HA‘INA MAI KA PUANA
LET THE STORY BE TOLD

robert wolff

Contents

"In the dust, where we have buried the
silent races and their abominations,
we have buried so much of their
delicate magic of life"

D.H.Lawrence

Introduction

Stories are rarely new, their value is in the retelling of human truths. Many of the stories in this collection are old, they happened many years ago, and were written a few years ago. What made me want to put them together in this book is that they are like snapshots of a past that is only just behind us. Our world is changing very rapidly, so rapidly that the world of a previous generation seems almost incomprehensibly strange.

Ha'ina mai ka puana[1] is a Hawaiian expression, used in almost all traditional and many modern Hawaiian songs. It is the last verse, used very much as a story teller might end his telling with "and so it is." Sometimes it is a summing up of the theme of the song. Usually it just says "and so it is." As many Hawaiian expressions it can mean other things as well, including "let the story be told."

These stories tell of a world behind us. Today's stories were born from what we did and did not do fifty years ago. Ha'ina mai ka puana is the last verse of a way of life, of human qualities that were alive and true not all that long ago.
Of course these few stories are not exceptional and could be told of all indigenous cultures, now gone or disappearing. I share them here only because they are mine. It is what I know.

For the past several hundred years we, westerners, have stomped around the planet, "globalizing" as we now call it, and in our conversions and conquests we have forcefully, often deliberately, eradicated values, age-old ways of living, customs and traditions. The things we call "culture".
The *culture* of a people used to be the distillation of the wisdom of generations after generations, telling a way of being in the world, always based on deep values shared by a group of people.

Today, when we think of culture we mean something else. Culture today stands for the fads and fashions of a world society in frantic haste to change for the sake of change. And it is clear now that in this roaring chaos not just the indigenous peoples of the earth, but also "the masses" are pushed aside.

We, humans, are not only raping the planet, obliterating a thousand species of beings every year— or is it every week, or even every day?— we are also destroying ourselves. But that is the thought of an old man. Many people believe that a new humanity is just around the corner.

We, westerners, mostly white and mostly male, have a deep conviction that we are right, that we are the future, that what we believe is "true" and therefore that other beliefs are not. We do not need to say these things in words, they are only too evident in our deeds and in our attitudes toward others. We cannot help but communicate our firm conviction that non-westerners have no 'worth' as someone said in the first story of this collection.

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[1] In Hawaiian "a" is always pronounced ah, as in *large*; "i" is always ee, as in *keep*; "u" is always oo as in *boot*. The above phrase is pronounced Hah...eena Ma.ee Kah Poo.ah.nah

I am of a generation that still remembers some of the old values, and to me it seems clear that what we had, even only fifty years ago, is richer than the flattened culture we have in the west today. A pop-culture, based on a statistical common denominator, is shallow. What we have left that could be called values is superficial and amazingly short-sighted. Our slogan (because that is what it has become) of “democracy” we interpret to mean the average of a poll, what the average person believes: the very opposite of wisdom, which is what previous generations learned by living, a body of wisdom passed on to the next generation, and the next. Stories remembered from generation to generation by being told.

We have forgotten, and now do not accept, that those who have no writing have perfect recall.

Values are not calculated from polls. Age-old values tell behaviors, attitudes and knowing that were essential for survival of a people, a tribe. Cooperation, respect, mutual help in difficult times. Any indigenous culture learned how best to manage their environment in such a way as to preserve it. Cultural values were customs and traditions but always in the context of their unique place.

We substituted fierce competition for cooperation, disrespect and inequality for progress. And bureaucracy to manage our environment.

In my life time humans have changed radically — and not because of technological machinery but because we think differently today. Our values seem no longer wise but selfish and based on greed.

I dedicate these few stories to the indigenous peoples of the world, from whom I have learned all I cherish.

Manuia

On a trip back from somewhere farther south I stopped at Pago Pago, the capital of American Samoa. At that time Pago (pronounced Pango, without sounding the ‘g’), its unofficial name among travelers, was the end of the line for Pan Am (then the flag carried for the U.S.). From there you had to take other, usually small airlines, if you wanted to go further south. Pago was not my favorite place to overnight — it was hard to escape the bars, the noise and the fierce traffic on such a small island — but I had no choice. Fortunately I had made friends with some wonderful Samoans, one of them chief of nursing. She was a high-ranking Samoan chief in her own right, and was married to the High Chief of the American part of the Samoas. Here, in Pago Pago, the title was perhaps largely ceremonial, in Western Samoa, an independent country, the High Chief is the ruler. Americans have a love-hate relationship with aristocracy; they are endlessly curious and at the same time always loudly proclaim that, of course, they do not believe in 'that sort of thing'. In Samoa one does not make fun of a Samoan Chief! The Chief Nurse was large, with a larger voice. When I sauntered around the hospital she saw me from two hallways away, laughed loudly and yelled: "Eh Doc, wanna go on a field trip with us?"

Sure; where are we going?

There was a small island, Aunu'u, not too far from Pago, with little more than a hundred people. The public health department had decided the island needed modern sanitation: flush toilets. The island was small and very rocky. In fact it was difficult to land there because there were no beaches, Our boat would stand off shore and the local people would ferry us ashore, one by one, in their canoes. We were to leave the next morning. Very early, before daybreak, she said. We did not actually leave that early, of course, but we tried. There were a hundred and one last minute instructions to leave, things to bring with us, and we had to wait for fuel for the boat.

While we waited I asked Nurse what the people on Aunu'u were doing about their sanitation now? Well, what they do on all small islands of course. The local people allowed the ocean's tides to wash away human and other waste products twice a day.
That seemed eminently sensible. It is the ways of modern man that are inscrutable.
I knew well enough that Americans, who have an unnatural horror of human waste would imagine they were bringing “progress”, the twentieth century! Relying on the ocean to remove untreated feces was, of course, altogether too natural.

As we were waiting for one more thing to be loaded, I heard some of the details of the plan. Flush toilets require a reliable water supply. There was no water supply 'system' on the little island, of course: every household collected rain water, as I am doing here in Hawai'i. The public health people planned to make a storage lake somewhere high on the island, with pipes leading down to the toilets. Because all this required considerable resources, mostly money, they had decided to make the planned first four toilets side by side, on one side of the island. Is there a village then, I asked? No, the people live quite scattered around the island. How about people who live on the other side of the island? Well, they would see how wonderful this new system was and demand more toilets to be installed on their side — maybe? The four toilets might serve the few people who happened to live nearby; the others would do what they had always done.

Some months later I heard that the four toilets had not been used much by anyone, but had attracted flies they had never had on the island before.
I hope the islanders knew to dismantle them...

We took off in a Boston Whaler, small motor boat, the kind of boat often used for one day trips all over the Pacific. Beside the Chief Nurse there were four or five others, including the driver of the boat, and myself. The seas ran quite a bit higher than our boat, so we ran at an angle to the waves, which made the boat make the most disconcerting circular dipping and waving motions.

I remembered someone's advice to always look at the horizon in rough seas, to have a fixed point to focus on, otherwise you get seasick. Our horizon was never horizontal, it moved and dipped at sick angles and was often completely invisible behind yet another mountainous wave.

Samoans are quite used to small boats and large waves. Chief Nurse sat on the roof of the cabin of the little craft, facing aft where we swayed huddled in the spray, holding tight to the sides. She led us in vigorous singing. We sang at the top of our voices, although not much could be heard over the crashing waves. I sang as well as I could, keeping my eyes riveted on Nurse, who swayed easily with the violent movements of the boat (that is where the movements of Polynesian hula comes from, I thought!). But it worked: the singing got us to Aunu'u and nobody was sick.

A sea anchor held us, bobbing and lurching, a hundred feet or so from what did not seem like much of a beach. Local people came out in small canoes, delivering us to the rough, pebbled beach one by one.

Samoans are hearty people; they are also formal. Every project — certainly such an important one as this one, sponsored by the government — must start out with a kava ceremony. We sat on mats in the open air near the beach with the local chief and a few people from the little island. A bowl of kava was placed in the middle of our rough circle, and a young girl handed half coconut shells of the muddy brew to each person in turn. There is strict protocol, of course. First the highest ranking chief of the hosts, then the highest ranking chief of the visitors, and so on down the line. Each person drinks the kava offered, pours a little of the dregs on the ground in front of him or her, loudly proclaiming manuia (a toast), and then gives a lengthy, flowery speech. Everyone expressed delight at this new project, brought by such illustrious visitors, which would surely live on in history. Every one also mentioned at least three times how honored they were by our visit, which was the most important event that had happened on this little island since...

Kava (in some parts of the Pacific it is called kava kava, in Hawai'i it is 'awa) is used in all of Polynesia. It is made from the root of a pepper plant. In the traditional world young girls (Westerners would say “virgins” although I do not think Polynesians ever valued virginity as we do) would chew the root until pulpy, spit the mess into a large bowl, add a little water perhaps. The resulting, often slightly fermented brew is indeed muddy looking, not very tasty, but has an almost immediate effect. Kava dulls the tongue, and some people feel it tingle. Some text books call it a 'narcotic', which it definitely is not. At a typical ceremony, such as the one we attended, the effect of the kava was minimal because the amount we consumed was also minimal. (Today it has become one of those fads for people all over the world who search for yet another substance that might get one “high”. Kava does not create a high, it relaxes.)

Perhaps it was the kava, but I believe it was the honor and praise that was passed around that made people feel good. This was a small group, but people made long speeches, so all in all the ceremony lasted at least an hour, I remember. No doubt the island received few visitors and this was an occasion to cherish, to tell stories about to children and grandchildren.

Eventually the kava cup came to me. I drank, I poured some on the ground, saying, Manuia, and gave a speech. Officially, of course, I had no part in this project. I was a visitor not only to this island, but to American Samoa. But I was connected to the University of Hawai'i at the time, and the University of Hawai'i was perceived by many to be a sort of door to the modern world. I had had enough time to think about what I would say, but even so my speech was certainly the shortest. Not good! As everyone else, I said I was honored, I was pleased to be here and get to know even a little about this island. I explained that I had no official connection with this particular project, but I had worked with Chief Nurse and others in public health projects elsewhere. I ended by saying that I would be very grateful and honored if someone could be kind enough to show me around the island. I was passionately interested in “native healing”, I said, and while the important visitors would do what they came to do, perhaps I could meet some others on this island.

There was what I imagined to be an embarrassed silence. My speech had been much too short, I knew. But the ceremony continued and eventually we all stood up, stretching to get the kinks out.

An elderly man came up to me and asked me what did I mean when I said “native healing?” I explained that I had traveled to many other islands of the South Pacific, and that I was interested in learning what people did to stay healthy. I said that I knew that when people live somewhere, like this island, for perhaps a thousand years, surely they must have learned ways to use local plants for healing, or perhaps seaweed, or even sea water. Certainly someone must help women deliver when it was their time. Perhaps someone on this island knew how to set a broken bone, because after all a trip to Pago Pago was quite long and I imagined it was not easy for people of this island to travel so far, certainly not when they had a sickness.
"Oh that," he said, "yes we do have some people who are good at that sort of thing..." After only a moment's hesitation he said he would be happy to be my guide.

Later I would wonder what his role was in this small society. I imagined he might well have been what in Hawai'i would be called a kahuna, a priest (in Hawai'i there are many different kinds of kahuna, from healing kahuna to priests who “control life and death”).

We walked around the island. The island is not very big and we did not walk very fast. He introduced me to people along the way. At fist I made notes, but it was clear that my note taking was inhibiting people, so we rested between visits while I made notes. We talked.

We visited an old woman who knew herbs, who made teas and infusions. She also knew how to make very effective poultices to draw out infections, she mentioned after a moment's hesitation. A man on the other side of the island knew how to set a broken bone so that it would heal straight. Two middle-aged sisters, living together almost at the top of the island, after some hesitation admitted that they were usually consulted for births, and sometimes deaths. When I had assured them that I would not say anything to the "authorities," whoever they might be, one of the sisters added that sometimes they also healed by laying on of hands. I assured them that many people, all over the world, do that.
Many people on the island knew massage. In contrast to other islands I had visited, we did not talk to anyone who knew healing values of seaweed, perhaps because the ocean almost everywhere was barely accessible. Where the island met the ocean there were rocks, not sand.
My guide became more friendly with each visit. In the end he took me to meet his wife and a grown son, the son's wife and their young son. The family shared what food they had with dignity and love (no Coca Cola on this island, or Spam — very unusual!)

It was late afternoon before I joined the other members of our little expedition again, having walked all around the little island. I was the last to get into a canoe.
Just before we were to be pushed into the surf, my guide rushed back with a mat, tightly rolled, in his arms.

On many islands of the South Pacific mats are often given to express appreciation; Samoans were famous for making what is called “fine mats”, mats so fine they feel almost like cloth. This was not a “fine mat” he said, and smaller than tradition required perhaps, but it was all he had. He wanted me to have it.

*"**You first palangi*** (white person) ***tell something we*** (have/are) ***is worth**,"* he said.

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Often, the ocean calms around sunset; on our way back the seas had only the long, flat waves of the open ocean. Chief Nurse again led the singing, but now she chose quiet, reflective songs, more appropriate for the rapidly falling darkness through which we sped back to Pago.

I did not sing. I listened to the feathery sound of waves caressing the boat, the mat clutched to my heart, feeling deeply ashamed of how my fellow westerners appear to much of the world’s people.

1989

Love of the Land

A friend of a friend was able to get a few acres of land, with a barely livable house, at an auction for back taxes. Probably a bargain, perhaps he paid less than the land was worth. The house, small, unpainted and rundown suited his simple needs. The location was good, but not exceptional: walking distance to the ocean, although the island there is very rocky, the ocean not really accessible.

He loved the land just as it was. He did not cut any trees. When an old tree fell in a storm he planted another. He made a modest garden, growing enough greens for his own modest needs.

He knew of course that the law states clearly that the previous owners can reclaim their land within one year for the amount he paid, plus ten percent.

Toward the end of the year the previous owners, a large Hawaiian family, invited the friend of my friend to a breakfast. The new owner of the land, a single man, finally met with quite a few of the near and far relatives of the people who had owned the land but did not pay taxes for several years. There were grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles and many nephews and nieces. The food traditional "local": eggs with Spam, rice and poi, pancakes and toast, fruit juices, water and coffee served in plastic cups.

Of course the friend of my friend knew that while they were eating no business would be discussed. And even though everyone seemed to go out of their way to be pleasant, he could not help wondering— it was not impossible that he might lose the land he had come to love deeply.

After they had eaten, the oldest of the family, stood up and said: "we invited you here to let you know we are not going to reclaim our land. We have seen that you take good care of it. You seem to love it as much as we did."

What Is

My good friend —I shall call her Kay—recently moved from this island to Honolulu, which is on another island, about 50 minutes from here by plane: the only way one can get from one island to another these days.

Kay and her dog Ani are inseparable. They certainly understand each other's moods, feelings and needs. They lived in a small town near here before they moved to the city.
Honolulu is not big compared to today's mega-cities of many millions of people. Honolulu has a population of under one million. There is a small area that has high rise buildings, most of it is what in other countries would be suburbs; Honolulu covers a large area of land.
Kay and Ani (and Ulu-cat) now live in an apartment, the upper floor of what used to be a two story one family house, converted to two apartments. The upper apartment has an outside staircase to a tiny piece of land, a city lot.

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Kay and I are close friends, we share many things, and central perhaps is our love for the *'aina* as Hawaiians say: the earth, the plants and trees that live in and with the soil that covers this planet. We share a love of growing things, which is not the same as growing exotic garden plants. We love the earth as it is here on these islands.

The Hawaiian islands are very isolated, the nearest land mass is 2500 miles away, a little more than the distance between New York and Los Angeles. Hawai'i is just north of the Tropic of Cancer, which marks the boundary between tropical and subtropical but the temperatures here are very even, varying perhaps 10° or at most 20° Fahrenheit from day to night, and from season to season. The soil is fertile: everything grows here, people say.

In a city, however, so much land is covered by concrete and asphalt that there are areas that have become desert, dried out land that no longer supports much life, only the hardiest weeds. When Kay moved in, there was some dry grass, lifeless bushes and what she thought were dead trees. Nothing else.

Kay lives on a corner where two busy streets meet, and a busy bus stop. Quite a change from the small town where she lived before.

I have seen Kay, on her hands and knees, making a garden of another corner of a big lot here on this island, planting bananas, taro and sweet potatoes for food, while nourishing the trees and plants that had been there for many years. She did the same from the moment she moved into the apartment in Honolulu. With a little trowel she carefully loosened the hard soil, inch by inch, To make the dried-up ground come to life she collected fallen leaves wherever she could find them, cut them up in small pieces with scissors to make a sort of instant compost which she carefully sprinkled around the dead-looking trees, and around the seedlings she planted in holes she dug.

Now, a few months after she moved in, two of the trees have come alive, and are sprouting small leaves, and a few buds. The taro and sweet potato plants she put in are beginning to grow.

A small part of the corner where the two streets meet has become Ani's territory, that is where she does her business. Ani is an American Bull, a kind of Pit Bull, but she is a gentle, sensitive and very friendly dog; she has made friends with some of the people who walk to the bus stop regularly. Ani and Kay have made new friends. People walk by a little slower. They stop to notice the new growth where before there was nothing.

Kay and her cat and dog are a family that has brought life to land that had almost none left in just a few months. And people notice. Just by seeing this miracle people have become mellower, they bring little gifts: cookies, some muffins for Kay and they talk to Ani.

Perhaps people do not even realize that they walk slower when they go to the bus stop now. They may not consciously appreciate the new life.
But the atmosphere around that house has changed, and all humans respond to that. Kay has made a little island of Nature. Not a flower garden with exotic plants fed by artificial (that means man-made) fertilizer. She has used her hands and her love of the land and has made things grow.

In a few months Nature can revive with our love, care and a lot of sweat!

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I remember when I moved into the little house in Volcano. The house was not much, old, and dark before some skylights were put in. But there was something about the not quite quarter acre around the house that told me, Yes, this is 'right'. There is a marvelous word in Hawaiian, '*pono*', that means right, healthy, harmonious, the way it is supposed to be (whatever "it" is). When I first saw this land I knew that this place was pono for me.

Perhaps six weeks after I moved in, and after I had gotten to know every tree and every plant that was here, my landlord came to visit with 'Anakala (the word for 'uncle', but also a male of the generation of one's parents, sometimes used as a name). When 'Anakala got out of the car, he looked around, took a deep breath and said with some astonishment, "*Eh, this place is alive, it has never been alive before!*"

All I had done as yet was to pay attention to What Is. I had not planted any plants yet. I had not changed anything, but I had loved everything. I had removed some dead branches, cleaned up a little. On my hands and knees I had admired the little weeds that grow in the grass, the ferns that came up in the shade. I had talked with the trees and had learned that on one of the corners of the lot there were 'talking trees'. Trees that grow so close together that their trunks rub against each other and so make a sound that varies with wind speed and direction and who knows what other factors), And where the dogs of the previous occupant had made 'dead' places, I carefully planted some wild ground cover.

Everywhere I have lived—and I have lived in many places, all over the world —I have always taken my time to get to know a new environment. I want to know what the weather is like here, and where the wind usually comes from. I want to feel what each of the plants and trees is like: does it like full sun or shade? I want to know what animals are around this place.

Then, when I feel I know this environment, and that may take as long as a year, I may buy some plants that I know might like this kind of environment. When I get a new plant from the nursery I leave it in the pot for days, or even weeks, so that it can get used to the climate: it is at least 10° colder here than at sea level. When the plant seems to do well, I walk around with the plant still in its pot, until I 'feel' that this plant should be over here. I always put a plant in a spot where it looks and feels as if it always has been there. I have no flower beds, or rows of vegetables; the vegetables I grow are where they blend into the existing landscape. I feel no need to change the 'aina, only make it more alive, fuller. And if I notice that a certain plant does not like it where it is, I move it or pass it on to a friend who likes plants.

Today, when people walk by they often stop to admire what I call my garden (as the English call what Americans call a yard).

I spend much of each day outside, rain or shine, admiring and what I call talking with the world of nature: What Is. I have no desire to make it over, to do something with this little piece of land. I do not want to 'own' land: how can anyone own what is alive? And in a deep sense even the lava which is underneath a few inches of soil, is alive.

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When I hear what happens all over the world, I cringe. What has happened to us humans? Where does this obsession with changing the earth come from? When did we get the idea that we own this planet? Why must we change it and shape it to conform to some idea in our heads? How can we think ourselves above, and different from What Is?

Some people say we are different from the rest of creation because we have intelligence. Oh yeah?

If we were intelligent would we poison the very ground we stand on? Would we kill each other? Would we, living in supposedly the richest country in the world, allow millions of our neighbors to have no job, no shelter, no income, no food? Would we change the very climate of our planet by polluting the air and the water we must rely on for survival?
It is not that we are ignorant of all these facts, we know the statistics, but we seem to be powerless to stop what we are being told is the necessity of always striving for *more*. Is that smart?

Other people say we are different because we have a soul, we are spiritual beings, because we know God. But we fight over a God who we think is apart from our world. There are as many Gods as there are religions. In fact, there are as many Gods as there are people, probably. We have fought ever more gruesome wars because we believed that our God was better or bigger or truer than theirs. Is that what makes us special?

The way we live destroys the earth, the air, the water of this world. And apparently we cannot stop ourselves. We live in an almost totally man-made world, a world that sits on top of the earth but in a real sense imagines itself not of this world.
The natural world is covered in asphalt and concrete, or fenced in. A few years ago we could still escape to some wild place where we could live simply, in touch with the earth and with all Life. We had time to enjoy the world around us. There are no such places left.

What seems very strange to me is that we all know that the world we have to live in today is insane, unjust, cruel, violent, and extremely dangerous to the survival of many species, including our own. But we feel powerless to do anything to stop our slide into chaos.

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Fifty years ago, I was a student at a famous university. One of my fellow students did research that eventually resulted in a theory, he called *Dissonance*. People who feel out of touch, alienated, feel that "dissonance". They know that the lives they live, what they believe does not work. The world is not as they were told it is. They feel a dissonance, a dis-harmony. The research showed that people who feel that dissonance behave in typical ways.

One way to lessen a feeling of dissonance is to recruit or convert others to believe what I believe and live as I do.

If I feel "out of sync," something is not quite right with the way I am in the world I live in, my first thought is to find others who feel as I do. Or else convince others that what I believe is right, "the truth."

Our history is an account of endless so-called Holy Wars.

Another mode of behavior that serves to escape a feeling of dissonance is denial. People who feel a dissonance deny the feeling, deny that there is anything wrong. Or else keep themselves so busy that they have no time to feel anything — other than stress.

Many of my fellow humans say, Do not worry, science will find an answer to our problems. That too is denial, of course.

And yet other people tell us they do not believe anything is wrong, on the contrary we live in a wonderful world full of beauty, full of wonderful people. They deny feeling dissonance, by denying there is dissonance.

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The point of course, is that the dissonance is all too real, and that the only way we can resolve it is to accurately describe it, like diagnosing a disease from its symptoms. When we know the nature of the disease, we can heal it.
It seems that the disease, the dissonance that all of us feel — and deny — is our separation from the source. By thinking that we, humans, are a species apart, we have lost touch with the earth, with our fellow creatures. By thinking of the earth as resource only, to be exploited, used, we lost our roots.
Yes, I believe humans must find another paradigm, another way of being, if we want to survive our own folly. But the paradigm does not come from our brains, nor does it come from politicians, scientists or from outer space.

The paradigm we so desperately seek is our own humanity. It is still in our deepest memories, in what the psychologist C. G. Jung called our *Collective Subconscious,* the memories that we as a species share. Perhaps our humanity is in our DNA, in our cells. Our humanity is still accessible to us, all we need to do is "step aside."

We have to learn somehow to put aside our civilized selves and find again that ancient self, the self that knew that what we are on this earth for is not making money, or building monuments to our own egos. We are not on this earth for what we now call "progress."

To be human is to be in harmony with All That Is — which means also, of course, that we are in harmony with each other.

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I have found, as Kay, and of course many others have found, that one of the ways to connect with that ancient self again with deep awareness is to work in the dirt, to allow ourselves to get to know intimately the world of Nature, to commune with plants and animals, and so relearn what it is to be part of the living earth, and of course, therefore also part of all humankind.
It seems we cannot love each other without loving ourselves. And it is very hard to love ourselves as long as we are as alone as we feel today because we are so out of touch with What Is.
We are out of touch with Nature, with plants and animals, with the earth itself, with the air and water that sustain us. Why else would we be so violently destructive?
It is not difficult to get back in touch. It does not even take much time.
And it certainly is not the opposite of being "spiritual". On the contrary, I feel it is the very essence, the ground from which we can reach to a higher awareness of What Is.
What it takes is a little piece of ground to make alive again with our attention, our love and sweat.2000

Living in Hawai'i

Famed explorer, Captain Cook, “discovered” these islands in 1778. He happened to come at a time of feasting, which he probably interpreted as a welcome from the Natives. He continued his journeys, came back a few years later and was killed by the Hawaiians.
That put these islands on the map, and soon a ragtag group of whalers and traders arrived, followed by missionaries.
In the early eighteen hundreds Hawai'i was an independent Kingdom. Treaties with all the major European kingdoms and the United States guaranteed its independence. In 1893 a small group of merchants, missionaries and adventurers, some, but not all of them American, proclaimed a republic. As it happened there was an American warship in the harbor of Honolulu, and armed men from the ship paraded through Honolulu. The newly proclaimed republic arrested the Queen.

Five years later the United States annexed these islands.
Eventually the Territory became the fiftieth State.
Of course there was a history before ‘contact', but because Hawaiians had no written language, modern historians do not know how to deal with that early history. We assume that if it is not written down it cannot be accurate. In fact, from what we know of ‘oral history’ all over the world, oral history is probably much more accurate than what is written down.

History never interested me very much. I vividly remember the moment when it dawned on me that the endless lists of battles and kings I had to memorize had no meaning in my life. But it was ‘required’. So I memorized dates and so-called facts:
1562, King so-and-so was killed in the Battle of wherever,
1614, the Battle of… where the King… of… defeated the Emperor of…
1736, some European “discovers” people who had lived there all along
1906 the signing of some piece of paper, which was made null and void at the next war only a few years later. And so on and on and on.

