Chapter 9 Peace

"It is a matter of saying, perhaps, that truth ought not to be seen as the property of a proposition, but of the person. This would mean that our appraisal of any course of personal or social action would not be determined simply by the degree to which the proposal before us squares with objectively demonstrable knowledge, but by the degree to which it enlarges our capacity to experience: to know ourselves and others more deeply, to feel more fully the awesomeness of our environment.” Theodore Roszak, from 'The Making of a Counter Culture', 1970.

The Whole Person

It is well worth reading Roszak, not just for the depth of his insight into the culture of his times, but for a sense of how his vision and interpretation of the period of which he wrote accurately anticipates the kind of saturation of technology that exists in the developed world today. If his feeling for the move towards a culture of objectivity which ironed out the necessity for a personal relationship with nature is evident in the complicity of a society who perceived the gains of technology as a social good; then the modern acceptance of media and technological saturation defines, not just a concept of citizenship which is submissive and emotionally gagged, but a form of identity which is a product of the need to mould society to the limitations of technology.

Effectively, he describes how society, in its willing participation in the construction of a social metaphor of identity, eschews any intuitive connection to the real world of the senses and substitutes a fantasy which evolves around the emergence of a self-image defined by the photo and the screen. From the camera view of reality as a simulacrum of an emotionally intelligent gaze on a divine creation of mystery and beauty, the screen and its virtual psychodrama of virtual participation in an endless nonsense myth of consumption and fear, substitute the electronic byte for the experience of the whole person. The convergence of technologically objective theorems of control of natural processes blunders ever towards the abyss of extinction in a theoretical bid for a synthetic utopia of comfortable numbness.

In this chapter I want to explore the potential of being again a whole person. If it is possible to re-imagine a world in which the experience of beauty and emotionally satisfying relationships are sufficient proof of the vitality of life without the need for drugs or synthetic environments, then this is expressed fundamentally as the disposition of the whole person. Gestalt psychology refers to this core state of being as the necessary physical/emotional foundation for mental recovery. We have, contained in our whole being, the essential ingredients to function as whole people engaged with an environment which caters for our needs and nurtures our spiritual self-realisation in ultimate fulfilment.

A holistic theory defines life as an opportunity for growth into wholeness of being as a given of an altruistic sphere which encompasses all of life. Gandhi
talked about this as the state of the world as a contrast between Himsa and A-
Himsa, being the poles of love or compassion and its opposite of hatred or
destruction. He suggested that if A-Himsa was greater than Himsa then we
would long ago have wiped out life on earth. Let's just hope his vision will see
us through the Nuclear age of which he was probably only dimly aware.

Throughout this book I have attempted to show beyond reasonable doubt that
human form and knowledge is inevitably configured around a dialogical
relationship with our environment which functions as one organic process.
Knowledge comes to us through the emotional storage of sensations which are
given an intuitive gloss and registered as names, stories and songs in the
abstract domain of the mind. The whole process of being within this sensual
reality then emerges into meaningful activity and identity through the
recognition of the absolute purpose of life which we can also discern as a value
in the everyday processes of being. That such a description is fundamentally
different from the kind of machine-metaphor which attempts to define
everything according to predictable mathematical equations, attests not only to
the paucity of the abstract processes as an explanation for the complexity of
life, but more essentially, as the need to recognise the process of living as a
search for meaning and harmony.

From this perspective we can see that one of the predominant factors of the
bid for a synthetic environment is the co-option of the masses in a machine
metaphor which reconfigures human identity in conformity with the parameters
of technological expertise. The bid for the ultimate goal of artificial intelligence
as an escape from the responsibility of being part of the natural world,
emerges instead as the widespread adoption of a type of personal identity as
defined by the parameters of the machine. We become ever more like the
machines we aspire to create through the need to conform our sense of reality
with the limitations of technology.

