

ratitor's corner

june 21, 1998

june solstice, 7:03am, pdt

Planting Seeds of Transformation

**Our Elders the Redwoods
Gifts of Life: Dad & Piano
Witness to a Last Will of Man**

Today is the June solstice, and, being so, the sun, appearing to travel along the ecliptic, reaches the point where it is farthest north of the celestial equator. In the northern hemisphere days are now the longest and nights the shortest while the opposite occurs in the southern hemisphere.

This ratitorial recounts significant experiences over the past half-revolution around SOL, how they have greatly expanded and deepened my appreciation of the bountiful gifts life bestows upon us, and an exposition of what the dynamics of inner transformation provide each of us with to manifest change within which in turn changes the world around us we are in contact with at each moment.

Many seeds have been planted inside over the past half-a-revolution around SOL and, with all the ratitor's corners "penned" over the past 2-and-one-half such revolutions, it seemed fitting to *finally* write one on the occasion of the longest day in the northern hemisphere given that today, where i live, is the day of most sunlight. After all, SOL is *the* source of the fecundity life bestows upon all plant seeds growing first in the darkness of the earth to marshal their energies for growth, and then bursting out into the light of its nourishment to manifest their further increase.

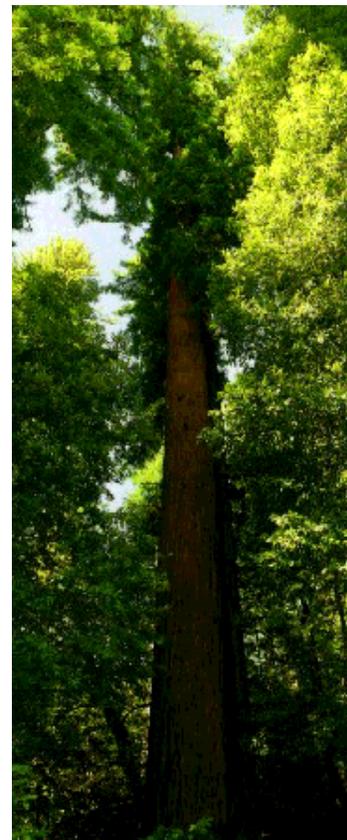
As with plants, so it is that the seasons and cycles of life exert their ineluctable influence and pattern of birth, death, nourishment, and renewal upon all of creation existing here. For me, i continue to feel the greatest fascination centering on what the processes of growth and change actually contain and symbolize. They attract me simultaneously as the most compelling and the most mysterious creative patterns swirling within and without. Compelling, in that i feel the imperative to continue to grow and explore what change is and means in an ever-expanding contemporary idiom; the gravity of these two "heavenly bodys" is enormous, cosmically astronomical in magnitude and influence. And mysterious in that both growth and change, processes so effortless and effusive during childhood, seem to atrophy and slow down or practically stop altogether as one assumes a supposedly inescapable burden of the increasing weight of mechanical patterns of thought and behavior as the years spent alive in this place turn into decades.

i live an extraordinarily privileged life at this time on Earth, where an inner sense of meaning continues to flower and urge further discovery and exploration of the limitless life imparts. For most of us it is a battle to simply survive physically as well as psychically; where concerns about giving something back to the life and world that spawned one, although such might sound like a "nice idea", do not enter into the picture given the daily challenge of simply existing, as best as one can, with the ravages of the outer *and* inner landscapes strewn about. The prospect of transforming our world into a place where all may enjoy the same quality of meaning in their lives seems to more and more be possible only by manifesting transformation inwardly, on a host of levels, which then flow outwardly to touch all one comes into contact with.

Starting in the latter half of January, i was able to enjoy a 3-month vay-kay away from the working-for-money grinder, stepping out of the time-lock most everyone i know feels the ever-mounting pressure of with each passing day.

Our Elders the Redwoods

In late January i made a short road-trip up the [California] coast and was transported into a state of grace not touched for some time with a few days of communing with the redwoods in Humboldt Redwoods State Park (south of Eureka) and Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park (south of Crescent City). These extraordinary beings also exist in Muir Woods of course, but there, as they are that close to the massive metropolitan area surrounding the San Francisco bay, one does not feel the same degree of "remove" and distance from such frantic centers of human activity and all the "distancing" and feelings of fragmentation such energy interposes between oneself and the natural world we belong to and are part of by rite of birth.



i frequently felt choked-up both from the beauty of their magnificent living energy combined with the sadness of the threat we have manifested and continue to pose to their being and future. Consider these items:

- Here are the largest beings on earth, some living more than 2,000 years.
- The Coast Redwood is one of three types of this species -- the others are the Giant Sequoia and the Dawn Redwood. Combined, they once covered significant portions of the northern hemisphere. Now there are just 3 spots left: the Coast Redwood and Giant Sequoia in California and the Dawn Redwood in China.
- Coast Redwoods grow to heights exceeding 350 feet.

- Coast Redwoods thrive on moisture: they also influence the climate of the river canyons by transpiring moisture which keeps the humidity high. A single tree can release up to 500 gallons of moisture into the air per day.
- Ancestors of the redwoods lived all the way back during the time of the dinosaurs -- they have "been around" *that* long.
- At the Visitors Center in Humboldt State Park was the round of a tree with this description:

In 1148 A.D. this tree begin growing near Jordan Creek at the north end of the "Avenue of the Giants". It was 839-years old when it fell in 1987. The height of the tree was 300-feet, the average diameter at the base was 9-feet and its weight probably was 325-tons.

- There were plaques on the side pointing to different ring "time markers":
 - 1215 Magna Carta Signed
 - 1341 Significant Fire Scarred the Tree
 - 1492 Columbus Discovers America
 - 1579 Drake Lands in California (more than 1/2-way out)
 - 1620 Pilgrims Land at Plymouth Rock
 - 1776 Declaration of Independence Signed
 - 1849 Humboldt Bay Discovered by Land
 - 1919 Save the Redwoods League Founded (close to bark's beginning)

On one level, what made me feel so choked-up was the fact that here are beings who live for hundreds and hundreds of years -- and, instead of frantically scurrying about hither and yon as we more and more do in the conduct of our lives, these living beings occupy the *same spot* for all their centuries, and even millenia, of life! Think of what they have "seen"! Think of all the stories they can tell! They stand and express and experience time in such a fundamentally different manner than we. And our own frantic nervousness is more and more consuming the entirety of the exquisite living system we share with them and all life exploring itself here in, on, and around our Mother Earth.

i slept in the town of Scotia where the Pacific Lumber Company has its large mill. In a public green there was a steam engine and another bit of historical machinery as well as another redwood round section on display with the following plaque:

COAST REDWOOD
(SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS)

AGE 1,382 YEARS

GREATEST DIAM. 13'9" INSIDE BARK

THE TREE FROM WHICH THIS SECTION WAS CUT
YIELDED 184 LINEAR FEET OF LOGS AND
CONTAINED 81.320 BOARD FEET OF LUMBER.
THE TREE WAS FELLED IN 1979 ON THE
PACIFIC LUMBER COMPANY LAND.

The poignant tragedy of the above speaks worlds about the human capacity to separate and distance oneself from the world one belongs to by rite of birth. The round in the Visitors Center was taken from a tree that fell of its own accord; the round in Scotia was taken from a tree almost fourteen hundreds years old that was cut down, killed, by people. People caught in the in-between moment after their ancestors had lived out their lives working in timber industries cutting and milling trees for building materials, when the Earth's bounty seemed infinite *and* when "civilized" man had already reached the point where his conception of the world, and his place in it, were divided and separated each from the other. Ten thousand years or more ago, by what we can observe from the aboriginal peoples still on Earth attempting to continue living as we all once lived, human beings did not feel divided nor separated from the natural world but rather, inseparably connected with and interdependent upon it for all life's blessings.

Today, more and more of our human family live lives engaged in the pursuit of accumulation, one of the most compelling substitutes people become trapped within -- i.e., the attempt to obtain physical security by amassing greater and greater quantities of material wealth (of which one can *never* have or acquire enough) as a bulwark against the reality of there being no inner, psychic, non-material security. Facing the fact -- that existing as conscious "apparently autonomous" beings brings with it the actuality that the only security in life is understanding that there is no security (either inner or outer) -- is so terrifying a prospect to explore that a significant portion of people living through recorded history have spent the bulk of their lives attempting to deny and escape from the consequences of this law of life.

i *certainly* am not free of this fear, and the conditioning of the culture i was raised in, to surround myself with material things as a means to stave off coming to grips with this fact of there being no security. But i *do* want to find out more about all this, and how my own experience of life is diminished and made less by it.

Spending some brief moments among the giants living to the north, has rekindled a sense of the existence of the unquenchable flame of life within, and the utter gratefulness that its warmth instills imparting a sense of deep connection with all beings. We would do well to listen to the stories our friends the trees are telling us still, if only we could but "take the time" to listen and hear them.