I knew that those facts were just lists that my teacher, or the authors of text books, had made up about ‘what happened’.

It seemed more important to know what a battle meant to the people who lived at the time, what does it *mean* to the people of that time when a king marries a princess from another country and so becomes an emperor? What did people experience at the time of the Black Death (plague) when half of all Europeans died in a generation or two.? History to me was a bleak landscape presented without passion. But I memorized dates and places, because I had to. Surely, I thought, history must be about people, not dates.

That is why for a long time I could not understand the sorry history of Hawai’i. I knew ‘the facts’ — how can one not know them? It is a story sickeningly similar to the stories of other lands, other islands of the Pacific, and countries all over the world. But what did it feel like? Why did the Queen, or the people, not rebel?

It is the story of what we in the West call *progress.*
An indigenous people comes into contact with the West, and within a hundred years the population is decimated, foreigners steal the land, destroy their culture, forbid their language, demean their religion and values. There is hardly an island in the vast Pacific that does not

have a similar history.
The same story is told in a hundred languages, all over the globe — and most of those languages are now dying out if not already extinct.

Americans often think that the history of Hawaii begins with Pearl Harbor. But Pearl Harbor was but one of the ignominious milestones of America in the Pacific, there were other milestones, none of them speaking for the values we now so loudly proclaim: 'democracy', 'freedom', 'self-determination'. History is more often than not presented from the point of view of the winner.

The world today knows Hawaii as a vacation paradise, with enormous hotels built next to gleaming white beaches, landscaped into picture-perfect English gardens with tropical flowers, endless pictures of smiles on the faces of 'exotic' beauties.
Few people know, and tourists do not care, that almost all of the flowers they see are not native, they were brought here from elsewhere. Most of the beauties shown are not native either, a bit of admixture with Western or Chinese blood lightens the skin to a more acceptable beige, and straightens out noses and unruly black hair.

Tourists do not want to know that these islands were once a kingdom, ruled by kings and queens who traveled all over the world; a kingdom that in the nineteenth century was recognized by both Britain and France as an "independent country". Our advertisements do not talk about the overthrow of the monarchy by a few merchants, many of them missionaries or offspring of missionaries. These islands were annexed by the United States despite a plebiscite that showed that the native population was utterly opposed to such annexation. The United States at the time was engaged in the Spanish-American war, and a base in the middle of the Pacific came in very handy for a nation waging war in the Philippines. The votes cast by natives (who could not write, so put an X) was "lost" somewhere in Washington, DC, and found only a few years ago.

Yet I never understood how Queen Liliuokalani, the last monarch, could accept a so-called constitution, drawn up by a few white men, which abolished the monarchy and established a republic. I was bothered by this sad, sad history which hardly seemed believable. How could the Queen, who had been befriended by Queen Victoria, not 'do' anything? Hawaiians are and were fighting people. How could a proud nation not resist? How could a few adventurers take over an established, well-running country, without official sanction from Washington (in fact, at least one President remarked that the take-over was against the best interests of the United States, and totally illegal)?

Today there is ferment in Hawai'i. For at least two generations the Hawaiian language, dance, customs were 'forbidden', Now there is a renaissance of the Hawaiian culture, language, and, what is most important, self-esteem. President Clinton, a hundred years after the fact, "apologized" to the Hawaiian people for the overthrow of their monarchy, and the stealing of their land. There is a Bill in Congress which would grant the Hawaiian people a status similar to that of Native Americans — as if we do not know what *status* Native Americans have.

I have been reading. I have been trying to understand what happened, what did people feel when all this happened? And gradually, slowly, I am getting a picture of some of the people who played a role at the time of the demise of the Hawaiian Kingdom a little more than one century ago.

The merchants do not interest me. I know their counterparts today. They are the same people who now run businesses without concern for the environment or for human beings. But I want to know how the Hawaiians felt. What did the Queen think, feel?

According to their oral history, Hawaiians are the descendants of two different migrations of Polynesians, the first almost two thousand years ago from what is now the Marquesan Islands, the second, less than a thousand years ago, from Tahiti. The second migration

brought a fierce, strongly hierarchical religion, that defined *'ali'i*, nobility, as almost divine. Commoners were little more than slaves. One of the noble chiefs, Kamehameha (now called the Great) unified all the islands and proclaimed himself King.
'King' was the western word for what he was in fact, the high chief who had won all battles with all other chiefs on all the islands..

We have a few images of these early Kings and Queens. The few (early technology) photographs show tall, impressively regal natives with dark skin, abundant black hair, posing stiffly in fussy Victorian clothes. Of course, in Victorian times, people dressed in Victorian clothes. But somehow, images of people obviously posing, in a costume that must have been excruciatingly uncomfortable in our climate, tell me nothing of what they felt, what was going on in their hearts. It is even harder to imagine what the 'common' Hawaiians felt. So I had to create my own images, not visual images, but word pictures.

Let me share some of these.
The last monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, was a highly educated woman, who had traveled as much as was possible in the mid eighteen hundreds. She was beloved by her subjects. She was married to a white man. She was a devout Christian.

Scientists have worked out that before "contact" the population of these islands was probably at least eight hundred thousand people, perhaps as much as a million before 1778. The first census counted, in 1850, less than 50,000 Hawaiians.

As in all other islands and countries, western contact brought diseases that the local people had no resistance to. In the first ten or twenty years after contact more than half of all Hawaiians died. A disaster that is almost unthinkable, and yet the same thing happened everywhere else. Almost everywhere in the world "contact" brought population crashes from between 60% and 95% the first two generations.

By 1893 the Hawaiian population must have been no more than perhaps thirty thousand. That fact alone could have accounted for the Queen's order to her subjects not to resist. She fervently wanted to avoid bloodshed.

And she believed that, surely, the American President would restore peace and restore the throne when he would learn what had happened here (news then traveled by boat and train). For some time she was held prisoner in her own palace. When she was free, now ex-Queen Liliuokalani, traveled to Washington, in a desperate attempt to stave off the annexation which the local government was working for.

With only a small retinue she spent months in Washington at the end of the nineteenth century. The United States at the time was attempting to compete with the European countries who had colonies all over the world. 1899 was the year America sent soldiers to the Philippine. A base in Hawai'i was obviously very useful.

It is not hard to imagine the Queen's feelings at the time, particularly because, as we now know, her attempts failed. In 1898 the Territory of Hawaii was proclaimed a 'possession' of the United States.

Queen Liliuokalani returned to Hawaii: by train to the west coast, and from there by steamer to Honolulu. When the steamer was sighted the pier filled with people. Thousands of Hawaiians waited for their Queen to return home (very few white faces in the crowd, one reporter wrote).
The steamer came closer, berthed alongside the pier.
On an upper deck a canvas enclosure had been made behind which Queen Liliuokalani (or, officially, ex-Queen) waited.
When the ship was secure, the Queen emerged, one hand on the arm of one of her nephews, (ex)-Prince David Kawananakoa — "moving too erectly to need his assistance," the written

account states.
The Queen was dressed all in black, with a black hat with black plumes.
For a few moments she stood at the top of the ramp leading down to the waiting masses who remained silent; deathly silent.

After what must have seemed a long silence, she spoke one word, 'Aloha!', which means love.

And, as one, the waiting Hawaiians answered, *Aloha*!
Slowly, ramrod straight, she walked down the gang plank, to walk between her subjects, who reached out but never touched her, most of them with tears flowing down their cheeks.
Not a sound was heard. Silence. Complete silence.

That, to me, is what "really" happened.
That tells me more of what Hawaiians felt at that time than records preserved in western newspapers. (Why didn't anyone ever make a movie of this and other such moments?)

We today are hampered because we think that only written records tell "what happened" — but who wrote the written records? The *haole*, the foreigners, the white people. They did not know, and probably did not care, what 'the Natives' felt...

That same day, upon arrival at the palace, the ex-Queen gave an audience to those of her subjects who had waited at the palace. She had changed into (I shall quote): "a gown of black and lavender, with a few diamonds like newly shed tears on her strong hands... She was seated in her dining room, at a plain deal table no more ornate than many a kitchen table in America. Yet she sat at it alone, for no one in the land might sit unbidden in the presence of Majesty... "
After the Queen had eaten a simple dinner, (I quote again:) ...the line of those who had waited patiently in the gardens began to form. As each old Hawaiian reached the door, he fell on his knees. Crawling thus, he passed before his Queen... The Queen) knew each of them of old, called each bent figure by name, eyed each bowed head with tenderness... Outside, the ancient chanters ... kept up a witchlike lament..." That is from a newspaper account of the day.

The 'haole' (white people) may have destroyed the monarchy, but she was still their Queen, a symbol of all that was strong and '*pono*' (which means 'right') in the Hawaiian culture.

I see that image clearly and each time I think of it, it brings tears to my eyes.
There is no question what the people of Hawai'i felt!

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for westerners to imagine other cultures, where 'democracy' is not a value — how could it? when what they saw from their white usurpers was a government which did not include them, the original people, the First People.
Hawaiians, as many, perhaps most of the peoples of the world, had never had a voice in the running of their land — and, to be honest, do we?

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My home is on the Big Island, the largest of the Hawaiian islands (twice as big as all other islands together), the island of "the most active volcano in the world." On this side of the island there are few white beaches and therefore no big hotels, but we have black sand beaches, and one 'green sand' (olivine) beach. This island has few tourists (and a growing number of them 'eco-tourists'), but miles and miles of black lava, some of it so new that nothing grows on it yet.

To me it is a magic place. It is obviously one of the 'power points' of our earth.

And one last image from history:

After Queen (ex-Queen) Liliuokalani had returned to Honolulu and annexation was a fact, she boarded a steamer to visit this and then the other islands. As it happened she traveled with the men who had been sent out from Washington to arrange the details of the annexation. According to all accounts "she was polite to a fault when she met them, but did not seek contact."

Upon arrival in Kona (on the other side of this island), where the steamer had to anchor out from the beach, the men from Washington went ashore; the Queen made it known that she would stay on board.

As soon as word reached the shore that the Queen would stay on board, a flotilla of canoes swarmed to the steamer. Hundreds of people climbed on board and again, in the presence of Majesty they were silent, on their knees, tears streaming down their faces.

When the boat steamed to Hilo the next day, the scene was repeated.

Those tears, I am certain, still live in the rains of this island.

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Today I understand the history of Hawai'i a little better. The people of Hawai'i and their royal leaders did not know how to play politics — dirty politics. They did not know (how could they?) that missionaries sometimes come with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other. Hawaiians did not know that the English who landed at Plymouth Rock survived their first winter only with the generous help of the 'Indians' they found there, and then turned around and slaughtered those same natives.

The rulers of the Hawaiian Kingdom were aware that they were an almost defenseless nation, far away from any of the large powers (in Europe) that might have come to their aid. They sought alliances, they traveled to Europe, to visit the rulers of countries they thought might be able to protect them — at least recognize them as an independent nation. That is indeed what both France and Britain did, they formally recognized the Hawaiian Kingdom as an independent nation. In fact, so did the United States.
For a very short time (six months) there was a British 'presence' in Hawai'i — until the British government called them home! (That is why the Hawaiian flag still has the Union Jack in the corner of an otherwise red/white striped flag).

Another way in which, perhaps, the Kings and Queens of Hawai'i sought to protect themselves was to make themselves a 'modern nation'. They wrote a Constitution, which was based, certainly at first, on the Constitution of New Hampshire from where the missionaries who had arrived after 1820 came. Trying to think as the Hawaiians thought at that time, I imagine the monarchs perhaps thought such a document was not too different from the customs they had lived with for many generations. Or, what I think is equally likely, the King could not imagine that a piece of paper would make so much difference. They did not know that 'laws' can be used against people, that laws are the instrument a government uses to control the behavior of its subjects.
In fact, the laws the Puritans from Boston introduced were very different indeed from local custom! Many laws were introduced controlling marriage, for instance. Suddenly there were stiff penalties, or even jail time, for 'crimes' that had never been crimes before: "living in sin", "adultery", "divorce". How does one introduce laws that were so contrary to prevailing mores? Easy. Under the guise of "these laws make Hawai'i a modern country", a "civilized" country. Who would not want to be considered 'civilized'?

The people of Hawai'i soon found out that the price of civilization is high indeed. They learned that civilization is a form of slavery. Slaves to the whims and prejudices of those who made the laws. Is it any different today? Compared to the avalanche of laws, revised laws, more laws, living under the '*kapu* system' must have been easy. Under the kapu system,

everyone learned from the first day of life that some people were 'higher' than others, and because they were higher, there were certain ways of behaving in the presence of these higher people. However, these higher people also had a powerful obligation to take care of their people.

Americans are strongly anti-monarchist, perhaps because of their revolt against a British King. At the same time, even today, Americans have a strange fascination for royalty (remember Princess Diana?)
I grew up at a place and a time with hereditary rulers, there called Sultan and other exalted titles. The Sultans I knew and knew about were never tyrants, they took their responsibility extremely serious. They traveled around their territory almost constantly, they paid attention to what people told them. They mediated in personal as well as tribal disagreements. To tell the truth, it was not a bad way of 'governing' at all.

Queen Liliuokalani was a deeply religious Christian woman who thought that she could save the lives of her subjects by going along, believing that "surely, the United States would restore the monarchy when the President learned of the illegal overthrow by a few adventurers (some of them not even Americans)". She trusted the United States to do the right thing, but the United States had wars to fight and profits to make that were more important than restoring her throne.

What happened a hundred years ago in Hawai'i was just another "cowboys against Indians" — and guess who always wins?

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At the end of the twentieth century I lived in the village of Volcano. One evening in January 1993, as I listened to the evening news, I heard that the next day was the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy. There would be a commemoration, a ceremony at the National Park nearby (Hawaiian Volcanoes National Park).
Kilauea (the mountain) has always been a holy place for Hawaiians. They would gather the next day in five locations around the huge caldera to pray, sing, chant, everything repeated one hundred times. As the announcer said, "One for each year after the Overthrow, to remember that year, and then let go..."

I knew that the best time to witness that would be very early in the morning. I went to the Park (only a few miles) at four in the morning. Pitch dark. No cars anywhere.
I know the Park well, I went there at least twice a week for many years. I went to one of my favorite places, parked the car.

On my left a string of people stood at the rim of the crater. I could barely see them, but I heard their chanting. On the right, a high point, I saw some people with flashlights, and what looked like camera equipment. Of course, "the Press."

I hesitated. Should I go to the Hawaiians, or stand with the Press?
Just at that moment the chanting stopped. One of the chanters turned around, saw me, and beckoned me to come over. He is a friend.

The Hawaiians stood relaxed, they talked quietly, stretched.
Soon the series of chants, prayers, songs, began again. I was spell bound. Occasionally we could hear the same prayers and chants from the other side of the crater, as if an echo.
This was not a performance, this was a heart event. The power of their chants was palpable. I could almost see shimmering auras stretching up and out from this small group of people. I sensed their deeply spiritual concentration.

Perhaps an hour later something was changing in the air. Dawn. The sun was coming up. I looked to the right where Mauna Loa stretches, an enormous mountain with enormous

power. Before the sun was visible, but when it was light enough to see, all of Mauna Loa was cobalt blue.
I have seen her in many colors, but never had I seen such a sight. It almost overwhelmed the commemoration of the Overthrow.

I had plans to go to the mainland because I wanted to market my writing, and thought I could not do that from here.
But at that moment I knew that I would always have to come back to this island. This is my place. My soul is at home here.

We remembered every single year since the Overthrow. The injustices, disappointments, losses, but also pride, courage, and always aloha, love. One hundred years, one hundred times the prayers, the songs, the chants. One hundred remembrances.

And then let go.

Les Kanakes

New Caledonia, a large island in the South Pacific, is part of French Polynesia. Not a colony, France considers all its overseas possessions "districts" of France. Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia, used to have the reputation of a rough town, not safe for white people because the locals were fierce and rebellious. The locals, I was told, were called les Kanakes.

Of course, I said, "kanaka" means Man, human, in many Polynesian languages, and, although New Caledonia is not Polynesian but Melanesian, I assume that even here kanake with an E at the end simply meant "the people". No, no, Kanake is the name of the particular tribe that lives on this island, they said.

Noumea looked at first like a charming town on the Mediterranean, bright blue ocean, white houses, French cafés everywhere. Until I came to explore the not-so-clean-and-pretty parts of the town. As everywhere in the world, the poor lived in squalor. And the poor, of course, here were the original inhabitants of this island. the Kanake — the people.

At the time I was a consultant to the South Pacific Commission, an organization supported by five nations that had interests in the South Pacific. The organization was attempting to soften the blows of civilization, I thought, as western culture swept through the islands of that part of the world.

The headquarters of the SPC were near, but not in Noumea: charming, comfortable, although I remember there was only one eating place near. New Caledonia is a very large island, certainly compared to many other very small islands that form nations in the South Pacific.

Of course I wanted to explore. I was warned not to go to the other side of the island (the other side from Noumea) because *les Kanakes* were unreliable, dangerous, poor and "proud." The French word *fier* (pronounced feeyair) means proud but must be the origin of the English fierce.

When I could borrow a car my first destination was the other side. Wild, I also had been told that the beaches were virgin.

I traveled with a sketch book then; stopped frequently to make little sketches of the magnificent, rugged landscape. The island is a "high island" — as contrasted to atolls, often a thin strip of coral sand, six feet above sea level, circling a lagoon. I also remember it as very dry. Not the dense green vegetation my eye was used to.

Not far from where I thought the pass would be, the highest point of the road, (I was wrong, the pass was some distance away yet), I stopped when I saw a man standing at the side of the road. He was waiting for the bus, he said. I told him I was going in that direction and would gladly give him a ride. He seemed surprised, almost taken aback. The bus is late, he said. Well then, how far are you going? Oh, he waved vaguely in the direction of the wild side of the island.

I often picked up hitchhikers. I knew what it was not to have a car. But I like to get to know my passenger, so when he was seated — the little car leaning: he was a large man — I said, How far are you going?
He did not answer.
I thought perhaps he had not understood my hesitant French. I tried saying it in a different way, How far is it to where you are going?
He said he would let me know.

As all Kanakes the man was dark. His hair was a black halo around his bony face. He was dressed in jeans and a blinding white t-shirt which accentuated his black. He smelled of good pipe tobacco — this was the time when "everybody" smoked, but not many smoked a pipe; I associated pipes with professors and English nobles. This man did not seem an academic or a Lord, but one never knows, of course.

A bit further on I tried again. Are you going home, or going to work?
He looked at me strangely. I smiled. He did not respond.
But I was not about to give up. I am curious about people and about their language, their culture. My French was good enough for small talk, but rusty; At the time I could understand more than I could speak with any fluency.
I asked him how one says, hello and goodbye, in his language. And how does one say, thank you?

Long silence. Then he half turned in the seat to look at me, and said, "*monsieur, je ne suis pas monsieur*," mister, I am not mister.
My face must have shown that I did not know what he meant. He repeated himself. Monsieur, I am not monsieur.

I looked at him. He was obviously male, so why would he not be monsieur?

The car I had borrowed was a little Citroen 2CV, the French world car — an amazing vehicle, simple to work on I have been told ("you can fix it with a paperclip"), very utilitarian. The seats are steel frames with a canvas sling. The car has soft springs so that it leans in curves and yet seems glued to the road. When he turned to look at me, the car wobbled so I had to pay attention to the steering wheel. I could not look at him, but he sounded angry.
A moment later I looked at him. He was certainly male. Was I mistaken, was my passenger a woman? Usually I do not pick up female hitchhikers.
So I mumbled something... madame?
No, no, he said. I am male, but not a monsieur, with great emphasis on monsieur.

I did not understand. What could I say?
Finally I said, you do not want to talk?

French is a language that has two words for "you." One says "*vous*" when speaking to an adult who is older, or higher in social status, or a new acquaintance. A friend, or a child one would address "*tu*".

He had turned back in his seat, looking straight ahead, and said, *I am not vous, I am tu.*

I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. Something was not right. He was certainly not a child and I did not know him, I had just met him. How else could I address him, but *vous*? I tried to imagine what he meant. I wanted to ask what he meant, explain to me what you mean, but how could I ask? I could not address him *tu*, that was obvious.

As the car was at that point leaning to his side in a fairly sharp curve, which made me have to hold on to the wheel if I did not want to lean on his shoulder, I said as firmly as I could, To me you are *vous*, and I do not understand what we are talking about.

When the car righted itself, I looked at him and he was sitting as stiff as before but with what I thought was a slight smile on his face.
You are not French, he said?

Very patiently, as if he were speaking to a child, he explained that he was a native of this island, and he was accustomed to being addressed by "whites" as *tu*. And you are white, no?

I told him I lived in Hawai'i. and that the Hawaiian word for themselves, for men, people, humans, was *kanaka*.
He turned to me again, his eyes lighting up. The same word? *Formidable*!
We talked about Hawai'i, about other islands I had visited, about the raw scenery all around that held great power, I said.
Oh yes, monsieur is so right. Great power indeed.

We were descending now; a few hair pin curves. The road was not bad, but certainly not a highway at that time — this was many years ago. I asked him about the mountains; he talked about the fierce ocean storms, "but not this season," he assured me, "they come later in the year."
The ocean was in front of us now, it was getting hotter, and this strange little car has no roll-down or -up windows, The bottom half of the door windows are hinged halfway up, horizontally. You could push the bottom half out, and when you pushed it far enough up, sometimes it stayed up until, it would clatter down on my elbow resting on the door.
I could almost imagine the smell of the ocean, it did not seem that much further down, but still too high to see the beach.

As we came around a curve my rider said, I live around the next bend.
I stopped at a wide place in the road. There was a neat path, lined with sea shells, leading to a neat little house up on a hill. It seemed a one-room house. Later I knew it was also spotless.
I turned off the engine. Silence. I got out of the car with my sketch book, looked down at what could well be a beach, and exclaimed, What a view, what a view!

It is better from my house, he said.
He smiled — I am envious of such strong white teeth in such a fierce black face.
I would be honored, he said, to introduce you to my wife and my children.
Then I noticed a young boy, perhaps eight or nine, running down the path.

His wife, tall, black with even more black hair than my friend, had a small baby in her arms. She stood ramrod still as we approached. The baby asleep. She was tall as a man, with a man's square shoulders, full-breasted.
My friend the Kanake had bent down to kiss and lift his son in his arms. Slowly we walked up the fairly steep path. We were a few feet from his wife, who stood like a statue, not moving a muscle.
The man, with his son squirming in his arms, standing beside me, said *Chérie*, dear, this monsieur is a friend; he insists on calling me monsieur. I could tell that he spoke French for my sake, they would speak their own tongue when they were alone.
The woman stood proud, very upright. She looked me straight in the eyes.

And very slowly, *very* slowly, her face melted into a smile, her eyes shining with the glitter of unshed tears. I reached out and kissed her hand, *Madame*, I am honored indeed to make your acquaintance.
In French that sounds not quite as formal as it does in English.

I never did get to the beach that day. When, late in the afternoon, I left to drive back over the mountains, we embraced French style with a kiss on both cheeks, everyone embracing everyone.

1991-2003

Moa

The rain forest all around me is damp and cool at 4000 ft. above sea level. Ferns and mosses thrive here. There is not much undergrowth, except in second growth forest, new forest that emerged after the land was clear cut. In ancient times this rain forest, called Ola'a, was where specialist bird catchers came to catch the tiny Hawaiian birds that gave some of their bright yellow and red feathers for the feather capes of high chiefs (no bird gave more than a few feathers, then it was released again). Now the little birds are gone, as are the bird catchers.

Very early in my explorations I came across a mysterious little plant that here grows usually in the bark of tree ferns, a plant Hawaiians call 'moa' (Psilotum nudum, or P. complanatum Sw.). Moa is also the Hawaiian word for chicken. Folklore has it that the stem of the little plant feels like a chicken leg, rough and with sections.
Here the little plant is almost invisible, it never grows very large. Many people cannot see it even from up close. Moa is not showy, it has no bright flowers to attract attention to itself. In fact moa has no flowers and it has no roots: as some other tropical plants it absorbs energy from the soil or the little spaces in the bark of trees with the help of a fungus (some orchids do that also). Moa has no leaves. It looks very much like grass (a bit darker and a grayer green perhaps). Moa propagates through spores, carried in tiny, bright yellow spore balls.

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I have always had special feelings for plants, but it took many years to admit to myself (and now to others) that I talk with plants. I do not mean that I talk baby talk, or that I give plants cutesy names. I respect them for who and what they are. And I do not mean talking with literally. Every plant species has a unique spirit, an essence that occasionally appears to me as a face, more often as a color, or a complex of ideas and feelings that together make up what I call the 'spirit' of a plant. In a very real sense I communicate with plants, and they with me. As a Hawaiian elder said to me once, 'the plants love you'.
Yes, I know, I answered. And I love them.

Several times, when traveling in other parts of the world, a plant, unknown to me, suddenly 'spoke to me'. From many feet away I knew what it would feel like, smell like, and what its healing or other important qualities were.
In the past I tried hard to not see what I could not help seeing. But as I grew older it became too much trouble to deny my own perceptions.

I am convinced that knowing plants is not an unusual talent, I am sure other humans had and still have that also. In fact, I think that is how people learned about the uses and values of plants.

Anthropologists and other western scientists who are interested in medicinal plants hypothesize that people learned about plants through trial and error. That has always seemed to me very unlikely when considering that many medicinal plants are poisonous, sometimes extremely so. The preparation of medicinal plants is often quite elaborate, involving perhaps soaking, boiling, peeling, squeezing, or even all of the above. In fact, safe preparation is so elaborate that trial and error would have cost an unthinkable number of lives. Why would anyone continue to 'try' a plant if the first trials resulted in violent illness or death?
No, it seems obvious to me that all through the ages at least some people have 'communicated' with plants, and so knew how to use them for healing or food.
And what is at least as important, I understand that through the ages those people who collected wild plants for healing, or grew plants for food, have treated the plants with respect.

