

## INTRODUCTION

A FEW years ago many of us believed that the rest of the world was 'underdeveloped', or, 'developing'. We assumed that we were all moving in the same direction: ours. We in the west were at the head of the line. We knew that, sooner or later, with some good will and our help—in the form of Foreign Aid and the Peace Corps—, everyone would catch up with us. We assumed that 'of course' other people would want what we valued: democracy, free enterprise, a free market economy, capitalism, the beliefs that are the foundation of our western world. And we knew that everyone wanted our bulldozers, nylons and antibiotics.

Today, politicians tell us that we won the Cold War, although it seems that it is not democracy that won, but the crudest forms of greed.

Strange as it seems in the west, it is quite possible to live without 'progress'. Even today there still may be people living in blissful ignorance of progress as we define it, although soon it may be impossible to find a place on earth that is not touched by our madness.

Many years ago I knew people who lived with less, not more. They aspired to *be* better rather than to have more. I found societies that knew no competition; in their world competition was taboo. I knew happy people who were content with life as it had been for a long time, they did not crave change. The people in those out of the way places would have seemed incredibly 'poor' to westerners. They did not think of themselves as poor, however. If nobody is rich there are no poor people.

I feel fortunate to have known people who had saner values than we have.

I no longer believe that Americans, or westerners, are at the head of the line, that others will follow our path because it is the only path, or the 'right' path, the path of progress. I am too aware of what has been lost, what we have rejected, what we have destroyed. I think I can see where our path is going, and it looks dismal and artificial ('man-,made'): too many people competing for resources in a world we no longer consider our mother.

More and more people feel concern for the earth. They see the destruction we have inflicted on what is our only habitat. The earth, I imagine, will survive. It is humankind that is endangered, more even than the thousands of species we do not tolerate to exist beside us.



This collection of stories is about people who live at various removes from western civilization. The farthest away from us are remnants of aboriginal people, who the media like to call 'Stone Age people'. They do not live as they did in the ages before knowledge of metals, of course, but they remind us what humans were like, long ages ago.

We must learn from them before it is too late.

Other stories are about people closer to us, people who share some if not all of the material things of our western world but who are not western. From them we can learn that humans need not feel alienated and alone, we need not be competitive, we need not be intolerant of others who are not like us. There are other ways to live.

These stories are not ordered chronologically. They show different points of view, different ways of being human. Together, I hope, they can open our hearts and our minds to human qualities we may have forgotten, repressed, or even destroyed.

In a real sense, these are love stories, stories about people I love.



By academic training I am a psychologist. I did research in some of the locations of the stories, but these are not research reports. They are vignettes that stayed with me long after the research reports had been filed and forgotten.

I am fortunate to have had unusual opportunities to learn about other peoples. I grew up in Sumatra, one of the islands of Indonesia. I lived in other countries of Southeast Asia. For ten years I lived in Europe. I lived and worked in Hawaii for more than thirty years.

The Malays of Indonesia and Malaysia are dear to me because I grew up with them. The warmth and nurture I received from them as a child gave me a taste of being loved unconditionally, a kind of love that is rare in western societies.

In Malaysia I got to know—and fell in love with—aboriginal people I knew as Sng'oi (a spelling that comes closer to how they say it, than Senoi, as it is also spelled). They gave me an inkling of what being human must have been like thousands of years ago, before we added the complications of civilization to our lives and before we forgot what it is to be a part of this earth.

After the time when I knew the Sng'oi I read accounts of western travelers and scientists who had known aboriginal people elsewhere. As I read their accounts, it intrigued me that Bushmen and pygmies in Africa, Eskimos in the high arctic, Australian Aborigines, and isolated tribes here and there, were described using the same words: peaceful nomads, non-violent, unaggressive. All of the

aboriginal peoples lived in areas of scarce resources, jungles, deserts or ice fields. They lived far from civilization, they were hard to reach and hard to find: they were shy. And all were nomads; some writers described them as migratory. They moved around, they did not settle. That meant to me they were people who knew their environment very intimately in order to be able to survive. They had few possessions. They did not have elaborate hierarchies of power or inheritance.

I often wondered what it was that affected me so deeply about the Sng'oi. Certainly, a kind of integrity that I had not felt in other people. I loved their joyfulness, their ability to be in the moment. I was moved by the strange synchronicities, as C. G. Jung would call the amazing coincidences that kept happening. How was it possible that people without a telephone knew that I was coming to visit, when I did not know myself until a few hours before I left home? Could people share dreams? How could one person know what another was thinking and feeling?

It took a while before I could let go of my own assumptions and presumptions, but I learned to experience the world as they did: a truly different reality. When one knows that all beings are one, inseparable, it is impossible to do violence, because the pain I cause you, is my pain.

My love for a people that experienced reality directly, not through layers of learned concepts of an artificial world, allowed me to re-discover a reality of my own that is as immediate and intimate as the world of the Sng'oi. I recognized this reality from feelings I always had deep inside and hidden; at some deep level I had always known that the world and I were inseparably one, but I had suppressed that knowing. My friends, the Sng'oi and other people of these stories, helped me regain that.



Westerners are intolerant of other ways to organize society, other ways to be human. We cannot accept that others may value different ways of being. We believe that others must want what we have and what we value.

Modern (western) science is so sure that it is the only truth, that it cannot accept other ways of learning about the world. Medicine, as a scientific discipline, is certain that all other forms of healing are 'quackery', and therefore cannot be tolerated. Quackery must be rooted out, destroyed. That arrogant insistence that ours is the only truth, has eradicated much knowledge and wisdom.

For some years my work took me to many parts of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Wherever I went, I recorded and collected what I could of dwindling information about methods of healing and herbal medicines. I became obsessed with the thought that I ran a race with time, that soon it would be too late

because no one would remember ancient traditions. It seemed that all such knowledge was being eradicated by our intolerance of other ways, other knowledge.

After increasingly frantic efforts, I had to accept that the information I collected was not very genuine, it had been watered down too much over the last hundred years or more of contact with the west. I found bits and pieces that had survived, but without the context of a healing *system*, these were no longer the ancient ways.

I was deeply saddened by what I thought was this irreparable loss of knowledge and wisdom.

In our rush to create man-made chemicals, we ignored age-old knowledge of the resources of the earth that were freely available all around us. We invented machines, but ignored talents we had inside us.

Until one day when I was in Tonga, an island kingdom in the South Pacific. Tonga is one of the few countries that has escaped colonization, although not the overlay of a foreign religion. I mentioned my feeling of sadness to a woman who had been pointed out to me as a 'gifted native healer'. So much knowledge and wisdom, I said, was lost through our efforts to eradicate native cultures.

She thought about that for a long time. Finally she said, "Yes, I know what you mean. Yes, we too used to have healers and much knowledge of healing. All that is gone." She paused for several minutes, then she sat up straight, looked me in the eye, her voice stronger and more affirmative, "But," and she pointed her hand at me for emphasis, "that is not the whole of it. You see, there have always been people who know healing inside. When it is most needed, someone will remember that ancient knowledge." She sat back, smiling. "The traditions may be lost, but the information is in here and in here," pointing to her head, then her heart, "and when we need it most, *it will out!*"

She was referring to herself I knew. Her gift of healing did not come from a western education, nor did it come from training in traditional healing. As she said, it came from within.

I know that what she said is true because I myself had experienced that 'knowing': when I needed it. When I needed knowledge of the world around me most, it was there for me. Not learned, but I 'knew'.

The people I asked had indeed lost much of their traditional knowledge of healing, as well as other traditions, but everywhere I found a few individuals who had re-discovered ancient truths and forgotten knowledge from a source inside them.

Native people might have lost the art of building boats as their forefathers had, but sailing in a 14-foot Boston Whaler on the open ocean, with no land in sight for twelve hours, they remembered how to find their way by the stars at night, and during the day by the currents and 'the little winds', as some

Polynesians say. What remains of old traditions is no longer a coherent system of knowledge and skills perhaps, yet individuals everywhere re-discover and re-create knowledge their foreparents had.

There are kahuna again in Hawai'i. A century ago, missionaries did everything they could to eradicate all remnants of 'heathenism' but somehow all knowledge was not lost. I knew one of these modern-day kahuna well (he called himself a kahuna lapa'au, a healing priest). He agreed that what he knows did not come to him 'in a straight line (from ancestors): but much of what he now knew and practised was re-created from his inner knowing. Others have said the same.



As I write this, it is 1993, almost the end of a century, perhaps the end of an era. In my world we are drowning in violence. What is worse, we can only think of 'doing something about' violence by applying more violence, more jail time, more jails. Ours is a history of violence. It seems all we know is control, oppression and intolerance to other ways of being.

To find non-violent people we must look very far back into our past, to times when humans were nomads, moving across the landscape as part of the landscape. Many, perhaps most of these people have been eradicated, exterminated by settled tribes who might have envied the wanderers their freedom.

## The People

THEY CALL themselves *Sng'oi* (also spelled Senoi, meaning people, humans. I prefer the spelling Sng'oi, with a glottal stop, because it sounds more like the way they pronounce the word Anthropologists and Government people call them Aborigines, some people call them *Sakai*, many call them the Little People. They are elusive and shy. The people of the country among whom they live, call them *Orang Asli*, 'the Ancient Ones' because they are thought to have lived in the Malay Peninsula from ancient times.

I had heard of the Aborigines, of course, when I moved to Malaysia: they were a mystery, few people actually knew them, they hardly ever came down from the mountains and the deep jungle where they lived. The Government estimated there were no more than thirty thousand of them left. "And that is probably a grossly exaggerated number," I was told. Government people showed me a map that showed where the three 'tribes' were: fairly large areas right through the middle of the country. There were no roads anywhere near.

I first met a few of these Aborigines when I visited anthropologists who were studying their language. They lived in a 'native hut': anthropologists make it a point to live as the people they study.

This village was large, just off the highway. It was quite different from the ones I would visit later. This was a show place. There were perhaps thirty or more people living in this village, twice or more what the normal population would be in an Aborigine settlement. They do not have settled villages, they are semi-nomadic, they move every few years. The people in this village were used to having visitors. They had lost some of their shyness.

We had dinner, a mixture of imported canned food and rice (again, not the usual fare, I would learn later). I noticed that very few of the People were eating, the meal had been prepared for the two anthropologists and myself, it seemed.

During and after the meal the anthropologists talked animatedly with their 'Informant', a bright older man with a wonderful twinkle in his eye. The little house was quite dark, and crowded with people. The anthropologists sounded loud in the small space. Sometimes I felt they were competing with each other to make points. I did not listen too closely to what they were saying, it sounded very technical, I was not interested in fine points of language, although later I wished I had learned some of those fine points when I had the chance!

The people of the village were soft-spoken, and—the strangest thing—there was always a little pause before one of the people in the group would say something. I had the odd feeling that they consulted with each other, and

perhaps designated one person to speak for all of them.

After dinner the conversation became even more animated, the hut reverberated with talk. I looked around and noticed that only three people talked: the anthropologists, a young couple from America, and the Informant. The village people seemed to have disappeared, or perhaps they were invisible against the dark walls of the little hut. Except for one tiny woman, who was cleaning up after the meal. She scuttled here and there, collecting plates, the cooking pot, cleaned up the mats on the floor. She was so silent and unobtrusive, however, that it was a few minutes before I realized what she was doing. She did not make a big show of cleaning up, she made herself almost invisible. When she came close, I whispered to her. She hunkered down near me, with a cup in one hand and the soot-black pot of rice in the other. I asked, did she lived in this house? She smiled a radiant smile and said, "Oh, I live in the house over there", motioning with her head over her shoulder, pointing with her lips, "I always clean up. If I did not clean up for them, this house would be eaten by ants and other animals. But don't tell her, she thinks she is keeping house." When I first arrived, Mary had mentioned how much work it was to live as the natives do, everything was so 'primitive', she said, but it made her feel close to the women.

I should have lost interest in the People. My first visit had been rather boring and frustrating. It had confirmed my perception of anthropologists as people who argue fine points of western scientific theory, without learning much about the people they are studying. I had learned almost nothing about the Aborigines at that visit, and yet I was strangely drawn to them.

A few days later I met a school teacher whose mother was Aborigine. He did not usually advertise his connection with Aborigines, he said. Sometimes he acted as a sort of liaison. if I were interested, he could tell me some things about them...

We talked about his mother's people, and very hesitantly he told me where there was a 'real' settlement. Most Aborigines lived deep in the jungle, never close to a road. He gave me directions. He told me where to park the car, at a little Chinese store, about 100 miles from where we lived.

"Ask at the store," he said, "they will tell you where the path is that leads to the settlement."

I asked a friend to accompany me. We found the store easily. The people at the store told us how to find the path. It would be about an hour's walk, they said, but easy to find. After walking perhaps an hour and a half, we knew we heard voices, laughter, people singing. We were tired and hot from our trek through the jungle but felt refreshed when we heard those joyful sounds.

Soon we arrived at a totally deserted village. Not a soul was to be seen, not a sound could be heard. Six empty huts stood randomly around a clearing.

We were tired so we decided to wait, thinking the people of the village would return soon. We talked softly, we did not want to break that reverberating silence. We did not hear or see anyone.

We waited an hour, two hours. We waited the rest of the day. Shortly before sunset we saw the face of an old man peeking around a hut<sup>1</sup>. He came forward very shyly. We looked at each other for a while. I said, in Malay, hoping he would understand, "we came to visit, I have met other Orang Asli, and wanted to learn more." I mentioned the teacher who had told us about this village.

He motioned for us to sit down again. He sat down across from us. He smiled the sweetest smile, and very softly he made known that since it was dark it was too late for us to return anyway, so we might as well stay the night.

He welcomed us in a mixture of Sng'oi, his language—which has a fascinating rhythm and what seemed like glottal stops<sup>2</sup>—, a few words of Malay, and signs. He was not really old, I discovered, perhaps in his early forties, but very wrinkled. He was a perfect host, self-possessed, calm, with great dignity. When he stood up he gave a hand sign and suddenly from all around us a dozen or so people came out, including some children.

By this time it was getting dark. Someone made a little fire. They cooked some rice, which, I learned later, is not their staple, but they had some in this settlement 'for special occasions'. We had brought some cans of sardines (our teacher friend had told us to bring food, 'they like sardines'). Someone put some vegetables on top of the rice that was cooking.

In the anthropologists' village someone had made a speech to us before dinner, apologizing for the poor fare, for the poverty of the village. A common enough ceremony in that part of the world, and a ritual that usually precedes a meal with important visitors. Here, the old man simply motioned for us to sit around the little fire and eat. They ate rice and vegetables; we, the visitors, ate rice and sardines. I tried to make them understand that we had brought the sardines for *them*, not for us. It took quite a while for them to understand, and accept, that we did not bring the sardines because we did not trust the food they would prepare for us.

On subsequent visits to this and other villages I would not bring sardines, or other gifts of food. Or, at least, I did not offer food until *after* the first meal or when I left.

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Since they move around, their houses are little more than shelters, often built high off the ground with a steep ladder: one space, no more than eight feet on a side; the house is used only for sleeping. Life is lived outside, in the open.

A glottal stop is as the little hiccup in the middle of the exclamation Oh-oh I have used an apostrophe to indicate this stop. Sng'oi: two separated sounds, 's(u)ng' and 'oy'.

We stayed most of the next day at the little village and had a wonderful time. The second day they all sang again, laughed and made jokes. I felt honored to be so accepted.

But then, I had hopelessly fallen in love with them. They were the most unusual people I had ever known. They had no neuroses, no fears (except of strangers, perhaps), they had an immense inner dignity, they were happy, content and they did not 'want' anything.

