and **as part of** 'conscious evolution' – of the wildfire, organic process and craft of the development of awareness itself.

Psychology and spirituality come sensitively and pivotally into development and environment operations on the ground in working with or around local beliefs and values. It is critical to work from a sound understanding of the various traditions of the peoples being worked with, and at the least an essential respect for the people themselves. While some indigenous cultures seem so socially and ecologically harmonious, certain traditions would seem to directly stand in the way of or indirectly hinder sustainable development, or to be somehow ethically unsound. Working 'around' local beliefs and values could at worst mean operating despite or even against these. This is of course a very tricky and dangerous – not to mention contentious – thing to suggest, and certainly borders on the kind of patronising, disconnected, we-know-better-than-you-what's-good-for-you kind of attitude that can be so repugnant to local people as well as outside observers. Yet if a traditional method of collecting a hive's worth of wild honey could well entail the accidental burning of many hectares of forest, say, (through smoking out the bees) – as it might in Madagascar – it could be hard not to want to encourage the traditional honey-gatherers to construct beehives. There is a subtle, all-important difference between approaching people in such circumstances in a patronising way and approaching them non-egotistically, recognising peoples' essential equalities in terms of deeper intelligence and motivation. No-one is born with an innate cautiousness about local values, beliefs and ways of doing things. On the contrary, we are all born into these as part of our immediate security, knowledge-base, support, home. One may look down on the notions and practices of what appears a 'more primitive' culture, without appreciating how one's having more knowledge than another may not mean having more understanding; having more intelligence (in the sense of a range of reliable incoming data) may not mean having more wisdom.

## The Heritage of Tales

Whilst it's clear that conservation and development initiatives need to work with respect for and the support of local people, from an ecological or animal welfare perspective, it could in certain cases seem *vital* to work against some traditions.

The demands of Traditional Chinese Medicine, for example, have driven many species to the brink of extinction, not to mention wreaked untold suffering on tigers, rhinos and bears, to name just a few. But take Madagascar's aye-aye – an increasingly endangered species unique to the island, last of its particular biological family (one of the five lemur groups). Malagasy tradition, in some localities in Madagascar, is that the aye-aye is a manifestation of the Devil or presager of evil and must be killed on sight. Other localities on the island hold the diametrically opposed view that the aye-aye is a good omen and should be treated with special respect. Generally less extreme differences go for other lemur species in Madagascar. If this seems at all gratuitous or absurd, though, it is surely in essence no different to dichotomies of attitudes in other cultures. The British, for instance, might give a poodle a coiffure yet condemn a pig to exist in appalling conditions and be slaughtered for human consumption – when from studies of 'intelligence,' pigs generally score higher (by humans' criteria) than dogs; evidently in many ways a more sensitive species, they may well be more self-aware. Malagasy *fadys* (taboos) may seem arbitrary to westerners, much as westerners' traditional taboos may appear to those looking with fresh sight.

A profoundly tradition-respecting and specifically ancestor-worshipping people, the Malagasy have local diviners and healers including the *ombiasy* who can hold considerable sway over local opinions and convictions, and hence over actions and ecological impacts. If the local people believe that for their ancestors something – such as an area of forest, or a particular species – is sacred, it will be safe from exploitation. The ancestors, however, are taken as amenable to supplications through the local spiritual intermediaries, as for contingent modifications to their decrees. Though it might require a ritually elaborate process, suitably answering energies at different depths of being, essentially the sacred may become game, and vice versa. The combined dictates and pronouncements of all the community patriarchs, ombiasy and other opinion leaders on the island could literally mean the thriving or extinction of a species, with whatever knock-

on ecological instabilities that could give rise to. With the potential for dramatic consequences through collective agreement among traditional authorities in Madagascar, the aye-aye and other endangered species could to some degree be safeguarded. To this end, community status might be measured more in terms of its local wildlife. For a family in Madagascar today, social status is traditionally measured in terms of possession of zebu (cattle), and there is certainly no shortage of this species on the island. Traditional opinion leaders like ombiasy could recommend contraception, say – which potentially could combine with other factors to have a significant impact on the population growth rate (currently extremely steep).

These are essentially questions of the potential for cultural shift – the psychological factors and possible synergies which could effect that. Altogether the leverage which the ombiasy and others in such socio-religious roles have in Malagasy culture might be compared to that which priests, popstars, sports-stars or TV personalities have in the West, be it through suggestion, persuasion, or what effectively amounts to group hypnotism.

In Britain, for one, many people's attitudes towards a variety of issues can be significantly influenced by those of celebrities, even the attitudes of fictional characters expressed within the format of movies, soap operas, etc., themselves. Over the last few years there has been an explosion of coverage of global warming, arguably as much eclipsing as helping bring to light other environmental issues. Apart from global warming, currently not a lot is actually said about environmental issues in soaps or movies, not a lot is the focus in newspapers, discussions in pubs, etc. What are the dynamics of suggestion, persuasion, hypnotism, 'conversion', that might be significant here, in the shaping or re-shaping of conventional viewpoints? How might people be, as a journalist might say, 'hooked' into the real issues? Could a sensitively designed subterfuge be used, geared to work against the habitual grains, to avoid automatic responses, to penetrate deeper and act for positive social and ecological impact? How might such a thing work, what might direct and indirect manipulations be able to achieve? What yarn, in any given situation, might it be possible to spin around people? Such questions as these the likes of advertisers, politicians and cult leaders may ask themselves regularly, in one form or another. *But what might not be ethical?!* And at first base functionally, how could one contrive to have such authority as would generate the kind of respect reserved for a society's particular

‘priesthood’? Is it essentially about complying with the rules of a given society’s most serious games?