Gifts of Life: Dad & Piano

When i came back from the land of our Redwood Elders i was endeavoring to heal soreness in my right arm from way too much typing with lousy posture, which i'd engaged in at work before i stepped off on January 20th. This had been a lapse back into useless old patterns which i *already knew about* from an RSI thing i had going back in 1996, and for which i had benefited from working for 6 months with Michael Siegel, a physical therapist of remarkable gifts and talents in Santa Cruz. Although the symptoms were not the same -- this time it was primarily a sense of mild strain and a feeling of muscles in the forearm being mildly engorged without releasing their extra fluid -- i already knew one ignores the intimations of such discomfort at one's own peril.

This time, through good friend Charles "Lucky" Stein, i found my way to Jill Cohen and her extraordinary gifts with the practice of myofascial release, "a therapeutic treatment utilizing a gentle form of stretching, producing a profound healing effect upon the body tissues, eliminating pain and restoring motion." On February 23rd, the first day i saw Jill, i intuitively realized i had found someone and something that offered me tremendous potentials in the areas of growth and change. i saw Jill 9 times over the next 3 weeks, in which period not only did i experience a sense of wonderful release in my arm, but an opening throughout the whole of my human overcoat. At this point i find my experience of looseness, from the spine and sternum outwards, to be more agile and flexible than i can recall from before i backed-up into computers in 1983.

But the most illuminating aspect of all is how, since late February, i have experienced the sense of old, mechanical patterns of behavior as well as of thought, dissipating and dissolving. Flowing from this, the greatest gifts manifesting from my time off were an active re-engagement of connection with my father and with the piano. As i've described elsewhere, i've been aware to varying degrees for a long time of the significance of the estrangement that grew up inside between myself and my father as well as the fact that actively establishing a more intimate level of communication between us was an avenue i could pursue at any time, if i would but choose to do so. The week before i started seeing Jill was when i elected to reach out to him as i never have before in my adult life.

Once free of the daily influence of the "accomplishment drug" i had already been burnt out on from the place i've worked at since February, 1986, i was able to commence wading into a second level of re-evaluating and re-visiting my own life and experience of being begun last fall in earnest when friend John Terhorst died at the age of 37 years after struggling with cancer for the previous 12 months. A *lot* of self-examination had already been opened up from that experience. John lived so *utterly* expansively to the end of his days here. His love and the light manifesting in him were available in great profusion to all his friends. His sharing of his own journey was unconditional right up to the end of his physical expression of life.

At the turn of the year i already knew something very significant was approaching. The feeling of "It was twenty years ago today" was alive-and-well inside as i was recalling February 1978 when i landed the job at Rhymes Records in New Haven, Connecticut and how that experience carried me to places i never had previously imagined during the 15 months i worked there and beyond. Here i was 20 years later, approaching the same new moon of February, remembering one of the first evenings i was on my way to the bus to go work at Rhymes. Looking up around the time of sunset, with snow everywhere on the ground and blue everywhere in the sky, i saw the sliveriest of cheshire cat smiling new moons beaming down from the western sky. Everything felt in sync in that moment. Now, 2 decades later, a different sense of "pregnant moment" was in the air.

But although i had been relishing the prospects of the two areas of interest i most wanted to spend the 3 months engaged upon -- practicing piano and working on ratical.org -- once i was free of work, i had to face the fact that i'd stretched my arm beyond its physical limits and needed to truly relax and let go of the on-going craving to accomplish. After some weeks of having to relax and truly slow down, i realized one day that there was no better time than the present to make time to visit my father, an hour's drive to the south. So i started to drive

over for the day once a week. He used to play piano for some years soon after i was born. 20 years ago he started playing the violin. Among other things, we picked up where we had left off some years earlier with Handel's Violin Sonata No. III in F major, Opus 1, No.12. The fact of music's healing power and energy has never been more evident to me than during this break from work-life. There is a glorious form of benediction expressed in the symbolic union of the creative spark spanning as well as being passed between the generations when one is given the gift of making music with one's father.

The estrangement i felt towards my father that started at the end of childhood and gathered momentum into my teens is, sadly, something all too many boys-becoming-men are familiar with. It can come to intrude in virtually every aspect of one's life. What i saw in February, more clearly and consciously than ever before, was that in believing i could not trust my father, i was unconsciously caught in the trap of believing i could not trust life itself. Such an inability to trust outwardly inextricably came home to roost inwardly in the form of self-rejection, the ultimate betrayal of one's own being. i have lived a significant portion of my life in a such a state of self-rejection. There is much about the world today that fosters such rejection of one's own self and by extension a commensurate rejection of life.

But anything is possible! And for me, i found that during the end of February and in March and April, something was beginning to thaw out after a long, frozen interlude. Along with this, at the very same time i began to work with Jill, i found it was effortless psychically to sit and play the piano in a way i had not felt for years and years. Extra to the fact that i was feeling much looser and less and less inhibited by any sense of physical stricture or block, was the infinitely more remarkable-to-me fact that i wasn't feeling *anything* of the previously familiar "i should play", or "i really need to practice" voice within. i simply wanted to sit down and play and play. And play i did as i haven't since studying with Mary Lou Williams in 1979-80; for the last 8 weeks, every day centered around playing on average of 4 to 6 hours.

i was interested in reviving as much of the bulk of my repertoire as i could and by this point i was actively pursuing the prospect of seeing if i might be able to start playing piano for kids in the schools. Last October i had been in Washington playing piano in my niece's 2nd/3rd grade class and was delighted with the enthusiastic response of the children. That experience stayed with me. At present i am listening with my Mom to recordings of the 1973 Norton Lectures by Leonard Bernstein at the Harvard Square Theatre in which he opens with the question Charles Ives posed near the beginning of this century, "*Wither music?*" Bernstein will forever be worlds beyond me as composer, performer, conductor, and teacher, but his example of inspired-to-the-extreme expounding on the syntax and semantics of a worldwide musical grammar and giftedness in the area of presenting an unrivaled, compelling "music appreciation act" makes me want to find out what i can do in the same vein with children today, playing as well as telling stories about the songs, their composers, and sharing my own love of and excitement with music to our future grandmothers and grandfathers. i also want to study all the Danny Kaye movies i can find as he was in a league by himself when it came to reaching kids and "bringing them along with him" into a magical world of music and song, humor and unbridled imagination.

While with Mary Lou Williams, she fostered a deep sense within of the importance of keeping the healing energy of jazz alive by playing it for people, whether through recordings

via radio stations or live performance. i brought back about 85% of what i used to be able to play and found a situation at the beginning of April where i can play piano downtown every Tuesday night at a coffee house to practice playing in front of people again. Currently i can play for about 2-and-a-half hours from memory but the current song list doesn't *begin* to include the range of composers and styles that i'd like, starting with J.S. Bach and coming up to the 1950s and early sixties. Given that most children will never hear practically any of this sort of music played live, i decided when i went back to work that i'd change my job status from 40 to 32 hours a week so i can have up to 3 days a week to work up more and more material in preparation for attempting some form of a evolving music appreciation gig in the schools. i volunteered and was able to play in a number of elementary schools in April and May and already have the enthusiastic interest of two school's music directors to work up on-going programs come the fall. In time, the challenge will be how to respond in the affirmative to requests to play elsewhere once it becomes more well known through word-of-mouth of what i'm offering.

Witness to a Last Will of Man



As those who've read the 1997 fall equinox ratatorial know, i've been greatly expanded by drinking in the stories of Laurens van der Post. His lifetime of service to a furtherance of the art of story-telling and of what stories mean and give to the human spirit sings worlds to *this* one. This spring i read through the out-of-print 1984 book, *Testament to the Bushmen*. This book is a companion to the film of the same name by Paul Bellinger, film-maker and friend of Laurens for many years. Jane Taylor wrote the bulk of the text. However, starting on page 121, i found the most remarkable essay written by Laurens entitled, Witness to a Last Will of Man .

Of all his books and stories i've read and listened to, this 48-page testament is unique and singular both in its concise as well as extraordinarily wide-ranging articulation of the real source of lethal illness daily consuming the human spirit, and moving, seemingly inexorably, towards its tragic completion of the profoundest night of non-being since before our aboriginal forebears manifested here on Earth. It

also provides great healing and illumination. For the remainder of this ratatorial, i will attempt to convey something of the essence of what i feel makes this testament so noteworthy and of some of the profound insights it contains which it is hoped others will likewise explore and ponder.

As stated on the book jacket : "For Sir Laurens, the Bushmen represent the primitive in man which we strive so successfully and so tragically to hide behind the mask we call civilization. In a more significant sense the destruction of the Bushmen is the destruction of the best in all

mankind." But this is not simply one more articulation of the ever more disturbingly familiar litany of crises facing humanity in its bid to either transform or perish. It is a unique exposition of the challenge we can face only if we are "prepared through profound self-knowledge to re-learn the grammar of a forgotten language of self-betrayal, and in so doing the meaning of tragedy and disaster".