At that first settlement, communicating in a mixture of words and gestures that people use who do not know the other's language yet, we learned about who they were. I should also get to know others of the Sng'oi, they said. They told us how to walk to another settlement, not too far away.

And when later we did go to another village, someone there suggested yet another. We were passed along, from one settlement to another. That first settlement, however, I would return to many times. They became special friends.



I was working and wanted to spend time with my family, I could not spend all my time walking from one village to another. But there were weekends, or days, that I could make free. On one of those visits I was accompanied by the teacher. We went to a 'far' settlement neither of us had been to before. It was quite a walk, at least four hours, as I remember. The settlement was located high in the mountains; our walk included much climbing.

Until then, there had always been someone who would be sitting by the side of the path, about half an hour or so before coming to a settlement. But when we approached the mountain village, no-one was there to welcome us, and even when we got to the little settlement itself, it was remarkably quiet. No singing, joking, laughing. There were a few people around, however. They did not hide from us. When we asked what was going on, we were told that a small baby had died that morning. Two days old. Everyone in the village was very sad, they said.

My friend, the teacher, said, "Come, we see." I did not want to intrude on someone's grief, but he assured me it was all right. When we came to the hut where the little baby had died, there were more people, standing outside, who made room for us. In this settlement, the houses were built quite high. There was a steep notched bamboo that one climbed to get to an open 'porch', maybe two feet wide and four feet long.

As my head came above the floor of the porch there was a gasp from the four or five people sitting there. Then the teacher climbed up behind me, and said "It is all right, he is one of us." They made room. We sat around the tiny body lying on a little pillow.

Nothing was said.

It was obvious who the parents of the little baby were. They seemed no older than sixteen, perhaps. The mother sat in what was almost a fetal position, all closed in. Tears rolled down her face every now and then. She made no effort to hide them or to wipe them away. The boy, the father, sat next to her. He looked at his dead girl child with an expression of such sadness that it wrenched my heart. Occasionally he would lean over and stroke his wife's hair, or hold her hand.

We all sat silently. We were allowed to share their grief, a gentle grief, no loud sobbing, or tearing out of hair. But obviously a deeply felt pain that would leave a scar in their memories. I tried to imagine what it would be like to have to return the gift of a first child a few days after birth.

Finally, perhaps an hour after we had sat down on the porch, a middle-aged man sat up straighter and asked whether someone had a box to bury the little body in. Someone reached up from the bamboo ladder and handed up what looked like a shoe box, made of split bamboo. Some people left the little porch, others came up, among them an older man and woman, the parents of the young mother.

There was some talk I could not follow.

The teacher softly interpreted for me: the baby had to be buried with something that had been 'close' to it during its two days of life. The only thing that had been close was the pillow it was lying on, a square about twelve inches on a side, woven of very fine matting. 'Too bad to bury that new pillow', someone said. The pillow was new, it could be used again.

In the end someone suggested that, actually, it was not the pillow that had been close to the dead baby, but the little cloth that had covered the pillow. With a feeling almost of relief at this solution, the baby was put in the box (it had no lid) and someone picked up the cloth to put on top of the grave.

The middle-aged man, obviously a priest or shaman, carried the box through the village. We followed in a rag tag procession behind him.

We came to the edge of the village where some teen-aged boys stood around a hole they had dug. The shaman, carrying the box, waited until all of us—maybe a dozen people—had assembled around the little grave. Then he stepped into the grave, the box under one arm.

He talked to the little child:

"You. We are sad to say goodbye to you. You made such a long journey to come to us, nine months in the dark. And then, when you come out, you have to leave so soon. Here,"—he reached into the earth to scoop up a little soil—"this is dirt. Dirt is what the world is made of. You have never tasted dirt, but that is what this world is." He gently put some dirt on the lips of the tiny body.. "Here, taste it. At least you will have had a little taste of this world, before you go back again. Your mother is sad to see you go so soon, your father is sad, we are all sad, but we know that you have to go."

There was a pause. Then, "We let you go..."

The shaman, who had been stooped over the box, standing in the little grave, straightened up. He looked at the three or four boys who stood at the edge of the grave, and addressed them. The tone of his voice changed, becoming strong and loud:

"You, boys, listen well to what I am saying. Remember this. Because when I am gone, *you* have to carry on. Do you hear me? Are you listening? Pay attention, *you who have to carry on.*"

He put the box in the grave. He quickly covered the box with a little dirt. The boys shoveled more dirt with their bare hands, until the hole—a small hole for such a small body—was filled. The handkerchief-sized cloth that had been close to the baby was put on top of the dirt. More dirt was put on the cloth. Then stones were put on top of the little mound. We left.



The People are ancient. They are preindustrial, pre-agricultural even. They are nomads, they rarely plant crops, they harvest what they need from what grows wild in the jungle around them. When the little clearing they make for a settlement gets too overgrown, and when the jungle in the vicinity no longer provides what they need, they move.

Their ways have not changed much in a long time probably. They have few what we call material goods, they do not need them, they do not want 'things' they would have to carry when they move. They seem healthy, although they do not live long, according to our standards. Today they die from diseases we brought, diseases they never had before, diseases for which they have no natural immunity.

They keep themselves apart, although the world intrudes. The jungle they feel themselves a part of is being clear-cut and planted in rubber and other cash crops. Every year there is less jungle for them to live in.

Once, when I walked with a young man from one village to another, we talked about their shrinking world. I asked him about the changes he had seen in his twenty-three years. At some point in the discussion, when the difficulties and problems he listed seemed overwhelming, I blurted out, 'but what can be done'?

He smiled that achingly sweet smile that I associate with The People; we who are civilized do not know such smiles any more.

He said, simply, "Oh, we are dying (out)."

That is how I interpreted what he said. Literally, what he said was, "we are dead," or perhaps, "we died."<sup>3</sup>



Today I reflect on the peoples of the world that are extinct. I am saddened to think that humankind is entering a new century leaving behind the cultures, the creativity, the wisdom and the smiles of people we have so thoughtlessly exterminated.

Whether we know it or not, we are their heirs. We must not squander that heritage.

*Hey Us, don't forget, it is **we who** have to carry on!*

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We were speaking a very simple version of Malay, in which there are no clear tenses. Whether a speaker means past, present or future is for the listener to determine from the context. I *sense* that he meant, "we are dying out," we will die in the future.

## The Real World, The Shadow World

SOME PEOPLE, and they are the people we think of as primitive, live well without 'doing' much of anything. They do not have jobs, they do not work nine to five, they certainly do not work for anyone else. They do not farm, they do not have to take care of animals. All of them, women, men and children wander around and find things to eat: fruit, roots—they know their environment intimately. Of course, because they feel part of nature. They spend their days doing what they do best. Some like making things, they make canoes, or cloth, or pots, or they carve. Some like hunting or fishing. Some people have a talent for staying in touch with another reality, they are priests, shamans, healers. Some of them have a talent for making other people feel good. I have probably learned more from these so-called primitive people than from any other.

People who live very close to the earth, or the ocean, with very few of what we think of as necessities of life, live well. Sadly, it is no exaggeration to say that as soon as we come and bring them 'civilization', they plummet into abject poverty and ill-health.

The people I got to know—aboriginal people in Malaysia, as well as wonderfully healthy and self-sufficient aboriginal people on a few islands of the Pacific, in the mountains of the Philippines—were different from each other, of course, speaking different languages, with different customs. But they are alike in that they were happy. They were content.

These people were hard to find, because our aggressive and intense civilization has driven them to the most inaccessible parts of the world. They lived off the land or the ocean. They did not have to rely for any of their needs on the outside. They could find all the food they needed to sustain themselves, they could find or make material for shelter and clothing. They carved canoes, made blowpipes, they rolled a powerfully strong rope from the fibers of coconut husk. And beyond what they could find and make in their environment, they did not need anything, nor did they want anything more.

They enjoyed life, they *lived* life. Life did not live them, as happens to us. They enjoy each other, and constantly reinforced the bond they had with the others in their group by touching. They huddled around a little fire, they slept in a big ball. They often fed little tidbits of food to each other, they combed each other's hair. In that they were like animals who groom each other.



The Sng'oi could not read or write. There was no written language. They had a limited knowledge of what went on in the world outside. No, I must amend that: they did not know the details perhaps, but they knew the large facts of history as it was played outside of their world.

They obviously did not have an abundance of 'things'. In fact, I learned that they did not have *any* things, they thought the idea of 'owning' anything quite absurd. What few things they used, they made themselves. With a few exceptions: they did trade for cloth occasionally, although obviously not very often, each person wore only one little rag. Every settlement probably had at least one iron pan. They had some knives and parangs (machetes), but little else. Oh yes, some people liked hats, and had found or traded the most unusual hats I had ever seen.

The Aborigines formed a minuscule minority of the population of Malaysia. They were thought to be the 'original' population, people who had been there before the 'native' population of Malays, but there were so few of them left that often they were not counted. More important, they were not Muslim in an Islamic State. It seems the official Government intention was to 'integrate' them into the Malay population, even though ethnically, culturally and linguistically they were not Malay.

I was in Malaysia to study dietary behavior. As one wit said, 'to find out why they eat what they do and not what they should'.

The first thing I had learned was that I must *unlearn* many of the standard assumptions western scientists make when they get to know people in other cultures. Malays do not eat three meals a day, they do not eat bread for breakfast, and sandwiches for lunch. They do not eat salads. Malays eat rice at every meal (usually two meals a day, not three). Malays do not often sit down for a meal with 'the family'. Their concept of family is what we would refer to as extended family, and, in a Malay village, other villagers were thought of as family. Children, drifting around in small bands where smaller children were helped along by older children, would eat whenever they were hungry, wherever they could find something to eat. Children also often slept wherever they found themselves when they were sleepy.

The Malay diet is simple, adequate for the most part, although deficient in certain vitamins, as we discovered (in fact, that was one of the goals of our research: our studies confirmed what was suspected). The deficiency was not because there were no foods in their environment rich in vitamin A, for instance, but the result of beliefs they held about food.

Working with nutritionists and dieticians in the field I learned that these food and meal-preparing professionals almost without exception had the notion that once you tell people that they *must* eat more foods rich in Vitamin A, they would do so.

Strongly held beliefs about food, or anything else for that matter, do not change because someone tells you you 'should' do this or that. We who were trained in western universities, where knowledge is imparted as bits of truth, learn in the real world that people in general do not live in a world that is ruled by the kind of logic we learn in school.

Later, when I got to know the Sng'oi, I had to unlearn more. The Sng'oi do not sit down together for a meal (except for very special occasions), and their definition of 'family' is something we would not recognize. In a real sense every human is family to them. The Sng'oi do what nutritionists advise people with ulcers to do: they snack. As they wander around during the day, they dig up a root here, pick some fruit somewhere else. Often, as I would accompany one or more people on these daily wanderings, they would chew on a root for a while and then 'hide' it, usually in a tree.

"So that someone else can find it when they are hungry," they would tell me seriously. When I asked whether that someone else might be an animal, they said, "Oh, sure."

I did not see them eat meat as a regular part of their diet. They set traps and occasionally someone would be moved to go hunting. When they came back with meat all the people who were in a settlement at that time would share whatever was the catch of the day.

Small monkeys were a special treat, I was told. Cooking these monkeys was rather casual, not much preparation was required. They slit open the belly, removed the intestines, left most of the organs in the body, and threw the whole carcass on a little fire. The fire would singe most the hairs off the skin ('...because the hairs stick between your teeth', they said). I had never been much of a meat eater and I did not share much of the monkey they cooked when I happened to be there when some young men had caught two monkeys. Almost all of the meat was eaten, not much was left after the group was through. As do most meat eaters, they ate everything except hair, skin and bones (although the marrow of the bones was sucked out). Westerners are the exception with our wasteful (and unhealthy) preference for muscle meat only.

A choice part of the monkey, they said, was the hand, and particularly the thick part of the thumb. A monkey's hand looks like a very small human hand, with long very human-looking fingers. When I was offered that little hand, chopped off just above the wrist, I declined...

The Sng'oi often chewed on leaves. They ate fruit when they found it. They ate insects, grubs, and things I had never thought of as 'food'. I learned that flying termites, lightly fried in their own fat, are a true delicacy, for instance. On the whole not a bad diet.

A few settlements had little gardens, if someone was interested in growing some sweet potato, for instance, and interested enough to protect it from other beings who might be interested as well. But agriculture was not one of the things they did. Anthropologists categorize aboriginal groups as 'hunter/gatherers'. I saw much gathering and not much hunting.

I did not even try to figure out what their diet would be in terms that western scientists could understand: how many calories, vitamins A, B, C, etc. How much protein, carbohydrate, how much salt (some settlements had a small container with a dirty mess of salt and occasionally someone would go over and take a lick). When people do not cook food on a regular basis, if meals are not prepared for a known number of people, if there is no regularity in what people eat from one day to the next, none of the categories of scientific nutrition are applicable. Yet, obviously, they had survived on this diet for many centuries.

The Sng'oi I knew were spare. They were short, maybe five feet tall. I never saw a fat person. They were well-muscled, but sleekly muscled. They were quite vague about how old they were in years: in the tropics there are no seasons. I did not see any very old people, although many people were quite wrinkled.

I learned to question my own assumptions about many things. For instance, my idea that if you do not have the use of the machines we think necessary for survival you must have to work very hard. Obviously that was a cliché that needed to be thrown out.

The Sng'oi had all the time in the world. They did not slave in gardens, they did not work to get ahead, they were not stressed because they had office hours to keep. They enjoyed living, they smiled a lot. They sang almost all the time: little tuneless tunes they sang alone, or two or more people would sing together, making up words as they went along, which almost always led to much giggling and laughter when they stumbled in this game.

I quickly threw away my idea that people who do not have the advantages we have—our many choices of education, infinite forms of entertainment—would have to work so hard that they had no time for fun. What remains most vivid in my memory of the Sng'oi is their contentment, their *joy*. They had the uncomplicated innocence of children, although they certainly were not childish or even innocent. They so obviously were not stressed. There was nothing they 'had to' do. They wandered here and there. They sang, they made jokes. They laughed a lot. They were active all day, they did not sit around until after mid-day when it got hot (most of the people I knew lived in the 'high jungle', in the mountains, where it did not get as hot as it was down below, but warm enough to enjoy sitting in the shade of a big tree).

There was no 'disciplining' of children. Voices were never raised in anger. There was sadness sometimes, and they freely expressed that, as they expressed joy.



As I got to know them better, and as I stayed overnight in their villages, I learned another dimension of their lives. I learned that they literally live in another reality.

When it got dark people huddled together, for warmth and companionship. The times I stayed over they would often gather around me and have me ask them questions. The second night they would ask me questions. Very quietly and softly.

In the tropics there is no long period of dusk, it gets dark quickly. It would get cool and people would get closer together, reaching out, touching a neighbor, perhaps holding hands, or putting a hand on someone's thigh. Women might run their fingers through the hair of the person sitting next to them.

Our being together was not like other social situations I had experienced. We talked, but softly. They did not know how to compete for attention. A few words now and then were all that happened.

A question, or a comment.

A simple answer.

Long silences.

Sometimes someone would have some tobacco and light a 'cigarette' (tobacco rolled in a leaf they had found somewhere), which was passed around. In our jargon we might say they had little or no ego.

People might ask each other whether they had noticed that particularly bright patch of sunlight on the side of the river, behind a certain tree. Did they notice the large yellow bird that sang this morning?