Authority everywhere basically grows upon soundly based respect, upon ignorance and fear, or on some mixture of these. We generally have a strong penchant to follow leaders, authorities – from the more apparently well-conditioned and domesticated to the feral atheist and anarchist. Colonialism commonly has its ideological counterparts, whether as whitewash for economic interests or as genuine ideological imperialism. Christian missionaries have had a major impact around the world; they made a big impact in Madagascar, and the country today is described as about 50% Christian and 50% traditional in religious persuasion, many adopting some blend of both. One beneficial side of these missionaries’ legacy is often seen in terms of bringing western schooling systems; yet how far has their ‘education’ been insensitive to local realities, and less than holistic in the skills and sensibilities it nurtures? How far today might it generate false hopes, nurture false identity, or point towards less sustainable, less holistic forms of development? Would there be a better impact from some kind of non-sexist, non-sectarian radically humanitarian eco-missionaries – or is the whole missionary-type mentality fundamentally flawed? What we think, whose word we accept on an issue, whose lead we follow, which story we buy into, depends on and impacts on a multitude of factors.

In trying to see the underpinnings of the likes of nationalism, tribalism, racism, sexism and sexualityism, not to mention species-ism, in any given culture, a fundamental place to start looking is people’s story base. Stories are the conserve of culture. Very much at a culture’s bedrock, the models within stories variously reflect and inform a society’s belief systems and moral values, forming feedback loops with everyday action; insofar as they are a product of an imbalanced viewpoint, a less than holistic kind of take on things, so far will they tend to reinforce these. Supporting bases of more sustainable livelihoods in a given culture must at some point include the telling of new stories; tales with all due turns to go further, broader, deeper in reflecting the facts – to take the listener to fuller appreciation of different realities’ relationships. Like our personal histories, our world history itself forms a ‘story’. Much as in a therapeutic context where a healing process may be stalled until we can see ourselves in a fundamentally different story and engage with a

new plot in our lives, our world history forms a story in which we might see ourselves as urgently needing to change gear.

Physical poverty drives deforestation and other forms of environmental destruction much as inner poverty, emotional-spiritual dearth, drives rampant consumer activity. Both slash-and-burn agriculture and industrially-fuelled consumerism can be seen as unsustainable cultures, poles of a 'cult' of blinkered human dominion. At one pole you might see the likes of an impoverished villager peddling one of Madagascar's critically endangered tortoises for a matter of cents; at the other pole you might see the creature sold in the USA for thousands of dollars. The human story across the planet today sees a rising tide of trade in species approaching extinction – besides increasing inequalities within the human species.

### **Global Grand Felony & Internal Neuro-war**

There are many historical factors in why the world's humanly poorest places, including those biologically rich, are so impoverished. International social evolution as a whole is such that, following slavery and colonialism's gross exploitations of people and resources, we have the development of political and economic structures and relationships which variously maintain inequalities.

As a long-isolated tropical island, Madagascar supports an order – in some respects orders – of magnitude more biological diversity and endemism than, say, the British Isles. Most (a reckoned 80% or so) of Madagascar's plant and animal species are unique to it. The loss of a hectare of natural habitat for flora and fauna on that island is a far greater blow to global biodiversity than the loss of a hectare virtually anywhere in the UK's green and pleasant lands.

Britain has gained much in physical comforts and conveniences over the centuries, in part at the cost of its originally extensive forest cover. It has lost some 95% of its native forests but has enjoyed much in terms of developments parallel to that loss, such as good housing, health and education infrastructure and recreational luxuries; the sustainability of what it enjoys is another question.

Madagascar in comparison has lost arguably as much as 90% of its original forest cover but has next to nothing to physically show for it. A major and complex factor in this

glaring distinction between the two islands, besides biological diversity and endemism, is colonialism. Madagascar was a French colony between 1896 and 1960. During this period much primary rainforest fell to timber extraction and cash cropping, though the chief pressure on the forests was and still is slash-and-burn clearance for subsistence crops. Madagascar's species-rich forests have already afforded effective treatments for two of the West's deadliest forms of cancer: childhood leukaemia and Hodgkin's disease. Chemicals in Madagascar's Rosy Periwinkle are the source of drugs from which Western pharmaceutical giants gain millions of dollars in profits every year. The Malagasy people are left short, meanwhile, of even safe drinking water or basic healthcare, and mortality rates are horrific. Such biopiracy is obscene and, for humans as a species, suicidally pathological.

The 'greatness' of Britain, France and other European countries has been in many respects built on the exploitation of countries like Madagascar which, with other African nations and countries in Asia and Latin America, mostly remain impoverished today. The development of the rich countries, with all their physical health gains and material benefits, has depended fundamentally on underdevelopment elsewhere. Whether brutally and directly or cunningly and otherwise, Britain et al have stolen and 'requisitioned' natural resources from other people's homelands - resources including human beings themselves.