The real trouble began for me, as it has done for countless others, when I sought to understand imaginatively the primitive in ourselves, and in this search the Bushman has always been for me a kind of frontier guide. Imagination shifts and passes, as it were, through a strange customs post on the fateful frontier between being and unrealized self, between what is and what is to come. The questions that have to be answered before the imagination is allowed through are not new but have to be redefined because of their long neglect and the need for answers to be provided in the idiom of our own day. For instance, in what does man now find his greatest meaning? Indeed, what is meaning itself for him and where its source? What are the incentives and motivations of his life when they clearly have nothing to do with his struggle for physical survival? What is it in him that compels him, against all reason and all the prescriptions of law, order and morality, still to do repeatedly what he does not consciously want to do? What is this dark need in the life of the individual and society for tragedy and disaster? Since the two World Wars that have occurred in my own lifetime, disorder and violence have become increasingly common on the world scene. Surely these things are rooted in some undiscovered breach of cosmic law or they would be eminently resistible and would not be allowed to occur? Where indeed does one propose to find an explanation for the long history of human failure? How can one hope to understand this aspect of man and his societies, and comprehend a scene littered with ruins and piled high with dunes of time which mark the places where countless cultures have vanished because men would not look honestly, wholly and steadily into the face of their inadequacies? The answers to none of these questions are available unless one is prepared through profound self-knowledge to re-learn the grammar of a forgotten language of self-betrayal, and in so doing the meaning of tragedy and disaster. It is the ineluctable preliminary to our emancipation, especially for those priests and artists who have been subverting themselves and the societies which they are dedicated to preserve. Unless one is honestly prepared to do so, one is warned at this crepuscular immigration post that one had better not cross the frontier. [pp.124-5]

van der Post goes on to discuss how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is, "[f]or the English-speaking world the most significant example of such an imagination shift", and how for him, "the Bushman has been a scout and frontier guide to me from infancy in the same dark labyrinthine underworld of human nature which Shakespeare entered precipitately with *Hamlet*." The questions posed above, complemented by the ensuing exploration into the implications of such enquiry, provide all who read this -- and listen attentively to what comes up from within that still small voice of the heart -- with an exceedingly rare (and hence all the more precious) glimpse into the subtle and expansive meaning contained within such a grammar of this forgotten language of self-betrayal.

Since *Testament to the Bushmen* is out-of-print, most people will never have the opportunity to benefit by exposure to such life-nourishing insights as those provided in *Witness to a Last Will of Man* :

Late, partial and hurried as it was in the doing, it will make those who ponder its fragmentary bequests nonetheless rich because they are all he had left to bequeath of the wealth and natural spirit out of which in his own day he gave so abundantly with all the grace, willingness and fulness of which he in his time on earth was capable. [p.160]

This sort of illumination needs to be given the *widest possible* distribution. i put this essay up

on ratical on May 31, 1998, guided by the certainty that anyone who finds their way to this and is touched by it, may well begin to experience something akin to the potent "dose" of the medicine that has been progressively restoring my spirit and psyche since the beginning of 1996 when i read my first tale of his, *A Story like the Wind*. Traveling richly through the landscape in this epic -- like any work of art, a story that is both timeless as well deeply relevant to the present period -- launched a process within that had been gestating for a *long* time. Where self-betrayal is concerned, my own interest in regaining a living grasp of this obscured vernacular and how to understand and recognize the meaning and influence of its articulation in my daily life is something i've yearned for since the closing years of childhood.

i alluded to this above in mentioning the trap i became caught in, feeling i could not trust life itself as a result of the fear, confusion, and doubt that beset me with the psychic death of my family when my parents divorced. For a child, such a deep-seated and heretofore alien experience as feeling one could not trust life laid-in the initial pattern of a rejection of self that was then accompanied by a host of resulting consequences. At the time i compensated as best i could and on into the years thereafter, but the "accommodation" to such a tempest of conflict buried deep within a locked treasure chest bursting with sadness, loss, grief, and rage. The process of cutting off access to such rich sources of growth and wisdom as these darker feelings embody and present us with is tragically all too common in our age as people are taught beginning early on to avoid and seek escape at *any* cost from such disturbing challenges. Such avoidance -- and the requisite Faustian debt incurred -- is an expression of rejection that lays one open to commit a betrayal of self rivaled only by rape or murder.

Decades were spent endeavoring to understand my self through a process of enquiry based on asking 'Why' as a means of gaining insight and understanding into the true nature of who and what i am. Such a question is the operative tool of the act of analyzing, one of *the* cornerstones of western thought and perception. The first definition of the verb *analyze* is, "to separate or break up (any whole) into its parts so as to find out their nature, proportion, function, relationship, etc." Starting in 1993, i became deeply affected by tapes and books of Krishnamurti and David Bohm. This began a process that continues to unfold and expand. i came to the point where grasping the deeper significance of things by asking 'Why' could carry me no farther. As Laurens describes from his own vantage point, 'Why' *is* "a severely limited question as the child discovers from the moment it begins to talk."

'Why' in any case is a severely limited question as the child discovers from the moment it begins to talk. It produces limited answers, limited as a rule to the mechanics and laws of the world, universe and life of man. But the human heart and mind come dishearteningly quickly to their frontiers and need something greater to carry on beyond the last 'why'. This beyond is the all-encompassing universe of what the Chinese called Tao and a Zen Buddhist friend, in despair over the rationalist premises native to Western man, tried to make me understand as a newly-graduated man by calling 'the great togetherness' and adding, 'in the great togetherness there are no "whys", only "thuses" and you just have to accept as the only authentic raw material of your spirit, your own "thus" which is always so.' In and out of these great togethernesses it came to appear to me that the story brings us a sense of this unique 'so' that is to be the seed of becoming in ourselves during the time which is our lot.

This is what gives the artist in the story-teller his meaning and justification to go on telling his story, and sustains him, despite a lack of material reward or recognition, in poverty and hunger. Even though his work falls on stony ground and deaf ears or is trodden under the indifferent feet of the proliferating generations too busy to live in their frantic search for the joys

and hopes of gaining the honours of the plausible world about them, this radar of the story never fails him. He does not even try to know but through an inborn acceptance of the demands of the gift which entered him at birth, spins his story in the loom of his imagination. The life in him knows that once a story is truly told, the art which this mysterious gift places at his disposal shall, when the time is ready -- and the readiness is all -- find listeners to take it in; their lives will be enlarged and the life even of the deaf and dumb around them will never be the same again.
[p.137]

i have become one of those listeners whose life has been enlarged by the rich vein of stories mined from the mother lode of humanity Laurens van der Post was exposed to from the time of his infancy on through the 9 decades of life lived here. But he is not well-known in the U.S. -- and he needs to be. Now more than ever people are silently crying out inside -- most without even consciously recognizing the fact -- for an experience of the living meaning of being made specific and immediate in their contemporary lives. The latin root of "religion," is *religare* : *re-*, back + *ligare*, to bind, bind together -- thus to reconnect or relink to the cosmos which spawned us. This understanding of the need for contemporary woman and man to regain a living sense of religious experience in daily life is a deep thread running throughout Laurens' writings: "I returned to the world, knowing that unless we recover our capacity for religious awareness, we will not be able to become fully human and find the self that the first man instinctively sought to serve and possess." [p.161]

i have been as conditioned as anyone by the fixed meaning words seem to inevitably assume in the mind. Everywhere is the evidence that systems of authority -- be they economic, political, religious, or social -- inevitably create and concentrate *the most* mechanical patterns of thought and behavior in people. For a long time, the word "religion" has conjured up an image within of people blindly imitating and repeating antiquated rituals while adopting literal interpretations of scriptures and sacred texts without any urge to find, much less live out, a contemporary and specific expression of the symbology contained within the given system of belief.

My previous urge to gain understanding within through the process of analyzing and viewing "me" as a collection of parts has given way to an interest in seeing things holistically, as a complete unit. Looking at life as a whole is something western civilization has very little practice in or familiarity with. In concert with this, our culture thinks of and sees the world in extremely literal terms with practically no understanding of the significance of living and seeing symbolically.

My Grandpa was a Congregational minister in our church when i was growing up. Born in Warren, Vermont in 1886, he too was a great lover of stories and an ardent storyteller himself. He married Mary Stambaugh who was born in Cheney, Washington in 1883, and grew up near Wilbur where she remembered Nez Pierce Indians including Chief Joseph coming into her father's grocery store. They went to China in 1916 (where my mother grew up) where Grandpa was a missionary and Grandma was a teacher and stayed until World War II, returning afterwards from 1947 to 1950. The times i sat through church services (instead of being in Sunday school which i did *not* care for) were meaningful not so much because of the sermons but because it was *my Grandpa* who was standing up there, speaking to all those people. It was this personal connection with the minister that matter the most to me.