Evening was a time of reflection, of gentle communication, of being together. I never knew blood relationships, but evening times felt like 'family'.

As it got later, one by one people would get up, go into one of the houses (often little more than lean-to's, or rickety huts on stilts) and fall asleep. Eventually we all had found an empty spot on the floor of one of the shelters, wrapped in our sarong, huddled together close to whoever else slept in that house that night. The houses did not 'belong' to anyone, no house was the exclusive property of anyone. It seemed that each of the four or five little shelters was for all of us. We would fall asleep wherever we chose to go, and, I am sure, with whom we wanted to spend the night.

Yes, people had sex, but even that was gentle, quiet and discreet. Occasionally someone might turn over and bump into a couple being a little too acrobatic, or noisy, and there would be a grunt. Or people might move away from a couple that made too much to do about their love making. Passionate love making between young people took place during the day, outside in a more hidden spot in the jungle, I was told.

In the morning, we might not wake up all at the same time, but those who woke up early would lie quietly, waiting for more people to be awake. And somehow, as if by magic, we would find ourselves sitting in a circle, rubbing our eyes, stretching to get the kinks out. One person would say, "I saw a bird, a beautiful bird...". Someone else would say, "Yes, I too saw a bird". "What kind of bird was it," another would ask. And so, we would create a story with images from our dreams.

The Sng'oi do not think that they are sharing dreams, as we think of dreams. They believe that the world we live in is a shadow world, and that the *real* world is behind it. At night, we visit that real world, and in the morning we share what we saw and learned in the real world. The story that is created around the memories four or five people bring back from the real world sets the tone for the day.

Sometimes one of the group would take the lead in soliciting input from each person in the hut. How about you? What do you remember? Other times the story flowed without help. A few times no story emerged at all. It was very obvious that when a more or less coherent story was created around the images we shared, we who had slept in that shelter would *live* that story that day. Most of the times the stories were simple: a bird had shown the way to a tree that was bearing fruit. Later that day some of us would find that tree, and of course it *did* have ripe fruit. Or the story was about a bad storm. People would stay close to the shelters all day, and, yes, there was a big storm in late afternoon.

Occasionally the stories were about things that affected all of them, all the people in that settlement, or perhaps even all the Sng'oi. In that case we would make it a point to share with the people who had slept in other shelters as soon as possible. It would take all morning to disseminate the story to everyone. I did not witness any attempts to 'call a meeting', but it was obvious that when a serious story came out of a morning's dream telling, all the people in the settlement would hear that story soon enough.

I learned about all this very early during the time that I spent with the Sng'oi. It was in what I thought of as *First Village*, the first settlement I visited, when I stayed overnight, that an 'important' story emerged from what I brought back from the *real world*. It made a big impression on me because part of the story came from my dream. I had a particularly vivid dream that night about one of our dogs, an all-black mongrel that seemed to have come with the house we rented in one of the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. We had tried to get rid of the dog, in fact one of the first days after we moved in, we had run over the poor dog in our driveway. But he would not leave. We tried chasing him away; he kept coming back. So we adopted him, of course, and called him *Jaga*, which is Malay for 'guard' (protector). I do not remember that Jaga was a particularly good watch dog, but he was around.

In my dream Jaga, who was a very quiet dog, had barked so loudly that I went outside to see what could be going on. I could not see the dog anywhere, which left me with a strange feeling of foreboding. I woke up 'uneasy'.

I shared this dream. A warning dream, one woman said. A good dream, they all agreed. But they wanted to know more. Since I could not see the dog in my dream it must have been a spirit warning, they said. The woman who sat across from me (there were, I think, four people beside myself that morning), asked what I had done after going outside and I could not see the dog. I tried to remember more details. It had not been an unpleasant dream, but yet in a strange way... yes, I had felt it as a warning. I could not remember what I had done in the dream after going outside and not finding Jaga. It had been dark in my dream.

"Of course, the dog is very black....," I said.

"Was it night?", the woman asked. "Yes," now I remembered, "it was early-early morning". Everyone nodded knowingly, that meant it was a warning for this day. A man who sat to the left of me said, was it a continuous barking, or a few sharp barks? Before I could answer, the little girl who sat to the right of me, said, Oh, she too had heard that sound, but she had thought it was a tiger coughing...

We all sat silent. Then I remembered, yes, it *had* been a sharp bark. In fact, it could well have been the cough of a tiger rather than Jaga's rather shy bark (tigers have many voices, of course; the roar that we often associate with tigers means one thing, a sharp 'cough' means something else. Indeed, a warning).

There was silence in our group. I was thinking that perhaps a tiger had been around in the night, that I had heard its bark and had created a dream around that, making the tiger's cough into the bark of our dog, Jaga. As if he had heard my thought, the man to my left spoke up, and said, "No tigers have been seen around the village for a while now, but of course it is always possible." Then he turned to me and asked whether I had ever dreamed of a tiger before? Yes, I told him. In fact, I dream of tigers not infrequently. I was a little embarrassed but I admitted that I *like* tigers. They all smiled.

In that case, the woman said, the warning is for *you*, and not for us.

She looked around our little group and asked, did anyone else remember any kind of warning? No, only the little girl who thought it had been the bark of a tiger. Other people spoke up, "there are many other animals that make a cough sound" (someone demonstrated the sound of a pig and other animals).

No, the little girl said, quite seriously, she really thought she had heard that tiger sound, but as if it were *very* far away.

"In that case," the woman said who, this morning, had taken on the role of interpreter, "it means that you heard the warning that Bah Woo heard (Bah Woo was the name they called me at that time). You heard the warning that was meant for *him*."

She turned to me, and said, "maybe the danger is *there*, at your house, not here".

All of the people in the circle looked at me with compassion. The man on my left put his hand on my arm and said, "somebody at home needs you".

I could not call home, of course, so I left soon after. When I came home one of my children had a medical emergency. I was glad I had hurried home.



There is something very powerful about sharing memories from the real world with a group of people that you have spent the night with, huddled together. I have come to think that it is not at all impossible that people sleeping so close together share some of their dream content—and that is putting it in the context of western thinking. I have come to agree with the Sng'oi that when we sleep we visit 'the real world', and when we can bring experiences back from there, it may help us live our day in this shadow world.

Very quickly I got used to the idea of spending a few minutes every morning, before getting on with the busyness of the day, remembering what I could of my experiences in the Real World. Doing it by myself did not work as well as doing it with a group of people, but often there is a message, a theme develops that colors my day.

Several months later I had a very unusual dream. At the time, I was traveling with a large group of people doing a survey of the *Nutritional Status of the Malays*. There were ten American physicians, ten Malaysian physicians, and at least a dozen supporting personnel.

I traveled ahead of the team, introduced myself in the chosen village, paid my respect to the Head of the village. How do you explain to people that they will be asked some invasive, personal, although fairly meaningless questions about what they ate? Or explain why every fifth person would be asked to produce a urine sample, every tenth person a blood sample? Or having to explain that we were a team of Malaysian and foreign doctors, who, however, could not *treat* them in any way (in order not to spoil the scientific design). We came with a half dozen or more vehicles, equipment, and we needed space to do our work. Then we asked them to 'volunteer', but when we had reached our predetermined number (one or two hundred), we would tell the rest of the people to go home, we did not need them any more.

I felt very stressed by the way the survey was conducted, and my role was becoming almost unacceptably embarrassing to me. I worked against my better judgment, I simply did not know how to say 'no'. Some of the scientists who had planned this survey (and similar surveys in other countries) were not concerned with the ethics of the project, I felt, nor with the people they used.

This dream occurred toward the end of the survey. My feelings at the time were anger, frustration, and embarrassment. I had a *dark* dream, a nightmare: it woke me up from a troubled sleep.

The dream was vague, but it scared me, although I could not say why.

I decided to imagine that I was sharing with a group of people in a Sng'oi settlement. I could not do much with the dream by myself, I was too shaken with a sort of nameless dread, so I conjured up a sharing with some people I remembered.

In the dream I was traveling somewhere, at great speed. I was driving a car, not my own. I could not remember where I was going, although the feeling tone of my dream suggested I might have been *fleeing* from something. It was dark in my dream.

This is how my imaginary sharing went.

A young woman who I imagined sitting next to me began to shiver, she added, 'I too remember a dark place, and it was *cold*'. Yes indeed, it had been cold in my dream as well.

Then an older woman who I imagined sitting across from me said she had come back from a place that was dark and cold, and a *voice* had talked to her. Not a human voice, she added. A sigh went through the group (I imagined six people around me). Yes, others also had heard a voice that was not human. A ghost voice, somebody whispered.

They turned to me and asked me to think back, it was very important since it was a spirit (ghost) voice. What else could I remember?

Slowly details came back. Yes, it was cold and dark and I too had heard a voice, a voice from a radio. I explained 'radio' to my imaginary friends: a disembodied voice coming from a machine, made by people. The voice belonged to a person far away, not a ghost.

A young man spoke up and said that the voice from that box was probably 'The Voice Of Government'. Did I think the voice had been The Voice Of Government?

Yes, now that you mention it, indeed it had sounded like an *official warning*... about a war?

As soon as that thought occurred to me, I thought, that is strange, there is no war. (Of course, for the duration of the survey, maybe a month at that time, we had been almost totally cut off from the outside world, we had not heard news, we had not even seen newspapers).

The—imaginary, but by now very real—seeming—woman sitting across from me said, "Go back to driving the car. There was a warning from the Government. What did it say?"

Suddenly I remembered the whole dream. It was indeed a warning, a Government warning, over the radio, one of those droning voices that announced some sort of emergency, with instructions to do this or that. A warning that had upset me so much that I was running 'madly'. I was running away from my own fear of what the disembodied voice had announced.

I tried to explain that the warning had made me afraid. Oh yes, they understood that quite well. A sort of panic. Yes, they could feel that.

The whole imaginary group was now in a state of suspense. What did this mean for me? A very young child piped up. She had seen a big, black *bird*, she said (children often see birds in the Real World, I thought to myself). When asked what kind of bird it had been, she began to cry. It was not an alive bird, she said, it was *very* big, as big as... she could not think of anything that big. A young woman, who sat next to her (next to me), took her on her lap and comforted her. "What did the bird do," she asked the little girl? "The bird pooped," the little girl said, "and the droppings made a 'bad' noise when they hit the ground. "

"A 'bad' noise," someone said, with almost a snicker in his voice?

"Yes," the little girl said, "the poop went BLAP," and she clapped her hands together.

"But *much* louder than I can make," she added.

"The poop went BLAP, *BLAP*."

The girl was obviously serious, we were all still.

I decided my fantasy sharing had gone far enough. I now remembered my dream, and I could think about it more rationally. The dream had been unpleasant, dark and cold, with a warning about something that I could not place. A warning about 'war' triggers memories of my five years in Holland during the German Occupation in World War II: a dark, cold, very unpleasant time in my life. I decided that the dream was my way of dealing with my anger and frustration with the survey: Westerners are good at explaining things away, particularly bad things. I tried to go back to sleep. I could not.

That day the survey team caught up with me, as they did every few days. We had surveyed, I think, eight Malay villages and were now in the northwestern part of Malaysia. We would overnight at a Government Guest House near Alor Star. There were two more villages to do after the one the team finished that day.

They finished in the afternoon. Late in the afternoon I sauntered through the streets of Alor Star with some of the Malaysian members of the survey. It was close to sundown. On one street, fortune tellers were packing up their paraphernalia, making ready to go home for the day. One of them had a bird, which would pick a fortune card from a deck, my friends explained. The fortune teller had just covered the bird's cage when we walked past.

I turned around, curious about the bird. It seemed a very ordinary macaw. The fortune teller looked at me, scowled, and said it was too late to get my fortune read. As I turned away he said, in a rush of words, *You have four sons, and you will see them tomorrow.*

I remember saying to my friends, "How could that man know that I have four sons? He certainly got that right, but I am not seeing them tomorrow, because we have almost a week more to go working with the Survey before we can go home."

A few minutes later we got back to the Guest House.

There was a message for the Americans from the Embassy, saying that the international situation was tense and uncertain and all Americans should come back to Kuala Lumpur (the Capital) as soon as possible. The next morning before daybreak, a plane would be waiting for us at Penang airport.

The next morning, before day break, the Americans on the team went to Penang.

We were flown to Kuala Lumpur.

I did see my sons.

Fortunately, President Kennedy was able to deal with what later became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.



Many months after that, when I felt I knew them better, I told a group of Sng'oi of that dream and how I had *imagined* a group of them sitting around me, helping me figure out what it might mean. It was evening, we were sitting around telling stories. They thought it quite unremarkable that I would have a sharing with imaginary people. They did not like to think about ever being away from their settlement, but if they were separated they would certainly imagine their people around them, particularly in the mornings, for telling what they had seen in the real world. When I came to the part of the big, dark birds, whose droppings went BLAP with a great noise, there was a wave of indrawn breaths in the group. If I thought I was the only one who could understand that image, I was wrong. They all seemed to know about planes dropping bombs. There was a long silence. Nobody seemed to want to break the mood.

I felt guilty that I had brought my so-called civilized, warring world into their settlement. I worried about people having bad dreams. I tried to change the subject, made a joke about something else.

We did not go to sleep until quite late that night. I slept, touched by at least eight arms.

The next morning nobody seemed to have had bad dreams. The story in our hut was light, about a yellow bird that called other birds to come see a *huge* flower. I did not pay much attention. The story did not seem important to me.

Later that morning the youngest child who had slept in our hut took my hand and said, "Come, let's go look at the flower." For a minute I did not know what flower she meant, but then I remembered the story of the morning. I smiled. She took me quite a way into the jungle, away from the village. She chattered about the plants we saw, about animals she knew were hiding from us. No, hiding from me.

"They do not know you yet," she said.

"When you come back another time, you will see them."

After almost half an hour of leisurely walking on what might be a path, we came to a sort of clearing. There were others of the settlement already there, sitting around the edge of the clearing. In the middle was a *huge* flower, on the ground. There was no visible plant. The flower had an *extremely* bad smell. The smell did not seem to bother anyone. Its 'petals' looked and smelled like very old, very rotten meat.

We sat and watched the flower, then we went back, a few at a time.

I asked why they came to watch that flower. They could not understand my question. After all, it was in *our* house that the story had originated when we talked about dreams. Of course they would look, the yellow bird had told them to go see the unusual flower.

Later I learned that *Rafflesia* is indeed rare, not too many people have seen one. It is a parasitic plant that grows only in the jungles of Malaysia and Sumatra, has flowers as much as 3 feet across, no visible stems, roots or leaves. Yet it is a plant, not a fungus, and, as the encyclopedia says it has 'fleshy' leaves that have a penetrating smell. Yes, indeed!

I decided to leave in the early afternoon. I could just make it to my car before dark, and then it would only be an hour or so until I was home. We stood around saying goodbyes. I felt I should apologize for bringing that story about war and planes and bombs. One of the two older men in that settlement took my elbow and we moved aside a little.

"Do not think that we do not know what goes on in your world," he said.

"Do not be afraid to tell us things about your world. We would rather, *much* rather, hear it from you than from anyone else. We need to know."

I looked at him. He seemed deeply in thought.

I waited.

"We know (what is happening in the world)," he said.

"For a long time we could hide from the world, we could be ourselves. Soon we will not be able to hide, then we cannot be people (Sng'oi) any more."

He paused again, then continued, "we need to know."<sup>4</sup>

He walked away, not looking back.

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His words were, "once we could be lost, now there is no place (left) to be lost...". The dialog is as I remember it. I never carried a tape recorder, I traveled light.