Unfortunately, as this process obviously leads to the gradual disintegration of
the body and the rapid dysfunctioning of society as emotionally intelligent and
sentient beings, the omnipresent motif of a consumer paradise is covertly
accompanied by a paranoid and co-dependent addiction to violence as the
means of suppressing any deeper awareness or hope of fulfilment. Indeed if
one is to appreciate the full implications of how our modern culture has already
descended into an abyss of despair fuelled by increasing violence and disregard
for even the basics of natural empathic relationships, reminiscent of a
concentration camp, then one can perhaps understand that somehow the crisis
is one of existential proportions. This is to say that if the final conclusion of a
bid for a utopian synthesis of technology and humanity is in fact the absolute
disintegration of natural human decency and respect, then it becomes
apparent that hidden in the original bid for intellectual supremacy over the
forces of nature, lies the fear of life itself and the need for a drug which will
obliterate consciousness of the compassionate response it demands.

**Violence is a drug**
To understand the modern world with its problems of war and the destruction of our home, we have to see that it is not a question of having to rectify a few mistakes and learning to appreciate each other's cultures. Actually at the root of the malaise of the modern world is a predilection for violence based on the feeling that anger somehow dispels fear. Therefore if violence is the expression of anger then violence reduces or controls fear. This was Hitler's basic theory which he used to lead the Germans into complicity with wholesale violence and scapegoating of the Jews and the Slavic peoples. The problem is that violence as a physiological event draws on the heightened nervous tension of the organism and the increased adrenalin response brought on by the manufacture of fear and its control through violence.

This means that such behaviour, being artificially constructed to impose a human-contrived pattern on the natural process of ecological existence, is identical to that of taking stimulants or toxic substances as a way of inducing artificial rhythms in the body. If the initial motivation for taking the drug is one of emotional denial and avoidance of pain then this will draw on both the body's natural response to synthetic stimulation and immune boosting responses, not to mention the triggering of its own adrenalin response to fear. All of these processes will induce a pattern which can only be sustained by increasing levels of stimulation because the body does not have the holistic reserves to sustain this way of being. Therefore it will lead to the eventual breakdown of the body and the ensuing emotional collapse of the person who cannot cope emotionally with the sudden return of their worst nightmares.

Once you can digest this analysis it then becomes apparent that all processes which lead humans away from a natural integration with the ecosystem and relationships which engender responsible cohabitation of shared spaces, are sustained by artificial means and involve some aspect of denial or avoidance. This is the fundamental reference point from which to view the state of the world as both a chaotic descent into self-annihilation and also the potential for a wholistic understanding of peace as a whole-person disposition within a harmonious natural sphere. It is not that war is basically the extreme extension of a logic of being which strays into violent intolerance. Rather it is the logical conclusion of a system whose roots are planted in the ground of despair and fear of an open relationship with nature. Effectively we are at war with ourselves and the very foundations of ecological existence because we cannot rise to a responsible and sustainable state of being. In this equation peace, or the disposition of being a whole person, is the necessary grounding of a system which promotes a fecund habitation of a diverse and rich space for all of life.

If we accept this challenge, then it becomes clearer that we don't have to trawl endlessly through erudite Freudian theories of Oedipal complexes and sophisticated analyses of war games to discover the subtle psychologies of conflict. There is basically only one mechanism and that is fear which begets anger which begets violence; which begets more fear and so on in spiralling waves until everything breaks down. And while I acknowledge that it takes a lot of discipline to arrive at a balance of our own lives in which we can feel the
irrationality of anger and modern technological paradigms, if we look at the way that the ostensible myths which justify conflict in the world operate we can discern the obvious hall marks of drug addiction. In a revealing book with the wonderful title of 'When Society becomes an Addict', [1988], Anne Wilson Schaef, explains how relationships can often be understood as 'Co-dependent' in that they conform to a power hierarchy of domination and submission which also shows the tendency for role reversal. She describes the 12 Step Process of Alcoholics Anonymous as a suitable metaphor for not only the dependent relationships in a family where one or more are alcoholic, but life at large where relationships are often configured around the social administration of power.