Among England's slave ships were those transporting Malagasy children, women and men as 'cargo' to Barbados. The Brits, over half a century after the Twentieth Century's "World War II", still care to vauntingly single out Nazi Germany, even though Britain in its history has countenanced so many atrocities, as has Napoleonic France, the Roman Empire, and so many other regimes. Amongst recent US administrations have been those notable for strategies to control world food supplies (eg. through the GM industry) and fuel supplies (eg. through the oil industry), if not to control the world's ideology. Consider the pursuit of the PNAC (Project for the New American Century) within the Bush administration, and the 'darker side' of US foreign interventions going back way before Star Wars. Observed in terms of attempts at imperialistic domination, whether militarily or economically, our national identities give most of us in 'civilised societies' more in common with followers of Attila the Hun than in distinction. Altogether

***"...most civilized societies have been collectively far crazier than their craziest members. The proverbial lunatic is deemed mad because he play-acts at being***

***Napoleon. But Napoleon himself really was Napoleon and an entire society endorsed his megalomania and followed him on his mad, murderous escapades across the face of Europe.”***

*(Theodore Roszak). Roszak speaks in his Unfinished Animal of such “collective insanities”. Apart from the obvious injustice of the exploitation of peoples, the plundering and decimation of the natural world that socio-economic exploitation exacerbates should certainly be considered as collective craziness. Roszak makes a point especially worth pondering in light of notions of a ‘collective unconscious’, as in a Jungian sense: **“To enter the deep psyche is to enter an intimate battleground where the future of our society is being contested.”** Towards grounding that in contemporary ‘scientific’ terms, take Norman Doidge’s point in *The Brain That Changes Itself* about neuroplasticity – the plasticity of our brains:*

***“The competitive nature of plasticity affects us all. There is an endless war of nerves going on in each of our brains. If we stop exercising our mental skills, we do not just forget them: the brain map space for those skills is turned over to the skills we practice instead.”***

Doidge starkly presents the battle within our very brains for neurological mapping space – the competition for neural resources. This can be seen in parallel with what Wangari Maathai stresses regarding humans’ general competition for natural resources. Maathai’s warning of escalating global conflict over resources can be taken both metaphorically and literally alongside Doidge’s emphasis that we can consciously orient our brains’ capacities to change themselves:

***“When resources are degraded or become scarce, people compete over them – and that usually ends in conflict. The problems of poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict are totally intertwined.”*** (Wangari Maathai)

Epics of oppression, abuse and theft span human if not biological history. Yet how quickly the ‘winners’ forget – British genocidal activities in Australia, say. How well the powerful can hide and get away with things – as in recent years with Britain’s expulsion of the Chagos Islanders. For the general patterns of things, how much do westerners (or ‘northerners’) feel any inner (ie. emotional/psychological/ spiritual) pressure to try to redress the balance? Outer pressures, such as those of the policies of the IMF and World

Bank, the World Trade Organisation and the like, increasingly work in the opposite direction, exacerbating inequalities and generating new problems. Colonialism, to so many intents and purposes, persists and thrives. The situation for a country like Madagascar today, for its apparent chances of pulling itself or being pulled out of poverty and environmental degradation, can seem close to hopeless. But it surely cannot be treated as without hope. Can we not at least believe in and work for damage limitation, if not in some ways 'attempt the impossible'? Could we not, as humans, take a lesson from the salmon, struggling compulsively against powerful currents, and maybe apparently ridiculous odds, leaping out of its element as it follows some primal internal drive?

What can the Malagasy themselves do? What *can* people with their hands so tied by poverty do? What can *we* in richer countries do? Politically, as global citizens, we can bring pressure to bear on the policy-makers, pressure to bear on the likes of the WTO, IMF and the world's financial power structures, as through pressure on our own political representatives. Through efforts to raise governmental, corporate and public awareness, through peaceful demonstrations and other activities, we can have some effect on third world 'debt' repayment schedules; through buying strictly Fair Trade products, we can support not-so-unfair international terms of trade; organic products, for lack of pesticide use, can be better both for the environment and for people. Becoming more responsible and informed as consumers, we may feel soon enough confused and frustrated, facing a choice, for example, between 'local', 'organic' or 'Fair Trade'. But how much in any case can Westerners really go against the Westerly grain, the mainstream? We might have the view that any such thing we can do is utterly peripheral, virtually devoid of any impact; re-arranging deckchairs, or playing ice-hockey, on the proverbial Titanic. It seemed of no great surprise and no great consequence that 2011's climate conference in Durban achieved so much less than what many had seen as critically necessary. Many at the time of 2002's summit conference at Johannesburg saw that as the final and ultimately missed chance to steer global development in a sustainable direction. Some, meanwhile, would say that in any event the best thing international charities and NGOs can do is leave the countries they are working in altogether, to allow for the development of more finely-tuned, home-grown, sustainable forms of self-reliance, and energies for this – albeit on decimated resource bases. Fewer conservation and development workers jetting around the planet would naturally make for a small saving on fossil fuel consumption and pollution. But, having

raided the pantries and brain-drained worldwide, what are the richer countries left owing the rest and ultimately themselves, if not to see that the far end of the ship doesn't sink?

### Developmental Dimensions

Effective conservation work, then, cannot be done in those biologically rich but economically poor places where it counts most without getting local people on board – as through working with and for them, consulting and facilitating, working in partnerships, and ultimately having local people running projects themselves – making such work their own. 'Conservation' which simply dispossesses local people of access to livelihood resources is fairly well discredited. While it's increasingly 'common wisdom' that you cannot succeed in conservation work in these kind of circumstances without doing development work suited to local needs and culture, it's currently more of an 'esoteric wisdom' that effective conservation and socio-economic development work needs to duly incorporate subtler kinds of development work – work to different degrees described and defined in the psycho-spiritual development world. Yet surely we, as a species, as a matter of critical immediate urgency as well as ongoing need, must do something in the order of psychological, or 'spiritual', development work.