## Trees in the Jungle

AN OFFICIAL of one of the Government Departments said, sounding frustrated, "Next time you visit those people (Aborigines), find out why they are so stubborn!" He explained that Malaysia had a 'Land Development Scheme', which would increase productivity, income, Gross National Product, in short be of great benefit to the country. Under the Scheme, thousands of hectares of virgin jungle were clear-cut each year, to be planted in rubber. Malaysia's wealth at that time came mostly from rubber and tin. The Government had repeatedly contacted Aborigines living in an area that was to be cut, and offered to pay them to tap the trees when they were mature enough to be harvested. It had been explained to the Aborigines that the Government would cut the jungle down, plant rubber trees, would care for the trees for two years, keeping the ground around the trees clear of weeds (using arsenic), then, when the trees were big enough to be harvested, all the Aborigines had to do would be to tap the trees, collect the rubber, and get rich.

Rubber is the sap of the rubber tree: shallow diagonal cuts are made in the bark of the tree, the sap (latex) runs down the cut and is collected in a little cup. Each day, the latex, which has hardened a little, is collected. Little processing is needed to make rubber, although, of course, we have 'improved' on the natural product by adding chemicals. There is some skill involved in cutting the trees, but not much. Cuts cannot be made too deep (the tree might be killed), and today's cut has to be as close to yesterday's as possible, so that every inch of the bark of a growing tree can be tapped.

It seemed like a risk-free offer to the gentleman from the Government, and he could not understand why, consistently, the Aborigines had smiled and said, No thank you. Maybe I could convince them that it was all in their own benefit to participate in the Scheme, he said.

I said I would try to find out how the Aborigines felt.

When next I visited an Aborigine settlement and we were sitting around in the early evening, I told them what the Government official had told me about the Land Development Scheme, and the role they, the Sng'oi, could play in it. What did they think?

As usual there was a long silence. People looked thoughtful but nobody said anything for a long time. I thought perhaps they had not understood the question.

I repeated, "The Government is cutting the forest so that they can plant rubber trees. They ask whether you want to learn to 'cut' (tap) rubber trees to earn

money. You do not have to do anything until after two years, when the trees are old enough to be cut. All you need to do is make the cuts in the trees (some people nodded, yes, they had seen that done, they knew how to do that), collect the rubber, bring it to the Government, and they will pay you. Pay you well."

A longer silence.

Finally one man spoke up, also, as usual: he obviously spoke for the group.

Yes, he said, they had heard about that from other settlements where Government people had come to tell other Sng'oi about that.

There was a slight hesitation in his voice, then he continued, "To make it clear to you: when you cut the forest, and then you plant *one* tree, you can grow only that *one* tree. After that the soil is dead."

They all nodded, yes, that was true.

I was not sure I had understood, but that was all they would say. They smiled but they did not answer any further questions.

Back in town, I asked my own questions. The average life span of a rubber tree is forty years, a rubber planter told me. After the first generation of rubber trees, well, yes, he guessed, they sort of let things go after that. But he thought you could probably plant more rubber trees, maybe with some fertilizer added or something. He was not too clear about the future, he was too involved getting as much rubber out of his trees in the forty years that they would grow. To him forty years was more than enough to make his fortune, and go back 'home' (England), a rich man. I went back to the Government Department where someone had asked me to 'explain' things to the Aborigines. When I gave the very short and rather simple-sounding answer they had given me, it did not make much impression on the officials in the room. Their faces showed clearly that they felt this was another typical Aborigine evasion and not really an answer.

In the back of the room an Englishman was on the telephone, he joined us a little later. I repeated that the Aborigines I asked had only said, 'when you cut the forest and grow *one* tree, after one generation the soil is dead'. He got excited, took my arm, *Come with me*.

We got in his Landrover and went for a short ride to an Agricultural Research Station just outside Kuala Lumpur. On the way there he explained that they had chosen a small section of jungle, one hectare, they had roped it off, making a grid by marking trees and using rope. Now they were doing a census of all the plants that grew in that small area. One hectare is about two acres.

When we arrived he showed me the one hundred meter (about three hundred feet) by one hundred meter square, with lines marking smaller squares. Then he took me into a little shack where they kept the paperwork. They had finished counting the trees, he said, now they were counting shrubs, bushes and vines. And after that, he said, would come the even more difficult job of counting the smaller stuff on the ground, the mosses, lichens, and other minuscule plants.

"And," he concluded with obvious regret in his voice, "we cannot even *begin* to look at the organisms in the soil."

I do not remember the count, but there were, say, three hundred trees there. Then he said, "The most amazing thing is, that with all these trees there are very few species with more than one individual." The trees in the census plot were all different. There were at most two, rarely three of the same kind.

He sat me down; we were going to have a lecture. He explained that because this jungle looks so lush, so rich in plants, all different, most people think it is the soil that is so rich that it can support all that variety.

"Not so," his voice reverberated inside the little shack, "*not* the soil. It is the *variety itself* that makes the richness possible."

What one plant takes out of the soil, he said many times in different ways, another puts back into the soil. "It is not the soil, it is the air and the moisture that grow this astonishing variety. Our warm temperatures, without extremes, the constant high humidity, *that* makes this variety possible."

He sat back in his chair, our knees almost touching in the small space.

"And as for rubber only growing one generation... Of course they are right, those friends of yours. Absolutely right. After forty years the ground is so depleted you could not even grow grass on it. That is an exaggeration, of course, grass grows on concrete, but you see what I am getting at. After forty years or so, that soil is *dead*."

I began to understand more about a people who had a completely different way of seeing the world. Forty years is a long time, I doubt that the average life span of a Sng'oi was much more than forty years. They based their refusal to tap rubber on something that would not affect them in their lifetime. The Aborigines were obviously not interested in getting rich. And they knew their environment intimately; they knew what western scientists are only now learning, and, one might add, what western farmers still completely ignore.

Forty years is too far into the future for most Westerners to think about. We run businesses looking ahead to the next quarter, governments run from year to year. Some countries have plans for the future, but I do not think there was one country, besides China, that ever had even a 'Ten-Year Plan'. More commonly a country might have a five- or three-year plan.

Westerners would have grabbed the opportunity to earn money for forty years. After that, well, something else will come up. We can save for forty years while we get paid well and after that live on the interest of what we saved. It is hard for us to imagine rejecting such an opportunity.

The Sng'oi did not have much use for money, they did not need it. They rarely went anywhere where they could spend money, and there was not much that they wanted to buy.

No, this was about *land*. They may not have felt they owned it, but it was their world. They could not be party to killing the land. The jungle was the medium in which they existed, they were part of the jungle. They could no more kill the forest than they could destroy their own skin.

They sometimes made jokes about people who felt they could own land. A child had said to me, "Neh, how can you own ground (dirt, soil), *we belong to the ground* (if anything, the land owns us)."



Later, much later, another official working for the Land Development Scheme took me aside and asked what I could tell him about this crazy notion that the Aborigines did not own land, they owned *trees*?! It seems they had started to clear the jungle somewhere and had been told that a certain tree belonged to an Aborigine man. He did not think that the person who had told him, was the owner of that tree, but apparently the person felt he should protect the tree because he knew it belonged to someone.

Could they have cut around that tree, the official wanted to know? Should they leave that tree, to be surrounded by the rubber they would plant? They were willing to do that, but someone better tell them quick, so that they would know which trees to leave.

I explained as well as I could what I knew about trees and people belonging *with* each other. It was not exactly ownership, I said. The Government man got very impatient.

"Well, is it or isn't it? If something belongs to you, you own it."

I tried to tell him that it was like his name, it belonged with him, but he could not sell it. That did not make much sense to the government agent. He was too busy to listen further. As he walked away, he looked back and said over his shoulder, "Tell your friends that if we cut one of their bloody trees, we shall pay them compensation. But *they* have to ask for it. We have no time to ask around."

## Slaves

MODERN MAN has many names: a first name, a family name, often a middle name, his nation-name, and more. The nation-name occasionally has the flavor of an ethnic identity, but national boundaries—drawn for political reasons, not for reasons of cultural affinity, language or 'ethnicity', whatever that is—usually include a hodge podge of peoples who happened to be caught within those imaginary lines drawn on a map at the time that particular slice of the earth was made into a country. Hence our need to invent names that are more descriptive of who we are. We call ourselves Native American, African American, Irish-Catholic American, Quaker, Mormon, Amish. Or we coin words that describe where we are from, Southerner, Californian.

There are still a few people in the world who are survivors of a time when none of those distinctions existed. They think of themselves as The People, and their name for themselves is whatever the word for 'human' is in their language.

In Malaysia, a new Constitution recognized three large groups of citizens (three different 'races', the laws of the land said). These three races were ranked, more or less in the order in which they had migrated into what was now a country, earlier arrivals having more rights than later arrivals. The Malays were considered the 'first', although the Aborigines certainly predated them in what was now Malaysia. Malays were called *Orang Kebangsaan*, people of the nation; they called the aborigines *Orang Asli*, 'the Ancient People' if they were polite, *Sakai*, in common usage. .

Most Malaysians had probably forgotten that the word they used for those strange, primitive, very shy people living in deep jungle in the mountains, meant 'slave'. They rarely thought about those jungle dwellers who wore few clothes and were rarely seen anywhere. In fact, the Sakai, The Slaves, were an almost mythical people, few people knew much about them.

After I got to know the Sng'oi, The People, and when I knew they accepted me, I apologized for having spoken of them as 'slaves' before I knew what they called themselves, and before I realized what the word sakai meant..

We were sitting around the embers of a little fire, in the early evening. There was a flickering oil lamp on the 'porch' of one of the little bamboo houses—really not a house but a semi-permanent shelter—that shed some light. In this settlement there were four houses; no more than fifteen people lived here. After the sun went down, we sat around, talking now and then, mostly just being together.

I had learned a little of their language, I tried to understand some of what they were saying, but I never became really fluent. My apology was a simple phrase. I

said I hoped they did not mind that I had called them 'Sakai'. I was not sure whether I had said it right: for a long time there was no reaction at all. I imagined that I saw smiles on a few faces, but it was dark, I could not be sure.

Long silences were not unusual. Someone would say something. There would be a silence, and finally *one* person would answer. I often had a strong feeling that this one person obviously spoke for the group, but how did he or she know what to say for the group?

This time, again, one person answered. He—an adventuresome young man, I was told later—spoke slowly, simply, for my benefit perhaps. "No," he said, "we do not mind when others call us *Sakai*. We look at the people 'down below': they have to get up at a certain time in the morning, they have to pay for everything with money, which they have to earn doing things for other people, they are constantly told what they can and cannot do." He paused, and then added, "no, we do not mind when they call us slaves."



Twenty years after I had that conversation, I read what a few authors had written about other aboriginal peoples in other parts of the world. Laurens van der Post, a South African author, describes how even as a child he felt driven to learn what he could about the Bushman. As an adult he is able to arrange an expedition to the Kalahari desert where he finds a small band of Bushman (the word is always singular in his writing, They call themselves San, which means 'human'). They are a remnant: they had been hunted and killed by the black man as well as the white man in Africa, not many survived at that time (a few years after World War II).

Laurens van der Post writes that what sets the Bushman apart from other indigenous peoples was that they could not be 'tamed'. In Africa, if an aboriginal was jailed, he died. 'For no good reason' as white historians would write. Perhaps aboriginal people are the only remaining 'wild' humans (wild not in the sense of crazy, but untamed). Laurens van der Post suggests that these pre-agricultural people were not caught in what he calls 'the tyranny of numbers', the idea that there is strength in numbers: they survived in small bands (as did the Sng'oi and other aboriginal peoples I read about).

Aboriginal people everywhere never settled down in permanent settlements. They roam the landscape, never organizing themselves into a tribe. They have no government, no leaders. They are free: and that, of course, is why they have been hunted down, often ferociously, by civilized people everywhere. We may no longer hunt them down today, but we 'integrate them' into populations that are controlled by a government.

It was ironic to find Malaysian aborigines called 'slaves', when they may be one of the few peoples left on earth who are free.



After knowing The People for a year or so, they named me. Not formally. It was not a name that was bestowed on me in a ceremony, it was more a nickname. Someone had probably referred to me as *Elephant*, and the name stuck (for a while at least, it 'faded' later on).

I did not like the name.

In my mind it meant they thought me 'lumbering', awkward, big. I am not big, not massive as elephants are, but I am taller than most of the Sng'oi. My mind was stuck on an image of circus elephants doing silly tricks. I was slave to my own clichés.

Only later did it occur to me that they may have meant something entirely different when they called me, *Elephant*. They had never seen a circus, they would not know elephants who did tricks. And I did not know what an elephant meant to them. Until, one evening, long after the sun had gone down. Only a few people were still awake in the hut where I would sleep that night. There was a slight rustle outside; the sound was of someone tip-toeing very lightly through dry grass.

"Gaja (elephant)," one of the women whispered.

"They are *very* curious, and they walk very softly," a young boy added, also in a barely audible whisper.

I do not think I said anything, but the catch in my breath must have given me away.

"Elephants are also *very* careful," the boy said, "they never step on anything."

## The Mango Tree

THE PEOPLE are quiet, they smile rather than guffaw, they never argue. I remember all discussions as slowly paced, thoughtful, and strangely orderly, as if people took turns. I cannot remember ever hearing two people speak at the same time. There was always that little pause, when everyone looks in the middle distance, then one person will speak, as if he or she were the designated speaker.

For quite a while I thought about that. I could not imagine that they were 'telepathic'. But they certainly seemed to know each other's thoughts. Of course, they live together, they are around each other all the time. They have to know each other intimately. Maybe that would be it, I thought. But it remained a baffling and confusing fact.

Gradually, I came to realize that their world, their reality, is what we would call a spiritual reality, it is not the tangible reality we are more familiar with. It is a reality where things are 'known' without thinking or abstraction; I cannot think of a better way to say that.

In the two years that I knew some of The People, I visited several settlements. sometimes with someone to guide me. There were no addresses or maps, of course. After all they moved about. Usually, someone had talked with someone else, who had talked with someone else, who had seen a particular group of people near a certain waterfall. I could not drive anywhere near where they lived, so we would drive to what we thought might be near enough, park the car, often at a little country store, and we would walk.

We were *always* met by someone about half an hour from the village. He, or she, seemed to be waiting for us. As we came along the person would silently get up and walk in front of us the rest of the way. Not much was said, if anything. The People did not have telephones, there was no way to let them know we were coming on a certain day, in mid-afternoon. My visits were often unplanned, depending on whether I could get away from home or work. I would decide in the morning, or a guide would show up and say, let's go. How then did they know to expect us? Obviously they did know; I was grateful. After the first few times, I expected to be met.

Once I asked the person who had sat by the side of the path, "who told you to come out here to meet us?"

Nobody told him, he said.

"Then, how did you *know* to meet us?"

No answer, but a beautiful smile.

I could not understand, and I could not let it be. So I asked another person

waiting by the side of the path another time, "Why are you here?" He was an old man, sitting by the side of the path. He looked up with surprise. "To show the way," he said with a shrug. We had followed an obvious path for more than an hour. Did he think we would not have found his village without his help, then?

"Perhaps," he said.

In time there were a few people who became special friends. To one of them I confessed that I was stumped. I could not figure out how they knew things. He laughed, *he* could not figure out how *we* knew things either, he said. The conversation stopped there.

A little later he volunteered, "Maybe we do not understand each other because we do not know to ask the right questions."