Interestingly it has been shown that in many conflict zones there is widespread alcohol abuse, but this is not the whole point. What it points to is the way that relations of power, or the urge to disrupt natural relationships, revolve around the adoption of a myth of domination and control. This attempts to subvert awareness of the reality that the protagonists are fundamentally aiming to increase their own self-annihilation, be that through a suppression of natural feelings or the disruption of valued relationships. If we tie into this equation a recognition that the myth of natural aggression or power hierarchy requires that the oppressed or victims become subordinated to the myth, then the justification for violence often revolves around the perceived psychological destruction of the identity of the victim as a means to indulging the cravings of the addict for denial. As I said before, this is a thorny subject which concerns the perceived emotional suffering of the oppressed by the oppressor. If their aim is to assert their control they will require passive acknowledgement of suffering to be satisfied; but as this is only a secondary requirement of the need to justify their own addiction to violence it tends to become absorbed in the general perception of whether the violence is effective on a physical basis.

Although this cadenza is not a fundamental part of the motivation of the basic addiction, it does tie in the tendency of the masses to adopt a submissive identity of complicity in events of violence because their survival may depend on the logic of mechanistic principles of social administration. This also leads to the confusing misapprehension of violence as a process which can be explained with recourse to behavioural understanding of the projection of patterns of abuse; independent of any more broad-ranging perspective of society as a whole. In reality such theories do not give credible accounts of the process from a person who is abused themselves to their use of violence as a way of normalising their emotions. This is because in collective violent movements there is no single event of abuse or projection, it has to draw on the embedded cultural myths that inspire the violence. As such it is more a product of a general culture of fear spearheaded by a few main protagonists and galvanised around the opportunistic selection of passive minorities.

In a monumental study of the subjugation of women, Jews and Palestinians, Andrea Dworkin, [Scapegoat, 2000], describes the embedded culture of persecution and scapegoatism inherent in Western culture. She suggests that there is no logical mechanism which leads from a recognition of the patterns of
alienation and victimisation of scape-goated minorities, to the transfer of this process in the context of the reinvention of modern Jewish identity in Israel. It is merely, she suggests, the substitution of one victim for another, or in this case the compounding of traditional Jewish Misogyny with a reversal of the victimisation of modern Jewry; which results in the selection of Palestinian men as the substitute for their traditional victimisation of Jewish women. Try as you may there is no logic which leads from the inherent shock of generations of oppression in Jewish culture to the normalisation of a different form of violence in the context of Israel-Palestine.

The only way we can assimilate this genocidal outburst and the countless instances of localised victimisation on a gruesome and regular basis is through the frame of addiction. This is to say that if the fundamental cause of the violence is an existential disorientation as a result of generations of cultural indoctrination in the logic of violence and fear, then this serves as a motivation in a process which is merely opportunistic. The oppressor stands in face of a victim who is subjugated by overwhelming force and selects their target, not through an understandable process of projection and normalisation, but rather as a random act of opportunistic violence which feeds their addiction on a physiological level.

If the fundamental cause of the process is one of addiction to a drug of some kind due to the unknown need to suppress a fear of life, then the method of its enactment tends towards one of victimisation and the construction of a myth of power as the logical and objective event of human control of the forces of life. This is the basic dynamic of modern colonialism and the recent surge of violence due to the race for the last reserves of fossil fuel which prop up the affluent consumption and drug-addiction of western society. As such it displays merely the compulsive emotional distortions of an obsessive personality and the devious but skewed logic of an addict aware of his progressive decline.

The following quote [cited in 'Dirty Little Secrets' by Claud Anderson,1997], comes from a speech made by a colonial slave-owner in Jamaica in 1710, William Lynch, who travelled to Virginia in order to try and teach the slave-owners there how to deal with recalcitrant and rebellious slaves. This is an early version of what became known as 'Divide and Rule' and which was practised by the British in Malaya [1948-1960], Kenya [1952-1960]and Northern Ireland [1969-1997]; and also underpins the expansion of the Jewish colonialisation of Palestine into a 'Greater Israel' which partially explains the wars in the Middle East at the moment.