Physical conservation and development work will not effectively 'take' among people long-term without somehow seriously tapping into peoples' deeper energies and evolving ideas – energies and ideas as otherwise essentially locked in engagement with traditional belief systems and customary practices; for the new to take root and survive, it needs some 'competitive advantage' relative to habitual patterns and mainstream persuasions. In any culture, challenging taboos and changing customs is a serious and complex business. Get a society's 'priests' to say something new and either they just get (in some sense) burnt or, if the society's ripe for the idea, things can begin to change in a big way. Much as we all are in our own sweet different ways, the Malagasy are big traditionalists, and it happens that their traditions don't have an especially ecological ethic. Like most on the planet, their spiritual traditions support embrace of the natural environment only up to a point; other species and the environment tend to be seen at best as a respected resource, essentially 'separate from' people, to be valued contingently and independently, rather than interrelatedly and interdependently. It's a multi-dimensional problem.

Worldwide, here and there, there are spiritual traditions which do embrace a strongly ecological ethic, typically among indigenous peoples: many aspects (certainly not all) of native Americans' and Australians' traditions, many African and Asian peoples', as well as some old European traditions. But, like that of the Malagasy, the focus of the world's major religious traditions tends to be relatively anthropocentric – and the anthropocentric leverage of Christianity and other major religions diversely raise and push *Homo sapiens* further out of ecological balance.

While some with a certain take on 'deep ecology' might feel it best for other species and the biota as a whole if as many humans as possible die off from disease, human conflict, or other 'man-made' or 'natural' catastrophe, this might not be a person's feeling where they care about those individually who may suffer or die; in any case, such a scenario would surely not address and solve the core problems. *What is the essential problem-generating mechanism?* Is it generically 'human' or 'natural'? If *homo sapiens* were not the cancer of the planet, perhaps some other line of evolution would turn out a species which was. What, for instance, if elephants came to achieve a runaway success, and populations boomed? Perhaps their habit of nudging trees down might at some point become as unsustainable as humans' slash-and-burn. Or what if the planet were overrun with rabbits? Or, more obviously worryingly for *homo sapiens*, overrun with some mutant virus – some not-to-be-sniffed-at influenza strain, say? By what criteria, by *whose* criteria, do we judge, if we hold the view that we are fundamentally better or worse, 'higher' or 'lower,' than any other species? We may – to ourselves – apparently have more apparatus and general hard-wiring to perceive ourselves as a species in a web of mutual dependency with others, but how much do we behave as if we actually operate from such perceptions? Suggesting the possibility of another species going as 'crazy' as ours on the planet is not to exonerate or excuse anything, just to help identify and put ourselves in context as an evolving species, an evolving animal, in a position currently of particular physical dominance over other species on the planet, and naturally enough of having such dominances within our own.

Serious problem-solving demands some learning process, some internal change; there must be some '*evolution*' in terms of energy, ability and/or beliefs. If learning a lesson is close to some sharing of it with others, this might be natural and healthy enough. Yet it might be a hair's breadth, the merest mental glitch, from some leaning towards ideological

imperialism, from a presumptuous imposition on others of one's 'better' values, notions or modes of activity. Preaching and do-gooding readily 'evolve' as operative superiority and varieties of domination. The implications of such delicacies are extensive. To pin them down in one key respect, any kind of 'development workers' who are looking to in any sense effectively tap into other peoples' deeper energies – energies 'stored' within belief systems and customary activities – surely ought to have a sound handle both on the external culture and on their own inner make-up and workings; more than a recognised need, it should be second nature to pay sharpest attention to their own energies, and look to the whole play of threads, swings and dictates in their own personal beliefs, values, habits, motives, etc. Particularly without alertness to the chances of it, the chances are that we will miss crucial subtleties. After all, the primary instrument we are using to see the content and workings of the mind is the human mind itself. The contention that the mind, for all its numinous delicacy, is inherently autocratic surely has much to confirm it, not least in what may awkwardly emerge as behind the scenes of the more publicly-known. Noting the ideological empire-building of his namesake, and apparently not averse to sounding overweening, UG Krishnamurti insisted: ***"Thought is self-protective and fascist in nature."*** From another angle, in the face of the horrors of a full-on fascist regime, Stephen Biko highlighted what's at the crux of power dynamics: ***"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."***

### Inner Enterprises, Cult Mentalities

Having identified the 'psycho-spiritual' as a fundamental dimension in these issues, we might then ask how we can get more to grips with this. Ecology, social and economic infrastructure, local and international politics need to be in focus, engaged with, acted upon. Interweaving with this is the need to be clear on and active in subtler dimensions.

What do or could we mean by 'psycho-spiritual work'? Are there not ideas, principles and practices in areas of psychological self-study, personal therapy and development work, spiritual or mystical disciplines, techniques and trainings, which have some mileage? Surely there's much to be investigated, explored, utilised; surely too there's great call for caution, as with there arguably being more purveyors in the marketplace of products and services in these fields than there are aptly qualified personnel. If knowing one's way around one's own inner processes is one key aim and qualification, such a thing