Yes, that was what I felt many times when I got those simple answers that did not answer anything—perhaps I had not asked the right question? So I said, "One of the things that is hard for me to understand is why there is always someone on the path before I come to a village. How do they know to meet me?"

"They do not come to meet you," he said.

"Then why are they sitting by the side of the path as we come by?"

"They are just sitting there."

"Do you mean, someone is sitting alongside the path because... for some other reason?"

He did not answer that. Was it my conceit to think they were waiting for *me*?

I was beginning to feel like one of those stupid dogs that bites and then cannot let go. I turned to my friend and asked him whether he sometimes just goes out and sits by the side of the path. Yes, he said, he would do that sometimes.

"And then? After a while you just go back and go about your business?"

Yes, maybe.

But usually, ...it would become clear why I was there.

Those were not his words, but that is my interpretation of what we talked about that afternoon.

Someone would have an inspiration, let's say, to follow one of the many paths in the jungle. He would have a 'feeling—that is not the right word, either—to wander. And whatever he or she would find, a particularly wonderful fruit, or a visitor to the village, or an animal that they could hunt, became the 'reason' for coming that way? Was that how it worked? You followed your intuition and then whatever happened was why you had the intuition. My clumsy western way to express what was not a western kind of behavior.

The People, of course, did not hang around a settlement very much. During the day they wandered here and there, sometimes in small groups of two or three people, often alone.

I had assumed they were 'looking for food', because often I would see them munching on something, and, in my thinking one always has to 'do' something. I had accompanied people on these vague wanderings. They were doing what I thought of as looking for food. But maybe that was just my interpretation, that was how I perceived what I saw. Maybe they were not 'doing' anything at all, they were just drifting, food was where they found it. Most of the food gathering they did was as casual as that, it seemed to me. No definite plans, they just floated this way and that.

In fact, when I thought about it, they rarely seemed to *look* for food. They would wander around, and look under a leaf, follow a path a little ways, sometimes they would dig and find a root, or reach up and pick a fruit. It all seemed very casual, unplanned. They were happy, it was fun! They would laugh at a small animal tripping over its feet as it scuttled away. They would stop and admire a flower, or a shaft of sunlight through the canopy of the trees far above. Often they would hum a little tune, while they seemed almost to dance from this tree to that bush, do a little step, then on to another tree. When they were with two or three others, they would rarely talk, but often hold hands, or reach out to touch a person walking beside them.

Maybe it was just happenstance that when we approached a village there would be someone sitting by the side of the path? Always? By chance? I still do not know.

In my reality it makes no sense, I cannot explain. In their reality it is what happens.

One thing I did finally understand and accept: they were not waiting for *me*. They were just sitting there as I happened along. Only then did it become clear to the people who were sitting by the path that '*to escort a visitor*' was why they were waiting. As we came by, they joined us, they '*showed the way*'.

When I understood this much about The People, I realized how truly different their reality was. My reality is made in my head, I create roles for myself, I create a structure that requires certain activities, prohibits other activities. I live in time, I have an agenda.

Their existence has no reality until they live it.

They do not plan their life, they do not say to themselves or to each other, today we do this or that. They do not say 'today we are going to have a visitor' (not an unusual occurrence, by the way. I was astonished to learn how much they traveled, visiting other groups, or just traveling for the sake of traveling).

Each day a blank page, to be written as one lives it.



I tried to imagine what it would be like to listen to my intuition, inspiration,

whatever one calls that inner voice. In my world that is almost impossible, of course. We live by schedules, appointments. We eat when the clock says it is time to eat. We go to sleep after the news, which comes on at 10pm. In my world we cannot live another way. From earliest childhood we are told to plan, to think about the future. We must have goals. We impress upon children how important it is to know what they want. And from the first day of life we are also told that some things are 'real', everything else is imagination.

What would it be like to live in a world where I did not need to want anything? Where I would follow my nose? A world where food was found, not bought, prepared, preserved, planned? What if I lived in a world where, if an interesting stranger came along, I could spend my time with him: being with a visitor is the thing to do NOW. What if I too could live in the now?

As a scientist, I decided I must try. I would have to experience how that feels. I told myself that for one day I would set aside any agenda I might have. I would just be, as The People seemed to just be.

Immediately I discovered that it was extremely difficult to change my usual behavior. It was very stressful not to have an agenda, not to wake up with a clear idea of what I was going to *do* that day. I felt lost, adrift, without the security of a schedule, goals and objectives.

The first day I tried this experiment, my mind raced all day. I could not stop 'thinking'. *What if - did I forget something - should I do something else - was it time for a meal yet - did I feel tired - maybe I should - what did I feel - what is going on?*

In fact, my mind was so busy that at the end of the day I was exhausted, and I realized that if I *had* an inner voice I could not possibly have heard it over the roaring noise of my mind. Gradually, I learned a little.

There were days I floated.

The strange thing was, that as soon as I could do that, I no longer heard my mind. To my surprise I started seeing things in my environment that I had not noticed before. I observed insects, I saw a sunbeam sliding around the edge of a tree, brilliantly illuminating a little puddle of muddy water. I smelled things I could not name. I heard tiny rustlings as well as bird song, a breaking twig.

I saw a mango tree not far away with hundreds of ripe fruits that had fallen on the ground, many of them rotting. I had an immediate old-style thought: *must gather as much as I can, because...* But I stopped that thought. That was not how one played this game. I reminded myself to live in the moment.

I sucked a very ripe mango; stopped when I knew I was eating more than I needed (I had not learned to listen to my stomach yet).

Sitting down under another tree, I saw ants crawling everywhere. Birds came when I sat still, a snake came to look at the birds. I smelled another animal, not sure what. I heard noises that I could not interpret, and I knew that I did not

need to interpret or name anything. A new world unfolded for me, and in me: I felt I was *part of the scene*, not just an observer. I belonged as much as the rotting mangoes and the birds.

When I tried to inventory all I saw I lost that new awareness. And when I tried to name something I saw or felt or heard I lost it, too. All I could do was experience.

I must have fallen asleep. I dreamed a formless sort of dream, no pictures, no story, just warm feelings. When I woke, I woke easily, immediately. I saw that what I had smelled earlier was a little monkey who was sucking on a mango. I looked up, saw a larger monkey keeping an eye on me and on the little one. We looked at each other, 'acknowledging' each other: yes, you are in that tree – I am sitting here. I see you, you see me.

The writing of those few paragraphs took minutes, my learning took many months. But, like learning to ride a bicycle, once one knows to let go and 'be'—observing 'from within', as I thought of it, listening without judging, categorizing, analyzing—once one knows, it is not difficult to get back there.



Some years later I was in San Francisco, riding a bus through the Fillmore District, at about 10am, a quiet time. The bus was not full. I chose to sit all the way in the back. At one of the stops a man got on, in his middle thirties perhaps. He seemed 'happy'. He talked with people, made funny remarks about a hat as he slowly made his way to the back of the bus. His speech was only a little slurred; he was slightly drunk, I thought, but happy drunk. He had a knife stuck in the back of his pants. He made no attempt to hide it, nor did he draw attention to it.

A woman in the front of the bus shrieked when she saw the knife. Her screams were almost immediately taken up by others. In seconds panic was sweeping the bus, people got up, surged away from the man.

The bus driver, with much screeching of brakes, stopped the bus at an angle to the curb, opened the door and everybody pushed and shoved their way out.

Except the man with the knife and I.

A police officer came rushing to the scene, got in the bus, grabbed the man with the knife, made a big show of 'disarming' him, handcuffing him, then maneuvering him off the bus. He came back in the door of the bus, looked at me, and said, "How come you did not leave the bus, mister? Did you not see he had a knife?"

Yes, I had seen the knife. A knife can be dangerous, but I 'knew' that this man did not think of the knife, there was no bad thought in his mind. I did not read his mind, I read his posture, his behavior.

"You are crazy, mister," the police officer snarled at me as he left the bus and the passengers came back. The bus driver came on last, looked around to see

that all his charges were safe, looked at me, shrugged his shoulders.



The People were not ignorant of the world. They knew that we had many *things* that they did not. They were very selective in choosing what they could use from our world. They did not want transistor radios, they made that clear. Transistor radios are the vanguard of the twentieth century in the most remote areas of the world almost everywhere else. The People could use a pot to cook in, although if they had one they did not want another. They had no use for nails, their little houses were made of bamboo lashed together with rattan. They did not particularly want nylon shirts, although a man who went 'down below' would usually 'find' a shirt to wear. They laughed at shoes, said they wore out too quickly. They had a few knives and parangs (machetes).

The People thought it *very* strange that other people felt they could 'own' land. The People do not own land, but they 'have' trees.

I tried to understand the concept. Language gets in the way. I concluded that what they meant is that a tree and a person might belong together, as my legs belong with me. I cannot sell my legs. Nor can I sell my name. Neither legs nor name can be thought of as possessions. Similarly, someone of the People could not give 'his' tree away or sell it. Trees are not property.

The People have no concept of property.

Someone who belongs with a tree could use the fruits of the tree, perhaps the wood itself, but could not dispose of the tree, as the tree cannot dispose of the person. I am not certain how one acquires a relationship with a tree. The only answers I could get to my questions was that 'everyone knows' that certain trees and certain people belong with each other. Sometimes, I was told, a child might be given a tree when an adult dies young and the child and the adult had a close relationship: not exactly an inheritance, but something like it.

Once I was in a settlement when a young man came back from a long time of traveling. The Sng'oi version of a Vision Quest perhaps, or, more practically, a way to find a wife. The young man did not say much about his travels, but he did mention that he now had a tree. Everyone seemed pleased and praised him. He told us what kind of tree it was, how old it was, where it was, what it looked like. It was obvious that from now on everyone in this settlement would know that that tree now belonged with that young man. And, from what I knew of the People, that kind of news would travel very quickly to other settlements.

Belonging with a tree, by the way, also meant that you belonged with the offspring of that tree. Some trees spread their offspring in a neat circle around them, but other trees have offspring that is scattered over a wide area. How would someone know that this tree is the offspring of another tree that is several hundred feet away? Again, nobody doubted: 'oh yes, we know'.

I wondered whether the mango tree that I knew when I finally understood 'letting go', and whose fruit I had eaten, belonged with someone. I would ask one of my special friends. This friend was not from the settlement near the mango tree, and general questions were very difficult to talk about, I knew. I could not say *suppose I ate from a mango tree that belonged with you*. A 'suppose' sentence cannot be expressed very well in simple Malay (and my Sng'oi was never good enough—and, more important, the very concept of "suppose" is unknown to many non-western people).

All I could think of was to ask him, "are there trees that belong with you?"

Yes, there were trees that belonged with him, "... here and there," He was vague about the location of his trees, probably because 'everyone knows', and he assumed I did too.

"Is there a mango tree that belongs with you?"

Yes, he smiled, a very nice tree.

"Can I eat some mangoes off that tree?" I looked away when I said that, not wanting to embarrass him, or me.

"Yes, of course, he said." Then he added, "Do you know the tree belongs with me when you eat the mango<sup>5</sup>?"

"No," I said, "I do not know. In fact, I do not know at that time that some trees belong with Sng'oi."

Another one of those long silences. We were alone, walking in the late afternoon, no more than an hour before sunset, when the world is shivering its feathers, getting ready to settle in for night and a new crew.

Finally he said, "We eat mangoes that are lying on the ground. If we do not eat the fruit, it would go to waste.

"Then," and I swear he said this with a twinkle in his eyes, "little monkey come and suck the very ripe fruit, and an adult monkey watch baby (monkey)."

Yes, probably little monkeys frequently find mango trees with ripe fruit lying on the ground. I told myself that he did not mean anything with that remark. Just a general comment. Bur, of course, I could not drop the subject there.

"Maybe I pick a whole bag of mangoes to take home with me."

"Why you do that," he said with genuine surprise in his voice.

"To share with (my) children," I said.

Another pause.

"You bring children to the tree; they know where to find; another time they hungry for mangoes they know where to find."

I was never sure whether we were talking about an imaginary tree, or about

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We were talking in the country language It was impossible to know whether he said "Did you...", or "Do you know, etc." Since general questions were usually misunderstood, however, I am certain he meant "Did you" and not "If you did eat from my tree 'would' you...".

the tree that I remember so well, where I had observed a little monkey sucking on ripe mangoes, while an adult monkey watched. But I was beginning to get a feeling for his world, a reality that is not exact and measured as our world is.

In his world it is not strange that one sits by the side of a path, and when a visitor comes, knows that that is why he is sitting there: 'to show the way'.

## Shaman

ONE OF the settlements I called *Three*<sup>6</sup>: the third settlement I had visited. I had been there several times, it was the easiest to reach, only about an hour or so walking from where I could park the car. I was beginning to know the people well, I thought.

Usually there were about a dozen people. That is not a census: every time I had gone, some people were missing, others had come whom I had never seen. The Sng'oi were a very mobile people. Personal questions, however, like, *do you live here, where do you come from*, were ignored, never answered.

I did not plan to stay long, I was on my way to Port Dixon, on the West Coast. Port Dixon was trying to become a seaside 'resort', a place to vacation, there were cabins to rent, and other facilities. There were miles of fine sand beaches, but the ocean (actually the Strait of Malacca, between Malaysia and Sumatra) was so shallow swimming was impossible. There was not much to do other than, of course, looking at the ocean.

I made ready to leave *Three*. Perhaps six or seven adults were standing around. On the spur of the moment, I asked whether someone would like to go to Port Dixon with me, as you ask a friend to 'come along'. I explained that my family would be there, and other friendly people, we would be gone a day, at the most two, and of course I would return the person who chose to go with me to the settlement.

There was that moment of silence when I imagined they consulted with each other (at that time I thought of 'mind talk'). Yes, one man said, he would go with me.

He did not need much time to get ready for the trip other than to get a shirt. As we were about to leave a woman came running after us with a pair of slippers, "Here," she said, "you will need these." Port Dixon was not much of a town and nobody would pay particular attention to a barefoot man. Malays often go barefoot, and he was fairly tall for an aborigine, he could pass for a Malay.

My companion, Ahmeed<sup>7</sup>, did not say much as we walked the path that led to the little store where my car was parked. Nor did he say much as we drove to Port Dixon, perhaps two or three hours from where I had parked the car.

Sng'oi settlements sometimes seemed to have names, although the name was always the name of the location, not the name of the settlement. *Three* did not have a name, people referred to it as 'where Sng'oi live near the Pak On store' (I am not sure that was the name).

That was not his 'real' name, he told me much later, but Ahmeed is what people called him, his public name.

I knew him from earlier visits, of course: he was a man of middle years, which meant, probably middle or late thirties. He was a man of few words, I knew, but with a nice twinkle in his eyes. He laughed easily. As I looked at him, sitting next to me, I realized I knew hardly anything about him.

We arrived late in the afternoon. People came to meet us, I introduced Ahmeed, who was welcomed warmly and, I thought, would be taken care of; I joined my family. We had dinner outside that evening, looking out at the sunset over the ocean. I sat next to Ahmeed, who was very quiet. I thought I could understand why: he was not used to being with so many strange people. It did not occur to me at the time that Ahmeed might be awed by the ocean.

The sunset was spectacular, the ocean flat, there was almost no wind. That meant lots of mosquitoes.

The next day I woke very early. The beach faces west and south: beautiful sunsets, but no sunrises. It was fairly cool, although there was not much of a breeze. There were slight ripples on the water, but no waves to speak of.