Many stories, from all over the world, tell of people 'wild crafting' (collecting wild plants) with prayer and thanks for the plants they collected. And ancient people never picked all the leaves off a plant, or all the plants from an area where they grew.
Modern man treats plants (as everything else) as objects. We rarely approach a plant with respect and even reverence, we rarely ask permission to pick leaves, or strip some of the bark of medicinal plants. When we see a stand of trees that are useful to us, we cut them all, without thought for the morrow. I cannot help it, but that seems stupid to me. Stupid, thoughtless, and irresponsible. Why is it we have so little concern for what our children will inherit? We are greedy. Some Hawaiian plants that have been considered medicinal for probably two thousand years, suddenly have become known to the western world. In a year's time collectors have, without thought, eradicated plants from large areas where they grew. Soon there will be no noni or 'awa (kava on other islands of Polynesia) left, except in 'plantations'.

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Moa is a modest plant. At our altitude it is small, at most 4-5 inches long; closer to the sea it grows taller. The flat, gray green stems branch in the simplest branching pattern: two from one, and a little further up again two from one, in the same plane. *Moa* is also a very ancient plant. My book of Hawaiian plants says, "(moa) is believed to be one of the few surviving species of ancient stock, that of the oldest known land plants, said to have thrived more than 350 million years ago and found today only as ancient fossils." (In Gardens of Hawai'i, by Marie Neal)
I like to say that moa is a plant from before there were plants.

Moa grows everywhere in the tropics; this is probably as high as it grows. Hawaiians consider it a (minor) medicinal plant (a purge, and it has other qualities as well). I could not find out much more about this little plant from books, or even from people
familiar with local flora. I was curious. What, who is this extremely self-effacing plant that grows in this garden?

When first I reached out in my mind I saw a face, the face of a very old man with a dark, wrinkled skin, sunken eyes. Blind eyes I thought at first. The eyes looked into a very far distance, he did not see me. He did not see humankind for that matter.
Sometimes it is not easy to make contact with a plant. It takes being very open but also, I believe, the plant must know that I mean it no harm. It is important that the plant knows I respect it. In my second attempt to reach out to moa I went into a meditative state first. I held an image of a moa plant in my mind while looking for its spirit, or essence, its uniqueness. This time I did not see the wrinkled face. Instead I saw a huge globe, featureless, almost abstract. I saw this sphere in deep space, not really connected to this earth. It seemed enormous although of course I had no way of knowing its size. It felt closed, impenetrable. The surface of the globe was a dull gray, or more accurately no color at all. It was as if the surface absorbed light without reflecting any back. Very forbidding! I felt rejected, not welcome.
Still in a meditative state I observed the mysterious globe as something not material, not real. I stared at it for what seemed a long time.
When I felt I could not learn more from observing, I turned away, almost regretfully. At the very last moment a crack (?) formed in the surface of the globe and a tiny (the size of my little finger?) pseudopod reached out in my direction. The finger reaching out was pale ivory, more organic looking than the sphere. I hesitated a moment.
Should I reach out and touch it?
I withdrew. I had a sense that if I were to touch this finger, something like a strong electric current would go through me, either giving me a jolt of great insight, or killing me. I felt intimidated, scared and not quite ready to take that risk.

For some months that was as close as I came to making contact with the spirit of moa. I did not do the meditation again, although a few times I put a sprig of moa under my pillow, which

gave me intense dreams, full of colors, very dense, not easy to understand or to work with. A few of the dreams were wonderfully clear, giving answers to questions I asked, or a new way to look at a problem a friend had asked me about.

I wondered whether I had missed my last chance to communicate with moa when I turned back at the last moment in the meditation? I was not sure. I touched moa growing in the tree ferns, trying to feel something. But for a long time moa remained a mystery, yet the attraction remained, in fact became stronger.
I knew one day I must try again.

— o —

Eliot Cowan, in his book *Plant Medicine Spirit*, mentions that sometimes it is useful to ask the spirit of another plant, one that has become familiar to us, to intercede in one's behalf.
I feel particularly close to the spirit of a very common weed here, a plant Hawaiians call *laukahi kuahiwi*. In English it is called roundleaf plantain. It has many other names, often colorful, and in many parts of the world it is known for its medicinal qualities. I discovered my affinity for this humble weed when I realized that every time I walked in a certain part of my garden I began to smile, I felt happy. When I looked down a little green leaf seemed to smile at me. Laukahi grows in very poor soil, or no soil. It grows by the side of the roads here, and the roads are nothing but barely flattened lava. I found that laukahi has important medicinal properties: it gives instant energy when chewed and it is a mild laxative (actually it normalizes internal functions).

It was the laukahi spirit that introduced me to the spirit of orchid. Cymbidium orchids grow almost wild here. These orchids usually bloom in the heart of winter, December through February, although now, here, they bloom many more months. I admire them greatly, but they had been impenetrable to me for a long time. I could not find a way to recognize and so communicate with the spirit of this plant. They seemed elegant, the leaves fountain, and in season these orchids have very large and very colorful sprays of orchids, sometimes a dozen or more blooms to a stalk. In other parts of the world they are much in demand, 'expensive'.

Laukahi introduced me. To my surprise, the orchid had a male feeling when I was able to contact it, although perhaps subconsciously I had imagined orchids as female, showy, beautiful, complex. But that was my western prejudice, seeing everything, including plants, as gendered. I was stuck in externals. When I thought of it later, I realized that the cliché that says males are soberly dressed and females are gaudy is a contemporary view.
In other centuries human males were the ones who strutted around in feathers and frills while females wore colorless dresses. Many animals are like that!
Needless to say, the spirit of this orchid has little to do with showing off or being beautiful; that is my human perception. The spirit of this orchid is modest to a fault. It is a simple plant, its spirit is strong, very strong. The plant has much 'mana' as Hawaiians say, much life force. Perhaps that is why the flowers last so long: even when cut (they last for months here).

Because I knew laukahi was my friend, I asked it to introduce me to the spirit of moa. Laukahi declined. It said, No. Other plant spirits also refused to introduce me to moa. With each refusal moa became more mysterious, and more unreachable.

Strangely, that made me feel more attracted, I could not stop looking for moa everywhere I went. And because I am tuned in to this little plant, I often see it where others do not. I felt a sort of gnawing need to approach it, get to know it, learn from it.

— o —

Age comes with aches and pains, but also a wider point of view. I can see that our meddling with the earth and with ourselves has changed who we are. We have cut off our roots, we no longer feel connected to the earth, we no longer feel part of All That Is.

For a hundred thousand years humans relied on nature, the way things are on this earth. Now we rely on ourselves, in the structures we have created, the so-called civilization we have made to live in. This has lead to a drive for control.
We can no longer even imagine a world not planned and policed by government and today big corporations. Many people who are younger than I believe, of course, that this is how it has always been. Not so.

Ten thousand years ago, when we were primitive nomads, we fitted into the world as we found it. Now we control even nature.

It distresses me physically that we have such a casual and cruel attitude toward the living things around us. I sense the pain of trees as they are felled to clear land for yet another shopping mall. I feel the pain of plants as they are chemically eradicated (many of our most valuable herbal medicines are 'weeds'). I mourn animals we have eradicated; I mourn the disappearance of tigers.
And we cannot stop, even when it is clear that by harming the environment we harm ourselves more, because we are told that we must have "progress." Our planet, our home, is a closed ecological system. How can we even imagine "more?"

The earth, I am sure, will reestablish a balance again, although it may take many of our generations. Meanwhile we humans rush headlong to extinction, blind and deaf to the signs that are all around us.
These were my thoughts these last years.

— o —

Again I went to bed with a tiny sprig of moa under my pillow and a firm resolve to find, in my dream, a way to communicate. As I made myself ready to go to sleep, I put firmly in mind that huge globe that I associated with the spirit of moa. The sphere that soaks up energy without reflection is again clear and 'real' in my mind. It is as forbidding as before. Almost alien and certainly inhuman.

I feel very cold. My feet are so cold I cannot feel them. My arms are cold, and yet they are burning. I am very hot and very cold at the same time. The space around moa feels empty, devoid of meaning. Not my kind of place; what am I doing here? In my awareness is nothing but that enormous sphere. I must lie dead still to deal with that freezing cold. I do not move a muscle. Time passes. Nothing happens. I am not moving, yet time flows. I am cold and hot at the same time.

Until I become aware that I must pee. Shivering, cold and hot, I get out from under the blankets and sit up. Putting on socks and going to the bathroom takes a few minutes. I am back in bed. The clock says it is well after midnight. The cold of space is still in me, as well as the heat of … lava? Lava, the heat of earth, flowing as if from a wound. I shiver as I get under the blankets again, only my nose outside. Cold and at the same time hot.

I am in my work room, finishing some work, a roomy and spacious room in my home, familiar (my house in this dream only, I have never lived in such a house!) My work requires intense concentration, I am leaning over a work table, deep in thought.

A persistent noise is breaking into my concentration. I look up, look around my work room. I stretch.
The noise comes from somewhere in the house. As if there are other people in the house?
Yes, definitely. Strange noises. People talking?
I open the door to the next room and find two men, dressed in formal-looking clothes, one wears a morning coat and one of those fluffy ties, the other wears a bowler hat!
I laugh uproariously. The men look so ridiculous! They must be hot , wearing such clothes in this warm climate, I think.
Laughing, I say, Hello! What is going on?

The men take no notice, they go on with whatever it is they are doing. Preparing food? They seem to be unpacking something.
A door at the other end of that room opens, and another man and two women walk into the room, carrying baskets; maybe picnic baskets? One of the women wears a large hat, something we used to call 'garden hats', with a very wide, floppy brim and artificial flowers around the crown. The other woman has dark hair with reddish highlights, swirled up into a high construction, with a large tortoise clasp in the back.
This is really ridiculous! I laugh louder. I cannot help but laugh at these strange creatures. Don't they know this is the tropics? We wear no clothes here, certainly not those ridiculous outfits!
I talk to them, but they do not hear me. They act as if they are not even aware I am in the room. They continue unpacking the boxes they brought in. They do not seem to hear my laughter either. Something is very strange. Who are these people?
Now they are rearranging the few pieces of furniture in this room. The far door opens again and more people come in, carrying long tables which they proceed to set up. There are some children who came in as well, and two cats, one very light yellow, the other a sort of mottled brown. They do not look very healthy, they act skittish.
The cats notice me! They look at me and shy away…
A very dark-skinned man walks in, his face full of laugh wrinkles, his hair sort of woolly, graying at the temples.
He seems a very comfortable sort of person. He sees me, comes over and kisses me on the cheek ; both cheeks.
'Welcome,' he says.
Welcome? But this is my house!
It is I who should welcome them. But I did not invite them. Who are these people, and what are they doing in my house?
The dark man leaves, the others stay, arranging long tables and covering them with fancy cloths. I have never seen such cloths, they seem almost like water, they flow and shimmer.
I am beginning to feel uneasy, something is very wrong here!
I raise my voice. Hey! People! Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?
No reaction. They do not hear me. They do not see me.
I walk toward them.
One man, the man with the bowler hat, turns in my direction and says something that I cannot hear. I do not know whether he sees me, or whether he was talking to someone behind me.
Or perhaps I cannot understand what he says?
Again I raise my voice, louder this time. Hey, you, what is this?
I say, You are making too much noise, my family is upstairs.
I grab the arm of the man with the funny hat ; he looks around, surprised. Now he is taking notice!
I tell him to move, get out, take your friends and your tables and move! Leave!
Get out! NOW!
Maybe he does not speak my language, because he certainly does not understand me. He and some of the other people go into another room.
I follow.
Now I am getting worried,
I do not know how to get rid of these people.
They have invaded my house in the middle of the night and what are they doing?
I follow them into the next room, a room with large windows all around ; or maybe not windows, maybe just open to the outside. I see my garden through the openings. On a table in the middle of the room is a beautiful large wooden bowl with two large, warm red fruit, lying on big green leaves. The man with the hat picks up one of the fruit and loudly complains that they are 'wrong', they are not what they need.
I am furious, speechless. I know that fruit is juicy and very tasty. I know the tree it grew on, right there in the corner of the garden. I brought these in yesterday, to let them ripen further They should be almost ready to eat now. How can they be 'wrong'?
But I do not know what kind of fruit this is. I have no name for it, and in waking life I know these fruit do not grow in my garden. But in the dream they are from my garden, they are from my world, they are important to me.
More people come in and crowd around. The man takes the bowl of fruit and walks away.

I follow him. PUT THAT BOWL DOWN, I yell!
He looks at me, shrugs his shoulders, puts the bowl on a narrow shelf.
The bowl is too big for that shelf, it might tip over any moment so I run over, take the bowl and move it back to the middle of the table.
Just then the sun…

(The sun? but this is the middle of the night — perhaps a spotlight? No, the sun makes the fruit glow with a warm inner light. It looks very warm, richly glowing red. Lava. I think of lava flowing, thick lava that turns black when it is exposed to air, hot red only at the edges. Now and then a crack shows in the lava and you can see almost white-hot inside the flow.)

Somehow the fruit captures the warmth of the earth itself, lava.
Briefly I am lost in contemplation of the bowl and the fruit.
It is now quite noisy in the house. I feel pushed and shoved around in my own house. I want these people to leave. NOW!
A strange white-haired dog of a breed I have never seen gets into a cupboard. I tell someone to reach in there and get the dog out.
Nobody hears me, they do not see me.
A bustling young woman comes near and smiles. I say, There must be twenty of you here, who are you, what are you doing? She throws back her head, laughing, Twenty, she says? There must be more like fifty of us, or a hundred, and that is 'net', not counting children and cats and dogs.
I am completely bewildered, overpowered by so many people, most of who do not see me, do not hear me.
In fact, I am beginning to feel frightened and lost.

I know I am dreaming, but the dream does not let me go. It seems such a simple dream, but it holds me fast. I am inside the dream and at the same time I am thinking about what the dream 'means'. What is this dream telling me? I remember that this is the night I planned to dream about moa, but this is not about moa. Or is it?

There are too many people, there is too much going on and I do not understand how this can happen in my own house. But, at the same time, this dream is very familiar; of course I do know what the dream means.

It is quite obvious that this dream is a personalized story of what has happened all over the world in this century. Civilized people (usually white) have invaded the lands of all First People, they have taken over, they invaded, they did not 'see' the natives.
Now it is I whose house is invaded, who is invisible, ignored while the intruders take over my house, the fruit of my garden, my world, they steal my peace and quiet, my life itself.
Oh yes, I understand the dream well enough. I am caught in it as I am caught in this century, and trapped in the skin I so unwillingly inhabit. The dream is my life and my life is this dream.

The dream is the century, now, today. This is no dream, it is a nightmare, infinitely painful and confusing…

I wake up all at once. It is a few minutes before 5 am. I feel as if I have had this dream for hours and hours. I must get out of bed, I cannot stay in this dream. I must wake up. I must… and I cannot.

Immobile in my bed, locked in this dream that is my life and the lives of so many in this century. I want to wake up but I cannot. This dream is not a dream, it is only too real, it is What Is.

— o —

The sun is up. My life shrugs itself into a more normal form. Outside it is calm, very beautiful. Plants and trees all around radiate life, pulse with light. My eyes are open. I cautiously get out

of bed, still shivering from the impact of a dream.
The outside temperature is 50° F. Cold.
Still only half awake and lingering in the dream space I think of the little sprig of gray-green under my pillow. This dream was certainly different and very powerful. Being inside such a powerful dream means to me that I had better pay attention; this dream is meant for me.

— o —

Days later, I continue to taste the dream. The conviction grows in me that moa certainly gives powerful dreams! Moa makes me experience what is real.
I know the statistics. I have written and talked about what was done to Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders, and the peoples of South and North America, people all over the world. I have read about and talked about the destruction of native cultures and native languages, I have deplored, I have felt ashamed and guilty. This dream made it all too personal.

They invaded my house, they took over, ignoring me, not even seeing me (only the cats and dogs saw me, and the dark man). I experienced a terrifying loss of identity. I felt in my bones the powerlessness when these unknown invaders, unseeing and unthinking, not only took over my house, but also what I value in the house, my privacy of course, and the fruit from my own world. I cannot forget how they casually moved furniture around, brought their own stuff in. I resent how they rejected the warm red fruit that grew in my garden. I still shiver when I think of the dream experience.

That dream brought back dark memories of The War, when for five years I survived occupation by a foreign power. But that was only five years! Suddenly, from one day to the next, foreigners told us what to do, what to wear, how to behave. They too did not 'see' us.

The dream was worse. In the dream I knew deep down that these invaders will never leave. Hawai'i will never again be what it was; not the people, not the plants, not the land.

When I thought about the red I kept seeing, I realized perhaps it was the red of blood, casually spilled when these strange people walked all over me; the red of my heart, squeezed dry.

The strangers *did not even see me*! They did not hear me, even when I yelled at them at the top of my voice. They were unaware and uncaring of all the many meanings my home has for me.

The 'aina as the Hawaiians call the land is not just land as real estate, but land as place, home, where one's roots are. In a very real sense Hawaiians thought of themselves and their 'aina as one.

In my dream these invaders invaded my life, trampled my roots.
"My family is asleep upstairs" *and I could not protect them.*

— o —

It was moa that allowed me to experience a little of what millions have experienced. Moa made me stand in someone else's shoes to see the world from a different point of view. For one night I was given the reality of so many people in this and previous centuries. Such a dream never leaves…

I knew not to try to interpret, or reinterpret what the dream told me at first. I learned long ago to let go, let the dream float somewhere in the back of my awareness. If other meanings come up, that is good. If not then the memory will fade, eventually to be forgotten.

But this dream will always be with me now.

An old Samoan once told me how at first they thought Palangi (white people) funny. We turned out to be far from funny. Samoans too were invisible in their own house. Everything in their islands was taken or rearranged. Westerners did not hear them, did not see them.

What we, the invaders, wanted from Hawaiians was real estate, the white beaches and tropical sunsets, and now and then a few colorful people to illustrate tourist brochures. And, of course, we wanted a place for military installations, an armed outpost in the middle of the Pacific ocean.

Hawai'i today is a destination, a place to vacation. We trampled the sacred 'aina because we did not see it.
We ignored what Hawaiians valued.
For a thousand years, before the white man came, these islands were home to a few hundreds of thousands of people, gifted people, people who worshipped nature as they found it on these islands in the middle of nowhere. They were healthy, they had no communicable diseases, they probably knew no poverty or degradation.

Today Hawai'i has not many more inhabitants than lived here then, but it is a very different population. Hawaiians are a minority in their own land now.

— o —

Once, during yet another of the many reflections of that dream, I again saw that ancient face. Still no smile, but this time the blind eyes looked at me. Perhaps we communicated. Not in words certainly, but I felt there was some understanding between us.
Moa told me to be detached, to look at myself and all that is around me, from a distance.

As I was caught in the dream, all of us are caught in the world we ourselves made.

Be detached. Get some distance. How else can we experience 'what is'?
Not an easy thing to learn.

— o —

Many months later, when I felt I was ready for more dreams, again I put a sprig of moa under my pillow. Again I had a vivid dream. This time the dream gave me a clear answer to a problem one of my friends had asked help with. I woke up with a smile, feeling wonderful. Detachment made me see things from a clear perspective.

Another night I dreamt of warmhearted people who made me remember the joys of friendship, frivolity and fun. I woke up laughing.

Ah! So that is what moa does! It gives clear dreams, 'real' dreams.

And now I am learning to detach from the mess and confusion of daily life. Moa to me is no longer the awe-inspiring, alien, distant sphere of nonreflecting energy-absorbing stuff I had seen in deep space. Moa has become a comfortable and supportive presence. Moa dreams, as I now think of them, are helping me experience from another point of view, and perhaps that is compassion?
Moa helps me be real.

— o —

One morning I woke up with the realization that what was happening in my relationship with moa is comparable to my relating with redwoods some years ago. When first I saw redwood trees they had seemed so enormous, so massive, that I could not comprehend them.

Redwoods are not like the jungle trees that were familiar to me. Tropical trees are intimately part of the jungle, each tree tied to another with vines, home to myriads of other plants and animals, their roots intertwined with the roots of other plants and other trees.
Redwoods, on the other hand, seemed each apart. In a redwood forest I saw few other plants. Redwoods are like mountains. I felt a great distance, I could not see them as they are.

Until I had an opportunity to live in a large, old redwood forest for some months. My feelings changed. Redwoods became familiar, they became a warm, protective presence, absorbing human pain and suffering as they absorb moisture from the heavy fogs, yet without being touched by human concerns.

Redwoods gave me calm support when I needed it, somehow giving me peace of heart. I felt the redwoods knew my pain and the pain of other humans, perhaps they even cared, but they had the detachment of great age. How else can a being survive that lives a thousand years?

Redwood trees and now moa put things in perspective, the perspective of centuries. I felt cleansed in the redwood forest. And I also felt very real.
Moa does that also, it makes me feel clear and simple.

— o —

I cannot say that I talk with the spirit of moa as I talk with other plants. How can I, with a spirit so ancient that it predates humans by hundreds of millions of years; predates even redwoods?
But at times, in some way, moa communicates with me. Occasionally.

I no longer see that forbidding globe in space. The wrinkled face I see rarely, but when I do, I understand why it has blind eyes, I am invisible to it, even humankind is no more than a blip on a wrinkle of time. Moa has survived so long it will probably survive the next many million years. I marvel at the simplicity of this plant, totally without pretensions, without show. Maybe it has survived so long because it is so simple?

Moa reminds me to cherish my affinity for simple truths and simple people. In a way I cannot quite explain, moa reminds me of the aboriginal people I knew and loved. They too survived far longer than any of the empires that write our history, because they are simple and real, close to the earth, and after thousands of years still close to the most basic qualities that make us human.

Moa did not change much, if at all, in 350 million years. It did not have to. It was able to adapt to whatever changes the earth went through in that long time. The aboriginal people also did not seek progress, they never craved the things that are so important to civilization. They are The Meek who inherited the earth again and again while civilizations crashed around them.

Moa makes me see the larger picture, and so reminds me to see the wonders of now. A tiny sprig of moa under my pillow gives me clear dreaming, makes me wake up with a smile!

"Dreams are real while they last. Can we say more of life?" (Havelock Ellis).

— o —

It is now a few years after I first reached out to moa. I still often sleep with a small piece of moa under my pillow. Occasionally these dreams are meaningful, always they are full of life and joy. I do not try to communicate with moa; what could I say? But moa communicates with me, sometimes. Rarely.

I have noticed that in this garden moa now grows in many more places than before. In fact, I have found it growing in very unlikely places: I found a little moa plant growing under the

house, where there is no soil, no sunlight, no water, only dry, soft sand. Nothing grows under the house, not even centipede grass which is an unbelievably aggressive grass. But Moa grows.

Last year I carefully put a little moa plant in an empty sardine can with a bit of moss and some shreds of *hapu'u.* I kept that inside, next to my work table. After ten months inside it was doing well, but it had not grown. I carefully found another home for this little plant, outside. Now it is thriving.

I am a curious human, so as I walked around quietly one day, I asked the spirit of moa, why are you spreading?
Almost immediately this thought came into my mind: *we* (moa) *are adapting to higher altitudes; the waters are rising.*

1994-2003

Lost and Found

There were years when I got to know students as friends. Strange how those things happen. I liked teaching, it was a challenge and I felt I was doing what I wanted to do: stimulate people to think, to consider alternatives to "what everybody knows." Most of the students who attended my classes were adult. I taught graduate classes only, in fact many students were what we called "mid-career," they had taken a year or two off from their work to get a degree. And there were students who chose me to be their 'advisor', which meant I saw them regularly, we would plan courses, field work, projects. Some students became friends — in fact, a few of them have stayed friends until now.

I had been invited for tea in the afternoon. I cannot remember whether there was a special occasion, whether it was a weekend, or perhaps one of the vacations in the school year. There were some people I did not know, others who were "my" students.
Talk ranged far and wide; no shop talk. This was in the late sixties or early seventies when older and younger people mixed easily.

Mid afternoon, around four o'clock, a young man joined us, huffing and puffing as if he had been running. Everybody looked to the door. He began talking as if in the middle of a story, "… scared! All I could do was pack up as soon as it got light enough to see, and run back. Lucky there was a plane. But of course waiting, and then here…"

Hold it. Start from the beginning. What happened? Thought you were on Kauaʻi. Why didn't you call someone, we would have picked you up at the airport. Calm down. Sit down; have a cookie, some tea.
Our animated discussions were left up in the air. We all sat down, in chairs, on a sofa, on the floor.

The young man was the boy friend of the hostess. Obviously others knew him. I did not; I was introduced. We were served cold drinks and more edibles. Only then did we get ready for the story.

He — Harold, *not Harry* — had gone to Kauaʻi with two friends. Camping in Hanakāpîʻai: the name of a valley and also the trail to the valley. Kauaʻi has very deep valleys — almost canyons —, one after the other, beyond the end of the road. The only way to get there is walking. Hanakāpïʻai is the first valley from the end of the road.

Harold and his friends had walked the narrow trail to the valley. The trail is narrow, and in places quite steep. It goes up and then down into the valley, way down below. They decided to camp close to the top of the trail, on the valley side, because of the spectacular view. They had made a little fire, and after cleaning up, they had climbed in their sleeping bags (it gets cold at a few thousand feet above sea level) and gone to sleep.

Harold had been awakened, at what he guessed was about two or three in the morning, by a sound like zzzhup, or thhhup! He had opened his eyes. It was pitch dark, he saw a few stars but there were clouds pushed by a strong wind.

When he tried to sit up he couldn't. There was a spear stuck in the ground, across his stomach, the point to his left, holding him down. He looked to the right and saw the figure of a very powerfully built man with long black hair, who he thought must have thrown the spear.

Harold tried to say something to the man, but he was not sure this was not a dream, or he had been so startled that he had lost his voice. He could not speak. He tried again to sit up, but could not.

He was getting panicked. He tried to move his right arm to move the spear, but he seemed paralyzed. He could move only his head, and that only a little.

He lay back, closed his eyes, thinking — hoping — the spear and the dark man would disappear. A Hawaiian warrior?

As he lay there, eyes tightly shut, suddenly it was as if a very bright light were turned on overhead. He opened his eyes, but had to close them again immediately. There was a circle of piercingly white lamps all aimed at him. He saw the heads of people standing around, bent over him, all of them with caps on and masks that covered their noses and mouths. They were talking, but he could not understand what they said. There were other noises that he could not identify.
He was astonished more than frightened, he said.

One of the others in the house interrupted his story, "… an operation; you were operated on?"