is an ongoing business; we may be able to 'follow our nose' to material that 'feeds our soul', but knowing one's own [inner] excreta is an ongoing challenge to the [inner] senses. In the sweetest self-delusion, what's dung can seem like honey – as a cult leader's or other propagandist's may seem to themselves and their followers. Like dealing with some exotic natural sewage system, no one toolkit can deal with all the jobs that come up here. Without apt intuition or qualified professionals in any given area, we can but proceed by trial and error, and whatever advice and inspiration we can get. Sometimes we must just dive in a deep end and try; and successfully fixing one kind of problem doesn't necessarily equip us much to sort out the next – and may directly generate further difficulties. Maybe in some areas little beyond the barest of essential principles can be prescribed; maybe even these could trip us up, at times when we must just proceed in full consciousness of practical ignorance. In any case, the psycho-spiritual field is an area where, hopefully, it would be most obvious that there is always more to be learnt, to develop context on, feelings about, senses on, awareness of different kinds of dangers of ideological pseudo-superiority in... This is an area surely where the cleverer we get, the cleverer our inner 'devils' get. Our egos are certainly masters of disguise, acutely motivated and endlessly driven, self-reinventing. Georges Gurdjieff, working in times and cultures where sexism could more easily be missed or overlooked amid the supposed pursuit of the spiritual, laboured to map and feed the human call to come to different relationships within ourselves, in part as a matter of energy and identity management strategy, e.g., providing idea-tools to help the observing mind not get lost in, fully identified with, emotional reactions: ***"As long as a man does not separate himself from himself he can achieve nothing, and no-one can help him."*** The emotional reactions that we least notice ourselves as 'lost' in identification with, however, are often those least uncomfortable for us, e.g., for a male with a default sensing delusion of gender superiority.

We are still in a time when a given 'spiritual authority' is often enough treated as if it has all the answers, its authority reinforced not so much through serious seeking, implementation and verifying of solutions as by social corroboration and the developing of acute, if not pathological, cultural attachment – by cultism. In both external authorities and in ourselves we might observe the finest moving lines and pervasive confusions between forms of healthy empowerment and control freakery; between healthy acceptance of critical feedback, of guidance, on the one hand and slavish collusion on the other.

To get to the real core of things often the challenge is effectively ‘unlearning’ – especially if we’ve acquired much in a field such as the ‘spiritual’ so riddled with trickery and twaddle. As Oliver Sacks says in *Musicophilia*, in relation to playing a musical instrument: “ **...once the mappings in the sensory cortex have gone wrong, a massive act of unlearning is needed if a healthier relearning is to occur. And unlearning, as all teachers and trainers know, is very difficult, sometimes impossible.**”

For sure it’s a challenge in any area of endeavour for something that’s chronically ingrained to suddenly become totally undone.

Steep or otherwise as the learning curve may seem, how to navigate in such realms as the psycho-spiritual? I’d say we could do with the kind of passionate pragmatism that combines scientific rigour with wild imagination; persistence, caution and readiness to radically change tack; following our nose, testing and re-testing; keeping grounded in our direct experience whilst reaching – madly enough – for the unreachable. Our multi-capacity brains surely can manage such characteristically different (even contradictory) things at once; to do so, besides a matter of possibility, is arguably a matter of essential need in terms of the challenges we face as individuals and collectives today. As Sacks puts it in a more than medical context, in *Awakenings*:

**“the living imagination of Nature itself [is] the imagination we must match in our picturing of Nature.”**

A key anchor, a central organic pivot in such a thing, is observing the observer, examining the examiner, as many from a ‘scientific’, ‘therapeutic’ and/or ‘mystical’ viewpoint emphasise. The essence of this is looking into and keeping an eye on what’s being directly and more subtly brought to bear in the act of examination, getting as clear as variably possible on the event horizons of the consciousness involved. If you don’t somehow ‘see’ your blind spots, you may not effectively believe in them. In the ‘spiritual’ realm, this would seem extra-specially significant in the examination of teachers and trainers themselves.

### Species Sanity: 'Us & Us'

We surely need a radical shift, as to and through deeper ecological perspectives, with 'evolutional' consciousness driving frameworks for justice and welfare across the board.

Slash-and-burn agriculture may be as crazy a 'culture' as consumerism, but it is also inevitable and understandable if people are in desperate poverty, with few or no apparent alternatives for survival. It is certainly madness not to consider ourselves as a single species eating through this planet's limited resources.

It can be seen as a matter of justice, physical need, and 'global therapy' that we attend to cancelling the phoney 'debts' of the world's poorest countries (including plenty built up by dictators the west sold arms to) and set about overhauling international terms of trade to create a more level playing field. Traditional community land rights need to be properly recognised if we are not to watch as land is grabbed for agribusiness to profit foreign shareholders and further drive deforestation. There is a massively urgent global need to actively back biodiversity and exploited populations through a diversity of means, and action at different levels. We need multiple cautions with 'market environmentalism' and the commodification of ecosystem services. Climate mitigation trading as through agricultural carbon sinks hold promise of problem solution as much as of problem exacerbations. The much-touted REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) carbon offsetting proposals cry out for robust rules to offset the dangers of their being hijacked by big business interests – as another neo-colonial increasing of human inequities and environmental strains. Other means that can be pursued to make things more equitable and sustainable include grants, microfinance, concessions and compensations, supporting alternative livelihoods and food security projects, resource management activities, environmental education and related initiatives, as to try to establish sound alternatives to the likes of slash-and-burn subsistence. Besides means to avoid exacerbating climate change, means to protect people and environments from the impacts of it need to be pursued.

Along with all this, we need to put our heads and countries together to help provide and support viable bases of values and beliefs encouraging just, sustainable alternatives – from the likes of political and legislative activities to the telling of tales and singing of

songs. Looking both at history and at present day international politics and economics, appreciating the various links between their lines, we can appreciate that we are all essentially responsible, incalculably but jointly responsible, for the despoiling of the Earth's precious resources, for polluting the planet and variously generating suffering with and through what we've 'developed.' Responsible too in the sense of being able to respond to this situation.