Sumatra must be across the water, I knew. Not too far on a map, but the ocean disappeared in a haze of mist and merged into the sky without a visible horizon to mark distance. There was nothing to tell that there was land anywhere other than the land we stood on. I saw Ahmeed standing very quietly among the casuarina trees that fringed the beach. I started in his direction, but turned back when I saw how intensely he was concentrating, his face toward the ocean. I was not sure he had his eyes open. It seemed he did not want company.

In the afternoon we drove back. I asked Ahmeed whether he would mind staying a night at my house, which was about half way. He mumbled something which I took for consent. We were living in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur, the capital, in a very large, very western house, with five bedrooms, multiple bathrooms, air conditioners in every bedroom. I showed Ahmeed to the guest room, downstairs. He declined to sleep in the bed and said he preferred to sleep on a mat on the floor. I feared the concrete floor would be too stony hard, but he insisted. I demonstrated the air conditioner for him, but turned it off before leaving him for the night. It would be too cold, he said.

When we got back to *Three* the next morning, I heard him say to someone, "Bah' Woo' lives in a big house, with *air piped in from the mountains.*"

In the afternoon, some people gathered around and we talked about the visit to Port Dixon, answered some questions. It got late, I decided to stay in *Three* that night. I was aware that there were lively discussions among little groups of people, well into the dark of the evening, but I did not intrude.

The next morning, as I was getting ready to leave, a very strange thing happened: two or three of the oldest people in the settlement came to me. They wanted to talk to me, they said. They seemed almost an official delegation.

Haltingly, they explained that Ahmeed on his visit to the Great Water<sup>8</sup>, as they called it, had seen some important things. There would be a sort of ceremony that evening, where Ahmeed would tell what he had seen. They were not sure what I might think of that, but if I wanted to stay, that would be all right: after all it was I who had introduced him to the Great Water...

Forgetting other commitments I had at home, I accepted. I am not sure what I expected, but I felt this would be a unique opportunity to learn more about these people I had come to like so much. In my contact with the Sng'oi, they had been remarkably down to earth, there was little talk of ceremony, or ritual, they did not say much about their spiritual life although from the morning sharing sessions I knew that their belief in the dream world, a world they called the Real World, was central to their lives. Yes, I certainly would like to stay another night and be there when Ahmeed reported to them about what he had seen. 'The Great Water'?

As everything in their lives, the ceremony was the essence of simplicity. They chose the largest 'house', a structure as all others, raised about six feet off the ground, made of bamboo poles in the four corners, a split bamboo floor (you could see the ground between the cracks), a roof and walls of dried palm leaves, a tiny door (one had to almost crawl to get inside). The ladder leading up to the little house—perhaps eight by ten feet—was a notched tree placed at a very steep angle. The Sng'oi, young and old, *walked* up that tree as easily as walking on the ground... I climbed it on all fours, carefully.

In the middle of the floor a shallow bowl had been placed, with a few pieces of burning charcoal and a few chunks of *damar*, a resin with a strong, pungent smell when burned (similar to *copal*, I have been told, used in Central and South America). A few small children were held by adults, in the corners of the little house. I also sat in a corner. Eight adults stood in a circle around the brazier. Ahmeed sat in the middle, next to the smoking brasier, occasionally taking a deep breath of the strong *damar* smoke that wafted to every corner of the hut (there were square holes on the sides of the house but they were closed at night; there was no hole in the roof, only the door opening, at floor level, to let smoke escape or fresh air get in).

The adults began to move counter clock-wise around Ahmeed and the brazier, making the house shudder and sway a little. I had never seen this kind of dancing before, almost hopping, syncopated, not together, on their toes, very softly. They shuffled around for a few minutes before one man began what I later learned is called 'keening' in English: a monotonous, very high trilling single tone. Soon others joined in, more or less together. The effect was of unmelodious yodeling, heard from a long distance, eerie rather than impressive.

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At first the people called it The Great Water, *ayer besar*, Ahmeed later used the words *Laut Besar*, Great Ocean.

I felt chills running up my back and could not keep my eyes off them. The shuffling dance accompanied by the strange sounds that never quite came together was unlike anything I had ever heard, the shuffling steps fascinating to watch.

Suddenly, Ahmeed spoke, in an unusually loud and deeply sonorous voice. He remained seated, at first, swaying, his eyes closed. His voice was 'different', not his normal speaking voice. It came from deep in his chest, or, it seems, from below his chest. He spoke with great authority.

He had gone with me to the Great Ocean, he began. It took a long time to get there, even in a car, it was far away. There was a slight pause, as if he were thinking how to continue. By that time I could understand some of what they were saying, and he used many Malay words. (he may have used Malay words because their language has no words for the Great Ocean, as he called it, and many of the other things he described).

The dancers sat down, but continued keening very softly (it is quite difficult to keen softly, I learned later), swaying their bodies in perfect harmony this time. Ahmeed continued, speaking with great authority.

When the car stopped and he got out, he heard "*shshsh, shshsh,*" the sound of rain when it is still a little distance away.

Very softly, "*shshsh, shshsh, shshsh...*" (he heard the sound of waves on the beach, but he had never seen a beach, never seen an ocean).

He looked up, and said, "there was not a cloud in sight. The sky was clear. Where could that sound come from, *shshsh, shshsh, shshsh...?*"

He described walking a few steps away from the car, "and then I saw the Great Ocean: *AAHHhhhhh...*"

Briefly there was total silence, then the people continued their swaying and soft keening.

Ahmeed went on: "There was great fear in this<sup>9</sup> heart. So much water...

"Listen! Before you there is water as far as you can see." And he repeated: "as far as you can see."

The people were silent now, awed and afraid. I could *feel* their wonder, but also their fear (the Sng'oi live in deep jungle in the mountains. The only water they know is rain water and the water of jungle streams. Water is feared: rain storms destroy, mountain streams are unpredictable).

Ahmeed went on: "As far as you can see there is water, and if you stand as far as you can see, there is still more water as far as you can see from there." The people were listening spellbound. Nobody moved, nobody made a sound. It was as if people were holding their breath.

A few times Ahmeed repeated, "as far as you can see is water; and you stand there, *again* as far as you can see is more water, and *again* you stand where you

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Malay has no personal pronouns, you cannot say 'my' heart.

cannot see any further, *again* there is water as far as you can see.”

Then he said, "the water is *everywhere*," ending on a sort of sigh...

Some people were hunched over, cringing from this concept of endless water. Ahmeed said again, "Much fear in this heart," he put his hand over his heart. "Much fear, because all this water *eats* the land..." (The water of little jungle streams 'eats' the land of its banks, when rains swell the streams to raging rivers).

There was a long silence. Nobody said anything. More people were hunched over, some holding their hands to cover their heads. A woman, sitting in a corner, holding a small child, crooned softly, "Don't cry, don't cry..."

Now Ahmeed stood up, straight, looking down at the people of the settlement who were bent over, fearful, silent. He stood for a few minutes, then, in a strong voice, he said: "*That night, when I go to the Real World, I meet the Lord Of The Great Ocean.*"

"*The Lord Of The Great Ocean*," he said again, *Datok Laut Besar* (he used Malay words).

*The Lord Of The Great Ocean* told him not to be afraid, that the great ocean would not eat the land, the land was *floating* on the ocean.

A sigh of relief went through the people. They looked up, looked at each other: yes, that was it, the land was floating on the ocean, yes, that could be...

Then Ahmeed said a strange thing: "All that water is *heavy*."

He bent over to indicate great weight; you could see his shoulders weighted down with the weight of water.

"Heavy, all around the world, *very heavy*." He went on, "the whole world is covered with the Great Ocean."

He cupped his hands, about eighteen inches apart, as if to mark a globe.

"All of it covered with Ocean, and the land floats on the water."

His body movement suggested that the land was lighter than the ocean, that is why it would 'float' on the water.

"The land is so big, there is so much land floating on this Ocean that it does not move, or maybe only a little, and we do not feel it moving."

There was a long silence, as if to let the people get used to the ideas Ahmeed had presented so far. He remained standing: he would continue.

The *damar* smoke was thick in the little house. A few people were discreetly coughing behind a hand. My eyes were beginning to tear. The scent of *damar* is not unpleasant, but this thick smoke in such a small space was getting to be uncomfortable. I thought that the smoke would be rising, so I bent down to the floor to get some breaths of purer air from between the cracks in the floor.

Ahmeed went on, almost conversationally. His eyes were still closed, he

swayed a little, and as he was talking he seemed to be listening.

"*All this water,*" he said, "*and underneath the surface ('that which can be seen') is a whole world, in some ways like this world.*"

He used his hands to accompany his words.

"There are mountains under what-can-be-seen, very tall mountains, some of them," he motioned high, high up with one hand.

"And there are valleys deeper than any valleys we have here."

"All through that Great Ocean there are streams, *HUGE* rivers (currents) that flow all around the world, around and around," his hands went around an imaginary globe again.

"These streams are so immense (the word he used means something like *bigger than big*) that they sweep all the fish around too. And there are many other animals as well, not just fish. There are animals so huge... bigger than elephants!"

The people made a soft WAAHHhhh sound.

"Animals that are flat," (he clapped his hands together once), "and animals that are like snakes, but bigger, *much* bigger."

"But do not be afraid, the Big Ocean cannot eat the land, the land floats, and the animals in the Big Ocean can only live there, they cannot come on land."

He repeated, in a singsong, "Do not be afraid, The Lord of the Great Ocean has told me, do not be afraid, the land floats on the water, and the animals in the ocean cannot come on land."

Many times he repeated that the land floats on the ocean, do not be afraid.

I could not imagine how he could have learned these facts about the ocean and the animals that lived in it in the short time we had been there. Could someone have told him? I did not think so, there had been few people, and every time I looked for him, he had stood under the ironwood trees, watching the ocean, alone. He obviously had not read the information in a book, he could not read. Where did he get such detailed information about something he could not have not *seen*?

Ahmeed continued, talking again about how large the ocean was, how vast, how 'heavy', how it went around the globe (he was using the word *dunia*, world, he obviously meant *globe*), cupping his hands. He repeated, there were whole worlds underneath the ocean like our world, but on a larger scale. He repeated his description of the huge rivers that flowed through the ocean, carrying animals with it, and how, when two of these rivers met there was enormous turmoil, all of it below what-can-be-seen.



While I was trying to grasp how, where, Ahmeed had learned so much in such a short time, I too fell into a trance.

It was not the first time that had happened, apparently I hypnotize easily, and I imagine the *damar* smoke, the close air, the swaying people, the voice of Ahmeed... all of these together put me in a trance.

I do not know how the evening ended.

Perhaps an hour later (I am not sure of the time, I never wear a watch) I woke up. The house was quiet and almost empty. Ahmeed held me sitting up, a woman was sitting in front of me wiping my face with a rag with the smell of *damar* (of course), mumbling as to a baby.

I was embarrassed. I apologized to Ahmeed, telling him I did not mean to fall asleep, that I had no recollection of what had happened after I had fallen asleep, please forgive me.

It did not *feel* as if I had fallen asleep, but here I was, held upright by Ahmeed while a woman wiped my face.

He smiled, and said, "Oh no, you did not sleep, you went into a trance: you talked to us." He would not tell me at first what I had talked about, only smiled.

"Later," he said, "later, you will know."

Weeks later, he told me, when I asked, that I had stood up after he had finished talking, and said something in a language nobody had ever heard before (not English, he said), and with my hands had made a globe; he, Ahmeed, had understood me to say that I had traveled around the world. When he had told the people that, I had nodded, as if to say, yes. Then I had said more things, and pointed up, away from that imaginary globe... he had not quite known what I had meant to say, but he *thought* I had told them that there are other worlds far away from the earth.

Afterwards the people had gone to the other houses, and he and the woman had gently brought me out of my trance. I felt embarrassed. I certainly never intended to do anything like this, for all I knew I had spoiled their ceremony. But Ahmeed smiled, and said it was all right.

Shortly after we all fell asleep. The charcoal had long since burned down, the *damar* was burnt up, even the smell seemed to have gone. I felt cold, I laid down close to some other people who came back in the house to sleep.

The next morning, when we sat around, sharing what we had learned in the Real World, everyone had seen or touched or felt something about the Great Ocean. Ahmeed himself did not say anything, even when people jokingly said, "You, did you not go back to that Great Ocean you told us about?" No, he smiled, he had learned other things in the Real World, but he would not tell.

I could not remember a single dream, but what Ahmeed had told us about the Ocean kept going through my mind: how could he possibly have known about

mountains deep in the ocean, the deeps, the currents, the whales, the flat animals (manta rays came to mind)? Where, how did he get that information?



I could not postpone returning to my world any longer, so I made ready to leave early in the morning. While I said goodbye, again I saw some of the adults 'consulting' in a little group off to the side.

Again, a delegation came to talk to me. They were not comfortable, I could see. They shuffled, looked from one to the other. Finally Ahmeed stepped up to me, very close, looked me in the eyes, and said, "We have to talk about something." He explained, and the others nodded as he talked, that I had fallen into a trance last night although I did not make any effort to do so: *not willed*, or, *not wanted*, he said. If I were Sng'oi that would tell the people that I was meant to be... Here he paused, as if he could not find the right word.

Then he said that he, Ahmeed, was a *Bomoh* (the word he used is a Malay word, and means healer, it might even be used for *shaman*). I must have looked surprised. After the evening's ceremony it was obvious that he was a 'shaman' perhaps, but not a *Bomoh*. I knew what a *Bomoh* did, and obviously that was not what Ahmeed did. He was not a healer—or was he? I was confused.

He smiled. "You did not know that," he said, but that was why he had come with me to Port Dixon.

"It is my work to bring new knowledge to The People."

The subject had not come up before, and I did not know that the Sng'oi had, what...? Priests? Shamans?

In fact, Ahmeed avoided using a name for what he was. When I pressed him, he would say *Bomoh*, probably because he knew—I had told him—that I was making a study of Malay *Bomohs* at the time. But the Malay *Bomohs* I was studying were healers, native doctors, some of them very skilled indeed. Ahmeed did not act or talk like any *Bomoh* I had met.

Later, I consulted what few books there were about the aborigines in Malaysia, and talked to people who knew them. The information I got was full of specialized terms, some I had heard, some that were new to me, but none of the information made sense, and none of it seemed relevant to what I had experienced in *Three*. Yes, the Sng'oi were known to have what perhaps could be called shamans, or even healers. But, none of the descriptions fitted what I now knew of Ahmeed.

All over the world people have *shamans*, men or women who, through predisposition and/or training, are 'guides' to the spirit world, as they were described in anthropological books. After Ahmeed's introduction of The Lord of The Great Ocean, it was easy to believe he was such a one.

Weeks later, I asked Ahmeed what The Lord of the Great Ocean *looked* like. Ahmeed seemed surprised, thought about it, then said,

"Datok Laut Besar is not a *person* of course. It is easier to tell people about the Ocean when you can say Datok Laut Besar. No... I did not see a 'person', *I find the Great Ocean in my heart.*"

But that morning after Ahmeed had revealed what he knew of the Lord of the Great ocean, as we stood around, I on my way home, Ahmeed repeated, with emphasis, "if you had been Sng'oi, it would have been very simple, you would have learned to become like me. But, for a white person... We do not know what to do."

Most of the people of *Three* were now standing around, looking at me with great intensity, and, I thought at the time, 'benevolent expectation'. Some of them smiling, all of them with their eyes on me, waiting for something.

As always, there was a pause, a moment of silence.

"So," he said, firmly, "we have talked, and what we tell you is this, so that you yourself can decide. If you want, you can learn. If you do not want, we understand."

Yes, all the people nodded, still with that air of expectancy.