Raised on one level to think of things in a very literal manner myself, i did not find much in the organized religion i was exposed to as a child that enhanced my own perception of the bounty and miracle of life, so palpably present in the world of a child. i *do* recall feeling very close to and connected with the world i was living in. My parents, siblings, and larger family, friends, our cats, dog and rats, the earth i'd play in, the trees, plants, water, clouds and sunshine, wind and birds, ocean and fish, mountains and sky, as well as the utterly mysterious stars and infinity of space; *all* the world i experienced felt close to and immediate within me. And it is precisely this same sense of belonging to and being intimately related with the world and all life expressing and exploring itself here that is re-invoked and re-joined more constantly in Laurens' stories than most others i can remember.

The Hunter and the Whale provides a good example of this. Although labeled "Fiction", it is written in the first person with underlying elements confirmed as autobiographical in Chapter 3, "The Singing Whale" of *Yet Being Someone Other*. The young protagonist, named Peter, becomes a member of the crew of the Norwegian whaling vessel, *Kurt Hansen*, based out of Port Natal in Durban, South Africa for four seasons during the early 1920s. Casting off from the the quay in the middle of the night and travelling out into the vast expanse of the southwest Indian Ocean on his first journey aboard, he stays above deck until dawn certain that "interesting things were happening all the time and I was convinced that if I went below I would miss something of the greatest importance."

Remaining on deck until first light, he watches the morning star rise and is filled with the sense of oneness engendered by such direct, unabridged connection with creation and participation within it:

There is something most significant about the encounter of a human being in solitude with great abiding manifestations of nature. It is so intensely personal and specific that it demands some special recognition from one's imagination. That moment, indeed, grew great with natural divinity and the vast uprush of light soaring after it with widespread wings became a miracle. I felt then as if I were witnessing the first day of Genesis and so near to some numinous presence stirring over the face of the waters that I had the impulse to pray in the ancient Amangtakwena way. They greet the day by breathing into the palm of the right hand until it becomes damp and warm, holding it up to the dawn till the morning air has fanned it cool and dry, taking that as a sign that the breath of their lesser life has been made one with the breath of a greater. I had often when alone with them on the veld or in the bush found it perfectly natural to join in with them. But on this occasion something I was not aware of stopped me. I know now that it was a fear that Thor Larsen, up there at the wheel, would see me do it. [p.75]

Thor Larsen is the Captain, an intense, complex man of extraordinarily keen perceptivity where the skills of a hunter are concerned, as well in his revealingly gentle appreciation of the experience of "inexplicable rejection and scorn to a far worse degree" than what Peter grapples with himself for the first time in his life during this story. In the present day, the art of hunting has been thoroughly eclipsed by the runaway excesses of the meat industry and the grotesque, assembly-lined mass-production of killing on such a grandiose, commoditized scale. But although we have lost our connection to such an experience as that with which our aboriginal ancestors were intimately familiar, there *is* an art to tracking and following the spoor, to the hunt for physical nourishment. This has its parallel in the symbolic dimension with the hunt for meaning in life. The pursuit of *this* quarry is of heretofore unparalleled significance to the psychic well-being of our present-day selves. We are also all the poorer for the fact that virtually all of us know not what it *means* anymore to participate in finding

and killing the animals and birds that comprise our own portion of the cooked flesh that appears on our plates.

In the above, Peter feels the presence and influence of the rational mind, symbolized in the character of Thor Larsen, intruding upon his own communion with the world of spirit "free of the mistrust of instinct and intuition wherein contemporary Europe tends to imprison human imagination". [*A Story like the Wind*, p.124] This intrusion of the intellect, into a realm it cannot apprehend nor grasp, followed by its attempts to either reject, ignore, or disparage such non-rational forms of intelligence and meaning, is one of the primary sources of the desolation i know i, as member of the "modern" world, feel within. Such nourishing encounters with the numinous nature of life are now mostly extinguished by the system of mass culture, with the extent of resulting desolation in the human spirit being anomalous to anything that has come before during the span of recorded history.

Peter, nicknamed "Eyes" by the Captain for his ability to see the blast of the whale's spout far off in the distance (and the luck he is perceived by the crew of the *Kurt Hansen* to bring with him from his numerous sitings), also enjoys a special relationship with 'Mlangeni, the Zulu engine room stoker and the only black member of the crew. Peter can converse in 'Mlangeni's native tongue, something no one else understands. This situation provides many opportunities to highlight the differences between the mind of European man and that of people not beholden to such patterns of thought :

I had not said more to Ruud because I had a hunch that the less I told the rest of the crew about my exchanges with 'Mlangeni the easier it would be for him to confide in me. Also how explain to a man like Nils Ruud what had just passed between the two of us? How make a regular church-goer like Nils understand that 'Mlangeni, ostensibly one of the benighted heathen, was more aware of the world of the spirit and its claims than most of us? To 'Mlangeni everything from a grain of sand to the fire underneath his boiler, from the movement of an ant to the lowing of cattle at night, even the sneeze of a boy, were all significant manifestations of meaning. What would Nils Ruud have said had I told him that 'Mlangeni was such a dedicated, accepting servant of the spirit that we, by comparison, became brutal materialists rejecting it? [p.87]

Of late, i feel increasingly in the presence of something being expressed all around me, so beautifully stated above, that "everything from a grain of sand . . . the movement of an ant to the lowing of cattle at night, even the sneeze of a boy, . . . all [contain] significant manifestations of meaning." There is a growing sense of something being rekindled within, of a perception of the utter mystery of life, manifesting every moment. It is *here!* And we, in our frenzied goings on, expressing through our daily patterns of behavior a nervous angst *almost* stretched beyond its limits to the breaking point, are prevented from sensing such nerve alarm bells since the warning of their incessant ringing assumes the quality of "white noise," taken in below the level of conscious recognition. Refusal to consciously acknowledge the significance and true implications of such "alarm bells of the spirit" is the machine-like unconscious *and conscious* pattern of rejection we must in the end, one way or another, face and resolve. This "business" of brutal materialists rejecting such dedicated, accepting servants of the spirit -- and thus rejecting the very same nature of spirit within our own selves -- is a core thread running through Laurens' story-telling, and one we cannot be reminded of and confronted with often enough, given the fact that such lethal rejection of this quality of the human spirit continues each day to grow in its ferocious intensity and influential reach.

Our ancestors lived in a world rich in the imagery and symbolic representations of the spirit which everyone felt themselves directly connected with and related to. Also included on May 31st was a copy of the 1957 booklet, *Race Prejudice as Self Rejection, An Inquiry into the Psychological and Spiritual Aspects of Group Conflicts*. This is a consolidation of lectures presented by Laurens at the Workshop for Cultural Democracy, in New York City, in December, 1956. Along with more stories, particular those of the Bushmen and their god Mantis, van der Post observes how, through stories provided in the form of legends, is illustrated "in its deepest sense the problem of rejection -- a rejection in ourselves, in society, and in civilization." He goes on to explain that, "Perhaps the mythological aspects of this machinery of rejection will help further to illuminate the situation."

I find it so tragic and ironical that the age in which we live should regard the word "myth" and "illusion" as synonymous, in view of the fact that the myth is the real history, is the real event of the spirit. It is this immense world of meaning with which the image links us. The myth is the tremendous activity that goes on in humanity all the time, without which no society has hope or direction, and no personal life has a meaning. We all live a myth whether we know it or not. We live it by fair means or we live it by foul. Or we live it by a process or a combination of both. We have a myth that we live badly. The Christian myth is a myth in the real sense of the word. [p.18]

Where growth of the spirit is concerned -- of an expanding understanding of the world within -- the attempt to interpret everything as possessing only a literal meaning (as is the case in modern society) exacts a supremely oppressive toll on our sense of participation in and relationship to the world we *are* part of. Laurens describes some of the major elements of the Christian myth which were both contemporary to the time 2,000 years ago as well as symbolic of an inner development of the human spirit beyond that moment in time. Included in such perceptions is the essential nature of the image of a journey, of the sense of direction :

At the beginning of all this mythological activity, at the beginning of everything always, there is the image of a journey. In fact, I think the whole of the religious approach to life is the awakening of the sense of the journey in the human being. And right at the beginning, immediately when man sees himself on the earth and separated from God, he finds himself on the first step of the journey, the Journey of the Garden, the garden to which he can never go back because over the gate stands an angel with a flaming sword in his hands. We cannot go back, once life presupposes a going on. [p.18]

Of course this is not only meant to signify a journey in the physical world, but also a journey into the spirit. "It is a journey of the spirit, of the human personality, moving towards a greater and more complete expression of man, to a greater and more contemporary expression of what is the first spirit in him." And van der Post -- every bit the equal of Joseph Campbell in his understanding and apprehension of the vast importance universal myths of the human family provide, expressed individually through so many cultures specific experiences -- relates the way in which one's own experience of the journey is always concerned with making contemporary, "in the circumstances of one's life, . . . what is first and oldest in the human spirit." This act of making the most ancient qualities in the human spirit contemporary within oneself is what provides the source of renewal we are today seeking and in need of more than ever before. The point is made above that "We cannot go back, once life presupposes a going on", but today we see all about us how we have once again forgotten "that knowledge, culture, and civilization are not standing-still structures, that they are only camping sites on the way of this journey."