"The black slaves after receiving this indoctrination shall carry on and will become self-refuelling and self-generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands. Don't forget you must pitch the old black male vs. the young black male and the dark-skin slaves vs. the light-skin slaves. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust ALL blacks, but it is necessary that they trust and depend on us. They must love, respect and trust ONLY us."

Here we have the classic dichotomy of co-dependent relationship. The
dominant player exercises total control over the passive victim and institutionalises both the violence and the status of the victim. The explanatory myth is one of the intellectual, and therefore economic superiority of the oppressor who benefits from the 'prosperity' bestowed by the relationship. If the victim consents to this hierarchy this also ties her/him into a hierarchy of values which is justified by the delusion that they could rise up the scale and achieve prosperity themselves. As such the 'master' is viewed as an expression of the necessity of violence and also the beloved supplier of identity and potential liberty.

In the context of the colonial projects of empire we can see that the original process of pitting one ethnic identity or religion against another serves as sufficient motivation in those cultures for the group selected as the dominant one to accept their status of complicity with the regime of occupation. This process of cultural genocide and its use of internment existed in the supposed context of preventing internecine bloodbaths, but was in reality a means of perpetuating a controlled level of chaos in order to better control the country by force. In the post 9/11 context the new American bid for world domination has extended its already widespread use of fuelling indigenous sectarian conflicts and the imposition of puppet governments, to the creation of proxy de-nationalised mercenary armies.

Although the media stories repeat tirelessly the fable that what we are witnessing is a historical religious rivalry, this merely illustrates the shallowness of the logic of imperialist senility, and the lack of coherent identity of those who take the pay-checks and swashbuckling justifications of violence of their masters. The reality is much as it has been for most of the last century; a process of the supplier of weapons and money enticing a mafia type oligarchy of complicit megalomaniacs as subservient puppets to the master race. All that has changed in the latest bid for world control is that the masters have run out of mechanisms to pitch more and more different cultures against each other so they have had to invent a new threat, the global and messianic terrorist from the east, AKA the fabled Muslim despot of the original Zionist Crusades of the previous millennium.

Anyway, there are many profound studies of this recent episode in the global struggle for control of the last resources of a vanishing ecosystem. Personally I find that the more I delve into the ostensible explanations for such behaviour, the more am I not only baffled by the sheer ignorance and nihilism of such moves, but the less I am able to focus on the positive explanation of what life is for and could become if we turn our imaginations towards the abundance of good things still left in this world. And to conclude this section let me just repeat my assertion that what we need to do is to understand that peace is a positive state of being whole people in the totality of our bodies/emotions and minds. It is only from the perspective of an intuitive relation with all of life as the source of our wisdom and sense of belonging, that we find the necessary structure to re-constitute life as a wholesome and fulfilling domain.

Possession is aggression
The rationale of Aggression presumes that humans are naturally aggressive and need to be so in order to survive in a dangerous world which is fundamentally chaotic. This logic serves not only to justify the addiction to violence of those who feel threatened by life, but also to perpetuate the hierarchy of co-dependency in which the binary relations of dualism are projected through the dependency of the victim onto the rationality of explanatory and authoritarian models. As such the only way out for the oppressed is to recognise, not just the violence which is unnecessarily visited on them, but the process of psychological indoctrination which suggests this is a real process backed up by the destructive economic capacity of the system.

Or to put this more simply, if we take the standard defence of Economic Liberalism which says that humans are naturally aggressive and so the best way to stimulate efficient businesses is to enhance our natural competitive instinct, we can see that this is a watertight argument in favour of aggression. In fact it is entirely circular as are all reductionist propositions because it merely re-states what it assumed as true in the first place; namely that humans are naturally aggressive. The supposed truth of the argument is derived from the explanatory power of the equation of aggression with efficiency. In other words, modern capitalist development is a wonderful exposition of the flowering of the human spirit. Or is it?