It was one of those moments that seems to mark a fork in the road. A node. A point where the whole universe pivots. I was asked to make a decision that, in my heart, was no longer a decision at all. I cannot remember what I *thought*. Probably I did not think at all. Decisions as important as this are made intuitively, mind cannot grasp such choices.

I know I did not think what it might *mean* to be whatever it was Ahmeed was. I had no thought for what the 'learning' might involve in time and commitment. I was intensely aware, however, of the smiles of these people, their warmth, and their expectation.

I knew I was offered a great gift.

Without thinking, I said, yes, I want to learn<sup>10</sup>.

Nobody said anything.

I saw only their smiles. I felt elation. I felt loved as I had experienced love but a few times in my life before, perhaps what is called 'unconditional love'. I turned to look at this one, at that one. I smiled until my face ached.

Finally, I turned to Ahmeed and said something inane, like, "why did you not tell me that you were a *Bomoh*?"

He knew I did not need an answer. He just smiled.

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Ahmeed never used the word 'teach', always he said 'learn'. Looking back, I am certain he saw his role as an opener of doors, not a teacher. What learning I did would be my own effort--but at the time I did not know that.

## Learning To Be Human Again

I CANNOT remember when I left, but I got home late in the afternoon of the same day. Driving home I had realized that I did not know how to tell my family, my colleagues. What could I possibly say? I said nothing.

After a few days, absorbed again in my world—all of my various realities—the Lord of the Great Ocean became so strange, so absurdly alien to the way of thinking around me that I could hardly think, let alone talk about my experiences of those days. My feelings those first few weeks were hidden: I thought I had to hide them. I did not know how to share what had happened. I kept a sort of inner glow, fortunately, and at night, in my dreams, I experienced again the wonder of that evening.

What was Ahmeed, anyway? What exactly would I learn?

I did not have a word. 'Shaman' is what I *now* call what Ahmeed was. At that time all I could think of, was a person who was wise, perhaps even psychic. I knew Ahmeed was not anything like the Malay *Bomohs* I had been working with, but he obviously had some kind of power.

It would be quite a few years before Carlos Castaneda would publish first one, then a series of books to popularize the idea of shamans. In 1961 I was superficially familiar with some of the anthropological studies about the subject. The word *shaman* comes from Siberia, where, the texts said, they were intermediaries between this world and the spirit world. *Shamans* were people who healed, who dressed in outrageous costumes, did a sort of trance dance, took toxic substances. I read that non-western peoples around the world had gifted healers and priests with strange powers, but I had no idea what they *did*.

I grew up in two cultures (more than two, in fact), I had learned two or three languages when I first began to talk, and knew well that you spoke one language to one person, and another language to another, and that it was sometimes very difficult, if not impossible, to translate what could be said in one language into another. I was now beginning to realize that the differences between peoples was not a difference of language, but rather how they experienced what was real, what is important.

At that time I also thought that 'spiritual' meant religious. I knew, vaguely, that there were people with special qualities, obviously powerful people, but did not think much about them, because they did not fit into my world view as a Westerner, and a scientist.

I suddenly remembered a strange thing that had happened when I was maybe

ten, or eleven years old. My father had taken me to the opening of a clinic, somewhere in the mountains of Sumatra, where a 'Tibetan'—he might have been from Nepal, or Birma, or India, but he was called Tibetan—did tricks, as my father said. The Tibetan levitated. We all saw that. My father and a few other doctors present looked this way and that, bent over to look under his feet, discussing what was going on. But when, on the way back, I asked my father about it he said things like 'illusion', 'mass hysteria', as if it had all been our imagination. "Do not pay any attention to those things, son..." I learned to be very distrustful of the inexplicable things some people did.

But after Ahmeed introduced The Lord of the Great Ocean, however, I remained curious. How did he know, how *could* he know?

As happens to people who grow up in two very different worlds, I learned early to be in two different realities. Now, at work, or at home with my family, "the Lord of the Great Ocean" became a story that I did not know what to do with. I tried not to think about it. Ahmeed was a charming friend who had accompanied me to Port Dixon. The idea of learning to be whatever he was did not have much reality in my daily life.

But there were other moments—other realities—when Ahmeed, and what he had told us of The Lord of the Great Ocean, were only too real, and I wanted to be part of that reality, I yearned to be able to 'know'.

One time I told the story of the Lord of The Great Ocean to a colleague, someone I thought had an interest in 'anthropological material'. His interest turned out to be a critique of my methods of field work, my linguistic interpretations of Malay and Sng'oi (neither of which he could speak as well as I did). I saw, perhaps clearly for the first time, that most people, even scientists, could only see the world from one point of view: their own.

I went to the library and read what I could find about shamans, healers, seers. Most books seemed vague, not very specific. A few accounts mentioned 'substances' that made a shaman go in a trance—this was before the drug culture, before use of hallucinogens such as LSD and mescaline were talked about and occasionally ingested, although rarely investigated. I knew that what had happened in the little hut in *Three* had nothing to do with mysterious 'substances'. There was no mystery in *damar* and nobody ingested it, anyway.

Of course eventually I went back to *Three*.

Maybe, I thought as I was driving up, it did not happen.

Oh yes, when Ahmeed talked about The Lord of The Great Ocean, and told us all those incredible things about the ocean (*how in the world could he know?*), that happened. I was certain of that.

But I must have imagined talk about learning... what? He did not even have a *name* for it! As a scientist I knew that naming is the first step, and sometimes the

only one, to understanding. When named, we have pigeon-holed something, and we think we understand it.

Ahmeed was friendly, all the people in *Three* were friendly. They had always been friendly. There were few people that time. I had learned to accept fluctuations in the size of settlements, people were often gone, others came visiting. One never knew what to expect. We all smiled a lot, not a word was said about The Lord of The Great Ocean, or what happened the day after.

In the evening, as we sat around comfortably and cozily, not saying much, Ahmeed asked me whether I wanted to walk with him the next day. He said it very innocently and casually: easy for me to reject or accept.

"Yes, that would be fine," I said equally casually.

Early the next morning, before the dew had evaporated, we set off. Ahmeed did not seem to have made any preparation, he did not carry anything, so I did not either (I had a few things with me, but left them at *Three*). We walked. Neither of us said anything for long periods of time.

As the day progressed, I got hot and sweaty, then thirsty, then hungry. We stopped a few times, sitting on a log or a rock. No mention was made of food or drink, until I told him I was very thirsty. He looked at me, with a sort of grin on his face, and said, "Yes, white people sweat a lot."

He did not sweat at all, it seemed.

Nothing further was said about finding water. As we walked on I began to have visions of a coconut tree, climbing—asking *him* to climb—to get a coconut, opening it... but we did not carry a parang, a machete, and I knew, of course, that in any case there are no coconut trees in the jungle.

Finally I asked him to find me something to drink. I was *too* thirsty. He stopped and cut a little hole in a vine with his thumb nail. I drank the water. It tasted sort of 'green', but it was clear and clean.

We got back to *Three* an hour or so before the sun went down. I wondered whether this aimless silent walking would help me learn to... whatever it was? Some people had cooked rice that evening. The People do not always eat rice, nor do they always eat together. Often each person scrounges something to eat during the day, in the evening there is very sweet tea and not much to eat. There were some vegetables that had been cooked with the rice, and some dried fish. I ate heartily, I was hungry and thirsty.

After my second cup of tea, Ahmeed leaned over, and took the cup away from me: "We walk tomorrow. Better you not drink." Remembering the vine and the green-tasting water, I assented readily enough. I agreed to walk again the next day. It was enjoyable, I saw things in the jungle that I had not seen before. There was a sense of adventure, of exploring.

The second day went much as the first. We walked, we rested a few times, we

did not eat or drink. I got tired, thirsty, but, I admit, not as thirsty as the first day. And not as hungry as the day before. Ahmeed did not volunteer any information. He did not 'teach'. When I asked him something, he barely answered, just grunted something.

In the evening, back at *Three*, I asked him what I should learn from these walks. He laughed loudly (unusual).

"No, I am serious," I protested, "I need to know what it is I should learn."

He chuckled, and said, "It does not matter, you do not have to understand, you (will) learn."

I felt abashed, I did not understand his method of teaching. I thought about it all evening, and probably in my sleep as well. In the morning I woke up with the realization that we, Westerners, are so used to thinking of training, learning and teaching, as a *verbal* activity, that we forget that much—perhaps most—learning happens without verbal instruction.

Unfortunately I could not stay another day, I had to get back to work, back to my family. I promised Ahmeed I would be back as soon as I could, and would make arrangements to stay longer. He looked at me with a smile that said, *you people are so strange with your incomprehensible customs, with your thinking and planning. Do what you must do...*

The next time I stayed several days. I came prepared to learn without verbal instruction. I felt free, curious, ready for whatever I would learn. I had told myself I did not even need to 'understand' what it was I was supposed to learn.

We walked. I learned to go without water and food for seven or eight hours and felt good about myself.

Ahmeed never volunteered information. He was friendly, smiled a lot, did not say much, did not even answer questions. In the evenings, I found I had nothing to say, we ate silently. I fell asleep soon after.

The third day, a sort of uneasiness was creeping up on me. I was beginning to think of my obligations at home and at work. If I did not *learn* something here I was wasting my time. I thought I was getting to know what the jungle looked like, I recognized plants, trees, smells, small sounds from previous walks.

I do not think we walked the same paths. Most of the time there were no paths to follow, but Ahmeed seemed to know where he was going so I followed in his footsteps.

I definitely was beginning to feel I was wasting my time. I could not take this much time from my work, from my family. I had to *do* something, and soon.

When we were resting, at the end of the morning, I looked at Ahmeed and asked him what he thought of me, was I *learning*? He looked at me with astonishment, "How could I know, only *you* know that."

I told him I did not *feel* any different. In fact, I told him, I did not 'get it' at all. I did not understand what I was doing here. I was not learning anything.

Please *tell* me, I almost begged.

He looked away.

We resumed our walk, which to me had become hard work, tiring, boring. I was thinking about what I would do tomorrow, what I would have to do, in fact, to catch up on things I was supposed to have done today. There was a meeting I must attend. Oh, and I had forgotten to write my part of a report, which had been due yesterday. And...

When we came back that evening I felt discouraged. The promise of learning to be whatever Ahmeed was, was not being fulfilled. I was not learning anything. I felt confused, distracted, angry.

Back in the city, my work did not go well. Nothing seemed to go smoothly. I got sick with a skin disorder, which doctors diagnosed variously as a rash, some kind of dermatitis, a non-specific this and a localized that. They did tests, gave me cortisone. Nobody told me to 'taper off' the cortisone, so when I stopped the first course, I got sicker.

One of the doctors came up with a diagnosis of 'auto-immune reaction'.

I asked what this was a reaction to.

He said, "Frankly, I do not know. Auto-immune essentially means that you are allergic to yourself. Why, I could not say. Only you would know that."

There it was again: *only I could know*. They did not take responsibility for my health, I thought angrily. I put my trust in the doctors – just as I had sheepishly followed Ahmeed, trusting him to... whatever it was he was supposed to do, and all they could do was throw it back in my face and say *only I could know*. I was beginning to curse the day I had taken Ahmeed with me to Port Dixon, and the day I had attended that wonderful 'performance' of his. That is all it was, after all, I thought to myself with a sneer, *a performance*.

Everything felt stuck. I felt miserable. I itched. I felt lost. One of the doctors suggested therapy. What kind of therapy, I asked. Oh, he said breezily, maybe you should see Dr...(a psychiatrist). That shocked me. Was that the kind of sickness I had?

My crisis somehow come to an end. Or, more accurately, it faded, *very* slowly. The rash, or whatever it was, disappeared. Slowly. I went back to work. I picked up some reading that I had neglected during the days I had felt sorry for myself, itching in an air conditioned bedroom.

During moments when I was honest with myself, I knew that nothing had changed. I was as confused as before. I was still blocked. Vaguely I felt there was something I had to learn from 'those aborigines', but what it was I did not know. And what was worse, I did not know how to learn learning whatever it was I had to learn.

Finally I went back to *Three*. I was almost hoping that Ahmeed would not be there. Maybe none of the people I knew would be there, and I would not have to explain why I had not come back earlier.

They were all there. Ahmeed seemed genuinely happy to see me. Nobody asked any questions, of course. I had been rehearsing how to explain why I had not come earlier. I had been very sick, I would say, with gory details of doctors and medicines. That was almost the truth: I had not really been very sick, but I had been very uncomfortable from being allergic to myself.

However, nobody asked, so I did not need to explain.

That evening, Ahmeed asked, "We walk tomorrow?"

I answered, "Yeah, we walk."

The morning was especially beautiful, I thought, crisp with a chill in the air. It felt good being out in the jungle again. I was looking forward to the walk. I made a firm resolve not to have any expectations. Whatever happened would happen. I wanted to have all the wonder a child has at the beginning of a day. We walked. I got thirsty (I was sadly out of shape after a month of inactivity). I got very tired. In the early afternoon, the hottest part of the day probably—cool in the shade, but very humid—when we were walking slowly, we came to a big clump of bamboo about twenty feet ahead. Bamboo tends to bunch together, forming an impenetrable barrier. Ahmeed stopped, listened, turned to me (I was walking behind him), and motioned, *silence*. I opened my mouth to ask a question, but he gestured quite firmly, motioning with his hand: *no talking, stay still, quiet*.

We stood frozen for what seemed a long minute when from the right a large light-colored snake came from under some bushes, slowly crossed in front of us, passed out of sight into the trees on our left.

Snakes, of course, are everywhere. I had learned long ago to watch out for them, which almost always meant looking for them in trees, looking up. Snakes generally do not crawl on the ground. Large snakes are not common, and a large snake crawling in a straight line on the ground was even more unusual. This snake was large, maybe fourteen feet long, or more. It looked as if it had recently eaten something, it moved slowly and seemed fat through the middle. It moved determinedly, I thought, as if it had a purpose.

I did not try to determine what kind of snake it was, or think much about the snake: I was too curious about how Ahmeed *knew* that the snake was there. I was certain he could not have *heard* anything, the snake made no noise that I could hear. I doubt that he could have seen it before it moved out into the open, a few feet in front of us. Did he smell it? Not very likely.

How did he know?

We stayed where we were for a few more minutes, all the time Ahmeed

making sure that I would not move, or make a noise. Then, when we were ready to resume our walk, he again motioned, *slowly, make no noise, no talking*. We turned to our right, around the clump of bamboo, walked on as if nothing had happened.

Maybe half an hour after that, we found a good place to sit down. I was mulling over in my mind how he could have known.

I asked him, "Did you *know* that snake was coming?"

Yes, was all he would say.

I tried to phrase the question differently, had he heard it, seen it?

No, but he knew.

We walked on, my thoughts falling over each other. I thought back to the evening when he had introduced us to The Lord of the Great Ocean. That was almost the same thing. He had seen the ocean, and only the surface of the ocean at that—he probably had not even put his feet in the water—, but he had 'known' many things about the ocean that he could not possibly have known.

"When we were in Port Dixon, did you walk into the ocean," I asked?

No, he confessed, he did not get his feet wet.

"Is the ocean rain water," I questioned him, thinking I would trap him.

"Salty," he said.

"But how do you *know*," I burst out?

He smiled his child-like smile.

That night I did not sleep well. I realized that I was *almost* on to something, but I did not know what. Obviously I was missing something. Ahmeed knew things about the environment that I might have learned from what other people could tell me, or what I could read in books. I might even have known that snake was coming if I had had modern instruments that are more sensitive than my ears, my nose, my eyes.