People who are poverty-stricken can be all the more motivated to have offspring for 'insurance,' to ensure their having the support of children in later life; improving standards of living can thus potentially help to reduce runaway population growth. Beyond this, along with tree-planting, 'permacultural' education, etc., what can help to underpin long-term sustainability? Through a deep, radical appreciation of ecological relationships, extending to all limits of the living, the known, the measurable, the physical, we must come at the least to an allowance for some unknown, immeasurable, parapsychical dimension to these realities we are trying to perceive – if not to some profound sense or awareness of them. If uncertainty is hard to bear, of course, concrete beliefs in particulars may quickly build around such a mental position. In any case, naturally enough, our sense of 'family units' may extend beyond our clans, tribes and cultures, to levels of species and groups of species; to see, for example, Madagascar's threatened lemurs as in fact cousins in peril, and we as directly or indirectly imperilled with them. Altogether, we can grasp how all organisms and species survive and develop through complex webs of relationships, including what we commonly describe as microorganisms, as well as 'substrates' at borderlands between living and dead, animate and inanimate. We may see our own lives, our own being, as streams within other streams, personal interpenetrating with transpersonal, as navigated in a flux of living and conscious energies.

It might be hard to fight if we don't see an issue as black and white. This can be a danger of being 'political', where camps, parties, are typically divided into 'us' and 'them'. Yet issues are rarely so simple, as complex as they might be, say, with some industrial development offering impoverished peoples economic gains at ecological costs. What subtle observations can be made about the 'socialist' policies once seen in Madagascar and elsewhere in Africa, about the ideologies and agendas of some western capital-minded aid agencies, or with regard to industrialisation in distinction to 'sustainable development'?

We may see blatant imbalances and abuses. We may also see that there are many complexities, levels and potential conflicts of interests in issues of human rights, fair trade, population, international responsibility, sustainable livelihoods; in biodiversity conservation, animal welfare, environmental management, alternative technology; and at the very heart of cultural plurality and the dynamics of consciousness. All these areas have their personal, practical and political dimensions.

In *World as Lover, World as Self*, discussing 'Despair Work', Joanna Macy gives the example of how one may be in therapy trying to work with energies such as grief which one might identify with the loss of the planet's rainforests, but which one's obliging therapist may be 'reducing' to just an internal, personal problem. There are surely many westerners stuck in non-therapeutic 'therapy' who might do better to explore, express and transform their energies in some arena of political activism, and likewise many angrily actively 'political' who could benefit from such clarity as might be afforded by an experience of counselling or full-on psychotherapy. Similarly, many 'spiritually' labouring might at some point give and gain more through mucking in with initiatives focused, say, on overseas physical infrastructure development; while many firing on all cylinders in the latter might be tuned up, if not re-tuned, through the likes of a meditative retreat.

We must be careful, in any case, not to mistake symptoms for causes. The need is to see problems both in their manifestations and essence, identifying the psycho-spiritual underpinnings and pivots for the social, economic and political shape of things. Gross inequalities continue to be exacerbated. As the greed of the West and poverty of the rest propel environmental plunder, we are seeing snowballing impacts from health impacts to species losses. Fighting a battle simply as 'us versus them', meanwhile, may help us avoid facing the worst things within ourselves.

### **A Lost World?**

There are of course many biologically rich yet economically poor countries in one way or another like Madagascar, but, physically isolated for some 90 million years and occupied by humans for less than 2000, it does stand in many ways on its own. Many species living on the island represent lines of evolution that elsewhere have run, outcompeted, to extinction; lemurs are not found on mainland Africa, monkeys are not found in Madagascar. The mammals to originally colonise the island are believed to have

floated over on rafts of vegetation thrown up by tropical storms – ‘arks’ that crossed a few hundred miles of ocean with the ancestors of Madagascar’s four mammalian groups. *Homo sapiens*, meanwhile, began colonising the island just 1,500-2,000 years ago; there have been great changes in the island’s ecology since then.

This ‘Great Red Island’ is a beautiful, fascinating, exploited and endangered place. It provides prime examples for discussion of such issues as those looked at here, besides being a treasure trove for medicine-hunting chemists, for evolutionary biologists, cultural anthropologists, research psychologists and other academics. With 1 in 10 children on the island dying before the age of five, with 8 in every 10 species being nowhere else on the planet, it has a galvanising combination of exceptional biological richness and extreme human poverty. With 77% of the population today under the \$1.25 a day poverty line, it is among the world’s poorest countries. No other is so poverty stricken that is also among those top of the list of the planet’s biodiversity hotspots; for diversity and endemism, Madagascar is commonly counted among the world’s top few places. With that combination, with the island having lost most of its original vegetation cover yet still so naturally rich, supporting around 4% of Earth’s floral and faunal species on just 0.4% of its land surface, it is actually seen by many as the planet’s foremost conservation priority. Yet relatively little is being done about it. From space, according to astronauts, Madagascar appears to be slashed and bleeding to death, with river mouths haemorrhaging red mud for miles out to sea; inland you can see the gashes of erosion gullies in the island’s red lateritic soil resulting from deforestation. There is certainly debate about the full story with such processes, and just how ‘man-made’ the problems are, but in any case the huge challenges in areas such as conservation, health, education and livelihoods are typically left to small, underfunded charities and NGOs to help local people tackle. (Organisations such as Azafady, Feedback Madagascar, the Andrew Lees Trust, and Money For Madagascar – see [www.madagascar.co.uk](http://www.madagascar.co.uk) for info on Azafady, plus links.)