The alternative explanation, which aligns with our contention that in fact humans are naturally disposed to kindness and compassion, as well as the in-built tendency for recognition of beauty and hope as the source of a sense of belonging, is that aggression is actually a negation of all that is good in people and the natural world. The red-in-tooth-and-claw brigade such as Konrad Lorenz and Erich Fromm, not to mention the macho mystique of the born-free wild men of Deep Ecology, suggest that we have only to look at the way that predatory instincts are the norm in nature to see that this is also the stuff we are made of. Speak for yourselves, I say; what about all the vegetarian animals? And just because predation is natural for some types doesn't mean it applies to us. Can we not be a bit more evolved to assume that we have the intelligence to make healthy and reasonable choices?

Anyway this is another argument which could go on for decades and which I am not in a hurry to join in. The proof, once again, is to look at the power of the explanation to provide a convincing and coherent picture of life as a whole which encompasses all our aspirations for a sustainable habitation of the planet and our collective spiritual journey as compassionate and respectful humans. What follows then is a theory which came to me after spending time researching the efficiency of processes of Foreign Aid in the modern world. I concluded that western economic models are largely responsible for the deterioration in quality of life and economic efficiency in so-called 'underdeveloped' countries. Also apparent is the conclusion that in the case where the original displacement of indigenous economic paradigms are not replaced, more doses of economic medicine by the I.M.F. seems to produce exactly the opposite of what is hoped.
Again I am in no rush to enter into the debate on how such processes may become corrupted by the peculiarities of resource-rich development oriented to exports. Nor is the theory that the influx of privately-owned multinational companies to provide a boost to the market forces of the local economy convincing in its claim to be the necessary antidote for internecine conflict brought on by poverty. Such arguments revolve around the basic idea that competition stimulates economic prosperity and lead to the remarkable conclusion that inequality is good for business. All these ideas draw on the basic theme that what we are doing in business is devising better ways to produce goods to satisfy our basic needs, and doing it in such a way as to enhance our natural tendency to increase efficiency through aggression.

However, if we turn this equation on its head and suggest that in fact all these processes of decidedly questionable merit are in fact a means to perpetuating a system of aggression for its own sake, then we are nearer the truth. And to take the final leap of faith in our houdini-like disenchantment with the modern myth of utopian productivity, all we need add is that capitalism is a tool which has evolved, not to enhance our natural productivity, but to allow a space in which we can fully vent our desire for escape from the responsibility for compassionate sharing, through the destruction of natural relations of exchange and the plunder of the ecosystem as a passive victim of our addiction to self-annihilation.

And if this seems at first incredible because it seems unlikely that we would travel to such ends merely in order to create a system which is in the process of progressively undermining its very foundations, we need to look at the ostensible myths of capitalism as the supposed opportunity for abundance and growth of the whole world into the economic paradigm of competitive stimulation. The reality is that, much as modern western technology purports to liberate the masses through increased material prosperity and political freedom, this hides what may have been partially true in the initial spurt of its golden age after the deluge of WW2, but which has become progressively less true in the context of the impoverishment of the majorities in developing countries, and the more recent growth of the divide between the rich and poor in the developed West. This new phase of Neo-liberalism is in fact a process of draining the last resources of global wealth from the deteriorating slum conditions of the undeveloped, who are subjugated with increasing levels of violence fuelled by the exponential growth in manufacture of ever more lethal weaponry.