Yes, that thought had occurred to him eventually, and then he got quite upset because he had never had any surgery. Was this a dream? Or surgery his future?

He continued the story. He had opened but quickly closed his eyes again, the lights were too bright. He had tried to hear what those masked people were talking about, but all he could hear was sounds, not words.

That lasted a long time, he said several times. He was immobile, could not move a muscle. Sounds, but no words. He wondered what the Hawaiian warrior had to do with this dream? Although it was his spear that held him down.

Finally, whatever it was faded. He opened his eyes. The spear was gone, as was the dark man who had thrown the spear. A Hawaiian warrior, as he thought about him. Or, at least, the ghost of a warrior, he said nervously.
Hanakäpîʻai is known to be one of the many places in Hawai'i that is haunted.

We were all talking at once.
Ghosts, surgery, the spear, others had similar experiences elsewhere. Until one of the women asked, What kind of surgery did you have?
No, he definitely never had any kind of surgery.

Oh, probably when you were a baby and you don't remember.

My mother would have said something to me, he said. She never mentioned anything about surgery. No, impossible. But why did I have that dream?

Someone said, Why don't you ask your mother?
Yes, we all agreed, call your mother now and ask her.
Reluctantly Harold agreed. He was given the phone. He called his mother who was somewhere on the mainland — probably evening, or even late evening there. We were all standing around the phone.

Mom, I have a strange question. Did I ever have any kind of surgery?
Harold listened, sat down on a nearby chair holding the phone, his face getting paler and paler.

Finally he hung up and turned to us. Yes, I did have surgery, when I was a week old. Something with my stomach, something had to be opened, it was a blocked… I don't know… *Pyloric* something (someone completed *Stenosis*). Yes, that was it.

Yes, I did! I did have surgery. I never knew. How could I remember that? I was a baby...

And the Hawaiian warrior?

We talked about it for hours, but nobody could come up with a rational explanation.
A pleasant afternoon tea tapered off into mystery.

— o —

A few years after the tea party I found myself on the same trail to Hanakäpïʻai. We were at least a dozen people. I lagged behind because I had a splitting sinus headache. The path there is very narrow, with a cliff going up on the left and a thousand feet fall on the right, straight to the ocean. I tried to concentrate my vision on the mountain but the headache hurt.

As we walked around a corner, carefully holding on to some roots that seemed placed just in the right place, I looked up and saw a plant, perhaps ten feet up. I did not know the plant, but somehow I "knew" what the plant would smell like, and that if I could get even one leaf and crush it, put it in my nostril, it would help the sinus headache. I could see that the plant was hairy, white and green, but the immediate knowing its essence was astonishing.

The plant was above my reach. I looked back, there were two men walking behind me. One of them said, soothingly, You are doing fine, go on.

I pointed to the plant, briefly telling him about my headache, adding that if I had a leaf of that plant it would help.

The man behind me looked up, looked at the man behind him, and said, Yes, we can get you a leaf. He cupped his hands, the other man stepped in, reaching up, breaking off a branch with several leaves.
It seemed easy, but I knew I could never have done that.

The plant felt and smelled exactly as I knew it would. I broke one leaf in half. Strong scent. I stuck a piece of the leaf in my nose and in minutes my sinuses cleared, my headache was gone.

Thank you to the men who had got the plant for me. Thank you for whoever, or whatever it was that gave me the knowledge of that plant.

Later, days later, I learned that the plant is a kind of oregano that grows all over these islands. Since then I have always had one oregano plant in my garden.

Weeds

A hundred and more years ago, the area where I live was called Ola'a. It is difficult to experience today what that forest must have been like then, because if the lava did not burn and bury the trees, we cut them. What forest there is now, is second or third growth, very different from the original forest. There are only a few remnants of that original forest, where the lava for some reason flowed around an enclave, called Ki Puka in Hawaiian. Or areas where several governments, one after the other, were able to preserve some rare areas. These ancient forests are awesome with powerful trees, vines, not much undergrowth but many flowers. Then, more than a hundred years ago, there must have been many native Hawaiian birds, because Ola'a was a sacred forest where bird catchers plied their trade: capturing the colorful birds to pluck a few of their breast feathers and then let them go. Before we came the natives knew, of course, to preserve rather than plunder. Many thousands of those feathers made the royal feather cloaks of the kings and queens of Hawai'i. Now Hawaiian birds are almost all extinct, displaced by imported birds, or, more likely, driven from their habitat by modern man.

I live on the slopes of Mauna Loa, a very large mountain, one of the five volcanoes that make up this island — or more accurately, one enormous mountain with five peaks and many mouths through which lava flows. Still, even now. This island, the so-called Big Island (called Hawai'i), is the youngest of the Hawaiian islands, geologically speaking. Near me is a vent, as it is called, through which lava comes up from the innards of the earth, collecting in a lava lake, and from there finding its way eventually though channels that often close over to make tunnels, to the ocean where the lava makes new land.

Much of the area around my house is wild. There are 'ohi'a trees, lots of ferns of different kinds and sizes, and an astonishing variety of grasses and sedges. Sedges are among the oldest plants, older than grasses. Grasses are humankind's earliest grains. Sedges probably were the earliest plants used for baskets of all kinds, they seem even more fibrous than grass. Often I have wondered why the British, and now most Americans, have such a fondness for lawns, when wild nature — anywhere in the world — is so much more interesting and alive. Here I have made no attempts to control the grasses and sedges, or any of the smaller "weeds" that thrive in this climate: cool much of the time, but never cold, and wet throughout the year. So the grasses are now well above my head. I love the way they wave thick flower heads in the wind: there are areas where the grass moves like water, in waves and swirls, nodding and becoming part of the wind and the sun, or the dark clouds overhead. Yes, I appreciate that such beauty grows all by itself, it needs no mowing, no special seeds, no fertilizer. But I appreciate even more the life force I feel in what I call the Wild.

I am partial to weeds. Underfoot are tiny, tiny plants of many different species. Some are rosettes with tiny flowers on tiny stems. Others are creeping over the rocks. I often wonder where they get the energy to spread so widely when their roots cannot go very deep into the lava.

One of my favorite weeds is *laukahi*, round-leaf plantain. The Hawaiian name means "single leaf," one leaf, although I like to think that it could also mean the first plant to grow where nothing else grows . One of my e-mail friends in Canada, a Cree Native Canadian, told me that in Alberta the same plant is called White Man's Footsteps, because it closely followed European settlers: in their footsteps so to speak. In Canada as well as here in Hawai'i it is a medicinal plant, strong medicine in fact. I make it a practice now and then to gather unblemished leaves to dry, so that I have them on hand when I might have a need for their medicine. I have learned that laukahi is a mild purge, but also it gives a burst of energy shortly after you eat one or two leaves.
I am sure that the energy comes from the powerful *mana* of the plant.

Mana is the Hawaiian word for life force (in the Orient called Chi, or Ki). As I observe that little plant I imagine that its powerful mana comes from the fact that it has to be extremely tough to survive in the places where it grows here. Laukahi grows where nothing else will: on raw lava, in a driveway, in cracked concrete. Elsewhere it also grows in the rich mulch of a forest floor, and there it grows much bigger. I remember some years ago a European herbalist claimed that what we here call laukahi is also a powerful anti-cancer herb; I would not be at all surprised.

Many of the medicinal herbs humans have found everywhere are weeds. No wonder, I think, because they survive where the food plants we cultivate cannot thrive. Now they grow between the plants we plant for food, and we have forgotten that what grows between is valuable.

Another underfoot plant that thrives here, and probably everywhere in Hawai'i, is called '*ihi*. It is obviously related to oxalis. It looks exactly like clover, but its leaves have a slightly sour taste.
There are many different kinds of 'ihi, from tiny plants with diminutive leaves and very tiny yellow flowers, to large-leaved plants with pink or violet flowers. I have not discovered any medicinal use for this plant, but it is always pretty.

Weeds are small and tough and almost invisible to most people. Because I like them I began to make little weed gardens in wide, low pots, or in the shallow dishes that are meant to catch the overflow of water from large pots that hold house plants. In between the little weeds I may place a stark lava rock, and moss of many different colors, green, yellow, even reddish and purple. The result is quite stunning. If nothing else, it shows the beauty of little wild plants: people who never noticed the little plants in the ground or between rocks, suddenly see a whole new world they did not know existed under their feet.

"Weeds", of course, are plants that grow where we do not want them — or, like here, where nothing else grows that is "useful." Weeds here come in wild colors, with leaves from pale yellow, through all the different greens, to bright red. Sometimes the leaves of the same plant are green in one place and red in another. I imagine because of the composition of the soil.

To me weeds are somewhat like indigenous people, and the people we do not see, the poor, the homeless, beggars, underdogs, the forgotten. All over the world (yes, even in America) there are people who survive and occasionally thrive under circumstances we cannot even imagine. Just like weeds.

Not all weeds are small and invisible, of course.
One weed that I dislike is a bramble, here called Himalayan berry (it has other names as well!) that grows fast, very aggressively, and has thorns everywhere, even on the leaves. It grows tree-tall, and occasionally makes impenetrable clumps of thorny vegetation. The thorns are the kind that stick to your clothes or skin. It is almost impossible to get rid of, because it grows back from the root, or from a piece of stem, unless you can get close enough to douse it with some poisonous chemical which I do not like to use. I have thought about burning it, but with all the tall and now dry grasses that does not seem a very safe thing to do.

And then there is *tibuchina*, once a house plant in Brazil that someone brought here because the flowers are so pretty. The flowers are indeed beautiful, a deep purple, with a touch of dark pottery red. The plant climbs and blooms profusely at this time of year. Unfortunately it likes it here so much that it has become a pest, albeit a very beautiful pest. It takes over, and is probably really impossible to eradicate. It is one of the many plants that were introduced in the last hundred years that is now out of control.

Another such import is *faia*, a tree that was introduced here from the South Pacific, or from Southeast Asia. In Tahiti it has destroyed much of the native forests in the hills of some

islands. Every now and then someone starts a campaign to root it out from this part of our island. Always without success.
A few years ago we had a very dry Fall, resulting in some brush fires here and there. Where the brush fire destroyed the native 'ohi'a trees, faia immediately took over. In three years these dense mini-forests have grown to be ten feet tall. The native 'ohi'a is slow growing, very tough, grows on lava, but cannot compete with faia in areas where there is some soil. Eradicating faia is going to be very difficult.

Probably as difficult as sending all imported people back where they came from.

When Captain Cook came in 1778, the first European to see these islands, there were an estimated eight hundred thousand or perhaps even a million Hawaiians who lived here, in harmony with the land — and islands have very fragile ecologies. Surviving and making a rich culture could only have been achieved with what we now call a "sustainable" way of life.

Eighty years after Cook's landfall, the number of Hawaiians had dropped to 50,000. The Hawaiians, as many indigenous populations, had no immunity for the diseases we brought. People died from the common cold, from measles, and of course other diseases that we think more serious. When white people began to settle here and cheated the local people out of their land, they needed labor to work the plantations they put in (sugar, later pineapple). Contract laborers were brought here from China and Japan, later from the Azores, from the Philippines, and many other countries. Most of these laborers were allowed to stay here, if they desired, after the term of their contract.

In 1893, a small group of Americans and foreigners (children of the first missionaries) forced the reigning Queen off the throne of the Kingdom of Hawai'i. She made what must have been an agonizing choice. She realized there were few Hawaiians left — perhaps only twenty or thirty thousand at the end of the nineteenth century — so she urged her subjects not to fight against what was at first little more than a small band of adventurers who had stolen their internationally recognized independent country.
A few years later, the United States annexed these islands, and eventually made Hawai'i the fiftieth state.

Today, not much more than a hundred years after annexation, the number of Hawaiians has decreased even further. The census does not count Hawaiians as a separate group, and, since the Hawaiian culture was accepting of foreigners (they had rarely seen any, and certainly never white people) there was and still is much intermarriage. The number of pure Hawaiians today must be very small indeed.

The plants and weeds of Hawai'i are a mirror image of this mixing of indigenous and imported people. There are very few plants left that were here before Captain Cook's visits, and very few Native Hawaiians remain.
Most of the flowers and fruits we associate with Hawai'i are imported from the Caribbean, South America, Asia, and elsewhere. Papaya and bananas were brought here probably from Asia. Pineapple and sugar, once the mainstay of this State’s economy, are not native to the Hawaiian islands.

The tourist industry often shows the big red showy blooms that look good on posters: another import. The "State Flower" is a yellow hibiscus, which is an imported species.There is a native species of hibiscus, but it has small white flowers.

Before Hawai'i was thrown open to the world there were no plants with thorns here, because there were no large grazing animals. Now there are many different kinds of brambles everywhere.

So I have to live with brambles, as Hawaiian natives put up with me and my kind.

I have no idea which of the little weeds I like so much are native. Probably less than half of the many species I have observed. But regardless of where they came from they are pretty and often have healing qualities.

May the exotic flowers as well as the brambles, may natives as well as people from everywhere who now inhabit these islands, be valued for their powerful life force, mana, their beauty and perhaps even their healing qualities.

Rafflesia

This is the story of the big flower in the jungle of Malaysia. A bare outline of the story is in the book *What It Is To Be Human*, now called *Original Wisdom, Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing*.

The Sng'oi are (were) one of the several tribes of Aborigines, as they were called in Malaysia. Few people knew them; travel writers referred to them as remnants of Stone Age people. They were not "Stone Age" of course; they used steel knives, metal pots and pans.. They lived in the deep jungle; they were nomads and truly peaceful— they avoided any kind of confrontation. Their shelters — temporary because they moved every year or so — were very flimsy bamboo structures to sleep in, often raised high off the ground, to stay out of the way of wildlife. These structures did not 'belong' to anyone in particular. Someone feeling sleepy would go to one of the two or more structures of what I called "settlements"— they were too small to be villages. There were rarely more than a dozen people, including children (they had very few) in any one settlement.

It was their custom, in the morning when people first woke, to share their dreams. These dreams they told me were "stories from the real world." This world, which we call reality, is a shadow of that world of dreams the Sng'oi said. As real as a shadow, which is not very real at all.

Those early morning dream talks were magical, the times when I stayed overnight. Sometimes the people who had slept in one house — maybe six, or seven — would sit in a sort of circle, other times we just sat up from where we had been sleeping (in a huddle, which is another story!). Often, it seemed, the little snippets of dreams that individuals reported were connected into a little story. Not always. Sometimes the bits of dream images did not cohere, and we went on our way without knowing what the day would give. But surprisingly often a coherent idea emerged that bound all the dreams together. Somehow the telling brought out how this dream added to, or fitted in with another piece someone else remembered of a dream.
Children often had the clearest dreams.

One day the dreams in the little house I had slept in told a very clear story: *there is a flower that is very special in the jungle* (and they all seemed to know where).
It seemed insignificant to me. The jungle is obviously full of flowers, full of everything. I would have forgotten the dream but for the fact that when we met the people who had slept in the other sleeping huts (I think there were three in that settlement), it seemed that they had dreamt a very similar dream.

After getting up I sat down somewhere and wrote vocabulary words in the little note book that I carried with me. A clumsy task because I am not trained in recording sounds in writing, but good enough for my own use. I tried to learn and remember at least some of their language. After probably an hour of that I looked around and noticed that there were only two or three people left. I figured they had gone out to look for food in the nearby jungle. We are so used to thinking that what one does during the day is work for a living. When one meets people who do not work for money, one assumes that what they do is look for food. They did look for food, of course, but I already knew that it was not "work" and usually only a few people would leave the settlement at a time. It was unusual that they all seemed to have left at the same time.

Then a little girl who had slept in the hut with me approached me. I did not know her name, but knew that she was bright, alert, very sweet, and strangely mature for what I guessed was her age — I guessed maybe five or six. She hunkered down next to me, not saying anything. I

was used to people not saying much, and felt comfortable sitting next to her without having to make conversation. Then she reached out and touched my hand, very lightly, and said, *Come we go*.
Where, I asked?
The flower, she answered (my knowledge of their language was very limited).

Oh yes, I had forgotten about the dream.
She took my hand and we started out.

After a little while, walking on what could with some imagination be called a path, she looked up and said, When you learn more you will see the animals who are watching us.
Obviously I had been unaware of animals looking at us! (At the time it never occurred to me to wonder how she knew that I did not see those animals). I knew she meant well, suggesting it was just a matter of learning whatever quality one needs to be aware of other beings in one's environment.

We did not walk far, perhaps half an hour, or a little more, through the jungle, which to me, at that time, still felt awesome, mysterious and unknown, led by a little girl who was obviously quite sure where she was going.

Suddenly we came to a clearing, almost round. In the middle of the open space was a strange plant-like thing, perhaps four feet tall, raw flesh-colored. There was a smell of rotten meat which I realized came from that strange plant — flower? There was no visible green, although the flower (?) must be a plant of some kind (later I learned that of course it was a plant, called *Rafflesia*, very rare, it grows only in Sumatra and on the Malay peninsula, now Malaysia).

Around the perimeter of the clearing sat the people of the settlement. Nobody said anything, but they all seemed intensely occupied watching this strange growth. At first I had trouble with the smell, it smelled like carrion. Flies and probably other beasties were crawling all over the raw pink flesh.
The little girl and I sat down, between others, but the clearing was big enough so that we were spaced several feet from each other. The little girl and I sat close together, however.

I started to say something. The little girl reacted with a sort of shiver, and reached out to my hand again, her face saying, *Shhh, quiet!*
When I made another noise, her hand squeezed my hand.

We sat in silence.

I had a hard time keeping focused on that plant. In my western scientist frame of mind I was trying to find words to describe the plant, the experience, wondering what those people saw that was so interesting. It seemed just another jungle mystery to me. Surely there were all kinds of growths unknown to me. And I wondered how they knew from the fragments of our dreams that this flower was here, and how had they known where it was? Many questions and no answers. My thoughts fluttered here and there.

The little girl increased the pressure on my hand; she was obviously exerting as much pressure as she could. Why should I be quiet? What was it I should hear? What was I supposed to *do*?

I concentrated on the little hand that held mine. I sensed that I felt more than the grip of that hand, I felt some sort of connection, a current of some kind..

As soon as I stopped playing word games in my head, and just concentrated on the hand, the connection with the girl, and the very strange situation I was in, I felt something else. At first it seemed like a sort of rushing sound, like a nearby stream perhaps? I looked around, but could not find a direction. No, it was not the sound of water, but another sound — no, not

even a sound. This was something else, as if people were murmuring but heard from very far off. And not even murmuring...

Then, I do not know how, but suddenly I knew that what I heard/perceived was the intense, concentrated absorption, observation, awe of a small band of people watching a flower.
I became aware that they were not thinking words, they were not interpreting what they saw (and smelled), they had no thought of what it meant, what the name of that being was.
They were getting to know the flower. They were in awe of yet another manifestation of the oneness.

I do not know how long we sat there. It must have been an hour, at least. And for much of that time I shared in the communal awe, storing the whole gestalt in my memory: the flower, the smell, the dream, the people, the jungle, the little girl — all part of one Oneness.

Then, as one, we got up, still silent, and walked back to the little settlement.

Nothing was ever said when we got back.
What more could we say?

There are no words.

Sophisticated Primitives

They say we cannot go back to when we were primitive, lived simple lives. We probably did not live as long as we do today, but as a species we survived for hundreds of thousands of years. We were different then. We had fewer needs certainly; or perhaps fewer wants. We did not know about wants. But somehow we knew about what is right, what is beautiful and true.

The primitives I knew, briefly, probably superficially, fitted seamlessly in their world, a world of plants and trees, very few other humans, hardly any artifacts (man-made objects) and no technology, as we understand that term now. To me, as an outsider, what made the greatest lasting memory was a sense of being part of the scenery. We, today, think ourselves characters on a stage: the world the stage, Nature as backdrop.

Primitive man does not feel himself apart from the world, he is part of it; a very intimate part. He cannot be separated from that world.

Laurens van der Post, South African writer of the early twentieth century "fell in love;" with the San (also called Bushman of the Kalahari Desert), the remnants of one of the aboriginal peoples of Africa (as I fell in love with the Sng'oi in Malaysia). I use the expression "fell in love with;" after much thought. Falling in love, or being in love, is the only expression left us to express a sudden and deep affection because the media have overused and neutralized every other large concept word. In a most peculiar way I felt as if I were coming home, as if these people were some long-lost relatives.
Because that feeling was unexpected and unusual I could not help trying to figure out why I felt that. What was it about these little people, so totally unassuming that appealed to me so? After many years I think it must have been a "rightness," an inevitability I sensed about them. They fitted in so seamlessly into their world, they were content, joyful even in what to any modern man must have seemed utter poverty. They were not beautiful as Polynesians are beautiful. They were not scrubbed, red-cheeked farmers from a prosperous part of Europe. But they had a rightness that was very much like the rightness of an animal in the wild.
They were the last wild humans, of course.

The people I knew belonged, they were part of their environment as a lion is part of the desert, or a tiger is part of the jungle. You cannot take a tiger out of the jungle; a tiger in a zoo is no longer a tiger. Laurens van der Post writes that a Bushman dies when you take him out of his desert. He tells of putting a Bushman in jail overnight: the next morning he is found dead. Medical examiners could never find a "cause of death";. Van der Post says about the Bushman that "they cannot be tamed". I felt the same about the Sng'oi. If they were to be taken out of their environment, they would die. Perhaps not physically, but they would no longer be Sng'oi.

A few times I saw them outside of their environment. The Malaysian Government made a little hospital for them, for instance. Planned with consideration, they were simple huts, families were expected to accompany a sick person, and cook the food, so that patients would feel at home. But the native-looking houses had concrete floors for hygiene. The doctor in charge was a wonderful man, who tried to be low key, "meeting them halfway;" as he liked to say. I appreciated the dedication of the doctor, but for me, seeing the Sng'oi there was a bitter experience. They were in a daze, their eyes were glazed not from tuberculosis, which would probably kill them, but because they could only be half aware of what all strange things were done to them. Taken out of their world, they had shriveled, all the life had gone out of them.

In their own world they left hardly a trace where they walked, they did not destroy or even disturb anything in their environment. They were content with what food and shelter they could find and did not want more. They had no ambition to reshape their world, no desire to

exploit the earth for resources other than what grew naturally. They lived in the world not on.

That is what, to me, "primitive" means. People who are content with very little.
If even the little is not available they move on. And if they cannot move on because we have claimed the entire world for our civilization, they die.

For a long time it has been important to me to live my life as much as possible as a primitive, an aborigine. I know of course that I cannot really live the life of a primitive, because today, in order to survive, I need to be part of this modern civilized world, hard as that is. If I ever get the courage I shall go and find somewhere to be a primitive. And of course, die there, also as a primitive

For now, I can live simply, as simple as the world allows me to live. But I live alone; and that, above all, marks me civilized. Primitives are never alone for any length of time, they are one not only with the whole world, but also in their own group, tribe, 'ohana, family.

I have a deep sense that primitive life, an aboriginal life, is perhaps the only truly human life. Humans today have moved so far away from our forebears that we are hardly recognizable as human.

Can we go back? Of course not, evolution does not go back. Or maybe sometimes it does? What if we discovered, and accepted, that our evolutionary branch is a dead branch, about to fall off? Could we not choose to go back to somewhere earlier on the branch, closer to the trunk at least?

I have figured out how to do that. It is simple.

First you have to learn patience, a way to meditate, and then to be aware. When I am aware, open to What Is, I will discover that the earth is a miraculous place, where everything is related to everything else, and every being is part of another being, many other beings. Once I know that, then I can no longer destroy my environment, I could not possibly live other than very simply. And when more and more people feel human again, perhaps suddenly all of us will remember.

That is one side of me.

The other side observes and what I have observed for the past three quarters of a century, makes me think that whether we want to or not, we must and we will live once again as primitives did. We must learn again to be part of creation, not its pinnacle.
Creation is One, there can be no hierarchy in All There Is.
One part of creation is not better or more important, and certainly not the boss of other parts of the same creation. Bosses and slaves are a cancer: one group of cells going to war against other cells in the same body.

— o —

Forty thousand years ago. Try to imagine a thousand. then forty thousand! A long, a very long time ago, my forefathers and yours, painted art on the walls of caves, some of which survives to this day.
Consider what that means: works of art have survived, intact, in their original form and matter, for forty thousand years!
Then realize that those "primitive" paintings are of a sophistication rarely matched and never surpassed.

Those paintings show the world as it must have been forty thousand years ago, a world of large herds of many kinds of deer, and lions and snakes and people. All drawn with a

refinement that is uncanny. Animals are drawn with a few lines, but lines so exquisitely drawn that there is no question that the unknown artists who did that were as great as Leonardo da Vinci.

Those seemingly simple representations require a deep understanding of the essence of their subjects. What does it feel like to be a wild horse, or a lion? When a deer turns its head all the way back the skin stretching tight, is expressed with a line. A running horse moves its feet just so, a few lines catch the movement perfectly.

In addition, of course, the state of preservation of these paintings says that the artists knew their craft, they knew the essence of the colored clays they used.

To me those paintings — and I have only seen them reproduced in books, but I have seen many!)— those paintings are of a purity and sophistication that I cannot find in modern art.

We know almost nothing about those people; all we know is these drawings in caves. Today we think we need a written record or at least a physical thing that we can read, study, measure, analyze, take apart and put together again. Very few of those kinds of things survive for forty thousand years. But those drawings, those paintings survive.

What do they tell us about ourselves forty thousand years ago? That we were sophisticated primitives.

To me, sophistication (as it was understood when I grew up — yes, that is a long time ago — is a quality speaking of refinement. Refinement in anything, art, speech, behavior, morality. Refinement requires knowing the essence of an art, or the essence of a thing or a being or even a behavior. Refinement, and sophistication, are not qualities of the rich, as we may think today. The affluent of today look for excess, not refinement.

Those primitive painters drew their world with a few strokes, applied with such mastery that they must have understood the essence of what they were painting. Only when I grasp the essence of a Lion, can I represent him with but a few lines, lines perfect, exactly right in thickness and power.

Yes, that is sophistication.