As described above, Madagascar was exploited as a French colony till 1960. Since that time, France has variously figured in Madagascar’s affairs, having its fingers and tentacles diversely in Malagasy pies. Most recently it has been directly implicated in causing and contributing to civil unrest, and even a coup on the island in 2009. Plans for major oil extraction from tar sands in western Madagascar have been argued as a key

driver of the military-backed coup which installed an ex-DJ as president. French-owned Total Oil have been accused of financing the coup, in terms of Malagasy military personnel being paid huge sums to see to the installation of this puppet dictator to maximise the benefits to an elite of such an oil extraction project. Proceeds by way of the sale of rosewood to Chinese traders would seem to have subsequently helped tide over the coup-installed government. But let's not single out France and China too much here. So many international corporate interests are now looking down predatorily towards Madagascar's mineral resources – little in their way but extremely impoverished people and a corrupt (and hence potentially happily collaborative) government. The vulnerability is as extreme as the apparent 'bounty' to hand, the stakes as high as they can get. Whether ilmenite, oil sands, uranium or copper deposits, or one of Madagascar's many other mineral riches, the plans for their extraction present threats not just in more or less immediate terms of human health and livelihoods, disruption of ecosystems, loss of species, poisoning of environments, etc., but in terms as big and unpredictable as any can be for living systems; the bearing of such developments as tar sands oil extraction on climate change especially so.

If Madagascar is little known for its dirty tar sands, it's well known for its cute fluffy fauna. Lemurs survive naturally on just this one island and nearby isles, though many lemur species are known to have disappeared in Madagascar relatively recently and those that remain are variously threatened. Aye-ayes and other lemurs, including critically endangered species, are being slaughtered en masse for bushmeat in conjunction with the hardwood felling spree following the coup. What can be done? What, first, can be felt? Apart from the kinship you might – as a human being – feel with the Malagasy people, perhaps upon a direct encounter you might feel a kinship with the ringtail, the sifaka or the aye-aye, our primate cousins, or some other creature you don't find naturally anywhere but Madagascar. Feeling a connection, you might be moved to somehow act – not forgetting that the problems of Madagascar are 'bigger' than Madagascar; bigger and by and large subtler. This island's seeming an all-but-lost cause may evoke a different order of response to one seeming altogether lost.

One bigger problem that Madagascar's is just a part of is the current worldwide cascade of species extinctions due to humans, as through habitat loss, hunting, pollution

and introduced species, many native species of islands having being wiped out through those introduced by human colonisers. Another bigger problem is of course climate change, as contributed to in part by continued deforestation rather than mitigated by reforestation. One blatant bigger problem is simply that of some 80% of the planet's humanly accessed resources being consumed by some 20% of its human population. The vast majority survive on very little. Such problems have massive and readily observable consequences, and potentially huge unpredictable consequences, as well as having significances and underpinnings that go to our innermost human dimensions. Coming from these, we must endeavour to see problems as a whole besides the heart of the problem, to come to sufficient clarities to act from.

### Holistic Strategies

So much, it seems, depends on people. We can feel encouraged by seeing the likes of movements 'on the ground' towards community forest management activities. Such initiatives rely on people being persuaded to, for example, cut only a certain number of trees from conservation buffer zones and to plant up other trees. Pervading beliefs that the forest is unending would not encourage active conservation. Local awareness that folk have to walk further to find a given species (as for some particular need), however, could be suitably informed to transform such an awareness into a potent dynamic of conservational appreciation and action. This could be seen as essentially a matter of education, of information-sharing, of empowering. Likewise, a country's natural resources could be re-valued in terms of potential for eco-tourism, with all cautions as to how mismanaged tourism may bring tremendous social and environmental damage. Given sufficient information, villagers can quickly see how deforestation can start a chain of erosion and flooding likely to end in human death, and become willing to change their ways – and links such as those between deforestation, erosion and flooding can be more clearly grasped and acted around in the proximity of local disaster. The ordinary Malagasy villager, then, is apt to see the dangers looming through environmental damage, and see real needs for change, more than the managing director of a multinational corporation – such as one who might register no evidence for global warming or any great change in global weather patterns. Though droughts and cyclones, immediate killers and major setbacks to development, have been observed for several years to have been getting more regular and severe in Madagascar and elsewhere, any link between these and the West's industrial emissions

may be blissfully denied by the fatter cats of Western industry. While more and more of the island's forest is lost to slash-and-burn agriculture, western corporate pirates continue making fortunes from the sale of cancer drugs derived from Madagascar's Rosy Periwinkle – from this island where most people lack access to even basic healthcare. So much, it seems, depends on humanity.

What might not register for those focused on indigenous people's rights or biodiversity preservation? The areas of psychology and spirituality may still seem the domains of the more academic or airy-fairy, if not the all-but-delusional. Yet evidence is there, awaiting investigation, confirmation, clarification, use; there's a wealth of useful operational principles to be gleaned, directly or indirectly, from such areas, with models on inter-relationships, ideas for strategy, parallels of dangers, and intimations on what means might serve healthy or creative activity in any arena, as with the development of more informed self-awareness. More than a shadow-puppetry of ideas about oneself, there may be an organic 'inner body' of consciousness, supple and sensitive, variously tunable. Though in the psycho-spiritual field there might be many professionals offering products and services of questionable worth, as Rumi highlighted, ***"Counterfeiters exist because there is real gold."***