The sense of a journey must always be expressed in the most contemporary way in the material, in the circumstances of one's life, in what is first and oldest in the human spirit. This is beautifully told in the opening phrase of our own Judeo-Christian myth. In the Bible, the opening journey is concerned with the first great discovery, the discovery of laws: with the lawfulness of life. Then you get a period where the people try to stand still in that lawfulness. They forget that knowledge, culture, and civilization are not standing-still structures, that they are only camping sites on the way of this journey. One has to move on, and one sees here that one has the trials and the tribulations, the disasters, that overtook this flesh and blood because it would not continue the venture. [p.20]

We can only continue the journey we are all here together embarked upon when we are able to re-infuse the structures of knowledge, culture, and civilization with the flexibility and dynamism life requires in order that they serve the totality of the human spirit instead of the other way around as is the case today. In the first quotation of this section the question is posed,

Since the two World Wars that have occurred in my own lifetime, disorder and violence have become increasingly common on the world scene. Surely these things are rooted in some undiscovered breach of cosmic law or they would be eminently resistible and would not be allowed to occur?

Something of what constitutes this cosmic law is mythologically identified in such lawfulness of life which requires we not stop the journey and attempt to create such standing-still structures, but recognize the essential nature of what it means to continue moving, changing, and growing in order to further learn about the infinity of what existence contains and provides. After "the trials, tribulations, and disasters that overtook this flesh and blood because it would not continue the venture", there comes the second phase in the myth when God comes down to the world to become human, and "*that this coming down is immediately concerned with rejection*" . . .

It is concerned with rejection from the start. Consider what Christ was from the little history that we have of the event. The myth starts straight away with rejection. He was born outside the law. It is an image that he was born in sin, the people of his period considered it to be a sin; and this is how the new aspect, the God, reveals himself to humanity.

Again, profoundly important, is the fact that this myth moves on -- there is the return to Egypt. That is the flight to Egypt. That is the land of bondage. It is a return to the very beginning of the myth, as it were, in order to make it reality. It goes right back to Egypt. There is the mysterious disappearance into Egypt before it re-emerges and there we have to deal with the God who has become law, the rejected aspect of that society. And what is this rejection? It brings something which the law, important as it was, has ignored: the discovery of love. It is the discovery of forgiveness, the mechanism inside the myth, inside the human being. Life could not move on because it could not forgive itself. It stood still in this law. It was pinned down, and the human mind, the human spirit, could not move on until there was this discovery of the reality of forgiveness.

This forgiveness is not a cerebral, soft or sentimental thing. It is not a kiss against the sunset. The new, immensely heroic reality which is God's Son brings a sword. But it has this extraordinary basis: the capacity of forgiveness. And this, in a world drunk and obsessed with law. It is the Roman might and power which this rejected being, this rejected God, discovers as He makes a wonderful remark already prophesied in the Psalm which He refers to when He says, "The stone which the builders have rejected shall be the cornerstone of the building to come." Thus there is a resumption of the journey, and the resumption starts with the acceptance of the rejected aspect of society.

From that time, 2,000 years ago, until now we have refused to go on with the journey. We have not, in a sense, many of us, even come as far as this mechanism of forgiveness. Spiritually and intellectually, we have tried to limit that myth to a particular event. In the meantime, another kind of rejection was piling up because this great discovery of the new, Christian reality has also brought about the rejection of the natural, primitive, instinctive man. The imperative of our time is that the journey must go on again. We have to strike our tents and be on the march and come to a new aspect of ourselves. We have to deal with this new kind of rejection.

I feel there has also been a third great discovery in the mechanism of man. It links closely with what is implied in the process of man becoming God. This discovery owes an enormous amount to Carl Gustav Jung. He has found that by delving into dreams and into the rejected aspects of the psyche there is found the godlike mythological activity in the human being, a sort of master image which, if you can get hold of it, can deal with the mechanism of rejection.

In each of us there is a transcendent image that can reconcile these opposites; bring them together and make it possible for us to move on again. This is the phase at which we stand today. This is the opening, and I think it is a turning point in the history of the human mind. This is the facing up to the mechanism of rejection in ourselves, the realization that the thing we reject in order to become what we are, unless we meet it as a friend, comes one day knife in hand, demanding to sacrifice that which sacrificed it. That is an absolute law. That is how it works, whether we like it or not. That is how it works in us, how it works in groups, how it works in the world. We have had disastrous illustrations of it from time to time, particularly in this generation in which we live. Twice already have we seen the sacrificed aspects coming knife in hand, being dealt with by foul means because we would not deal with by fair means.

Until we transcend this darkness in ourselves, we shall never be able to deal with it in our societies. *It is an axiomatic law that no human can take an institution or a situation or another individual farther than he has travelled himself, inside himself.* And here we have a fact of tremendous religious importance. But it is not being dealt with in our religious life if we allow dogma and doctrine to destroy the sense of journey in human beings, this sense of becoming, this sense of travelling from the state in which we have been born, into the new country of our soul. [pp.20-23]

Within myself, i sense that the process of self-rejection is a paramount fact and dynamic of what is happening at this time on Earth. By rejecting so absolutely some of the deepest elements of our nature -- containing but not limited to non-rational awareness of intuitive and instinct intelligence and illumination -- we are engaged in a pattern of self-betrayal, the cost of which is the very tangible desecration of the natural world and its complement in the world of spirit within each of us. i feel the fact of this because of my own earlier experience in life of a betrayal of self that grew up as a result of my feeling i could not trust life, could not trust my father, to take care of me, to consistently affirm i was lovable, and good, and welcome here. These feelings of not being good enough, of not feeling welcome did not beset me from the start. They were something that began to manifest in the latter years of childhood and *really* took off during adolescence, a time in which Laurens points out, "no human being is so completely helpless and lonely as at the moment of his adolescence." [*The Hunter and the Whale*, p.133-4]

As it happened for me, my parents ended their union when i was 10 years old. Many people never even *knew* both their parents, or lost one or both of them to the scourge of war, poverty, political repression, disease, or accident. Or grew up and came of age with parents who still were married but for whatever reason physically and/or psychically abused them to whatever horrific degree, or had parents who were so lost in their own private hells, there was no energy left to express anything towards their offspring, negative or positive. Each of us only has our own lived experiences and the ensuing memories to proceed with along our unique journey. From this vantage point, i have recently come to see more fully than ever before how i am both the product of my parents in the genetic, psychic inheritance, and

teachings gleaned from their actions carefully observed when i was young, as well as then taking those experiences and adopting my own "Dad" and Mom" personas within. I lived through my own unique initiation of the human experience of dethroning one's parents from the towering godhood they literally as well as symbolically occupied at the beginning, to the imperfect, fallible, and eminently human status we all in fact embody and manifest here.

Laurens points out above that "At the beginning of all this mythological activity, at the beginning of everything always, there is the image of a journey." For the journey to continue to develop things must keep moving, continue unfolding. If the process of the journey stops and stands still there can be no further growth and maturation. Alternatively, van der Post asserts if it has stopped and then resumed, that when "there is a resumption of the journey . . . the resumption starts with the acceptance of the rejected aspect of society." From his own life-long contact with and relationship to the Bushmen, beginning with his half-Bushman nurse Klara who was already present in his earliest memories, Laurens' grew up and came of age seeing very clearly, as he describes it, that a manifestation of "the deepest divide in the human spirit" was a fundamental split in the mind of European man with that of the Bushman of ancient Africa over the sense of property and ownership of physical matter. In Witness to a Last Will of Man he illustrates this rejection of a side of our human consciousness with the story of Esau, the first born, the hunter, who was betrayed by his brother Jacob.