— o —

Me: *Are you born sophisticated, or can sophistication be learned?*

Me: *I do not know. I imagine you get sophisticated when you are aware, awake, wide open in the here and now. Then you can see inside, rather than be stuck on surface.*

Me: *Sophistication is not the only word that is vague when you started to say things about a sophisticated primitive.*

Me: *True. In the popular culture "primitive"; has become the new tribal craze, people piercing strange body parts, decorating themselves with enormous tattoos, when that is but decoration. A true primitive has a culture. The pierced youth of today have no culture, they yearn for meaning. And when they cannot find meaning in today's world, they hark back to the customs of earlier people. But it still is only this week's fad . And next year?*
No, primitive in its original sense, is a person who lives in a world he feels a part of, a world that supports and nurtures him; a world the primitive respects and reveres.

Me: *Boy, you get carried away, don't you?*

Me: *I knew you would say that!*

Me: *After all, aren't we the same person?*

We: *Yes. Now I understand how all and everything can be One.*

We: *Just aspects of the same One.*

You Must Choose

Driving back from the store I thought about a letter I must write to L. He has questions. Why did I wait so long to write about the Sng'oi, and what has changed that I can write about them now?
I did not want to write about them because I felt I would be betraying a trust. I am not sure what I meant (or mean) with that expression. What trust? But even now, so many years later, I do not want to betray the people from whom I learned so much. In a real sense they changed my life.

They were a remnant from a very ancient age. I understood that the only way they could have survived so long was by hiding in the deep jungle. But even then, thirty-five years ago, it was clear that our western civilization would finish them. Sooner or later they would be eradicated, or swallowed by the surrounding culture. In either case they would lose their identity.

The six miles from Freeland to my house is mostly straight and there is little traffic; driving does not take much of my attention. My attention now is focused on not hitting deer, although I can usually sense when they are around before I see them.

Not long ago, I found some old photographs of Sng'oi. Some rare event with a group of them together. Their faces all show that expression of being lost. They were so displaced, so out of their world where there was no jungle, where they had to wear clothes. Their pained smiles were grimaces.
If I were taken to another planet, among people who might be friendly but felt different, had a language I did not understand, lived in enormous buildings, whatever natural green there was, was manicured, I would look like that. Dazed. Confused. The Sng'oi had that glazed look that says, what is happening, where am I? Animals in a zoo have that expression. I remember a gorilla in the Honolulu zoo. The zoo in Honolulu is not famous or even large, but on the whole the keepers treat animals about as well as humans know how. This gorilla was in a small, temporary cage, heavy bars to protect us from him, or more likely, him from us.
He was on display. He must have been a new acquisition, they had not prepared a habitat for him yet.

The gorilla sat hunched over, squeezed in a corner of the cage, apparently not paying attention to the curious who were trying to get him to "do" something; people want animals to perform. If the animals do not feel like performing, people poke them, or yell, or make faces, or throw things. A child threw a pebble into the cage, then others took up the game, finally a man took a handful of dirt and threw it at the big ape.

The man missed by a wide margin. The gorilla looked up, although only his brow lifted a little, the rest of him stayed in a motionless clump of dark fur, the picture of misery, or perhaps disinterest.
He took a handful of shit and threw it at the onlookers with surprising force. His aim was much better than the man's had been.
Then he averted his eyes again, he had said what was necessary to say.

As I was driving through the peaceful landscape of this island, worlds away from the hot, humid jungles of Malaysia, I imagined a Sng'oi in a cage, a cage equipped will all the amenities, but in a zoo nevertheless. I knew very clearly again why I did not want to write about them before. I did not want to be the one to bring these gentle, loving people to the attention of the world. Even thirty years ago I knew that it was inevitable that they would be integrated into the complex political world of the country. But I did not want to be the one to make that happen.

"But," I hear someone say, "did you not want to help them? They live in poverty, they have diseases that could be cured."
As a westerner of course I should want to.
What help can we possibly give? They have lived like this, closely integrated into their natural world for thousands of years; why meddle? Western medicine could cure the tuberculosis they are now dying from (a disease we brought), but in the process they would lose their identity.

You ought to want to share the benefits of civilization with the Sng'oi, friends say reproachfully.

Our civilization is ruthless and will, certainly and without a doubt swallow them up, as it has absorbed and erased other humans, animals, plants and landscapes. Our civilization does not allow wild to survive unless in reservations, protected by our laws and guns. Just another kind of zoo.

I knew again why only now I can write about the Sng'oi. Their way of life is already extinct. I have heard that the people I knew have been absorbed into the modern country that was formed around the territory where they have lived for 50,000 years.
The last Wild People are gone.

We who talk about freedom are the prisoners as well as the zoo keepers. We are slaves, owned by big corporations and big government, pushed around by incomprehensible laws. We work many hours a day to become somebody, to earn enough to live on, even to save some for our old age, and in the end we are forced to give it all to the people who keep us alive longer than we choose to.

The wild people I knew did not strive to become anything, they knew who they were. What they had was who they were, free humans.

However good our intentions, we cannot be anything but intruders and destroyers.

— o —

I turned my attention back to the road. I always enjoy the scenery. I was cresting a gentle hill, a few miles from home, when I saw a young man by the side of the road with his hand out. We do not have many hitchhikers any more, but occasionally a high school student, or someone young and adventurous, will try.
I looked to see where I could get off the road to let him in, and take him to wherever he might be going.
Only a teenager would hitch a ride these days, I thought. This teenager seemed typical, his pants were many sizes too large. He wore a scruffy shirt and a nondescript cap.
He looked harmless but we live in a strange and dangerous world. Daily we are given reports of shootings and killings, whose perpetrators often seem to be school age youngsters.

I refuse to think such paranoid thoughts, so I slowed down and prepared to stop.
The road does not have much shoulder there, barely enough to maneuver the car off the pavement. I had to drive carefully not to go too far off to the side and land in the ditch. As I was steering carefully, eyes fixed ahead, paying attention to what little space I had to get off the road, I reached my arm over to open the door on the passenger side.

Just when I came to a complete stop, I heard the door slam shut. I looked into a shy, but smiling face. He smells, I thought. Oh well, that probably goes with the sloppy clothes, maybe it is a fad these days to smell. I did not look at him closely. I was eager to get off the non-existent shoulder of the road. Carefully I drove back onto the pavement.

With eyes still on the road I asked him where he was going.

"Where you are going," he said. He seemed to have a slight accent, but I could not place it. That intrigued me. I wanted to hear him talk some more. Usually I can place an accent; it is like a game, trying to pinpoint a region of the United States, or another country.
"I am not going very much farther," I said. "I turn left soon. I can leave you by the side of the main road so that you can catch another ride."
"*Bagus*," he said.

At least that is what I think he said.
Bagus is a Malay word, meaning beautiful, or, good. Modern Indonesians use it to say, okay (young people say hokay, which sounds very strange when heard within the rhythm of their language). Did he mean that the scenery was beautiful, or that it was nice of me to stop? Or that it was all right to go where I was going?

Then it hit me, he had said a Malay word!

I turned my head to look at him. He looked a bit darker than I had seen him when he stood by the side of the road.
"*Orang Indonesia,*" I asked, are you Indonesian?
"No," he said, in English.
He smiled but did not say more. I wanted to ask more questions. I thought perhaps he was an exchange student. Or I had misunderstood, maybe he had not really said, bagus.

I slowed down for my turn, getting ready to let him out. He reached over and gently touched my arm, and said, "I go that way," pointing to the left, the way to my house. The touch on my arm felt familiar, it is the way people in Southeast Asia touch to get one's attention. I turned the car, driving slowly to the next turn. Again he said, "I go that way," pointing in the direction where I was going — and he pointed with his chin, as Asians do.

When we came to the driveway I hesitated. I wanted to cheerfully say something like "well, you have to get out now, I am not going any further."

I turned my head and saw he was getting out of the car.
He stayed, with his hand on the door handle, smiling such a wonderful smile I could hardly take my eyes off him. Something in that smile touched a spot deep inside me. He motioned with his head, as if to say, go on, park the car.

He helped carry groceries into the house. I had not exactly invited him, but how could I not let him in? I put the groceries away. He stood inside the door, looking around.

I asked him to sit down, would he like tea? He preferred water, he said. I poured water for both of us. (Filtered, of course. Our civilization is fast breaking down, taps do not run potable water any more).

We looked at each other. I was getting a little nervous about this silent stranger who had in some mysterious way come into my house. Again, I had a hint of something familiar. An Asian can be physically near and yet respect one's privacy. I was getting very curious about this young man.

He was not that young, I noticed when I looked at him again. He certainly was no teenager. Yes, he must be Asian. Asians age differently, they look young until middle-aged, and then, suddenly, they are old. This man probably was close to thirty. Or even forty, or more?

He was sitting on a straight chair, looking uncomfortable. I was sitting in the one easy chair my house has, and it is not all that 'easy' either.
"Where are you from," I asked? In Southeast Asia that is an acceptable question. You cannot ask, Who are you, but you can ask where are you from.
He smiled and did not answer.

His smile gave him away. He smiled as only a Sng'oi smiles: with his eyes and his face, not his teeth. Malays are more expressive, Indonesians would have laughed out loud.
But here, on this island, a Sng'oi man?
He did not say anything but he nodded very slightly.

Suddenly I was overcome with feelings. Tears blurred my vision; I could not see him very well any more. Then I did a strange thing. I did not consciously decide, but found myself moving off the chair to sit on the floor, facing him. He moved off his chair and sat across from me. Again, a very familiar way of being with another person, sitting across from each other with legs crossed. And close enough so that we could touch each other's knees.

Unfortunately, my legs do not cross very well any more. I felt the aches and pains that are with me almost all the time now. My back hurts. One foot is swollen. My skin itches.
I felt almost embarrassed, sitting in front of this unexpected visitor with a body that does not work well any more. I apologized, "I am old; I cannot cross my legs any more."

He leaned over, gently touching the knee that did bend, and said in perfect, unaccented English, "look into my eyes."
"What do you see," he said?

Myself, I said with surprise!

I looked again: yes, I saw myself. The picture of *me* I saw in his eyes shifted from what I really look like, to another *me*, a more vibrant *me*, without scarred skin, with a straight back, a *me* that could easily sit with crossed legs.

For quite a while I looked into the mirror of his eyes . The picture of *me* shifted back and forth, between a bedraggled, painful, hurting *me*, and another *me*, an ideal *me* perhaps. In any case a *me* that felt real in a manner quite different from the *me* I see in my bathroom mirror, or the *me* I feel.

"You must choose," he said.

1994

Senang

Once someone took me to visit a very small settlement.
I would never find it by myself, she said, although it was not far from here.
I had learned by then not to ask, how far?

The next morning Mah and I left the settlement where I had stayed the night, and we walked. We did not walk more than an hour, probably. I am not good at time guessing; I have never been able to wear a watch, but I know from where the sun is, and perhaps from some inner time sense, approximately what time it is in the world of clocks.

We came to a clearing with only one shelter, as most others a rickety bamboo structure on high stilts. Five people were sitting around a little fire. There were no children. The people ranged from young adult to old adult. My western self automatically tried to pair them off, or tried imagining relationships between these two men, one young, the other almost old, and three women, of indeterminate ages in between.
It looked as if they had just finished eating the remains of yesterday's dinner. Nothing was left now but a few bones. Judging from these it must have been a monkey.

We heard you coming, one of the men said.
We went to see who was coming.
And then, *We came back here to wait*, one of the women said.
Mah translated for me; she had arranged this little trip.
Generally men are referred to as Bah and their name, women are Wah and their name. Mah must have been her name. It does not mean mother, neither in the Sng'oi language nor in Malay. She was a lively and intelligent woman. The night before she had asked me many good questions when we sat around the little fire after eating.

It did not surprise me too much that these people had come to check out who or what was coming. We had made no attempt to be quiet, in fact we had talked almost all the way. But how could it be that we had not noticed? And why did they not meet them, but instead go back to wait for us here?
Later I figured out that they did not want to, or could not afford to share the few shreds of meat that were left on the little monkey carcass. Rather than hide the food, they quickly ate it before we came; it would have been unthinkable to receive guests when eating and not offering to share.

Even early in the morning it was too hot to sit around the little fire, even though it had almost burned itself out by now, so we moved to sit under a big tree.
Watch out for snakes one of the women said. And watch for scorpions, another said. The third woman did not speak. She looked at us without much curiosity, and continued to sit quietly, with one hand in her lap, a half smile on her face.

I was obviously an object of observation, but not part of the conversation. They spoke Sng'oi. At the time I had not learned to understand more than a few words. Probably at least some of the people, besides Mah, knew some Malay, but I knew it would be best not to open my mouth, for fear of being thought *kasar*. .

Kasar is a Malay word.
In the Malay culture how one is-in-the-world is extremely important. The word for the right kind of being-in-the-world is *halus*, which means soft-spoken, gentle, refined, it also means slick black hair, a soft complexion, well-behaved and quiet, and talking politely in a soft voice, being modest. Satin is halus, or silk.
The opposite of halus is kasar, which means rude, crude, loud, making big gestures, macho

strutting, stomping, making loud noises, rough or kinky hair, pockmarked skin, leathery work-worn hands, and other equally obnoxious qualities and behaviors.
Needless to say most non-Malays, like Chinese and of course white people, were considered kasar most of the time. Malays were supposed to be halus all the time.

After a while, I got restless. I did not feel comfortable being part of the scenery.
I knew well enough that just sitting there quietly was the height of being halus! But my body, it seemed, did not know. I looked around, twisted my position on the log on which I was balancing. I could not help myself, I wanted to join the conversation.

I asked Mah, Why, how come you talk, two men talk, two women talk; one woman not talk? That is a literal translation of what I said in Malay. It could mean, What do you think about that woman who does not talk? But it could also mean, Can you ask the woman what she is thinking?

Mah looked at me surprised, then worried, then embarrassed. She knew who I referred to, of course. I did not have to point with my chin — pointing at a person is always very rude; definitely kasar.
It would also be kasar for her to ask the woman what she was thinking, it would be an intrusion. The woman did not participate in the gentle back and forth of the discussion although she seemed pleasant enough. If she had wanted to participate she could have. She obviously chose not to.

Everyone in the group had heard me ask the question. I am not sure how many had understood what I had asked Mah, but they could see that Mah was now uneasy. It was obvious that it would require a lot of tact, or wisdom on Mah's part to resolve this situation. I had put Mah in a difficult position, which in itself is kasar!

As I realized that, I felt acutely embarrassed, but there was no way to undo what I had started.

All of the people were silent. They looked down at their feet, careful not to look at Mah or me and certainly never to even glance at the woman who had not talked.

The woman looked up (I fantasized she was coming out of some kind of meditation), looked directly at Mah as if to ask, Well ?

Mah said, in Sng'oi (she later told me how she had phrased it), *Him wants hear you talk. .*

The woman turned and looked at me, smiled a broad smile with her mouth as well as her eyes — never showing teeth of course — and said one word (a Malay word!): *Senang*.

Senang means comfortable, content, happy. It could even mean bliss or blissful.

The woman never said another word while we lingered for at least another hour. That smile never left her face; it still haunts me.

Meditation

A quarter of a century ago, perhaps more, I lived in the important world of universities. In that world I was a scientist and required to attend conventions (boring) and important meetings (very boring). I remember one of these important meetings although I could not say what the meeting was about. All I know is that it was a meeting of one of the branches of the United Nations, held in Bangkok. At that time, among traveling scientists, Bangkok was said to be expensive for UN people and their guests, so it was advisable, they said, to find lodging with a private individual — I should not want to stay at the affordable hotels!
I wrote a former student who now lived in Bangkok. He replied that his own house was too small, but that he had arranged for me to be the guest of his neighbor, Mrs. W. I accepted.

When I arrived, some weeks later, the student introduced me to Mrs. W. who turned out to be a severe matron, obviously from New England. Polite but no frills, direct. She said she could not entertain me, I had to find my own way around. In fact, in less than an hour she would have to leave me to go to her meditation class.

At that time I did not know much, I thought meditation was sitting still and waiting for something to happen. I wondered at the idea that meditation could be 'learned', but it intrigued me that this ramrod straight elderly lady from New England would go to a class here in Bangkok. I must have said something; she explained in a few words that, indeed, she went twice a week to see a Buddhist priest, with two or three other foreigners, to learn a bit about Buddhism, but mostly, yes, how to meditate.

Could I come along?
Well, yes, she did not think there would be any objection.

She indicated which room I would stay in her house, where to leave my baggage (better to hang things in the closet) and half an hour later we set out on foot to the meditation class. On the way through what seemed like a big park, still in that dry, almost formal way of speaking, she explained that we were on the grounds of the Queen's mother—not the Queen Mother, she added—which was close to the Palace. The priest we were going to see was an important priest, apparently, who lived on the Palace grounds. Oh yes, and the little bungalow she lived in? That too was one of the many such 'guest houses' scattered through the lavish grounds.

When we came to the palace itself (the King's palace 'complex', she called it), we wandered through corridors, across gardens between buildings, along hallways, until at last we came to a tiny cell in a concrete building. There were a few chairs. The Priest's name,—or perhaps title?—was JauKun. I do not know whether that is the proper spelling, but that is what it sounded like. There was a monk with shaven head in the little room. An Englishman, it turned out, who would translate for us. Then there was a German anthropologist, who I later heard had attended only once before, some months ago (Mrs. W. obviously did not like her).

Our small group settled itself on the few chairs, I sat in a sort of window seat. At the time I had not heard much Thai, so as the Jau Kun spoke my thoughts wandered. When the English monk translated I listened.

I cannot remember much of the introduction. After less than half an hour the Jau Kun asked whether we had any questions. Now that I think of it, his name must have been a title: Mrs W. referred to him as the Jau Kun).
Yes, I had a question. At that time I thought of myself as a bright scientist, always questioning. Today I am embarrassed of how I was at that time. It was a phase!
My question had nothing to do with the Jau Kun's introduction to meditation. I said that the

followers of Christ were told to do good works, whereas the followers of the Buddha were told to work on their own spiritual enlightenment. What did he have to say about that?

Looking back, I am really quite embarrassed! At the time I did not know much about Christianity or Buddhism, my question was the kind of simplification that is practiced in the popular press. But the Jau Kun never stopped smiling, he answered me patiently and humbly. He did not say much, all he said was “Is there a difference?” Which I thought at the time was ‘slick’ — now I know that his answer came from a very deep understanding of human spirituality as we call it today. But even then, I understood why Mrs. W wanted to learn from him.

There were a few other questions from the German lady, mostly to do with fine points of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, she added every time — to show that she knew that there were different forms of Buddhism.

The question and answer period faded into silence, lit by the Jau Kun’s smile that seemed to emanate from his entire head.
Then he talked about meditation.
This part was by far the most animated. He told us that before you meditate you should find your ‘center’. He impressed on us how important it is to know that ‘center’, so that we could return there each time we wanted to meditate. We meditate from that center, he said several times. The English monk added a little talk of his own, saying that this was one way, there were other ways to meditate — the Jau Kun nodded his head and smiled, Yes, that was true, but for us, he thought, it would be best if we learned to meditate beginning in our own unique center. That center was of course different for each of us. But to give us an idea he would tell us what his center looked and felt like.

The JauKun’s ‘center’ is still vivid in my memory of those days: a pool with coca cola-colored water in deep jungle — on this side a thick grove of bamboo (a bamboo forest is almost impenetrable, I felt the security that such a solid wall must have given him). On the other side big jungle trees with vines hanging down. He mentioned the reflection of rocks and trees, plants, flowers, mirrored in the little pool. Peaceful, but not quiet, many birds were singing.

He stressed, again, that of course this was only a picture of ‘his’ center, ours must be very different.

Then he said, In a few minutes we shall all go upstairs to the meditation room. But first I want to warn you that when you start looking for your center, you may feel resistance, sometimes layers of rocks you have to sink through, or it might be water, or even air. But never force your way down, never use force. Let yourself flow down to your center, make yourself patient and soft, fluid.

The meditation room was garish as Southeast Asian Buddhist temples are. At least one altar, a Buddha (probably several Buddha figures around the room), flowers, candles. It was not a large room, but large for the five of us. Each of us chose a little square carpet to sit on, in the closest approximation to the lotus position each of could hold. At that time I was limber and I could sit a full lotus.
A little bell tinkled.

I closed my eyes, and began my descent. I was prepared to find layers of who knows what before I would find my ‘center’ (at first I had a hard time not thinking of the forest pool and the bamboo). I was prepared to be patient and soft and flow my way down (it was only years later that I wondered why the JauKun had stressed going ‘down’).
Of course, I felt resistance. Rock, granite; white stone and black. It took a while for me to experience how I could ‘flow’ through granite. Then layers of cotton, a layer of very cold clouds, a layer of sand. I felt it was taking a long time to traverse all those barriers.

Until at last I found myself in a dry warm (not humid like Bangkok) court yard. A very unpretentious square of low rooms or spaces around a round well in the middle. The well had a low brick wall, a pleasant height to sit on. And as I stared into the well I could see dark glimmering water on which floated a blue flower. I could not tell how large it was, but probably a few inches across. Cobalt blue with six petals.

Where did my mind — or my fantasy? — make up such a place? It was not like anything I had ever known, it felt vaguely Middle Eastern perhaps, or Greek? But, I had to admit to myself, very pleasant, almost familiar. As I looked around paying more attention to the building, or little cottages aroundi the well, I saw there were trees and flowers everywhere. Not the tropical kind of plants I was used to, plants and trees that explode with color and exaggerated exuberance. These plants were modest, grayish green, flowers were small and white or yellow. All except that one magical six-petaled blue flower in the well.

I did as the JauKun had instructed us. I walked around, storing in my awareness the pleasant, comfortably warm but not humid air, a simple courtyard, the well and its low sitting wall, the blue flower. I impressed on my memory the sand-colored rooms around the court, with rough openings barely high enough to walk through. I did not see any features inside the rooms. All of it pleasant, modest, very unremarkable except perhaps for the cobalt blue of the flower.

After a while I became aware that this was an exercise. It must be time to come 'up' again. I felt wonderful, I loved the center I had found (I still use it today, although I also have other ways to begin a meditation).

This time, as I went up, to my great surprise there was no resistance. It was as if I were in a glass elevator, and we zoomed up in seconds through the rock, the cotton, the clouds, that it had taken me so long on my way down only a little while ago. Before I knew what was happening I shot up into the air, the atmosphere, higher and higher. And as I went higher I felt myself spreading out, getting thinner and thinner, spreading around the whole earth.

I panicked. I was afraid all of me would be breaking up in molecules that merged with the stratosphere, and I would never be able to reconstruct my body. I shot awake.

Later, downstairs, when we shared our stories, the JauKun burst out laughing when I got to the ignoble end of what had started out as a 'good' meditation.

But before the JauKun could say anything, the English monk went into what I knew was a western interpretation of my experience. He said what I had experienced was very common, completely normal, it often happened. He added, "in English we call that astral travel"

The JauKun said something quietly, and very seriously.
Translation: You should never be afraid, never.

That I have taken to heart.

— o —

Not long ago I had a dream.

In the dream I was slowly ascending through first rock, then cotton, clouds — the dream took me back to that first lesson in meditation..
But now I did not panic. I felt very light and with some amazement I realized that I felt no pain or discomfort anywhere in my body. In fact I hardly felt my body at all. I knew my material form was spreading out, all around this earth, and I knew I was merging with all the molecules and atoms and energies that make up that layer around the earth we call the 'biosphere', the shell in which all Life takes place.

I felt free. Released. Whole again, without flaws.

As I woke up very gently, and very slowly, I felt I had learned something.
I understood something.
I had a fleeting thought that perhaps a few molecules would find their way to wherever it is in this Universe that I am 'from'.

As all mystics have said through the ages: There are no words...

Levitation?

This was somewhere in the mountains of northern Sumatera. I cannot remember where, but it could not have been too far from where we lived, it took us a few hours driving from our home. The occasion, I recall, was the opening of a clinic; my father allowed me to go with him. Some of these isolated clinics were then staffed with native doctors, called "mantri". Often they were people from the area who had taken training for a few years in town. They were dedicated people; many of them practiced far from any other western medical centers.

We arrived mid afternoon, and I remember that it was quite chilly. There were few people, the staff of the clinic, the mantri (physician assistant we might call them now) and a few local people. Perhaps a dozen people all told. I think there was at least one other doctor besides my father. The clinic was a small building, standing by itself, near but not in a village. My memory is that it was rocky, not much vegetation. Bleak.

There was no particular ceremony. The adults walked through the clinic, which smelled of fresh cement. I stayed outside and looked around the clearing, with only a few trees around the nearby village.

There was not much to see in the clinic, perhaps: after no more than perhaps ten minutes all the adults came outside again. We were served very sweet lemonade, I am sure, some sticky rice balls probably, and a basin of (very cold) water was placed on a stool to rinse our hands. Hygiene was often the most immediate contribution a western medical training could bring at that time, before antibiotics and all the other miracles of western medicine.

There was entertainment, the host mantri told us. He asked us to stand in a circle. The entertainer was a very scruffy man of a completely indeterminate age — he could have been twenty or fifty — who I had seen sitting on the edge of the forest. We all stood around him, talking, not paying too much attention to the man, who, we were told, was from Tibet. I knew that "from Tibet" often meant he was from India, but that he was a holy man. Despite the chill,we were all shivering, the man had almost no clothes on, only a cloth loosely wrapped around his loins, and a rag around his shoulders.

He did not say anything. Perhaps he really was from Tibet and did not speak Malay.
We stood around, not very attentive at first, but gradually people became curious and began to watch what he was doing. He had his eyes shut, seemed to concentrate very hard on something, but otherwise nothing was happening. We were not told what to expect, so there was some banter back and forth, *what are we doing here?, this is entertainment?*

Then the Tibetan man leaned to his left, first a little, then more and more. He kept his body stiff, and in my recollection he leaned much more than anyone could lean, completely unbalanced.
We, who stood in a circle, saw him from different angles, of course. Some of us moved around, or hunkered down to look from another angle, we compared notes, He is leaning in your direction; Yes, I see it too; But that is impossible! One of the doctors walked around the circle, shaking his head.

The local people did not comment much, but I had the feeling the show made them uncomfortable.

After several minutes (a long time!) the man came to an upright position again. A great shiver went through his body, and he slumped, sort of collapsing upon himself.
But the show was not over, we were told. Wait, there is more to come.
After a short rest, the man stood straight upright as before. His eyes closed, and again that

intense concentration.
Again, for what seemed a long time, nothing happened.