Quoting 'authorities' can itself prove a glittering art of deception. Take Lao Tzu's suggestion: ***"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."*** A handy quote to illustrate a key principle in development. Shining wisdom in one sphere, though, may eclipse issues in other areas, or be taken out of context – as here, we could consider what might be pertinent in respect of gender bias, animal rights and dangers of over-fishing, issues with different configurations in the era and contexts in which Lao Tzu made his point. While there's every chance the man himself would say something further or differently on this point were he alive today, in his absence we might hear his words trumpeted by the likes of the World Bank in 'principled' support of its approaches to development. IMF policies, as geared to develop fishing activities along industrial lines, have brought ruin to local ecosystems and livelihoods in many poor countries. And as the WTO ensures a hill-slope playing field in international terms of trade, the rich countries get richer, the poor more impoverished and falsely 'indebted' to them

There are many issues and dimensions pertinent to such points that are illuminated little in this discussion. Having just touched on justice and welfare from a non-human perspective, though, an interesting related point is that ringtails and most lemur species live in matriarchal groups. Ringtails are highly territorial and clan warfare, led by the females, is common. Maybe a female-dominated human world would prove no less unfair and warfaring; but all we can categorically confirm just now is that our currently configured global society, consisting of male-dominated cultures the world over, is inequitable, parochial-minded and warmongering in the extreme. Unjust within and between countries, races, genders, sexualities, and pretty much anything we are or can be. And given the opportunity, such as closed doors to take place behind, rapacious brutality and cruelty can and does run wild. Around such things we'll tend to look for justice, or at least immediate safety, before sustainability.

Hopefully the points in this discussion will evoke and provoke senses and thoughts that stimulate rooting into other areas, that feed into deeper feelings, pertinent debate and new action. Like different aspects of our own existence as conscious beings, what today are regarded as in areas of eco-husbandry, socio-economic development, psychology and spirituality may increasingly be realised as interpenetrative – and duly approached more holistically. Acting inwardly, practically and politically, weaving together different lines of learning and implementation, effective solutions to our problems 'big' and 'small' may emerge not so much as religiously prescribable remedies as matters of unique response and synergy in the field of action. Matters, or energies, some might say, of love.

### **After The Point Where One Ought To Have Stopped (Rabbiting On)**

Besides those more nobly fighting fights, there are of course those more evidently in them for profit and prizes, for power and glory. In richer countries, like the personality cult-riddled cultures of the US and UK, this is a time of the phenomenal clout of celebrity endorsement, sound bites, spin doctors, pop promo depictions. Increasingly we can see ego-fuelled over-simplifying or otherwise misrepresentative social media campaigns to fund-raise and vote-win for different causes. Like game shows and gladiator sports they entertain, and where apparently champions of freedom, individuality and high-level mental function, they're in essence typically more about herd mentalities and delicacies at borderlines of psycho-pathology. Such as they depend on, they usually breed more of.

The spiritual, with a small 's', is surely an ever-evaporating kind of thing. Some like to gas about the spiritual. Some might say the spiritual is like a gas – always disappearing, spreading, infusing, extending beyond our immediate grasp. In the realest terms we can describe things in, the spiritual is surely indescribable apart from our saying something to the effect that it *is* indescribable – that it *is*, it exists, occurs, operates, influences, pervades, whatever, indescribably. Its indescribability does not mean that it doesn't, in its own way, have impact. If not existing in any ordinary sense, might it not be ever-interfacing, perpetually in some dynamic relationship with, what *does* variously exist? Like some quantum vacuum, or zero-point field, just because you can't put your finger on a thing doesn't mean that it isn't there. Can you put a finger on where fingers themselves come from? Naturally, ultimately, not. And whatever we may think we have in the palm of our hand is surely nothing beyond what could be in the palm of the next person. All we can know from this angle is that it's unknowable; so to presume that there is no such thing as 'spiritual meaning' would be as questionable, as dodgily grounded, as tying such meaning to exclusive specifics. Liking emotional security and intellectual closure, we prefer there to be definitely either something or nothing, rather than uncertainty – an uncertainty shiftily straddling apparently contrary possibilities. Once we're inclined to see things as if there's some 'spiritual' reality with them, we might suddenly have perceptions of meaning, design, function, characteristics, inherent nature, which we didn't have before. Our perceptions 'describe' these to us as we may subsequently describe them to others. Yet if all we can ever describe or understand is relative to something else, something perceived before, how does a person effectively gauge anything new? We might see that our yardsticks are essentially all worldly ones – however spiritual what we're measuring, or what we're measuring with, might seem. But there remains the unseeable, in the depths of mystery as at an interface where such sticks are growing. On an invisible side of the tree of life.

Shadows of doubt, grey areas, fuzziness, uncertainties come across, perchance to fizz and sparkle where before distinctions were plain...

***"Kindred forces to those which, in some period inconceivably remote, gave birth to that primal bit of protoplasm tossing on the ancient seas continue their mighty and incomprehensible work." Rachel Carson***

***Mal Mitchell, 2003/2012***

(Extracts published as *Global Braid: Conservation, Development & the 'Psycho-Spiritual'*,  
New Renaissance Magazine, Dec. 2003) Quotes from talks (or books) by:

**Wangari Maathai--Joanna Macy--Theodore Roszak--Norman Doidge--Jiddu  
Krishnamurti--U G Krishnamurti--Steve Biko--G I Gurdjieff--Oliver Sacks--Rumi--Lao  
Tzu--Rachel Carson**

*“Ny tody tsy misy fa ny atao no miverina”*

*(All you've done will echo back to you sooner or later)*

*Malagasy saying*

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