The essence of this being, I believe, was his sense of belonging: belonging to nature, the universe, life and his own humanity. He had committed himself utterly to nature as a fish to the sea. He had no sense whatsoever of property, owned no animals and cultivated no land. Life and nature owned all and he accepted without question that, provided he was obedient to the urge of the world within him, the world without, which was not separate in his spirit, would provide. How right he was is proved by the fact that nature was kinder to him by far than civilization ever was. This feeling of belonging set him apart from us on the far side of the deepest divide in the human spirit. There was a brief moment in our own great Greek, Roman, Hebraic story when his sort of being and our own were briefly reconciled and Esau, the first born, the hunter, kissed and forgave his brother Jacob, the strangely chosen of God, his betrayal. But after that Esau, like Ishmael before him, vanishes from our story and a strange longing hidden in some basement of the European spirit still waits with increasing tension for his return. Meanwhile, the divide in our consciousness between the Esau and the Jacob in man deepened and the Stone-age hunter and his values could not have been more remote and antagonistic to ours when we clashed increasingly in southern Africa. We were rich and powerful where he was poor and vulnerable; he was rich where we were poor and his spirit led to strange water for which we secretly longed. But, above all, he came into our estranged and divided vision, confident in his belonging and clothed as brightly as Joseph's coat of dream colours in his own unique experience of life. Where we became more and more abstracted and abstract, he drew closer to feeling and the immediacy of instinct and intuition. Indeed for him, his feeling values were the most important and the liveliest. Even the language he spoke was a feeling language, expressing reality not in ideas, calculation and abstraction so much as through the feelings provoked in him. He would speak of how the sun, feeling itself to be sitting prettily in the sky and feeling itself to be warm, believed it could make people on the cold earth feel warm as well. His language, therefore, was poetic rather than realistic and though, of course, he was not indifferent to a robust range of the sort of verbs we favour, all usages of his grammar, still warm from the presses of his aboriginal imagination, were contained in an assessment of reality and meaning through feeling. [pp.150-1]

This "divide in our consciousness between the Esau and the Jacob" is the rejected aspect of society van der Post refers to, which must be reconciled if we are to move on again in our journey of the human spirit. There has been a fundamental abrogation in our culture and civilization to face squarely the fact of this rejection of an essential part of our nature that

includes the feeling, the intuitive, and the instinctual non-rational states of human consciousness. Laurens' life spanned not only the divide between cultures of "west" and "east", "white" and "black", but between the cold, growing evermore impersonal, 20th century human being and his stone age forebears manifested in the Bushman who had lived in Africa going back at least 30,000 years. The remnants of the Bushman he found in the Kalahari in 1957, who were still then living as they had millenia ago, were, by the time he returned in 1984, fast becoming completely subsumed by the encroaching cattle ranchers and others spreading over their last refuge. But even with the destruction and annihilation of the final vestiges of the people themselves, the spirit they embodied and the meaning they lived is still something we must take back in ourselves in a contemporary way for the journey to continue.

For years I would watch the Bushman as I shall always remember him by countless such fires at nightfall, so confident and at home in his immense wasteland, full of an unappeasable melancholy. He was the Esau being we daily betrayed in our partial and slanted modern awareness and instead of blaming ourselves for the betrayal, we projected it on to him to such an extent that we had to kill him as Cain killed Abel. Yet, though he himself is vanishing fast from the vision of our physical senses as Esau vanished from the great story which contained as it fashioned the foundations of our culture, he lives on in each one of us through an indefinable guilt that grows great and angry in some basement of our own being. The artist and the seer, even though the priests who should have known it best have forgotten it for the moment, know there is an Esau, a first man, a rejected pattern of being within us which is personified by something similar to a Bushman hunter, without whom they cannot create and sustain a vision of time fulfilled on which a life of meaning depends.

As they create and dream their dreams by making his sort of being contemporary, by linking that which was first with what is new and latest and all that is still to come, they do work of cosmic importance and in the process are invaded with a compassion for this betrayed Esau element that leads unerringly to a love that is overall and which knew him long before we were made. Like that which created creation, named or not named, known or unknown, he is always there.

That this vital link with the first man in us is no subjective assumption of mine but objective truth is proved, I believe, by the striking parallels that exist between the basic images of his spirit and those of Shakespeare, Goethe, Blake and Valéry on which I have already drawn. I know of many more. But I believe these are enough to show how, in considerations such as these, we can proceed to dispel the lethal imperviousness in the cultures which compelled men to fear and extinguish him. Our diminishing civilizations can only renew themselves by a reconciliation between two everlasting opposites, symbolized by Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau and, in our own day, by the Bushman and his murderer. We have no excuse left for not seeing how fatally divided against themselves the processes of civilization have been, and how horrific the consequences in the human spirit. Now there is only a re-dedication of man to knowing himself: the command of both Christ and Apollo which can lead him to rediscover the wholeness lost in the beginning in a contemporary and greater form. Something of this sort is the armour the spirit needs for a future imperilled by corruption from the power we have acquired over the forces of nature. Since this future has come to include man's journey to the stars, the proportions that our humanity needs to protect it from brutalization by hubris of power and extremes of greed demand that we should look back to the moment the first man summoned his son, his future self, and gave him a stick of light with his fire, his awareness, and pointed it to a great feminine star, a mother figure through which an overall father begets. In that slight exercise of what the anthropologists label Stone-age superstition, the journey to space was born and made inevitable, and we have an inkling of why the first man thought of the glittering men of heaven as hunters. [pp.154-5]

The challenge we face then can be no less than to find a way to fashion an armour for the spirit to dispel the corruption engendered by the power we have acquired over the forces of nature. And this armour can only be created with rediscovering the wholeness lost in the beginning in a contemporary and greater form. Speaking about all this recently with a close

friend who understands a great deal more about it than i, she pointed out the nature of human life on Earth has always been and continues to be irrevocably engaged in the process of expanding and maturing. Though i do not yet clearly understand all she said, i apprehended glimpses of the meaning of what she expressed. We are learning what it means to separate from our innocent roots -- manifested in aboriginal times and peoples such as the Bushmen -- in order to find out what life means when we are alone and apart from that time of innocence. As one may find, as one matures and ages, a new basis of meaning and way of belonging to one's own biological family that was so fundamentally different when one was a child, so are we now as the family of humanity involved in finding a new basis of meaning and way of belonging in the changed context of maturing as a species with heretofore unimagined power over the material world.

As best i can articulate, if i had to try to sum up at this point on the journey what i have learned from being here, i'd say it is that each of us is here to find out what the nature of being human means -- what is its meaning?, its significance? -- as it applies to our individual contemporary experience of life itself, and of being human life specifically. Whatever-it-is that sings or speaks to each of us, the clarity or the recognition of meaning will not necessarily resonate and strike another in any similar degree. The bedrock fact is that what for each of us is meaningful and of value, another may not see at all in the same light. All we can do is share what we have found with one another. If it strikes a sonorous chord there is possibly more of mutual interest to explore; if it doesn't, the stream of joint meaning dries up at that point.

David Bohm, the physicist who explored the nature of being human together with Krishnamurti for the last 25 years of Krishnamurti's life up to 1986, conducted weekend seminars after this *On Dialogue And The Nature Of Thought* until his own death in 1992. Given the extent to which the word *meaning* has been employed here, i'd like to include a segment from a seminar held in December, 1989, which contains a segment exploring the meaning of the word 'meaning' :

Bohm: Culture is the *shared meaning*. And meaning includes not only *significance*, but also *value* and *purpose*. According to the dictionary, these are the three meanings of the word 'meaning'. I am saying that common significance, value and purpose will hold the society together. If society does not share those, it is incoherent and it goes apart. And now we have a lot of subgroups in our society which don't share meanings, and so it actually starts to fall apart. . . . If we want to say what the meaning itself is -- the concrete reality of the meaning -- we can't get hold of it. But we can experience it in various forms -- like the significance, the value, and the purpose. If we share meanings, then we will have a common purpose and a common value, which certainly will help hold us together. We have to go more deeply into what that means.

Q: Is the difference between significance, value, purpose important for this discussion? And if so, could you expand on that?

Bohm: There is not a fundamental difference. They are really different aspects of the same thing. 'Significance' has the word 'sign' in it, indicating that it sort of points to something: 'What is the significance of what we are talking about? What is the significance of what we are doing?' That is one idea of meaning.

Value is something which is part of it. If something is very significant, you may sense it as having a high value. The word 'value' has a root which is interesting -- the same root as 'valor' and 'valiant'. It means 'strong'. You might suppose that in early times, when people sensed something of high value they didn't have a word for it, although it moved them strongly. Later

they found a word for it and said it has high value. And then later the word itself may convey that.

If something is significant it may have a high value. And if it has a high value, you may have or you may develop a strong purpose or intention to get it, or sustain it, or something. Things that do not have high value will not generate any very strong purpose. You would say, "It's not interesting. It doesn't mean much to me."

"It means a lot to me" means it has high value. And "I mean to do it" is the same as to say, "It's my purpose." You can see that the word 'meaning' has those three meanings. And I don't think it is an accident; I think they are very deeply related. [*Proprioception of Thought*, David Bohm, 1990, pp.51-53]

This articulation of the three meanings of the word 'meaning' is important for what it points out about the interrelation between them. It has been helpful for me to grasp on a deeper level how the three words work together where *meaning* is concerned. van der Post emphasizes in different ways that the *meaning* of life is embodied in the story each of us is here to find, explore, and live out. In the 1996 film *Hasten Slowly*, Laurens recounts a time in the Kalahari desert in 1957 when he found and lived for a short period with a group of Bushman who were at that time still living in the manner their ancestors had for tens of thousands of years. He longed to hear them tell some of their stories but had been met by blank expressions of resistance and denials that such stories even existed.

I told Jung this story, and Jung said that's wonderful. How wonderful that the wise old lady should protect a story like that. Because, he said, you know so many civilizations have used their power to deprive primitive, vulnerable people of their story. And when their story is taken away from them they lose their meaning and they get corrupt and they cease to live. They lose the will to be an integrated society. And I said to him this is what I had felt too; I'd felt very strongly.