Then he rose up, first almost imperceptibly, then a good three or more inches. We all got down on our hands and knees to look under his feet. It was undeniable, the man stood on air. All the time he was stiff as a board, straight up in the air. Eventually he must have been a good two hands above the ground.

It did not last long, but long enough; more than one minute, perhaps two or three minutes. Then he fell down, rolled up in a ball and groaned loudly. Father said maybe he had lost consciousness. One of the Indonesian doctors went up to him, but the local mantri told him not to touch him. He is all right, he kept repeating. Do not worry, he is all right, but do not touch him.

We left shortly after, in dead silence. Nobody said anything.

On the way back I asked my father about what we had all seen. The whole performance had obviously upset most of the people there. My father was sleepy. Quiet.
But I kept thinking of that Tibetan man.

What did the man do, I asked? Oh nothing, my father said a few times. Nothing. Just your imagination, mass hypnosis, and words like that. My father obviously did not want to talk about it. Forget it; just in your mind; don't worry. Many people try to trick you into believing this and that.

Later I asked Udin, who was driving. What was really going on?
He looked at me, *You were there; you saw it.*

Yes, I said, but my father told me it was all imagination, in my own head. My father said nothing happened.

Udin looked at me again, smiled a little, and said, *Oh, you white people are funny. You are so proud of your science, and you cannot see with your own eyes. You need machines to see.*
My father was a bacteriologist. I knew Udin referred to the microscope my father had in his lab.

Neither of us said anything for a long time. Udin drove silently.
Then he added, *Holy people can do that.*

Between Afternoon and Evening

That time I spent almost a month on the island of Bali. It was not the first time I was there, but it was my longest stay there. At the time — if a "generation" is twenty-five years, on average, it was more than a generation ago — my personal life was a mess, I had been away from home and work for months, I thought I needed a vacation to think. As it turned out I did not do much thinking in Bali, but I meditated many hours each day.
A friend had given me a small bungalow, located just behind one of the two most famous beaches. The house did not have power, or water, but we managed: we, the caretaker of the little house and I. There was a primitive toilet, but no kitchen. In Southeast Asia that is never a problem, I took all my meals in the nearby village, from the little stalls that line the road. During the day I spent most of my time in one of the two temples. I had befriended one of the priests, had asked him to study "trance" with him. He had shrugged his shoulders: *What to learn?* I was too old to learn, I imagine he thought. His pupils were children. But I helped sweep the floors, dusting the many statues, dressing the statues on feast days, and in Bali every other day seems to be a feast day of some kind. I helped bring out and put away the costumes the trance dancers used. That is how I know it was less than a month I stayed there, but more than half a month: I attended two Barong performances. The Barong is danced at the full and the new moon.

I cannot remember what I ate, but I remember how cheap it was to live there. The food was always tasty, served on a square of banana leaf. That too dates this story, nowadays they give you a little square of plastic. Unfortunately plastic does not biodegrade, so the landscape is littered with pieces of plastic. The price of being modern.

One late afternoon, just before sunset, I sat on the dunes, doing my second meditation of the day. A very peaceful time. Usually there is no wind around sunset, it is rapidly cooling, the mosquitoes are out in force. But here, so close to the ocean, there was enough of a breeze to make mosquitoes not much of a problem. They do not like my skin anyway.

The scene in front of me was the wide beach, stretching in both direction to the vague mists that come down later in the evening. There were people here and there. I did not pay particular attention to what they were doing. The Balinese have a talent for doing whatever needs to be done gracefully and quietly. My mind was blissfully empty. My eyes gloried in a gentle ocean stretching out to a horizon that disappeared into the sky. The ocean there is shallow quite a way out. There were ripples but no waves. My nose picked up a few wafts of charcoal smoke, probably from the food stalls that had appeared on the road leading to the beach.

Suddenly, a man walked down the beach. Obviously a white man, young, vigorous. He strode purposefully, almost as if he were in a ballet, lifting each leg, pointing it forward, placing the foot just so. His arms with large movements away from his body. He looked left and right. His posture loudly demanding attention. Here I am, he expressed. Look at me.

Yes, I looked at him, and I could not help noticing that many of the Balinese villagers stopped what they were doing and looked in his direction.
He stood still. Looking around again, as if the ascertain that he had everyone's undivided attention. He peeled off his shirt with large movements of his arms, twisting his torso this way and that. He sort of waved his shirt around, and dropped it with studied nonchalance.
He bent one knee to his chest, took off one slipper with both hands, and dropped the slipper on the shirt.
Then the other knee, lifting it even higher, to his chin perhaps, taking off the other slipper carefully. then flinging it on the shirt that was lying rumpled beside him.

Are you all looking at me, his posture shouted?

Then he took his shorts off. No underwear. But taking off the shorts was definitely a studied ballet, lasting several full minutes.

When he was naked he stretched his arms over his head, turned left and right. Bent over, touched his hands to his knees.
And finally he moved with large heavy stomps to the water.

He entered the water. Paused again. Bent over to splash a little foam over his head, shoulders, his chest. Bending again to take another handful of sea water which he poured over his head.
He moved one step further, hunkered down, made vigorous washing motions.

He did not have soap, I know — soap does not foam in sea water anyway.

I felt myself getting embarrassed by this display. He was so obviously flaunting his nudity. Evidently he felt that we should all know — perhaps admire him for his daring?

He "washed" himself all over. Oh yes, all over, with great emphasis on washing under his arms, between his legs, between his buttocks, then rinsing his hair and shaking his head so that the drops flew far and wide.

I felt myself shrinking. I hoped nobody would have noticed me, or rather I hoped that nobody would think that I, another white man, would be like him...

As a child closes his eyes so that others won't see him, I looked down. I saw the dry sand between my bare feet. Oh, I was dressed, of course. I made myself smaller so that nobody would notice that I was sitting there watching this person, perhaps a compatriot, make a fool of himself.

Finally I looked up again. I looked at the villagers, to see how they had taken this show. They were still looking at him, now drying himself with his hands, lovingly stroking his body, his arms, his legs. Most of the people I saw looked as if frozen in mid turn.

One or two went back to what they had been doing before. In a few minutes everyone had turned back to what they were doing.

Only then did I realize that what they had been doing, and were now continuing to do, was what the young man had been doing: bathing in the ocean. But what a difference! They did not make a show of it. They hunkered down on the edge of the water, gently loosened their sarong, stepped out of it or moved it over their heads. Walked into the water, washed themselves. Yes, they too were nude, probably, but even now that I was paying attention their nudity was so unobtrusive, so natural, that I had not noticed

When dark descended we went quietly home.

Why go to School?

At mid-day the village is quiet. The hottest time of day. People move as little as possible and seek shade. Most villages have big trees so it is not too difficult to escape the fierce sun overhead. Some people fall asleep, most people are quiet. There is little or no talk.
Children do not seem to be affected by the heat as much, they wander around as always.

So it was that on one of my regular visits to this Malay village a small band of children settled around me. There were perhaps seven or eight children in this group, two of them with a baby on their hip. I am not very good at guessing ages, but I imagined they ranged from three to perhaps ten or eleven.
One of the girls came closer and said, *From the big city, eh?*
Yes, from Kuala Lumpur.
Is that far, she asked?
Well that depends, if you go by car it takes a few hours.
How long is that, she asked?
A few hours? Maybe half of the morning. If you had left early this morning, and when you got to Kuala Lumpur and turned right around to come back, you would be back just about now.
Oh.

The other children moved restlessly. An older boy who carried a baby in a sling, moved the sling to his other shoulder, waking up the baby only briefly. They mumbled something among themselves which I could not understand.

I asked the girl who still stood close, looking up at me, Do you go to school?
Nah! I did not like it.
Then she volunteered, *All the other children were Chinese, or maybe Indian, but they could all talk*. (Talk Malay, I understood that to mean).
What did they do in the school, when you went, I asked?
They were learning to read; do you read?
Yes, I can read. Didn't you like to learn to read?
What is there to read? Nobody reads, only some people know the Koran, they say it but they cannot read it. Just say it. Some people know the whole Koran, then they go to the city and say it, and people praise them. Somebody got a prize for that.

There were yearly contests in Kuala Lumpur, recitation of the Koran. The Koran is considered the literal Word of God, so it cannot be translated in other languages. People who know the Koran by heart know the sounds of Arabic, but often they do not speak or read Arabic. Of course they do know the meaning of many verses of the Koran, because meaning can be translated and said in, for instance, Bahasa Kebagsaan, the Language of Malaysia.

What do you read, the girl asked?
Oh, books, many books.
Do you read the Koran?
No, because I don't know Arabic. But I read explanations of many of the verses of the Koran, in English.
The girl nodded her head, she understood that would be possible.

But I also read other books, and sometimes newspapers.
The children lost interest at that point and were getting more restless. Most of them moved away, the girl seemed torn. She looked at the children, she looked at me, then she followed them, but turned her head and said as she was leaving, *I come back*.
Actually she said *kembali*, which just means return — in Malay you say I as little as possible.

I settled under a tree. I did not have any reading material with me, so I did what everyone else did, I leaned back, after I had checked that there were no ants, or snakes behind me, and closed my eyes.

Maybe half and hour later the girl came back, alone this time.
They went to the river, she explained. *The river is very dirty now.*
She sat down close to my sandals.
You look like a white man, but you talk Malay, she said. *How can that be?*
I told her I grew up in Sumatera, just across the ocean, west of here. They speak Malay there.
Yes, she had heard of Sumatera.

There was a fairly steady flow of people from there who moved to Malaysia at the time. Some were legal immigrants, others perhaps refugees, or just people visiting family.

The girl looks at my sandals, the same footwear everyone wears.
Did you bring those from Sumatera, she asked?
No, I bought them in the city.
The city has many things to buy?
Yes, many. But of course in the city there are many people, so they need many things.
She thought, then began to list, *Slippers, and sarongs, and rice, and chili pepper, and... what else?*
Fish, I said, tentatively. And chickens, perhaps.
The girl looked quite astonished. She looked off in the distance, *Do people* pay *for fish and chickens?*
This was obviously a new thought to her. I did not answer her question. She brooded for some time.
Where do the fish and the chickens come from then?
I tried to explain that there were people who fished the ocean perhaps, or a river, and if they caught more than they needed they would take it to a market in the city. And maybe in some villages they had more chickens than they needed so they brought those to the city also.
I saw her shrug her shoulders. This was getting too strange for her. She changed the subject.
Are there children in the city?
Oh yes, many of course. But I would think all of them go to school when they are as old as you are. (I did not know how old she was, but she seemed old enough to go to school, and apparently she had gone at least once).
She said, *But school is far. I had to walk and walk, and then in the afternoon I walked home all by myself. I did not like that.*
I can certainly understand that. Maybe a few other children from this village would go to school as well, and then you could walk together, I said?
No. No, nobody here wants to go to school.

The girl was wearing a short skirt, or perhaps a mini sarong that looked worn and torn. She moved away a little, stood behind a tree, lifted up her garment, spread her legs and urinated. When she came back she said, Why do people go to school?

Good question. I tried to think of all the arguments for "education" — almost all of them were true, but only in the context of a modern society where jobs require a certain amount of learning, probably even certificates, diplomas, a degree or two. But for living in a village? Apparently rural schools taught Malay reading and writing, but I did not know whether they taught Malay using the Roman alphabet. In Malaysia street names were written in Arabic script. Some Malay newspapers were written in Roman script, a few used Arabic script. All of which would make teaching “reading” extra difficult. Perhaps one day Malaysia would choose one alphabet for the written form of the national language.

I had spent a year learning Arabic script from a teacher who constantly reminded me that unfortunately, too bad, it was useless to learn just the script without knowing Arabic. But he

himself did not know Arabic very well, he could not read the Koran — but as a boy he had memorized the whole Koran, so he knew and could say the sounds. I had found Arabic script very hard to learn because the letters are connected, they flow together. And it has no vowels, or rather vowels are indicated by little scratches above and below letters. It is beautiful to look at, but to me often hard to guess whether this curlicue is a letter or just embellishment.

So, the girl said. *What's the good of going to school?*
I must have said something, but not very convincingly.
She walked away, shrugging one shoulder, as if to say, *See... told you!*

The Inventor

Our western culture, as all cultures, has many beliefs that are so basic to us that we never even question that they must be "human qualities" rather than ideas unique to our culture. So we believe that violence is a trait of all men, and all Men. We also believe that cooperation does not work but competition does. And we believe that ours is the "highest" culture there ever was; and we believe that whatever a mind can conceive of building, must therefore be built.

This little story illustrates that there are (were?) people in this world whose culture does not assume that "progress" is the goal of existence, and where an invention may be praiseworthy and interesting, but does not necessarily have to be used or promoted.

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One of the weekly tasks I had taken on when we lived in Malaysia, was to visit Malay Kampongs, villages, to become familiar with the daily lives of the Malays in Malaysia.
Malays are far from primitive, of course, they accept many of our "things," although generally not western culture as a whole. The Malay culture is coherent, complex, complete and alive, very much part of everyone's life.

Every place probably has its own uniqueness, but this village at first seemed so typical, so average, that it was bland. Not much was going on when we arrived, shortly after mid-day. The houses looked much as one would expect in this part of the country: neglected, needing repairs, but not really decrepit yet. A few people were lounging around, dreamily. A handful of children, half asleep on the fringes of the little group of adults, sat or lay in the dirt. Nobody showed any interest in us, or even looked at us with curiosity, as we came closer. No one came to greet us, to check us out. None of the children seemed awake or alert enough to even stare, as children are wont to do.

The driver and I were absorbed into the village lethargy. I felt as if we were sinking into thick molasses as we approached what looked like the village hanging-out place, located under a big tree of course, a cooler spot at this time of day.
We silently merged into sleepy village life, hanging out, doing nothing. We mumbled some greeting. A few probably mumbled something back.

It was peaceful, certainly. It was too hot for mosquitoes to be around, they would come later. Flies were not flying. There was no breeze. Not a leaf was twitching: even the spirits had gone elsewhere.

An hour or so later it began to feel cooler. A few children began to fuss, then disappeared to go their own mysterious ways. A middle-aged man next to me looked up, awake enough to ask where we came from. No one would ask what we were doing in the village, of course, that was not the way of Malays, but it was polite to inquire where we were from. And slowly, very slowly, a conversation grew.

By mid afternoon, now pleasantly cool, most of the village stood around us. We had explained where we were from, and in the process, of course, mentioned who we were. Now it would be their turn to tell us about themselves.

First, however, someone wanted to know the latest gossip from the Capital. Was it true that a famous politician had an affair with an even more famous movie star? I had a friend who goes to the kind of parties where politicians, famous movie stars and foreigners mix, but even he

would not have known whether that was just rumor, and nasty gossip at that, or whether there was truth to the story. Was it true, someone else asked, that the Prime Minister had gone on an extended visit to Europe, and would visit the Queen? Yes, we assured them, that was definitely true. In fact, the PM had already met with the Queen, the story, with their picture, was in all the papers this morning.
A sigh of wonder wafted over the group: wha-a-ah!

There almost certainly was at least one transistor radio in this village, as there is in almost any village anywhere in the world. A few people here probably could read the papers, but it would take a few days for newspapers to reach here. This was a poor village, off the beaten track, but they knew what was happening in the Capital. Few of the villagers were wearing traditional dress, although all of them wore sarongs, faded and threadbare as they might be. But there were also nylon shirts, some watches, even costume jewelry, a hat that looked as if it had gone through at least one war.

There was not much to tell about the village, it seemed. They were just ordinary people, not much happening here. They grew some rice, some vegetables. Chickens running around everywhere. I did not see any goats, but there might have been one or two. No dogs, of course — dogs are "unclean" animals to Muslims, and, as all Malays, they were Muslims.

What was different, was that they had an inventor in this village.
Someone had invented a machine, they told us, and he lives right in the village. They said the word in English: mah-tcheen, adding a T to make the word sound more aggressive.

There were probably not more than fifteen adults standing around, and I could not imagine any of them to have invented a machine.
No, a woman who stood at the back said, *he is not here, he does not leave his house very often. He is a recluse.* Another voice added, *And he cannot hear nor can he talk.*

We all moved to visit this inventor who was a recluse and a deaf mute. He lived in what was almost certainly the smallest and shabbiest house in the village. His wife met us standing in the door to the little house, making clear that we were not welcome to come inside. The house was so small that we could not have fitted inside anyway; I am not sure we could even have stood up inside. She motioned for us to go next door, where there was a small barn-like structure. She was not deaf and she could speak, we learned later, but perhaps living with a deaf mute husband had made her silent as well.

It was getting close to sunset and what light came into the barn came through the door and a few chinks in the walls. In the gloom we saw a structure of heavy beams and pulleys. The inventor stood aside to let us in, eyes downcast. He was a slight man, unusually thin even for someone in a poor village, as if he had been hungry for a long time.
He quickly motioned to his wife, and made some signs to a few of the women who were edging into the small space. The women left.

I could not imagine what the machine would do, but it looked solid and well-made.. It looked strong, simple, almost new, the wood had not discolored yet, although in places it had worn smooth or had been polished perhaps.

The place was dark and part of the machinery seemed to be behind a partition. When I studied the machine I saw pulleys, stout sennit (coconut fiber) ropes connecting a heavy beam of wood to heavy bamboo supports. I still could not imagine what the machine would do. What was it for? By now most of the villagers had come, standing outside, waiting for the show to begin.

There was some mumbling and a bit of confusion when the inventor gave more hand signs and a few more women disappeared. Maybe five minutes later — it was dark now, little oil lamps had been brought to light up the inside of the barn — the women returned, single file,

each with a handful of unhulled rice.
Now I understood what the machine would do. The inventor had invented a mill!

Traditionally, each household hulls rice once a day. Without refrigeration food does not keep well in the hot, humid tropics. Raw, unhulled rice keeps better than rice that is hulled and ready to cook.

Every household has a block of wood with a cup-shaped depression that can hold some unhulled rice; the pestle is a long wooden pole, which pounds the hulls off the rice. Two, sometimes three women (or girls) take turns lifting the pole and letting it fall into the mortar, sometimes with some force. It is an ancient ritual, the movements of lifting and dropping are done with the whole body. "Pounding rice" looks almost like a dance. The pestle bonging into the mortar makes a wonderfully syncopated rhythm that fits the dance of the women. The women often sing to accompany themselves. They obviously did not dislike this work, they usually smiled and laughed when lifting and letting fall the long pole.
I had thought of it as "woman's work." as getting water from the river or from a stand pipe, is women's work, accompanied by giggling and sharing gossip.

The mortar in the barn was considerably larger than those used by a household, the depression might hold as much as six, or seven, or more cups of rice. The pestle was the large beam I had seen sticking up into the dark recesses under the roof, its bottom end rounded and smoothed, thicker and much heavier than the poles used for one household.

The inventor stepped on a treadle, and slowly the machine came to life. It took a few minutes to get the pestle to move up, fall down, but when its rhythm had been established it became obvious that one rather scrawny man could hull, in a few minutes, all the rice five or six families would need for a meal.

The demonstration lasted no longer than five minutes.
Then the inventor proudly showed us a small bucket full of smoothly hulled rice, visibly cleaner, smoother and whiter than ordinary village rice.
I knew that it would take a household half an hour to hull the rice they would need for a meal.

The onlookers waited for our comments. We ooh-ed and ah-ed and exclaimed what a wonderful machine this was. I wondered why it was so obviously unused. The villagers were proud of the inventor in their midst but they did not use his invention.

Here was genuine native genius at work. A labor-saving device invented by a simple, almost certainly illiterate villager. Even from this simple demonstration it was clear that this slight man could easily have hulled all the rice needed each day for the whole village in less than half an hour a day.
That would leave all the women and girls who now did their daily rice pounding dance with nothing to do. Obviously, the women did not think of hulling rice as a chore, as hard or unpleasant work. Perhaps it was something they looked forward to doing, it was part of the daily rhythm of life.
Nobody had to work very hard, or long hours, except during the intense days of planting and harvesting rice. The activities that kept the people in this village alive, getting firewood for cooking, hulling rice, planting, tending the rice fields, fishing occasionally, growing some vegetables, all these were not thought of as "work," it was what one does each day. These activities were the rhythm of their lives, a pleasant routine, essentially unchanged for generations. They felt no need to change.

As we walked outside I asked the inventor's wife whether the inventor had seen pictures of a similar machine in a book? She obviously did not know what I was talking about. I doubted that she, or he, had ever seen a book with schematic drawings of anything like that mill.

So I asked her how he had thought of making this? She thought for a moment, then she went inside the little house, and came back with two handfuls of crude models made of pieces of bamboo, twigs and string, each mounted on a piece of cardboard.
The inventor had invented by making and trying out scaled-down models; he had discovered the principle of moving a large upright beam with a small force. The models looked childishly crude compared to the finished product. It was hard to imagine that the models would work. The finished product certainly did.

It was quite dark as we walked back to the car, followed by the adults and many of the children. They asked again how we liked the demonstration, was this not a wonderful invention? Yes, we agreed, it is indeed a wonderful invention. The fact that it was not used, obviously did not lessen its value as an invention.

Perhaps the villagers thought of the inventor and his invention as we might think of an artist and his art: not useful, but something to be proud of, something we might display in a museum.

One day we may put our bulldozers in museums, permanently locked in concrete.

1994

Note: the above story, The Inventor, first appeared, in a shorter version, in the book *Original Wisdom, Stories of An Ancient Way of Knowing*.

Trees

In Berkeley, California, for meetings. Never my favorite non-activity. Found a new book shop, as small as a small living room, crammed with a few new and many old books. A young woman sat behind a curved counter. On the front of the counter a thousand business cards, too many to read, so I let my eyes find their own path.

This card; do you know anything about this woman who says she does Tarot readings, I asked?
She smiled. No, that is the last card that would fit. She came in this morning.

Outside, in a telephone booth, I called. Yes, she did Tarot readings. Yes she could do it now. Yes, I could come to her house, and she told me where she lived. Very near.

The reading was simple, a few cards. The first thing she said was, You should stand with your back to a pine tree, and get your batteries charged. She said not much more. Stand with your back to a pine tree.

We don't have pine trees in Hawai'i: it's the tropics.
Well, yes, she said, I don't know about that. I'm just telling you what the cards say.

Two days later I was home.
Palm trees. But I grew up with palm trees, and the very first thing you learn about palm trees is never, but never, stand underneath a palm tree. Coconuts are heavy. When they fall they break bones, and the skull bone does not heal very well.
There were other trees. A "false Wiliwili tree" in front of our house, with thorns three inches long. What we called shower trees, with twisted very rough trunks that split into branches almost from the ground; no way to stand with my back to those trees.

Decided pine trees, if there were any, would grow higher up. When I had time explored roads that went to expensive neighborhoods a few hundred feet above sea level.

It was not until three months later that I found a park that had a few what looked like pine trees. Straight trunks, going up high enough before branching so that I could stand with my back against one of them. I had to wiggle a little to get my back touching the tree all the way from my tail bone to my head.

Electricity! It was true. Somehow there was a powerful current flowing up to my head, the tree was electric, "charged my batteries." It was true.

Ever since I have been a tree worshiper, if that is the right term. Everywhere I go I look for a more or less straight trunk with branches branching out higher than my head. Different kinds of trees have different energies, of course. Some are more potent than others. But all trees seem to have that energy that they cannot help but pass on to whoever stands with his or her back to the tree.

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Some trees have taproots, long extensions of the trunk that go down, down into the earth. Other trees have roots that spread, they are like mirrors: a trunk branching to branches that branch to more branches, and leaves at the end of branches. Below the ground they have roots branching from the trunk, and roots branching from roots, and finer roots branching from roots. The roots spread as wide as the leaves. As above, so below.

Trees and other plants use carbon dioxide from the air and turn it into oxygen. The roots need nitrogen from the soil, and many other substances that we now call minerals and metals and acids and other chemical names. Trees are veritable chemical factories.

For us mammals, and for many other beings as well, we could not exist on this earth without these chemical factories that make oxygen for us, that we breathe in and that make the red blood cells that keep us going.

Trees, on the whole, are slow growers. It takes time to make wood. Year after year trees patiently make a layer of wood around the of the trunk and branches. The life of the tree is on the outside, just under the bark. The energy they share with me flows through the layer just below the bark, which is the skin of the tree. Just putting a hand on a tree is powerful, tells something of the story of this tree.

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A million is a one with six zeroes. A hundred millions years ago our planet grew dinosaur in many shapes and sizes, some predators, more prey. They disappeared sixty-five million years ago. Some catastrophe wiped out dinosaurs. We think it might have been an asteroid slamming into this world causing years of "winter." But it is so long ago that little remains of that time.
Except oil. And we have used almost all of that up in the last few hundred years.

The planet had an early version of trees then, tall plants that grew taller as dinosaurs grew bigger, able to reach higher.

Sixty-five million years is a long time. This earth changed, there were some ice ages, some periods of hot. Ice moved down from the poles, melted and moved back. The ocean surrounding us got higher and lower. All the continents moved, floated apart. Slowly, but sixty-five millions years is a long time.

During that time, after dinosaurs disappeared, something very small and insignificant grew bigger, split off into hundreds then thousands of different four footeds. Mammals, animals who grow their young inside them and then take some time to nurse this offspring with milk until they are big enough to fend for themselves. Mammals small and large, in ice and deserts, in water and on land. All of the difficult versions of mammals learned different ways to survive where they were. Some could survive by being very large, others by being fierce, others by running fast, or almost invisible. Our kind by learning a little of this and that and the other. Maybe one million years ago there were people somewhat like people. Probably Nature tried several versions of this new type of mammal, until only a hundred thousand years ago — that is a one with five zeroes — there were humans that, judging from some fragments of bone that remained, looked like us.

But this story is not about humans, it is about trees. There were always trees. In fact the planet was covered with trees during most of the sixty-five million years from then till only a few years ago.

Trees are amazing life forms. They are like mirrors, as above so below. They have a trunk that seems to come out of the ground spreading arms sideways, and on each arm many fingers, and on each finger branches and each branch branching out again, and on every tiniest branch leaves. What we cannot see is that underneath the ground the trunk branches into roots, and each root branches into smaller roots that branch again into yet smaller roots. As wide as the branches reach so too reach the roots. A very smart arrangement because water dripping from the leaves drip on the roots below the ground. The roots not only root the tree firmly in the ground, they feed the tree. The leaves too feed the tree, by taking sunlight and changing it to energy that flows down. The roots drink water and push it up to the trees.