So if the gains of technological emancipation through the opening up of covert systems of control have been slight in comparison to the onward march of destruction and the ever-tightening grip of paranoid security-infested cultures, this is the time to recognise the fallacies of the American dream of freedom and happiness for all the peoples of the earth. In fact the United Nations organisation and the Coalition of countries aligned behind the U.S. in NATO are engaged in a deadly game of Russian Roulette with their fingers twitching perilously close to the red button of ultimate apocalypse in a psychotic delusion
of grandeur. As Elaine Morgan said in face of the lack of any viable alternative to her Aquatic Ape Hypothesis, if this explanation works and we have no other alternatives as yet, then it would seem to be true. In other words, if the theory that the ghastly mess of genocidal proportions unfolding in the world today can be sufficiently explained by recourse to the idea that the whole system, including its myth of justification in capitalist economics, is really a pretext for the continued suppression of a more wholesome and harmonious acceptance of life and nature, then perhaps this is the last chance we will have. If I am wrong, then I feel the inevitability of a nuclear winter and the eradication of most of life on earth is the only logical result of a full-steam-ahead acceptance of the world as it is.

Since this last expansionist phase and exponential increase in technological production of the modern economic paradigm, it has become progressively more difficult to resist the ravages of the tightening noose of the privatisation of public spaces and the colonisation of public discourse by the advances of social media. For each step forward of the growing awareness of the freedom made possible by increasing levels of autonomy, there appears to be a paranoid recolonisation of cultural identity in service of the production lines of consumerism. This factor of economic coercion through the dual forces of compulsive consumption and mechanistic indoctrination, play on the gradual estrangement from nature which is the source of our vitality, and lure us into complicity with an agenda of doom populated by the demons of the paranoid imaginations of despotic military champions.

The only way to resist this indoctrination of the military-industrial complex then, is to recognise the hopeless state of addiction that goes with co-dependency and attempt to break out of the psychological conditioning which decrees citizenship as a passive subservience to an all-knowing technocratic elite. By this I do not mean, to echo the anti-globalisation economist Michel Chossudovsky, to go on the occasional march or the wearing of a badge or 2 giving token allegiance to some half-hearted petitioning of the political process which is busy burying you in a shallow grave. No, we have to completely reassess our whole lives in terms of the way that they conform to the economic necessities of materialism.

Obviously we can only do this as a transitional process in which we participate in group activities which substitute natural subsistence technologies for the parasitic creaming-off of the hugely wasteful militarised nation state. I suggest that the best way to effect a new awareness of our true potential is to start with the psychological aspect, and try to discover in our own ways the blockages of our own personality through the release and positive inputs of a reinvigorated relationship with nature. Whether this comes through engagement with simple processes such as growing our own food or moving to a more beautiful environment, or whether we are able to reconnect with a more authentic sense of self through deep introspection and discipline in our choice of lifestyle, the point is to create an alternative space, physical, emotional and mental, in which to re-orient our lives to peace as the fundamental principle of holistic being.
The End Times

In the last chapter I focussed on the need for an epic story of creation and belonging as a central feature of the desire for meaning in our lives, and also as a way to re-imagine a possible future free from the excesses of technological imperialism. In chapter 5 I outlined some ways in which we can develop our health as a means to greater happiness and an increasing awareness of sensations of the physical world as a source of wisdom and inspiration. These 2 elements, meaning and vitality, are the necessary ingredients of a holistic outlook on life which includes a vision of a more compassionate and sustainable future; but in order to enact this vision in the context of a world at war and an enduring legacy of poverty and ecological destruction, we have to rise above it all and ask the big question: what is it all ultimately for?

In Buddhist meditation, which I am using as a model of a dialogical relationship with the life force, the first principle which allows us to perceive the unity of all of life and transcend our own subjective fears, is that of the impermanence of all things. This is really another way of saying that because all things in life are part of a process of temporal growth and decay, we have to hold the idea of the absolute emptiness of form, or total relativity of meaning, as the basic stuff of our experience. This does not mean that our experience is not real, but that it is a partial view of the infinite totality of life which derives its meaning only from letting go of the individual grasping for permanence, in favour of a sensation of the eternal wisdom of what the Buddhists call 'beyond the beyond'.