And he said to me, yes, psychologically it's an *enormous* truth that every human being, through his dreams, is in communication with a story with which he's charged to live. And if they don't live that story, for one reason or another, they become neurotic, they become alienated and they lose the will to be complete members of the life their time.

Along with the individual experience of life we each explore is the shared meaning defined above by Bohm as culture. van der Post's sense of the individual and the collective and how they interrelate is relevant and timely to the disintegration of meaning being acted out on wider and wider scales of size in the material world. I'm referring here specifically to the mob-minded sort of collective behavior that manifested so concretely in Germany in the thirties, and is, to my limited view, gaining more and more ground globally throughout post-industrial culture. This is the collectivity of an unconsciousness that chooses to stay thus asleep and so live out a partial form of existence and being. But there is also a collective whole that each of us is joined to and in communion with in our individual material experience, living inside these "human overcoats" (as Evelyn Eaton's *I Send A Voice* so beautifully evokes).

Among its many perceptive observations, *Witness to a Last Will of Man* points out how the nature of being human -- with regard to the individual and the collective -- has become lost in the reductionist thinking of our day that only concerns itself with "things that are useful." In so doing we are not only cut off from that "partnership with an overwhelming act of creation" our aboriginal forebears lived intimately with throughout their lives, we also falter because we no longer know what "a living experience of religion" feels like, expressed in "a contemporary idiom" that directly reflects the tenor and meaning of life in our own day.

As I thought of the first man's instinctive sense for the meaning of life, I seemed to be more aware than ever of the loneliness creeping into the heart of modern man because he no longer sought the answers of life with the totality of his being. He was in danger of going back precisely to those discredited collective concepts and surrendering this precious gift of being an individual who is specific for the sake of the whole, an individual who believes that a union of conformity is weakness but that a union of diversities, of individuals who are different and specific, is truly strength. A grey, abstract, impersonal organization of a materialistic civilization seemed to be pressing in on us everywhere and eliminating these life-giving individual differences and sources of enrichment in us. Everywhere men were seeking to govern according to purely materialistic principles that make us interesting only in so far as we have uses. It was true even in Zululand, let alone Paris and London.

I was speaking once to an old Zulu prophet who, when I asked him about their First Spirit, Unkulunkulu, said to me: 'But why are you interested in Unkulunkulu? People no longer talk about him. His praise names are forgotten. They only talk about things that are useful to them.'

This ancient reverence for the individual, so clear and unprovisional in the Bushman, has been lost, this individual dedicated to a self that is greater than the individual, who serves something inside himself that is a microcosm of the great wheeling universe. This individual who, by being his self, is in a state of partnership with an overwhelming act of creation and is thereby adding something to life that was not there before, is being taken away from us. We no longer feel the longing, the wonder and the belonging out of which new life is raised. In the depths of ourselves we feel abandoned and alone and therein is the sickness of our time. . . .

It is only now that we have lost what I re-found in the Kalahari in the nineteen fifties when, for months on end, I moved through country no 'sophisticated' man had ever set eyes on, that I realize in full what it meant and did for my own senses, brutalized by years of war. It was as if I had been in a great temple or cathedral and had a profound religious experience. I returned to the world, knowing that unless we recover our capacity for religious awareness, we will not be able to become fully human and find the self that the first man instinctively sought to serve and possess. Fewer and fewer of us can find it any more in churches, temples and the religious establishments of our time, much as we long for the churches to renew themselves and once more become, in a contemporary idiom, an instrument of pentecostal spirit. Many of us would have to testify with agonizing regret that despite the examples of dedicated men devoted to their theological vocation, they have failed to give modern man a living experience of religion such as I and others have found in the desert and bush. That is why what is left of the natural world matters more to life now than it has ever done before. It is the last temple on earth which is capable of restoring man to an objective self wherein his ego is transfigured and given life and meaning without end. [pp.160-2]

To me, there is something so deeply true about this perception of "being an individual who is specific for the sake of the whole" and how this relates to the direction post-industrial society continues to head towards. This mass culture is fast absorbing and making homogeneous more and more of the remaining distinct and diverse cultures still not assimilated into a collective world asleep, where the one speaks to the many through mass media, and a partial, limited version of consciousness continues to *attempt* to usurp and take the place of the whole in life. This fact of the manifestation of partial being and awareness is painfully apparent to anyone who still is blessed with whatever degree of sensitivity that was not "unlearned" or seared out of one from early trauma or unbearable pain. As van der Post describes in *A Far Off Place* :

Obedience to one's greater awareness, and living it out accordingly to the rhythm of the law of time implicit in it, was the only way. Unlived awareness was another characteristic evil of our time, so full of thinkers who did not do and doers who did not think. Lack of awareness and disobedience to such awareness as there was meant that modern man was increasingly a partial, provisional version instead of a whole, committed version of himself. That was where tyranny, oppression, prejudice and intolerance began. Tyranny was partial being; a part of the whole of man masquerading as his full self and suppressing the rest. All started within before it manifested

itself without and tyranny began within partial concepts of ourselves and our role in life. [p.111]

Maintaining one's own depth of sensitivity -- physically and especially psychically -- at this time on Earth is perhaps one of the most challenging *and elusive* feats imaginable. Everywhere is the call not only for instant gratification, but more pervasively, the pursuit of activities and goals promising escape from coming face-to-face with the fundamental incoherent nature of our lives and our culture. To cohere means "to hold together firmly as parts of the same mass". Incoherence is lacking coherence, a way in which things fall apart and move away from each other. In another seminar facilitated by David Bohm (November 3-5, 1989), he describes one of the ways our society attempts to stabilize itself by destroying sensitivity to incoherence in young people :

I think our whole society tries to stabilize itself by starting out to destroy sensitivity to incoherence starting with very young children. If people could see the vast incoherence that is going on in society they would be disturbed and they would feel the need to do something. If you're not sensitive to it you don't feel disturbed and you don't feel you need to do anything.

I remember an instance, a daughter was telling her mother, "this school is terrible, the teacher is terrible, very inconsistent, doing all sorts of crazy things," and so on. Finally the mother was saying, "you'd better stop this -- in this house the teacher is always right." Now she understood that the teacher was wrong obviously, but the message was, it was no use. Even the message may have been right in some sense, but still it illustrates that the predicament is that in order to avoid this sort of trouble, starting with very young children, we are trained to become insensitive to incoherence. If there is incoherence in our own behavior, we thereby also become insensitive to it.

Those of us who have not lost this sensitivity to incoherence are, to my mind, blessed because we are still aware to whatever degree of the whole in life and are able to see wholistically to whatever depth and scale we each perceive. Above, the Zulu prophet remonstrates about how people nowadays "only talk about things that are useful to them", which is of course what will comprise a partial expression of consciousness if the material, the physical, is all that is vaunted and held up as being valuable and worthy of human searching and purpose. The sense of the search and purpose of the original hunter for the greatest quarry of all is almost completely extinguished for most people today, who are left 'palely loitering" through life'. i'm referring, of course, to the hunt for meaning.

We know so much intellectually, indeed, that we are in danger of becoming the prisoners of our knowledge. We suffer from a hubris of the mind. We have abolished superstition of the heart only to install a superstition of the intellect in its place. We behave as if there were some magic in mere thought, and we use thinking for purposes for which it was never designed. As a result we are no longer sufficiently aware of the importance of what we cannot know intellectually, what we must know in other ways, of the living experience before and beyond our transitory knowledge. The passion of the spirit, which would inspire man to live his finest hour dangerously on the exposed frontier of his knowledge, seemed to me to have declined into a vague and arid restlessness hiding behind an arrogant intellectualism, as a child of arrested development hides behind the skirts of its mother.

Intellectually, modern man knows almost all there is to know about the pattern of creation in himself, the forms it takes, the surface designs it describes. He has measured the pitch of its rhythms and carefully recorded all the mechanics. From the outside he sees the desirable first object of life more clearly perhaps than man has ever seen it before. But less and less is he capable of committing himself body and soul to the creative experiment that is continually seeking to fire him and to charge his little life with great objective meaning. Cut off by accumulated knowledge from the heart of his own living experience, he moves among a comfortable rubble of material possession, alone and unbelonging, sick, poor, starved of meaning. How different the naked little Bushman, who could carry all he possessed in one hand!

Whatever his life lacked, I never felt it was meaning. Meaning for him died only when we bent him to our bright twentieth-century will. Otherwise, he was rich where we were poor; he walked clear-cut through my mind, clothed in his own vivid experience of the dream of life within him. By comparison most of the people I saw on my way to the sea were blurred, and like the knight at arms in Keats' frightening allegory, "palely loitering" through life. [*The Heart of the Hunter*, pp.137-8.]