No wonder people everywhere have worshipped trees.
The world tree: all of Life with its interacting and interrelated qualities pictured as a tree.

There are trees that live to be two thousand years old; probably older than that even, if we would only leave them alone. If one generation is twenty-five years, that is eighty generations of humans. Trees grow old, much older than plants or animals or people. It takes time to grow wood. In climates where growth stops when it is cold and dark, then begins again when it gets lighter and warmer longer, trees grow a layer of wood each year. By counting the rings we can tell how old the tree is when we cut it down and sliced the trunk to look at the rings. Or, we can bore a hole straight into the heart of a tree, and count rings that way..

Trees have always been shelter.
We have kept ourselves warm and safe with wood to make little fires. When there were many more trees than people all we needed was the branches that had fallen off, trees that had been blown over in a storm or died of old age or hunger or thirst.
Then we used trees to make tipis and other shelters of our own designs.

When we made saws that could cut a tree and make planks, we built houses to live in, houses to pray in, to sell in, to entertain in. In places that did not have many trees we made houses from rocks, or with mud and straw, perhaps straw mixed with cow manure. Later we learned to make concrete and steel houses that reached a hundred stories up into the sky.

Then we invented written language. And the a printing press, publishing only bibles at first, then poems and literature and newspapers, and reports and receipts.
Paper is made from trees.
We cut forests to make paper and more paper and more.

When we invented computers we thought we would no longer need paper.
But instead we used more paper, and more every year.

The tropical rain forests our planet relied on were cut down to make land to graze cows to make into hamburgers sold in fast food places, franchised all over the world. The first billion round bread buns filled with meat were sold many years ago. Now it must be trillions. Even thought the chopped meat occasionally has become meat “products,” a trillion beef patties require millions of cows..

Tropical rain forests are rich only because they are mixed and because it rained a lot. What one tree takes out of the soil, another puts back in. It is the whole ecology of soil and trees and air and water that is lush and rich and wild.

After we cut the trees we discovered that the soil was not rich at all and could not support many cows. We no longer learn from our mistakes. We cut more forests to get more poor land to feed a few cows for more hamburger patties.

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Now we are reaping the results of our follies. Weather worldwide is changing. Our planet is getting hotter, much more rapidly than we first thought. Weather is getting hotter but also more violent. Storms, droughts, floods everywhere — not just the places where we cut a million square miles of ancient forests.

Around my house are precious trees. I cherish them as gold, as diamonds. These trees can find cracks in the lava, and as they push little roots further they make more cracks, until a few hundred years from now the lave will be crumbled, and the soil rich. Perhaps these islands will be the tropical rain forests of the next millennium.

Trees are patient. They grow slowly, slowly — they don't rush as we humans do.
Trees are life.
The tree of life.
Branching branches above, branching roots below.

As above so below.

Another Old Man

These days are empty for that other old man. He tries to occupy himself to take his mind off the endless pains in his body. The body has become a burden. To be honest, he has always taken his body for granted; it always did what he expected it to do — more or less.
Why should the last years or months be like this? Some people just drop dead. Good way to go! If only those damn medics would leave him alone, but no, they have to do anything and everything to prolong life. What life? Creeping along, hurting in his bones, his skin too tight, or too loose perhaps. His eyes see well enough if he could only get rid of those constant bleary tears that blur What Is. His sense of smell is almost as good as ever. This morning he got the shovel to throw some poop over the fence into the neighbor's woods. A neighborhood dog, or perhaps a wander dog; yes, there are those.

Why complain? It's a beautiful day! Some rain this morning, but now, afternoon, a clear sky, a soft wind waving leaves in praise of the last drops flying.

The sun, the rain, days and nights, go on like a dripping faucet, oblivious to the little pains of humans. Comforting, in a way. We are not important. But they say that the weather is affected by our wanton destruction of rain forests all over the world. And of course the trillion machines we run on oil.
We may not be important but we do stupid things that have consequences.

Animals, left to themselves, go off in the woods and die unattended. By themselves, they don't moan and groan. Or perhaps they do? No one to notice the groan. We may not hear, but the snap and crack and bomb of a falling old tree — all of nature hears, hurrying to eat the corpse into soil again.

Plants? Yes, they hurt. And they are happy. They do their best. They give up. They shrivel, they swell, even bloat. They flower in season, or out of season (I saw an orchid bloom in July, and another—on the same clump of plants—in September). And plants die. No need for a certificate that says: Cause of Death. Cause? The plant just died as we all do.

We on the other hand must have a certificate that we did not do ourselves in, or were done in by someone without a doctor's license. For the record. So that the whole machinery of courts and laws can grind on to give the heirs their share of whatever is left behind.
That is what it is all about: things.

We are proud of having stepped out of nature. We can create and manage our own eco-system, thank you. We have power, we impose our will. Boy, do we impose our will!

When you think about it, all that separates us from animals and the rest of creation is our ego. It is our ego that is driving us and this civilization.

Could we really destroy the planet we live on, are dependent on, are a part of?
I think not.
Or, I should say, I hope not, because in fact, from what I now know of humans, there does not seem to be anything that can stop us. Except, of course, the planet itself.

These are thoughts of another old man, at the end of his life…
Cause of death: the end.

Language Talks

As a toddler I spoke two languages to two different kinds of people. I never confused the two. As I learned words I also learned who they belonged to. My parents spoke Dutch (the language of Holland, not Germany), almost all others in my world spoke Malay (the language of Malaysia and Indonesia).

Later, in school and after, I learned proper Dutch and proper Malay and some other languages as well. Scientists who have studied this process report that if one is even exposed to hearing another language in early childhood, it is easier to learn other languages later on. I can well believe that, because learning another language is not so much learning words and grammar, but it is most of all being able to hear the rhythm and sounds of words, and learning to think differently, using the categories another language defines.

Dutch and English have a word, "we," that means myself and at least one other person.
In Malay there are two words for we, one we means I and one or more others including you, the other means I and others excluding you.
Hawaiian has four words for we: you and I, you and I and at least one other person, someone and I but not you, and several people and I but not you.

I learned early that thinking "we" requires a different kind of thinking in different languages.

It seems I always knew that different people had different words for the same thing.
But then I also learned that words can have levels of meaning.

In 1947 or -48, only a few years after the end of the war, I was invited to stay with my friend Henrik in Denmark for two or three weeks.
Taxis in Denmark are called Bil, and often had B.I.L. written in large letters on the doors.
Bil in Dutch means buttock.

The original word, 'automobile' is the same in both languages. The Dutch, and others, abbreviated a long and awkward Latin-sounding word by using the first part, auto. The Danes chose the last syllable, bil.

Words 'mean' something, but there may be one or more other associations attached to a word. Words suggest — and one has to know the language, and often the culture that expresses itself in a language to know these suggestions.

I was very impressed with Denmark then because it was ahead of Holland in getting back on its feet. It was only a few years after the war. In Holland things were still rationed. In Denmark everything looked new and prosperous. They ate well in Denmark: I was no longer starving, but hungry much of the time.

I shall never forget the episode of the eggs. Henrik's mother asked me the third evening whether there was any food I would particularly like, something I missed perhaps in Holland. I said, Eggs!
The next day I had eggs for breakfast. I enjoyed the two eggs, but we had eggs the day before, so I did not realize it was anything special. At the end of the day Henrik's mother asked me whether I had enough eggs that day. I looked at her with some surprise, I remembered the two eggs for breakfast. What did she mean? She told me that I had eaten eggs in pancakes, in a toddy, in the desert at lunch, in some other food at dinner. I had not noticed, because the eggs were hidden. What I had dreamed of was a meal where I could eat as many eggs as I wanted. As a wonderful cook she spread them out over a day, 'hidden' in different foods. When you have plenty it is difficult to understand the mind set of being without.

I felt disappointed, almost hurt, because I had not really cherished the eight eggs she said I had consumed. My body had received eight eggs, but I had not noticed.

I knew then that unless I say very clearly what it is I have in my mind, others cannot guess. The hearer puts her own spin to what she hears — and the speaker assumes that both share the same reality. An assumption we rarely put to the test, and even more rarely question

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For many years I took classes to learn Hawaiian. Our kumu — kumu means tree, but also teacher — our teacher insisted that in addition to basic grammar and a wealth of words we must learn to make a drum, make rope the way ancient Hawaiians did, sing Hawaiian songs, and dance the hula. She was firmly convinced that all that was one and the same. Of course she is right.

As with all languages, it is easy to learn a few Hawaiian words. It is more difficult to say a sentence properly. But to speak, let alone write, in another language means knowing that the language is but the expression of a culture.

One day our kumu brought a few gourds to the class that she had grown. The "ipu" as it is called, was used as a container, and also as a rattle, or something that could be used as a hand drum. Over the next few weeks each of us made our ipu into the instrument that is used to set the rhythm for songs and hula (dance). Part of learning Hawaiian.

I only learned English when I began to read and learned proverbs, sayings, quotes, common expressions, exclamations, and "dirty words" — oh yes, learning what are considered "dirty" in another language tells more about the culture than any grammar or word list. Bodily functions in Malay, for instance, are considered "dirty" in English. And very common English expressions and exclamations are considered unthinkably rude in Malay.

Learning Hawaiian had plateaus for me. I learned quickly at first, until I came to a place where I had to rest, let it sink in, mull it over in my mind.
When I learned to make rope from the leaves of a plant that grows by the ocean I stepped up to another level. My hands had been involved in learning. My eyes had learned to see the plant as a part of the daily lives of the people I have come to feel much *aloha* for.

Of course everyone knows that "aloha" means love. It also means hello and goodbye, and it means standing by someone, supporting, praising someone for tasks well done. Aloha does not mean making love, there are many words for that, different words.

When I learned a few songs I reached another level again, I learned poetry. Grammar then is sometimes subtly changed to keep the rhythm of a song, a word without meaning may be added at the end, or even in the middle of a phrase.

Then dancing! Men may dance the same steps and movements as women do, but with a difference. More forcefully. The same foot forward, the arms just so, the head looking sideways, legs always in tension. But more so. The same dance, the same hula flows with women and is angular for men. The difference is a difference, but subtle, not as gross as it sounds.

I had a breakthrough experience when I realized that the first thing I had to know about speaking Hawaiian is the order of the words in a sentence.
In English we say I love you.
In French it becomes I you love.
In Hawaiian, love I you.

First the action word, then who does the action, then what.

And of course there are a hundred exceptions and changes and other rules. But I discovered that in order to be able to speak even the kind of simple Hawaiian I wanted to speak, I must think differently. I must think of the action first, then who does the action, then what is acted to or upon.

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There is a language that is spoken in these islands called Pidgin. It is the mother tongue of many people in Hawai'i. It has many Hawaiian words, many English words, maybe some Portuguese words, Chinese, Japanese. But the sentence construction is more Hawaiian than English. Fortunately today there are books written in pidgin, beautiful and poetic works that capture the feel of real people in a real world on these little islands in the middle of nowhere, twenty-five hundred miles from the nearest anywhere.

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There is a great and significant difference between a spoken language and the written language. All languages were only spoken at first. Writing came later.
Today we think of language as words written on paper, or on a computer screen. We think of the written language as "language", and the way we speak as if we were reading the words. We forget that children of course learn to speak years before they learn to write. In fact, some children never do learn to write. When I was teaching at a university I gave up giving essay questions when I found that at least half of my students — many of them adults — did not know the difference between to and too and two.

After having been outlawed for two generations, Hawaiian as a language is now having a strong renaissance — a French word which literally means rebirth. Before westerners came to these islands there was a Hawaiian language of course, but they had never had the need to write it. As everyone knows who has known people who have only a spoken language, their memory is exact and total. Westerners do not accept that. To us something is not safe unless it is put on paper, preferably signed and notarized. Only then is it "true."

When, not many years ago, some people began to reconstruct written Hawaiian, they went back to what had been written in Hawaiian in the second half of the nineteenth century. Quite a bit had been written then. Unfortunately it was based on an alphabet created by a missionary, who wrote to his superior in, I believe Boston, that he had created a "simple alphabet for a simple people." He simplified by removing consonants. Modern Hawaiian has no T, no S, no F, and of course no C, X and Z, no B, no V. Hawaiian is a language of vowels, single vowels, two, three, four vowels in a row, and each one voiced.
It also has diacriticals, accents, one of which could stand in the place of a consonant: the glottal stop, called 'okina in Hawaiian. The 'okina is considered a letter, it sounds like the little break in the middle of the exclamation oh oh!

Modern Hawaiian, with only the K sound for what could have been a T or an S or an F, sounds harsher than I imagine it did a hundred years ago. In fact, Hawaiians who sing ancient chants still use T.
T is said in the front of the mouth, K in the back. T sings better.

Personally I think it is regrettable that those who developed modern written Hawaiian, limited themselves to that "simple" alphabet. The Hawaiian language, and the people who speak it, are certainly not "simple." I am almost certain someone will want to get at least the T back — and then it will be very difficult to change all the text- and other books that have already been written in Hawaiian.

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Hawaiians have a word for salt water, and another word for sweet water. Yet another word for

ocean. There are words for different kind of waves, for the many different kinds of wind we have here. Meaning that to distinguish different kinds of wind was important enough to give them different names.

Eskimos have ten words for snow, different kinds and conditions of snow.
Many Asian languages have a dozen words for different kinds and tastes of rice.
The English language has become a sort of soup of the world's words. We add words from many other languages, new words, made-up words, designed words, and they all blend in the soup. We have a hundred words for colors today, some of them borrowed from other languages, some of them made up by clothes designers, others by Hollywood.

Not long ago I found out that many languages never had a word for the color blue — until westerners introduced the word. Does that mean people did not see blue? I am sure that people always saw the blue of the sky, or the blue of water, but it did not need a separate word. I doubt that fish have a word for water. There was no need for a word to describe the sky.

Those languages that did not have a word for blue, did have a word for green, however.

In Hawaiian blue is *pelu*, simply the English word adapted.
In the Malay languages it is sometimes *biru*, which comes from the Portuguese.
In the Marquesas, an island group in French Polynesia — probably the place from which the first Hawaiians set out to come here, two thousand years ago — the word for blue is *'ele'ele*, which means black in Hawaiian.

Learning Hawaiian became more interesting when I learned that Hawaiian has several words for we and they.

In English when we talk about a person we have to know the gender of the person, either he or she, his or hers. In Hawaiian there is no such distinction, there is one word for he, she or it. Women have rightly protested that in English we use "he" to mean a sort of generic human, but obviously that suggests that we think men are more important than women. There is no such distinction in Hawaiian and many other languages.

The French language is obsessed with gender. All nouns are either feminine or masculine. A village is *le village*, a town is *la ville*. Who knows why? It makes sense that I must say *ma mère*, my mother, and *mon père*, my father. But why my lips are feminine, and my nose masculine I have no idea. The word "word" is masculine but a letter feminine. An egg, *oeuf*, is masculine — but a work, *oeuvre*, is feminine. And all qualifiers also have different forms, masculine or feminine shapes, and they take the gender of the word they qualify. A big village is *un grand village*, a big city *une grande ville*.

My French would be a lot more fluent if I could remember the gender of words. But there is not always an obvious reason, one simply has to know.

My first and favorite English teacher began her first class by telling us that English is a language almost impossible to learn because it has many rules and regulations but infinitely more exceptions. And how it is spelled, she said, has little to do with how it sounds. Read, she said. And listen to how it is spoken. Read everything and anything, that is the only way you will learn that language. Listen to songs, to talk, to speeches. There is no other way to learn English.
She was right.

In English and most European languages there is a word, "my", that is used to say my house, my car, my land, my wife, my children, my dog, my money. It is called a possessive pronoun. One word that makes no distinction between persons and things and abstract concepts. Because we still have only one word for relationship with persons and non-persons, it is

difficult to remember that we do not "own" a wife or a child. We used to own slaves, not so long ago. Some laws still read as if we own our children.

Hawaiian has two forms — actually three — that talk about these relationships. In Hawaiian there is a different word for "my" when I say my parents, and my children.
I did not choose my parents, but I chose to have children. Different words that indicate that in the awareness of a Hawaiian-speaking person there is a difference between relationships that are consciously made, and relationships one has no control over.
There is a third word for "my" that can only be used for one person, my beloved.

In addition to parents and other family that I did not choose, the unchosen my also applies to things that I *need*: a house to live in, the clothes I wear, my horse or my car that provides necessary transportation. I have to live somewhere, I have to wear clothes. Even the word "friend" has that no-choice my, one has to have friends.

When I talk about the house I live in I use the "my" that has no choice, but when I talk about the house I own but rent out to someone else, I must use the other "my" that implies I have, or had a choice.

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The Malay language really has no word for "my" in terms of human relationships. You cannot say my wife, my children, my husband. If you cannot say it, you cannot think it. In the traditional Malay societies of Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as in many of the Pacific islands, children are considered whole persons, respected as persons. A parent cannot tell a child what to do. Wives and husbands are not "owned." An adult cannot tell another what to do. One can only be an example. That makes a great difference in how people who speak these languages think of human relationships.

Perhaps I simplify a little, but not much.
The way we westerners think of children is very different from how many other cultures think of children. In the cultures that I am most familiar with, in Southeast Asia and in the Pacific area, children are always loved; there are no unwanted children. Children are not owned by anyone. In many cultures babies are held 24 hours a day, touched, handed from one person to another: no cribs, no separate room for a child. Children grow up in a village, they are of the village. Their roots are the village and what we call "extended family", a mother and father but also uncles and aunts, grandparents, and any and all other adults that are close by and have concern for the children.

That provides a feeling of self-being-loved-unconditionally that we in the west cannot even imagine. Westerners put babies in a closed box minutes after birth, with artificial air and monitoring devices hooked into the newborn. As soon as possible we put babies in their own beds, their own rooms. We let them cry, to get used to the idea that they are on their own. In most other cultures that I know babies rarely cry.

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In western languages the word "I" is important. In English so important it is capitalized. When I grew up, a long time ago, we rarely used the Malay (Indonesian and Malaysian) word *saya*, actually *sahaya*, which means "slave, your servant, at your command." I learned early on that it was rude and did not speak well of the speaker if one used I. Educated people never said I.

Perhaps once a week a few pages are written to describe what is going on in the woods around here, or in praise of the dogs, or to record the discovery of a new flower. An exercise in writing. Writing Down the Bones, as someone wrote. Practice, practice. Choosing just this word and not that. Changing the tense of a verb perhaps, or adding a comma — although all writing teachers have always stressed the importance of removing commas and adjectives and

all things that are unnecessary. Keep it simple, clean, clear. As much as possible write the present, much more interesting than the past. The future? There is no such thing, it has not happened so how write about it? Now is wide enough to hold all the world's stories. And perhaps there are only a few stories, told over and over again. All stories seem to tell of loss and hope, the outer edges of human awareness.

The real purpose of the above exercise, of course, is to write without ever using I, or me, or my.

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It must be obvious that I am intrigued with languages. I am intrigued with the different rhythms languages have. Chinese has four tones, others have even more. The singsong of Scandinavian languages. The endless syllables of Finnish, eminently suited to what is now called Rap. Languages that sound clipped and brittle, others that sound soft and melodious.

How did we humans imagine so many different ways to talk with each other? How did it start? With grunts and bellows, warning each other of danger? With the cooing sounds a mother makes to her baby? A few words obviously were formed by mimicking a sound. Linguists call those words onomatopoeia, like the words buzz and hiss. But most words must have started differently. Why the word "why", which is *waarom* in Dutch, *pourquoi* in French, *aha* in Hawaiian — although in English the word aha! means that we understand why.

The Aborigines I knew in Malaysia, spoke a language that sounded to me as if it had glottal stops, that little hiccup in the middle of oh-oh! I was told that linguists had determined that their language was related to the Khmer language group. Then I heard Burmese (Khmer), and I realized that it was not glottal stops I heard, but words full of "plosives", K and T.

Malay is unusual in that it has what linguists call "unvoiced plosives", there are many words that end in K or T, and the tongue is where those letters are made in the mouth, but they are not voiced at the end of a word. The mouth is ready to say T, but a fraction before you voice that "plosive" you stop. Very subtle! However, Malay is a language of prefixes and suffixes that change the function and sometimes the meaning of the root word. If then the plosive K or T gets to be in the middle of a word, it is voiced. The word muat means to contain, the T at the end is not voiced. Muatan, however, which means cargo, "what is contained", is pronounced with a normal T in the middle.

Language has to do with hearing. But not just the hearing of ears, but how the brain interprets and distinguishes sounds. There are many sounds we cannot hear, we cannot distinguish because we have never heard them before. As there are colors we have not noticed until someone gave them names. There are concepts, ideas, we cannot hear because we have never thought them possible.

When Einstein gave us his very simple equation, $E = mc^2$, the relationship between energy and matter was new, unheard of, but we knew matter and we knew energy. It took Einstein to put them together.

Every language distinguishes those elements that the speakers of that language think important. But we do not all think the same things important. Unfortunately we often cannot "hear" ideas and thoughts that are important to others because our language gives form to our thinking and so may restrict hearing.

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Americans and probably others think the sounds of some languages "harsh." The letters we say in the very back of our mouths, in the throat, sound rough. English speakers have a hard time hearing the differences between soft and hard guttural sounds. Actually there are many

more than two different back-in-the-throat sounds. In Arabic languages and Russian, there are at least three, or even four different sounds that come from way back in the throat. As the French R is said back in the throat, not in the front as in English.

Dutch has at least two of those harsh consonants that come from back-in-the-throat.
Yet I have noticed that Dutch vowels are much more difficult for people to hear.
Pronunciation is a function of hearing. Dutch has vowel sounds that do not exist in English, and so English speaking people cannot quite bend their tongue around those sounds because they cannot hear them.

Hawaiian has strings of vowels.
Slavic languages have strings of consonants that I cannot pronounce and can barely hear: SZ, or SCZC and many more.
I once read a whole paragraph that tried to explain how to make the sound that is called "click" in Zulu (also called Xhosa). I have heard it sung by Miriam Makebe and I have spent hours listening to her saying that click word, trying to follow the instructions Laurens van der Post, a South African writer, gave. But I still cannot make that sound, although I can mimic the sounds of many languages.

A famous Irish writer wrote a book, Finnegan's Wake, and part of another book, Ulysses, in a language of his own invention. I think James Joyce played with sounds. His writing communicates when you read it out loud and find that the sounds remind one of words. Some poetry can do that also.

English is spoken in a hundred distinctively different voices, tones and pronunciations. Some of these versions are the national language of countries all over the globe. They are written much the same. Yet native speakers of one "English-speaking" country may not be able to understand native speakers of another English-speaking country, unless they write to each other.

British English- and American-English-speaking people often cannot understand each other, although their writing differs only in very minor ways of spelling a few words — labor and labour, and a few others.

I know no Chinese and only three ideographs, ideas expressed in brushstroke, in Japanese. What does it feel like to have a language that uses a picture for a thought, instead of letters for sounds? Does a Chinese think in concepts rather than words? Does a Japanese string ideas to make a sentence? And does it matter how these pictures are ordered in a sentence?

We are accustomed to read from left to right. We have conditioned our brains to think that left is where we come from, right where we're going. Do Arabs and Israeli, who write from right to left, think that the right hand indicates where we have been, and the left where we are going?
We make books that read of course from front to back we turn pages to the left. Books in Arabic have the spline on the right, and we turn the pages to the right as we read.
Tibetans and many others make books vertically, pages follow each other from top to bottom, much as the first computer printers printed on a long strip of folded paper.

These things are fascinating, but more important than we image, because words, ideas, and how we organize them express and determine how we think, as well as how we feel.

To know my neighbor I must understand how he thinks, what is important to her, how his mind organizes what is seen. (See how one has to twist to avoid being sexist?) Language gives me a glimpse into other minds, other ways to see, other ways to define what is important.

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"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God," we are told. Does that mean that "the word" is what is uniquely human, the divine in us?

Theologians of all colors and convictions, have for long ages argued bitterly over what words mean, what they should mean, what may have been meant in old scripts. Human history is a sad and seemingly endless telling of battles, cruelty, injustice and oppression, much of it in the name of this or that interpretation of words.
Leading early on to the Tower of Babel, which is Babylon, 55 miles south of Baghdad.

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"The medium is the message," language is not only a medium of communication, but is itself the message.

This message is a double-faced mirror: language is an expression of the culture within which it lives — and the people who speak the language think within the categories their language allows.

Language is almost like an organism, it is a very complex structure with a form and a skin, also organs, functions, enzymes that stir the brew. But above all it is alive. It lives on, generation after generation, in the memory of speakers and in the written word. It grows and changes over time. It ingests and excretes words, thoughts, ideas, categories, values.

Grammar is an artificial — meaning man-made — skeleton that rarely fits the living reality of a living language.

Words.
Words must be the red blood cells of this organism, or perhaps its face. But language is much more than words.

We think the written word is fixed. We do not remember that over time words change not only how they are written but what they mean. Speakers of a language continue to add words to the whole; other words are left behind.

Today language is used for purposes other than simple communication. It is used for advertising, for entertainment, in politics. And so we now have words that are used so often for a purpose that has nothing to do with the original meaning of the word, that they have lost their meaning. They are but flags. Democracy is such a word. Politicians use it to make us feel good, although nobody remembers what it meant last year. Words used in advertising are meant to draw attention, although many of them mean almost nothing at all: super, extra, natural, large, bargain, all words that no longer mean what they meant before. They just yell at us.
Words have fashions. Once we said hot for what today is cool.
Words can and do lie!

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To me the most important facts about language are that it seems to be uniquely human, it is richly varied among the peoples of the world, and it allows us to think, it guides our thinking and at the same time gives boundaries to thinking.

We should be grateful for the varieties of language, and the variety of different ways of seeing and being in the world. We can learn from each other.

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Writing in words about language is tricky. There are rules and conventions about writing,

about punctuation, about spelling and grammar.

I write about something that is alive — although we do not think of language and words that way— because it is important that we treasure all the treasures of our human heritage before we let them slip away with so much else that we discard.

It is a challenge to use a ruler to measure living flesh, to use geometric figures to capture an idea. It is as difficult to write about language as it is to think about thinking.