Once we apprehend that our own individual part in life is fundamentally relative to the undefinable and mysteriously elusive quality of unified being, it becomes possible to breath more deeply in a relaxed way and sense the fathomless depth of wisdom of pure undifferentiated being as part of the whole. From here, the relative strife of the world which the Hindus call Samsara, or The Wheel of Illusion, can be understood as a stage in the evolution of consciousness, no less than an opportunity for ultimate self-realisation as a release from the subjective perils of physical life. Of course this is not to say that it has no meaning, but that what is happening in the world has to be seen in the larger context of the unknowable dimensions beyond human perceptions.

Perhaps on this basis, speaking from my own concern to find a relative meaning for my own life, what is happening in the context of the ultimate bid for power and total control through threatening to annihilate everyone with nuclear weapons, is exactly an attempt to grasp the final meaning of life as a whole and humanity's part in this process. This is to imply that if the motivation of those who toy with the idea of absolute apocalyptic destruction is one of the bid to transcend the limitations of their own egos, then the crucial question must be, what do they expect to find once they have gone beyond the necessity of a wholesome environment as the seat of life? My feeling is that
such thoughts do not occur in their minds because they are so bent on controlling everything and probably drug-crazed in one form or another, that the merest concept of a black hole sucking everything into it in an ultimate vortex of meaninglessness is sufficient to placate their minimal curiosity.

The six zillion dollar question then, is will they wake up sufficiently to entertain the thought that perhaps there is indeed something beyond the parameters of their own nuclear bunkers? Will the thought that wiping out all of life forever on the planet might not actually be such a great thing, actually coincide with the possibility that life could perhaps be bearable after all? And the answer obviously is that we will have to wait and see; but that whatever course of action we take to tip the outcome in favour of a viable place to live for the future, it will come from the same stable as the conundrum of nuclear apocalypse and the basic mystery of why we got into this mess in the first place!

Anyway, I don't think you can really go any further with this inquiry other than to joke about what to do when you hear the four-minute warning or whether, as in Raymond Briggs beautiful film 'When the Wind Blows', the milkman will still deliver on the 'Day After'! What I think is a more pertinent avenue of inquiry is the idea that we should be prepared for any eventuality and that this comes from a cultural grounding in a more natural understanding of death. Indeed when you realise how central is the understanding of the role of awareness of death in life, it becomes easier to grasp the sickness of modern culture as partly due to its trivialisation of death, and distraction in the material cornucopia of unlimited consumption.

So when we consider also the relative paucity of End Time Myths in our culture we can then see not just the nihilistic appropriation of the Revelations account of Biblical Apocalypse by a supremacist culture heading blindly towards an abyss of their own devising, but also the regular emergence of partial End Time Myths in such events as the Millennium, the abundance of 'Climate Armageddon' scenarios, and the recent 'Convergence' event focussed around the supposed end of the world predicted by the Mayan Calendar in 2012. To my mind this indicates a growing awareness of the relevance of mythological accounts of life and death amidst an extremely reasonable fear of total destruction.

And I am sure that there are plenty of people out there far better qualified and experienced to furnish us with a wealth of stories and rituals associated with dying, regeneration and the meaning of life in general. For my part I have long been taken by two simple ideas of death and the life beyond. The first comes from Gimbutas' book on the Goddess culture and describes how the body of the Goddess was often portrayed in clefts of rock out of which sacred waters flowed. The obvious association with birth serves as the foundation of a myth of being re-absorbed by the earth at death, and entering into the womb of the Goddess when the dead person's soul is conveyed back through the opening into the solidity and agelessness of the rocks.
The other story is even more simple and is depicted in various Celtic stories of an island, called Tir-Na-N'og, situated on the far western horizon which is the place where you go when you die. The various stories revolve around what happens when you get there and contain a kind of archetypal Davy Jones' Locker of symbols of death and reincarnation. The enduring fascination of this story for me is not just the association with the sun setting in the west and the fact that I have in fact spent most of my life gazing at the horizon over the sea in the West, but its appeal to a lover of the sea and the obvious metaphor of journeying gradually over the water to one's final resting place in a vessel which carries the timeless associations with the Ark, the Pharoah's golden ship or the boat across the river Styx to the underworld.