The insensitivity to incoherent human activity manifesting around the globe continues to be lived out by those poignantly and painfully caught up in it by their own choice, as well as by those thrall to the scourge of "the four horseman," primary instances of such previously and amply discredited partial patterns of human thought and behavior. I am always grateful when I catch further glimpses of my own insensitivity as well as instances of self-deception still raging and manifesting with an energy and power as disturbing as it is illuminating. But in all that is happening, I also find myself buoyed up by the manifestation of greater meaning in the life expressing itself through me with such activities as playing piano for kids in school and exploring further and living out within myself what van der Post so richly evokes as "an example of [what it means to be] a 'spy of God'". The following two paragraphs follow immediately from the first quotation in this section regarding how for van der Post, the Bushman was always "a kind of frontier guide" along a boundary where "[i]magination shifts and passes, as it were, through a strange customs post on the fateful frontier between being and unrealized self, between what is and what is to come."

For the English-speaking world the most significant example of such an imagination shift is to be found, of course, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It was preceded by works in which Shakespeare celebrates the beauty, the potentials for happiness, the plausible attractions and surface patterns of the outer world. But suddenly it is as if the wind of time from some absolute frontier of the universe brings him a scent of the existence of a denied meaning that is far more than surface beauty, and so much greater than either the happiness or unhappiness encountered on the worldly scene. And at once it is as if, with Hamlet, man crosses not only for himself but for all men, this long shunned frontier of the spirit, and from there begins years of journeying of a new kind. The journey this time inevitably goes down into an underworld of mind and time, where man is confronted not only with all the inadequacies and consequences of his worldly consciousness but also faces alone and unsupported by a familiar pattern of living the stark necessity of making his own choice between good and evil, truth and untruth, before he is free to move on towards the wholeness that their opposition so paradoxically serves. Shakespeare, I believe, becomes, in his great phrase, one of 'God's spies' and takes on himself 'the mystery of things' so 'utterly' (as the Bushmen would have it), that he could come to rest in the conclusion: 'Men are such stuff as dreams are made on'. But even as dream material Shakespeare in *The Tempest* is still faced with an ending that would be despair, 'unless I be relieved by prayer'. Why prayer? Because it is the symbol both of man's recognition of the existence of, and his dependence on, a power of creation beyond his conscious understanding, and greater than life and time, that time which Einstein described not as a condition in which life exists so much as a state of mind. In prayer, there is an image of certain promise that through this recognition and this remembrance and surrender of the part to a sense of the whole, Shakespeare could summon help from the heart of the universe to live the final portion of the overall dream with which his art was invested and to which his flesh and blood was entrusted.

All this may seem as remote from the Bushmen and Stone-age culture as to be irrelevant. Yet in reality it has an *a priori* significance not only for understanding the nature of primitive being but for preventing the contraction of individual consciousness which is such an alarming symptom of our collectivist day and promoting the enlargement of individual consciousness into an expanding awareness on which the renewal of our societies depends. The collectivist and intellectual turned 'intellectualist', the promoter of 'isms' of the intellect that are to the sanity of being and spirit what viruses are to the body, will no doubt find it absurd but it is precisely because the Bushman has been a scout and frontier guide to me from infancy in the same dark labyrinthine underworld of human nature which Shakespeare entered precipitately with *Hamlet*,

that I have been compelled to tell the world about him. From time to time during my life I try to reappraise what the Bushman has done for me and here I do so probably for the last time. I cannot disguise that for many years I lost conscious sight of him as I went my own wilful way but instinctively he was always there and bound never to mislead or fail. He could not fail, as I realized looking back on to the vortex of the movement which he started in my imagination, because I recognized with the clarity and precision of instinct of the child that he was still charged with magic and wonder. He was an example of a 'spy of God', to follow beyond the well-dug trenches of the aggressive Calvinist consciousness of our community into some no-man's land of the spirit where he had taken upon him the mystery of things. He, too, was from the beginning 'such stuff as dreams are made on' and had soldiered on in the field where the prophetic soul of the wide world also dreamed of things to come. [pp.125-6]

Always it seems, whenever change has occurred that manifested a greater awareness and illumination of the meaning of life, it originated from individuals who had taken upon themselves the mystery of things and set out into the unknown to discover and explore whatever was waiting there for them. The meaning of Shakespeare's image of a spy is expansively inspired to say the least: one is spying out a new land where things are not yet known -- or conscious -- and initially this seems to be the way conscious awareness manifests and is increased. Lived out individually at first, it is only after one scouts out -- on one's own -- whatever new land such a spy of God will detect, that this can then be made accessible to the society one exists within and belongs to.

It occurred to me in time that this kind of separation, even in the animal, was necessary to create a greater awareness which it was impossible to acquire in the context of sympathetic numbers of their own kind. In the years I had already spent in devout observation of the creatures of Africa, it was most striking how these lone phenomena developed senses so keen that the beasts who preyed on them and their kind would leave them alone, because they realized they were no match for the qualities of vigilance produced by loneliness and isolation. It was, in fact, far easier to prey on animals who assumed that there was safety in numbers. If this were true and necessary for the increase and renewal of animal awareness, I often wondered how much more necessary it was for the human being. Unlike the animal, the human had no sheer, blind obedience to the will of nature which is instinctive. On the contrary, he had an inspired kind of disobedience to the laws of nature which led to a recommitment of life in a more demanding law of individuality designed for the growth of consciousness. This growth set the implacable pre-condition that any new awareness had to be lived out in isolation before it could be understood and known, and made accessible to society. [*Yet Being Someone Other*, p.75]

Increasingly for my self, i find that living out this being "specific for the sake of the whole" imbues a richer and richer appreciation of the life expressing itself within and without, as well as bestowing a deepening sense of meaning and purpose i grow daily more grateful for. In all this i feel i once more belong to the world, and am somehow known to it and by all of the life in, on, and around it. This embodies an increasing sense of wholeness within similar to something felt in the first years of life, but augmented now beyond what existed without conceptualization or abstraction in childhood by making contemporary in my consciously maturing self the experience of re-linking to the cosmos with a commensurate cosmic meaning surrounding the ineffably mysterious nature of life and its infinitude of expressions of being. And i know somehow, more and more now as i approach the middle of my fourth decade, that with respect to my own journey i've needed to find out about this by spending a great deal of the ensuing years alone. Such loneliness and isolation has, without my consciously realizing or seeking it out, bestowed one of the greatest gifts i can imagine any one ever receiving: "the increase and renewal of animal awareness".

The title for this ratorial was chosen to convey what has been gleaned more consciously of

late than previously understood in the school of life: just as a seed in the ground does not spring into the form of a mature plant overnight, so has it been repeatedly demonstrated recently how significant events in life have achieved a state of maturation only at their own tempo of development. On the surface level of the physical senses, this relates to the energy required to expand the repertoire of songs i'd like to be able to play for children which in turn requires patience, dedication, and a strong sense of affinity with the composers who lived out their lives creating such quintessential expressions of what it means to be human, with all the contradictions and apparently irreconcilable opposites intact and present in such a soulful form of art. And on the deeper level of the spirit is the ongoing hunt and search for meaning, for that which is perceived to be significant and of high value. While the surface level of energy i am concentrating my focus on requires much time (as measured by the earth spinning through space) for new songs to mature so they can be played for others, the time it takes to capture an understanding of expanding levels of inner meaning and self illumination can occur instantaneously, provided one is alert to the significant clues life all ways presents us with at each moment. On both these levels, the image of planting seeds in the ground of being -- to then nurture and cultivate so the unknown possibilities of life can sprout and release their transformative energies -- feels especially appropriate.

For everyone who actually reads this, i can only hope each finds a similar re-connection with their own story and inner flowering of meaning. The possibilities *are* limitless. This wintertime of the human spirit is reminiscent of *Fahrenheit 451* where people congregated together who shared a similar interest in preserving the wisdom and understanding from works of literature by memorizing whole books and keeping them alive by reciting them to interested listeners. Oren Lyons, faith-keeper of the Onondaga of the Iroquois Confederacy, speaking in an interview about the challenges facing human kind today, said his people were told, concerning the power of the ceremonies of the Longhouse and the thanks giving they were instructed to do, "'As long as there's one to sing and one to dance, one to speak and one to listen, life will go on.'" So as long as the instructions are being carried out even if it's down to the last four, life will go on."

In the last quoted paragraph of Laurens' interpretation of the Christian myth he states, "Until we transcend this darkness in ourselves, we shall never be able to deal with it in our societies. *It is an axiomatic law that no human can take an institution or a situation or another individual farther than he has travelled himself, inside himself.* And here we have a fact of tremendous religious importance." To me this implies what maturity, in the best sense of that word, means: to recognize and unconditionally accept -- and rejoice in -- the fact that once one is a physically mature adult human being, one is utterly response able for one's own state of mind and spirit. Seeing the fact that in each moment, we choose how we interpret what it is we perceive in precisely the way we *choose* to interpret the events occurring within and without us, gives us the full measure of the power of response ability we each are born to fulfill and manifest here.