"The Word"

Languages did not begin with grunts and growls.
Language began with names.
Beating my chest: Me Tarzan,
pointing: you Jane.

You can say hunger without words.
No words are needed to say food,
or I am cold, let's go, come here; go away.
You can say I love you without words.

The Word in the Beginning that was God,
was the word that banished the many gods.

Soon many claimed exclusive ownership
of the One God.
One humanity got The Word,
named names and became many.

It always begins with names.
This plant has a name,
another plant another name.
Distinctions. Categories.

Plants have a plant family name and a plant name.
Animals have species, of which we are one.

We have races, and classes and gender and age and appearance: distinctions.
We have beliefs and religions, convictions, opinions, knowledge and fears,
not even mentioning attractions and repulsions.
We cannot see without differences.

We have eyes and ears and a mouth,
hair in many colors and textures,
hands and feet,
and genitals of many forms and functions.

All those differences are just differences
that make a difference when we see the difference.

This group of folk names itself The People,
but it comes out of their mouths as Chinese, or Somali, or Greek.

This dwelling is a house, a mansion, a hovel, a tipi, a hut, a palace.
Just a shelter from the sun and the rain,
or a way to show off the difference.

The more differences we name, the more we find.
After finding ten ultimate smallest indivisible particles of matter
we found ten more.
Then we found that matter and energy are one.

Not the same, but two faces of one.

Until we find the one face that is all of us,
we must kill different faces.

For thousands of years people who thought themselves different
fought and killed and tortured
others who thought themselves different
because they all believed the one God was theirs alone.

What is in me and you and this plant and that dog is holy and creates.
Differences are but names that mean nothing.
All words we can imagine for *we*, all mean *us*.

Words are names are differences.

Voice is for whispering sweet nothings,
ears hear birdsong.

Pu‘u Honua

Hawaiians were civilized before Captain Cook "discovered" these islands in 1778. On every island there was a place of refuge. The Hawaiian word for these sanctuaries is *Pu‘u Honua*, which the dictionary defines *place of refuge, sanctuary, asylum, place of peace and safety*. Tradition held that anyone who could swim or walk to one of these places of peace and safety, was safe from whoever hunted him or her.

One of the journal reports that were written about Cook's voyage goes into almost embarrassing raptures about the beauty of the people they found in Hawaii, so clear of skin, so healthy, strong, well-muscled, with long shiny hair. And friendly.
What Captain Cook and his crew did not know was that they happened to land at a time of feasting, the season westerners think of as After the Harvest. Autumn. These unexpected strangers were welcomed and royally fed and entertained.

On their second stop at these islands, a few years later, Captain Cook and his men landed at another time of year (on the same island). This kind of ship, white men, even their cannon and muskets were no longer a novelty, and this was not the time of *Makahiki*. When Captain Cook insulted one of the Chiefs — perhaps unknowingly: westerners then did not try to understand cultures of people who are not white — he was clubbed to death. The ships fled. Where Cook landed is very near one of the now famous Pu‘u Honua on this island.

The two words, *pu‘u* and *honua* each have their own meanings. As many words in Hawaiian — probably in all languages — there is no direct, one-to-one equality: this word in one language means that other word in another language.

Pu‘u (poo-oo, with a little break between the two oo sounds) is "a hill, peak, cone, mound, bulge, heap, pile, portion, bulk, mass, quantity, clot, bunch, knob, in short any kind of protuberance from a pimple to a hill", and half a page of yet more meanings, including the name of a fish, a method of catching plover, a head of cabbage. It is a word whose meaning becomes clear in the context. Very much like many English words.

Honua is land, earth, world, background as in quilt designs. Or it can mean basic, at the foundation, fundamental. As a verb it is scooping out earth as for a fire place. And as a particle it can mean suddenly, abruptly and without reason. And it can mean the middle section of a canoe as well as the middle section of a fleet of canoes, or even the main section of an army.
But together these two words have a very unique meaning: place of safety and peace, a haven.

One of these P*u'u Honua* (in Hawaiian plural is not made by adding an S) is on this island, and now a National Park. Although it is visited by thousands of people, from all over the world, even today it continues to be a powerful place. Visitors instinctively walk slower, speak softer. There is a sense of awe there. It lies on one side of a little bay, with a long beach stretching out for miles. A place where locals as well as tourists visit at sunset to watch the sun slowly and then suddenly sink into the ocean: the beach faces due west.

There are stories. Women who managed to flee angry husbands and had to swim to reach the place of safety. Warriors who escaped mayhem to live holy lives at this place of peace.

Our modern world could use places of refuge.
But since we don't the millions who seek refuge from tribal wars, mad dictators, poverty and

natural disasters, must find friendly nations to accept them. Perhaps the refugee camps that have been established on many continents are the modern equivalent of these ancient places of safety and peace.
Then, only a few hundred years ago, all Hawaiians knew and respected the holy function of their Pu'u Honua.
There is no such universal understanding any more.

The Mind

Start at the beginning.

I live in the world. The world to me is not only the earth but also the sky, the stars, the weather and all the things I see, or hear or feel. My world does not include many of the things I have learned in school, or from reading important works of research. My world is not a scientific world. When scientists talk facts they mean figures.

It may well be that the entire universe as Science thinks of it began with a big Bang. That is no part of my world. My world is only what I can experience. Here and now.

I experience myself as a part of my world. I am of this world, I am just one of the many manifestations — creations — of this planet.

My world is intense, vibrant and vital. It is always changing — everything in my world is in constant flux. I do not see that it moves in a certain direction, toward a goal or away from a beginning. I perceive only that it grows.

About parts of this world that we have different names for, let's say rocks, I know that rocks go through cycles. A rock grows from a bigger rock, or perhaps lava, and each rock is quite specific. Or, take a palm tree. They grow from seeds, some of them big as a coconut, others small as a date. Somehow these seeds have in them a principle that gives some leeway, it can grow faster or slower, or faster at certain times, it can even stop growing for a while. But in the end a coconut can only grow into a coconut palm, a date seed can only grow into a date palm. A tree may lean in one direction to catch more sunshine. It can even make a right turn: when the wind blows a coconut palm down, it often continues to grow upright, after making a sharp ninety degree curve.

I communicate with all parts of this whole world. I talk with dogs of course, and cats. Unquestionably, they answer. Not in human talk, of course, after all they are not human. I talk to plants and they sometimes answer. Not like talking with a person, of course. People talk with words, and expression and body language. Communicating with plants is different, it happens without sound and without words, but through something related to what we call 'thinking'.

Thinking, I am beginning to understand, means sorting and playing with information. Arranging information this way and that. Adding information stored in memory, discarding information that does not fit.

Thinking needs an 'I'. It is that 'I' that sorts information, memories as well as learned 'facts', and fits it into previous sortings. And so we construct whole structures of meaning, as we call it, and importance. We are told, in today's world, that thinking is a very important activity, it is what makes us human, which we are also told means that we are different and better and more of all kinds of important things than, for instance, animals. Oh yes, we are not animals, we say to each other!

For convenience sake we have a word in our language for where all that thinking takes place: the Mind. Scientists, and people who are paid to think, have placed the Mind inside our brain case, for reasons only they can understand or explain.

Since I am now mostly outside of that scientific world, it seems clear to me that what we call 'thinking', is playing with information. Maybe it is not really all that important. It probably is

not what makes us human. Maybe it does not need to happen in a place.

What we call cyberspace, for instance, is not fiction, nor is it in the air somewhere, but it is in the network of copper and glass wires that carry the pulses of the globe's telephones. That network carries an enormous amount of information, 'facts' if you insist. And yet, our playing with information does not take place in cyber space, or any other space.

In fact, I am thinking that most of what we think of as facts, are not really facts at all. They are just observations. And obviously, observations are only as good as the observer, or what the observer uses to look through, hear through, feel through.
And we all know that what I see is not the same as what you see.

We call these observations facts. That makes us feel virtuous. After all facts are the truth, no?

But if facts are nothing but observations, and one person's observations at that, what are truths?

People tell me, this is the truth, this table, feel it, it has mass, it is solid. Or this rock: if I throw this rock at you — and if I aim well and my arms are strong — this rock will break your skull! Things that are hard, that have mass, that have matter, are true. Only things we can measure are true. The air is true because we have ways to measure how much of it is one chemical, how much another.

Then they tell me that colors are just reflected light in some knowable wave length. Or that radio and television are waves of other wave lengths that machines can pick up and then translate into other wave lengths that we can hear and see. I cannot even imagine how sound and colors can exist at the same time in the same place, and then they tell me there are even other rays, other wave lengths, that come from the sun, or from deep space, that go through solid things like the earth.

I am getting a headache — obviously from all those different wave lengths pushing through and against each other.

The trouble with our thinking is in the assumptions we accept without question. Who says the only *real* is what we can measure? A sunset is not a bunch of different wavelengths of light. In fact, one theory says that light, under certain circumstances, can be thought of as particles and not waves. Oh yeah? And sound is another kind of particles hitting my ear drums?

No, I do not trust facts. Most books that tell me they tell me facts, are outmoded next year, when scientists have come up with different facts that make yesterday's facts fiction.

What does not change is what I learn from this plant, a plant that I know has healing qualities. If, that is, you know how to pick its leaves with reverence, asking permission; if you then know how to make medicine out of those leaves, and who to give it to, when. I think of that as "knowing". I cannot prove it — I do not need to prove it, because it works.
The tiger I saw when I was ten years old smiled at me. That is how I remember. Of course I know that tigers do not smile. Even at ten I knew that, probably. But what I meant with that word was that I could sense the intention of the tiger, it was benevolent, and friendly, as smiles tell us the intention of people.

When I was fourteen I let a German Shepherd out of a cage, because I knew he was not mean and dangerous as the owner said. He was lonely and needed some exercise. So, very early the next morning, before anyone was up, I got the lock unlocked and we went for a walk. We got along from the beginning, because I knew his intentions, and he knew mine. He was bigger than I, certainly more powerful, so I got tired before he did. He patiently waited until I had rested a little before going on. Later we both got hungry and thirsty. And still later we both

were not surprised and in fact somewhat relieved when a posse of men found us and brought us back.

I got into more trouble than the dog: everyone wanted to know where we had gone, why I had released that dangerous animal, didn't I know that… And so on, and so on. It must have been obvious that the dog was not dangerous at all: we had spent at least ten hours together in peace and harmony.

One day I was planning to go to town. I had the list of things I had to do in my breast pocket, my pouch with my wallet and check books was around my middle, my hat on my head, the car keys in my hand, opened the front door, walked out, was about to shut the door when for some reason my body turned around and walked back in. I sat on the couch I had then, hat on my head, car keys still in my hand. What is going on, I wondered?
The phone rang. Someone I did not know called from the east coast. He had read my book and had nice things to say about it. We talked for quite a while.
So, I said to myself, a good thing I did not leave. I would have missed that phone call. Got up from the couch, took one step, decided, Nah, I can go to town another day. Took my hat off, my pouch and the car keys and the little shopping list in my hat. Phone rang again.
Three people called that day. Good thing I was home.

When I am driving, I am driving, not thinking about other things. But there are days that suddenly I find myself slowing down. I do not speed very often, but slowing down brings me closer to the speed limit. Sure enough, a police car around the next corner, waiting for speeders.
Dreams often tell me of people I will meet, or things that will happen.
All that has nothing to do with thinking, certainly not with science. But I have learned to gratefully accept those "knowings."

Thinking almost always gets me into trouble. Thinking leads me to dead ends, to insoluble dilemmas. The more logical I try to be in my thinking, the more I get stuck. I make these tapes, circular thinking, around and around and around.
If this, then that and that and that, and that is where I started with this.
Maybe what we call the Mind is not inside our head at all. Maybe our brains are like radios, accessing the Mind that is out there somewhere. But reception is poor, I can only get a few wavelengths, so when I play with the information I pick up from the Mind, I play with pieces of something whole.
I can only sense *the whole* with what we call intuition, which, my dictionary says means "the power or faculty of knowing things without conscious reasoning."
Yes, that's it exactly.
I just prefer the word *knowing*.

Ecology

We survived for long ages by hunting and gathering. Of course we had to know our environment very well. We knew every sign, every clue, every whim, color and mood of plants, animals, rocks, the air and the water of the world we were part of.
When food was harder to come by, or when winter came, we moved on. Our way of life was predicated on leaving the environment as we found it: a hunter-gatherer learns early that he must not destroy, nor even change his world; his life and the life of his tribe depends on finding the same world again next year and the year after. We felt part of the environment. The aborigines I knew did not feel there was a boundary between them and the trees, the animals, the sky, the rain, the sun.
To modern man oneness is but a deep, vague memory. Those of us who try to recapture that feeling of oneness, call it mystical and declare that we have no words to describe the experience.
No words because our memories of that oneness date from before we had words.

Being one with nature worked for millions of years: we survived and multiplied. Then, only a few thousand years ago probably, we moved a giant step up the ladder some call progress: humans learned how to control their environment. We invented what we now call agriculture. We developed grains and other crops. We domesticated some animals.
No longer one, we learned I and other.
Surviving became toil and hard work 'by the sweat of our brow'. Wresting the products we needed from a limited environment — using only a small piece of the landscape, but intensively — made nature the adversary. Wind, rain and sun became enemies, to be cajoled, begged, guided, used and forced to do our will.
We learned to defend 'our' territory from 'weeds', unwanted animals and humans. Our new way of being-in-the-world required the eradication of competing species.
We discovered specialization, creating hierarchical societies with bosses, soldiers, farmers, men who do some things, women other things.

Some found ways to live together without coercion, obviously more effective than control. "Culture," the all-pervasive network of habits, customs and values, can maintain a stable society at a level of comfort and health (and close to zero growth) for sometimes hundreds of years.
This too 'worked': with more food, more things, and many more of us. However, a life style of 'more' inevitably leads to depletion, desertification and ultimately the destruction of our environment: inevitably, sooner or later we waste our world.
Some cultures were more successful than others in maintaining environments, but none of them were able to survive the latest big step up in evolution: the sudden explosion of ideas and values that occurred when in the last few centuries Man thought himself the 'owner'. We got drunk on the technology that allowed us to change the very earth to our whims. As a result of modernization and urbanization millions of people moved, or were moved, across the earth: migrations on a scale never before known, resulting in the destruction of fragile cultures.
“Change” became the goal, no longer the means, although we had scant knowledge of the direction in which we should change, and virtually no knowledge of the consequences of the changes we so vehemently demanded.

Today we have entertainment: instead of culture, law and politics instead of justice and tradition.

We rely on ever more oppressive governments to control us, invading every last bastion of privacy.

We demand — and get — armies of enforcers of laws we ourselves make, while throwing away a growing number of our fellows who are locked behind bars.
We learned to compete rather than cooperate.
We kill each other with mass produced super weapons.
Everyone is everyone's enemy, and so we eradicate ourselves.

Then perhaps earth will heal herself again as she has done so many times before.

Do Earth-Based Ceremonies Belong to Natives Only?

Why ask?
Our culture thrives on collecting what is valuable wherever it is found. We celebrate Easter around the Spring Equinox, a date from the 'earth-based' calendar. Easter remembers the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, but we have added rabbits and eggs, 'earth-based' fertility symbols from two earth-based traditions. Historians agree that the man Jesus was born in Spring but the Church made it mid-winter, to coincide with the Winter Solstice, another' earth-based' date. Some of the symbols we associate with Christmas, the evergreen tree and lights, are from earth-based religions. We added Santa Claus who was a historical figure (St. Nicholas, Bishop of Toledo, Spain, 16th century) via Holland and Germany to the United States; the red-nosed reindeer comes from Hollywood. Original meanings are lost in today's hodgepodge. Today, Christmas means shopping.

It is nice to know that a priest uses a Native American 'sacred pipe' in the Mass. But how can a pipe be made meaningful within the meaning of the mass, which, I have been told, is a re-enactment of Christ giving His blood and His body to His believers? The wine is His blood, the wafers His body. Where does a pipe fit?
Native Americans may be pleased to see an object that has meaning to them being treated with reverence in a church. But beyond that, what does it mean?

Our culture eats everything from everybody then homogenizes it into a colorful, even gaudy soup that has lost all previous meaning. Who remembers that eggs and rabbits stand for fertility and therefore Spring? Who remembers that evergreen trees and lights were sacred reminders that after the shortest day of the year—and the darkest—the days will grow longer and the sun will shine more hours each day. And of course we always ignore that that is only true in the Northern Hemisphere.

Our lives are filled with objects and ideas from all over the world, our restaurants serve every food known to man. Such a collection of things and sacred ideas becomes nothing but decoration, the food just calories. Our riches are empty. We overeat, overmedicate and overdose because we are starved for meaning, for something more than our man-made mishmash gives. We may not know it, but what we seek is that which gives meaning to a ceremony, not the ceremony.
A pipe can be sacred only within the context of a Native American world.

The western view of what life is about is based on separation. We do not feel part of the earth, and so we cannot be part of each other. Westerners see themselves—Man as we call ourselves—as not of this earth, but directly or indirectly connected with a Supreme Being, who is not of this earth, and who has given his favorite creatures the planet we live on for our exclusive use, apparently to do with as we please.

Earth-based ceremonies are synchronized with a calendar that is formed around earth events, or moon events: observable events. Our western calendar is rooted in a mixture of historical systems of time-keeping, now unconnected to earth or moon. In an earth-based world humans are earth creatures, animals our brothers, plants our cousins. Earth-based implies that we, humans, have concern and consideration for all creation, not as owners but as responsible and equal participants in the life of this planet.

Westerners consider plants and animals and the earth itself to be here for our use. We can and do eradicate species, destroy virgin forests, change the face of the earth without thought for the morrow, because we believe that we own this earth, it is our possession, to do with as we darn well please. Our modern way of life is the opposite of earth-based.

In our world anything and everything can be owned. In an earth-based world very little can be owned, certainly not ceremonies or sacred objects. To a native a ceremony is a holy sharing, the pipe a sacred object.

White people can create a workshop around a ceremony he has learned to make money. But what has he *bought*? A formula that no longer has meaning, a string of words, music, gestures. The meaning can only be felt from within an earth-based world view.

Native peoples everywhere have always known that the earth and the wind, the sea, fire and *all our relations* are one, not as an intellectual concept but as a reality. Natives everywhere live(d) in a world where every ceremony had its roots in that basic understanding that we are an indivisible part of What Is.

Westerners threw that away when we invented property, power and money.

To survive we may have to relearn that old way of being in the world; being not masters but integral parts of the earth. We can learn words from the remaining First Peoples, but ultimately we must find that way of being of the earth ourselves, it cannot be borrowed — consider what we have done with the earth-based ceremonies we already stole.

Ceremonies that cannot "fit" demean the people we borrow from, and demean us more for trying to be something we are not. Stolen or borrowed ceremonies are not any different than the "genuine Indian artifact" — and in small print, *Made in China*.

Miracles Do Happen!

I do not use the word "miracle" lightly. I like the word for many reasons. For some people miracle has to do with an unexpected pleasure, a bonus. Yes, that is nice, too. Miracle, to me, also means something that is awe-some, a wonder to behold. And, of course, miracles happen unexpectedly, suddenly, out of the blue, so to speak.

Lately I have thought of another reason for liking miracles. In this Age of Communication, all information is available to all people all the time (with a little effort). All humans must know — or could know, certainly should know — that there are some dire things happening to our Mother, the earth. Some of these things are our doing.
In fact, however, most of us do not *want* to know.

Of course we all know that not wanting to know does not make whatever it is go away. Daily more species become extinct, acres of virgin forest are destroyed each day, and some (many?) of the things we do and have done have long-lasting effects. We are despoiling the air, the water, the very dirt of our earth.

It is a race against time although most of humanity seems to be watching with almost no interest in the outcome. Most of us assume, without much thought, that of course Man will always come out ahead, or we assume that our science, our technology will "find a way" to save our life of consuming more and caring less.
Man is asleep.

We are overfed, over-stimulated, over-medicated, alienated from our own roots, from the source, from our human heritage, the sun, the rain, dirt, water, growing things.

As Einstein and many others have said, science and technology cannot save us from the effects of science and technology. The people who are in charge want to stay in charge and the only way they know how to do that is to continue what they are doing, but more so.

The only thing that might possibly slow this mad dash to extinction is a change of heart. Can people change what they think life is, what they want?
That is an extremely hard thing to do, because first you must shake off all the sureties we have been given all our lives by society, the Media, our parents, the churches.

We were told that life is a jungle, we have to be competitive, climb over the backs of your friends to the top. How do we relearn that neighbors help each other to survive?
We accept that the world is a dirt heap, to be raped, changed, dug and thrown away. We have become drunk on our power to rip up what we "own" — it says so on a piece of paper.
Who can *own* the earth?

Stand back for just a minute and look, really look.

The world is no jungle, it is a closed ecology. Predators and prey are two sides of the same coin, they 'belong together', one is closely related to the other, one cannot be without the other. The earth is not ferocious, or fierce, or dangerous, or beautiful, or wonderful. It just is. We, humans, are part of all that is. In fact we are a creation of What Is, we exist in and from the bio-sphere, that thin skin of gases and water and some dirt and a lot of sunshine that we think of as *our* earth.
We think we are the boss, we claim ownership. We claim territory and we act as predators and hunt our neighbors as prey — not to still hunger, but for greed, or pride, or any of the other mortal sins.

One of these days Gabriel is going to blow his horn: STOP!
Stop whatever you are doing.
Wake up!
Reflect: how what you have been doing affected or effected the health of our planet, as well as your own. Turn around, all the way around. Let's all get together and repair the damage.

I can see you shake your head, Nah, that is not going to happen, people cannot change that much overnight (or instantaneously). Impossible!

Of course it is impossible in your world. That is why it has to be a miracle.
Imagine that a CEO found work for all his employees rather than closing down his operation, or changing the operation of his plant to start producing something more healthful. Imagine rich Joe, giving all his money away and now working to clear the lake of pollution. Imagine schools as hotbeds of excitement and change, incredible growth and development of children, teachers and administrators.

Pray for that miracle.
Expect that miracle.

There is no other way!

The face of God

This morning went to Volcano.
Clear and sunny at the National Park a little after eight-thirty.
The mountain, Mauna Loa, her most beautiful. Tears in my eyes.

The mountain serene, so obviously huge. Pure. She looks and feels immense, and immensely powerful.
Not a cloud in the sky except on the south side of course.
Standing in the Kilauea caldera, an active volcano,
Mauna Loa in front of me.
A presence.

Mauna means mountain, Loa means long. Today I see her wide: from horizon to horizon. A smooth profile up to the slightly rounded summit and down again speaking power, weight. Hard to imagine her summit ten thousand feet higher than here where I stand, she seems so close...
So very obviously 'holy'.

I park on the side of the road, walk into the wild.
A very powerful power spot.

The enormous landscape demands a voice. I pray, loud. Because I am so moved my voice wavers, making my few words in Hawaiian sound as a chant is supposed to sound. I say the prayer that is most meaningful to me:
E ho'oulu ana i tini ‘o te atua, ta helu ‘o te atua, ta mano ‘o te atua.

A poetic translation, more meaningful than the literal: "make grow, increase" (the presence of) "the forty thousand gods, the four hundred thousand gods, the four thousand gods." Or, of course, the unnumbered faces of god.

Saying the prayer the first time, the noise from a helicopter flying low over my head. The noise, the rude flying machine between me and the gods.

Ram Dass wrote, "use the energy of an intruding loud noise when meditating" (or in prayer) "to get deeper, higher." I almost succeed doing that.

I do not know how many prayers I say. Many. My voice grows more powerful, coming from deep below, in my belly. Finally my prayers just a wordless chant in adoration of the mountain in front of me, the endless, endless lava fields surrounding me, a few trees here and there, some bushes.

The face of God. The many faces of the many gods. The raw face, the bare face of God. The essence of the gods of everything, or God in everything — same thing.
No other people.
No building, no cross, no statuary.
Nothing but the very presence of God.
A very exalted few hours: food for the soul.
Wanted to share that with you,

Today

Now all these stories are history. Behind me.
There are no generalizations.

My own life has some perspective, I see snapshots of past scenes, faces, a house, a jungle, more faces, I hear voices long dead. As in every life of every human life there was pain and horror and love and joy.

There are so many strands of this tapestry; I cannot unravel even one of them.

I spent years — wasted — trying to "understand."
Where I saw injustice I tried to understand where it began, how.
Grief, I thought, must have a cause.
Excessive riches must be the result of … what? Greed, or smart bargaining?
Poverty must come from lack of opportunities. Or?

I believed that we, humans, should/ought be happy; "the pursuit of happiness."
I also believed that the, or another purpose of life was enlightenment.
Until I realized that "belief" is one of those words that has no reality.

Probably everyone I have ever met has had joy and pain, has experienced reward and injustice, has tried and failed, has hoped and despaired.

Our history is a record of foul play, murder and mayhem, cruelty, torture, horror and starvation on a grand scale.

What history does not record are the random acts of kindness, unconditional love, the daily miracles of our lives, compassion and cooperation, and all the other acts and intentions that make us human.

I recognize self-serving arrogance as a basic human trait; fear a basic human emotion. Ego is an invention, an illusion that makes nothing but trouble.

Chaos is a natural state of affairs.
Chaos, after all, is the soup where creation is born.

Nature, with a capital N, is change, some of it man-made. The flowers we think the essence of Hawai'i are all imported, by design or accident.

Yes, white people have done much harm — to millions of people, to the world, to themselves. And so have black people and brown, at different times and places.

Are humans more ruthless than grass? Or rats, or cockroaches?
More powerful because we are smarter?

I have learned much, and perhaps more in the last few years than in the three quarters of a century before. What I have learned is that things change all the time. Life is change. I don't need to understand Life.

Life is for living. And the basic energy of the world, and probably the universe, is what Hawaiians call aloha. It is too bad that our word "love" has been used too much in the wrong context so that we have mostly forgotten what love is.

And I have learned that I am responsible only for myself.
I do not need to change the world.
What is important is that I see the oneness.
What is, is.

the Big Island, Hawai'i, 2003

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Computer programs are wonderful instruments that make it possible to write,
check the spelling, format and do many of the things that make a “book.”
But it takes people to notice the little errors (and sometimes not so little)
that computer programs overlook.

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