Was Ahmeed more sensitive? Had he trained his senses to be *super-sensitive*?

I *had* to stay another day, I felt, although I had planned to go back. I could always go back in the afternoon.

The next day, after walking an hour or so, I realized that I was thinking so much that I did not pay attention to where we were, what was going on in the environment. I was trying to figure things out in my head, making lists, weighing probabilities as if Ahmeed's talents were a problem in statistics. I decided instead to really open my ears, my eyes, my nose, my skin to whatever I could pick up in the jungle around us.

I stopped abruptly.

The jungle suddenly was dense with sounds, smells, little puffs of air here and there. I became aware of things I had largely ignored before. It was as if all this time I had walked with dirty eye glasses and someone washed them for me. Or,

as if I were watching a home movie and someone turned the focusing knob. But more than that, much more than that. I could smell things I had no name for. I heard little sounds that could be anything at all. I saw a leaf shivering. I saw a line of insects crawling up a tree.

Ahmeed noticed that I had been walking slower and slower while paying intense attention to the world around me. He stood still.

"Sit," he asked?

Well, no... not really... perhaps... I don't know, I stammered.

"Drink," he asked?

Afterwards I realized that he had spoken very softly, so as not to intrude on what was going on inside me, and he had used simple, single words: sit? drink?

Yes, I was very thirsty. I looked at him, thinking he would find a water vine. He was the person who knew the jungle, after all. He looked back at me with a perfectly blank expression. He was not helping. He was not talking.

Suddenly, a new thought burst in on me: maybe I could 'sense' water. In my mind I made a sort of list: seeing water, hearing water, smelling water. I might smell water, or even hear it if it were dripping on a leaf perhaps. I looked around...

"Do not talk," Ahmeed said. I knew he meant, *do not think*. "Water inside<sup>11</sup>."

I knew he meant I should sense 'inside', not with my mind, but from the inside. It is sad to have to use so many words to say something so simple.

As soon as I stopped thinking, planning, deciding, analyzing—using my mind, in short—I felt as if I were pushed in a certain direction. I walked a few steps and immediately saw a big leaf with maybe half a cup of water in it.

I must have stood there for a full minute, in awe. Not in awe of *something*, just awe. When I leaned over to drink from the leaf, I saw water with feathery ripples, I saw a few mosquito larvae wriggling on the surface, I saw the veins of the leaf through the water, some bubbles, a little piece of dirt.

Reaching out, I put a finger in the water, saw that one of the wriggling mosquito larvae had been trapped in a tiny bubble on my finger. How beautiful, how perfect. I did not put the finger with the water droplet in my mouth, but looked back at the leaf. My perception opened further. I no longer saw water, what I felt with my whole being was a leaf-with-water-in-it, attached to a plant that grew in soil surrounded by uncounted other plants, all part of the same blanket of living things covering the soil that was also part of a larger living skin around the earth. And nothing was separate, all was one, the same thing: water, leaf, plant, trees, soil, animals, earth, air, sunlight and little wisps of wind. The all-ness was everywhere, and I was part of it!

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We were speaking Malay. 'Heart' in Malay is 'ati (often written hati, with a silent 'h'). 'Ati also means liver, and sometimes other internal organs and it also is used for feelings.

I cannot 'explain' what went on inside me, but I knew that I had learned something unbelievably wonderful. I felt more alive than I had ever felt before. All of me was filled with being.



What this other sense is, I do not know. For me, now, it is very real. I think of it as a sense of 'knowing'. It probably is a quality we all have to a greater or lesser degree. For me it works when I can get out of my mind, when I can experience without having to understand, or name, or position, or judge, or categorize.

This knowing has to be used, or it fades away. As one has to exercise muscles or thinking, so too knowing must be exercised.

All that is after the fact talking, of course, trying to say something that does not fit into our western concepts, and so there are no words. At the time I did not think anything. I was learning how to put my mind aside and use some other sense to 'know'. Standing over a leaf with a little water in it, somewhere in the jungles of Malaysia I did not think in words. I did not think. I 'bathed' in that overwhelming sense of oneness. I felt as if a light were lit deep inside me, I knew I was radiating... something, love perhaps. Love for this incredible world, this rich, varied, and always totally interconnected world of creations which also, at the same time, gave me love *from* this incredible world. And in addition to love, or, more than love, I felt a very deep sense of belonging.



After a while I slowly woke up. I came to, so to speak. I was in my body again. I looked around. Ahmeed was not where I thought he was. In fact, he was not anywhere in sight. He must have walked on I thought.

And as soon as I *thought*, I panicked. I realized that I was alone, that Ahmeed had left me in a strange jungle. I had no idea where I was, or how to get back to *Three*, or find Ahmeed. My first reaction was to shout, to yell, to call him. But the sense of being part of this wonderful whole was so strong, that I could not raise my voice. I opened my mouth, I tried to make a sound. No sound would pass my throat. I could not possibly disturb this oneness by yelling, by feeling panicked: *I could not be afraid*, after all I was part of this all-ness.

My life changed in that moment.

I need not shout for help, I need not run after Ahmeed. I knew with a great certainty that all I needed to do was put my mind aside and 'know' where he was. Almost immediately I *knew*. Not too far away. I had an impression of him walking leisurely in *that* direction. He sauntered as if he were deep in thought, or, perhaps, he was thinking of me? In my mindless state of being I sent him a

voiceless *hello*, and it was easy to imagine receiving back his slight smile, barely stretching the corners of his mouth. Part of me wanted to join Ahmeed, go back to *Three*, eat and drink. But another part wanted to stay here, know this new world more intimately.

I stayed.

I was certain I would find the way back to Ahmeed and the village later, when I wanted to get back, when it got dark perhaps.

I have no idea how long I stayed, there is no time in that mindless state, but it was quite dark when I finally returned to the settlement. When it was time to leave the place where I had discovered the leaf with water (I never drank any, by the way, I was not thirsty any more), I extended my knowing to sense where the settlement was. *There*, my knowing told me immediately.

With my new and now extended knowing, I became aware of a soft sound, some distance away. At first I did not recognize the sound. It sounded familiar, but I had no name for it and in that state I avoided naming, understanding and recognizing. But this sound wanted to be known. It intruded on my being. It was almost as if it introduced itself: I am Tiger. The sound was that sound between purring and growling that tigers make when they are not sleeping and not hunting. I think of it as an announcement, 'I am here'. All animals that talk have their own sounds to tell the world they are here.

I felt a whisper of fear, but that was a learned reaction I knew.

From earliest childhood I have had a special feeling for tigers. What fear I had of tigers was the fear others had tried to give me. Growing up in Sumatra I had seen tigers in the wild a few times. The first time was when I was perhaps eight or nine, in a car. The tiger was in the road in front of us as we came very slowly around a steep hairpin curve in the road. The driver stopped the car. It was an open car, the top was down, the tiger certainly must have smelled us. We waited. The driver, my friend Udin, sat calmly in the driver's seat. I sat beside him. It was night. The headlights had been on, but Udin turned them off. There was enough moonlight to see clearly. The tiger's tail moved rhythmically from side to side. He stood in the middle of the road, his head turned to look at us. He was large, as large as our car, it seemed. His head was at the same level as ours sitting in the car.

I do not know how long we stood there, but it felt as if time were suspended: we looked at each other for an eternity.

Finally, the tiger slowly, very slowly, straightened his head in the direction he had been going and softly stepped back in the jungle on the side of the road. I heard that soft growl/purr and knew then that he said: I am Tiger, I am here.

Udin waited a few minutes, turned the lights on again, drove on. He looked at me, and said: "*Rimau*," tiger, as if to say, now you know what a tiger is.

When I stood alone in another jungle in Malaysia, I thought of the first tiger, as I listened to another soft growl/purr. If I had not been 'open' to the world, I might not have heard the sound at all, it came from far away. Alone this time, I experienced the sound as very comforting.

I 'knew' where *Three* was, and how to get there (not the way we had come). It was not in the direction of the tiger, nor was it away from him. I started walking, still drinking deeply of that wonderful sense of belonging. I was part of this jungle, and the jungle was part of me. The smells, the rich colors, now darkening, the sounds of animals, were almost overwhelming. The only way I could deal with so much was to feel it as one: not analyzing, interpreting, naming, sorting, judging— not 'other', but me as part of all.

At times I felt as if I did not even walk, I was *flowing through this medium that was everything and also myself*.

It gets dark quickly in the tropics; it was quite dark before I reached *Three*. I did not hurry. I knew all the time where Ahmeed was (to the side, and slightly ahead of me), and all the way back to *Three* I heard the soft tiger sound travel with me. I had a fantasy about that tiger sound: first I thought of it as, 'welcome', as if the tiger were talking to *me*, rather than just announcing his presence to the world around where he was, maybe a mile away. Then I imagined the tiger saying to me, 'you are doing well'.

I felt he was as aware of me as I was of him. He walked with me.

Before I reached *Three*, I had a whiff of the smell of the oil used in the lamps people had lit. Ahmeed joined me just outside *Three*. Neither of us said anything, we looked at each other and smiled. I felt my heart swell with pride, with gratitude, with accomplishment... and other feelings I did not (do not) have words for.

I wish I could recapture the smiles of the Sng'oi. Their smiles are not as ours, they do not show teeth. Sng'oi smile with their eyes more than their lips. Their eyes light up. Ahmeed's smile lit up the night as we stepped into the clearing of *Three*.

I was full of my new knowing. I felt such love for these people, my family, as the trees also were my family, and the grass, and the scruffy dog that ran between our legs, and the small child with the runny nose, and even the mosquitoes: we were one whole. The night seemed to be particularly rich with sounds this evening, and sounds, too, were part of all.

I listened for the sound of Tiger, but he had gone.

We ate a meal that someone had cooked. The food tasted incredibly wonderful. There were roots, I remember, that I had not had before, that tasted like... bitter sweet potatoes? A few wilted, unnameable vegetables tasted like

gourmet spinach. The sugary tea was ambrosia.

After the meal nobody said much, but as I began to be more aware of individual people (coming down from my exalted place of being-one-with), I noticed that they were watching me. They knew.

As people were getting ready to go to sleep—the few dishes they had were wiped off and put away, the rice pot was washed in the stream and put away—Ahmeed stood up, and asked me whether I was tired. No, I was wide awake.

"We walk a little," he said.

In the dark people stay close to home. We moved away only a short distance from where the few huts were. We did not sit down (you are careful where you sit down in the dark).

After a long silence, Ahmeed said,

"So...

"You found water."

Yes, I had found water. I had found a whole new world, in fact. I opened my mouth to tell him about what I had felt, experienced. I wanted to tell him that I was finally learning the marvel of being one with the world. But nothing came out of my mouth. I did not have words to say what I wanted to say in English, let alone in Malay, and certainly not in Sng'oi.

Of course I knew that he knew. There was no need for words. Instead, I reached out my hand, and touched his elbow. We stood like that for some minutes. Communicating without saying a word.

Finally, he stepped back a little, and said, not looking at me: "Who brought you back?"

He did not say 'how' did I find the way back, but 'who' brought me back.

Without hesitation I said, "Tiger," *rimau*.

I was surprised myself at what I said, but as I said it, I realized that it was true. It had been that comforting sound of the growl/purr of the tiger that had brought me back.

Ahmeed nodded, yes. He repeated, "*Harimau*<sup>12</sup>."

Nothing more was said, and we drifted back to the little huts.

It took me quite a while to come back down, after that day. Everything I did was blessed, things flowed smoothly.

Because I had spent so much time away, I had to catch up on my work, there were trips to make, research report to be written. I spent time with my family. I knew I did everything that was expected of me—everything that I had committed

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The Malay word for tiger is spelled harimau, usually pronounced 'rimau. Saying Harimau makes it more formal.

myself to do—and yet I also knew that I was not the same person.

I had frequent flashes of what I then called 'oneness', that magical knowing of being one with literally everything in creation. Reminders, they were. Each time I had the 'oneness' experience it became more natural, more part of me, not something that I knew, but something I *am*.



About ten years earlier, I had spent a summer in Denmark, sailing with three Danes. We were in our early twenties. They spoke English for my benefit, except when something needed to be communicated in a hurry, as when we were coming into a harbor for instance. The captain then would yell commands in Danish, everyone would run, do this and that. I felt completely left out, I did not understand a single word they were saying.

My bunk was in the bow of the boat, I had to sleep in a curve. As I lay awake at night, in my mind I heard Danish, but it was all one blur. In my frustration I could not distinguish individual words, all I could hear was pure sound, intonation and rhythm.

The next time we came into a harbor, the same thing happened. Much activity, people running around, commands and comments thrown back and forth in Danish that I did not understand. I hid in the cabin below the deck.

When the boat was tied up, they all came down, still excitedly talking Danish among themselves. When they saw me they switched to English. Suddenly, out of the blue, I blurted out, "Dammit, I cannot understand a word you are saying," and other, less polite words. I was mad, I was furious, frustrated, angry. Somehow, that anger broke through a barrier: suddenly their speech was no longer a string of weird sounds. I could hear words, expressions. From that day I learned Danish, and a few days later, when we stopped of at a small island, I had learned enough that they could send me to a little store to buy supplies (tomatoes, I remember, whose pronunciation in Danish is particularly strange and difficult).

Learning to experience the oneness was very much like the experience of learning to hear Danish. I had to break through a veil, a barrier. I had to let go!

I forgot Danish because I did not use it, but after having once experienced the oneness, now I can find it again, and each time it becomes easier to slip into that mode of being.

At first, each time I experienced the oneness, I also heard the soft tiger sound, but that faded. I knew the two were separate phenomena. Tiger was with me all the time, and I knew that he always had been. Experiencing the oneness, the knowing, was new, i changed my life. It was probably a month or more before I had an opportunity to go back to *Three*. I wanted very much to ask Ahmeed questions, learn how to handle this new 'knowing' as I call it now.

I should have known that Ahmeed did not 'teach' that way. I asked him to explain... Of course he did not answer. He did not even let me finish the sentence.

"Let's walk," he said.

We walked.

We did not go far before we sat down on a rock. The air smelled wonderful, I took deep breaths, turned my head this way and that, closed my eyes, and again felt the rich oneness all around me.

This time Ahmeed talked. He told a long story. He told me how he had learned what I now knew, when he was a young boy, perhaps eight or nine years old, he said. A woman had taught him, a woman from another 'family' (another settlement). She had come over for a visit, and had found him sitting by himself with his eyes closed. She had hunkered down beside him, and after a while she had asked him what he saw. 'Everything, everything...', he had answered.

She had taken him to her settlement, and he had lived with her for 'many years'. During that time she had shown him that there were times when it was good to 'see everything', but other times when it was not good.

Here Ahmeed looked at me, for emphasis: "There are times when it is *not* good to see everything," he repeated..

He told me stories of times when he had seen things before they happened, and how frightened he had been at first. He told me stories of strangers who had come to the settlement who did not know 'who he is', and had 'talked loud' to him<sup>13</sup>. But he did not mind, he said, he had just 'shut off seeing'. Again, he turned to me, for emphasis: "*do you 'turn off' the seeing?*"

Yes, I told him, I had had to, the people around me would not understand, so I had to learn that very early.

"Good," he said.

He added something which I realized only later was very insightful.

"You are alone," he said.

"It will be difficult for you to 'see' because you do not have the village<sup>14</sup> around you."

Now I know what he meant. It is indeed difficult to 'know' as I call it, without the protection of a village, or an extended family. I knew, and I 'knew' with my

In Malay culture, and also in Sng'oi culture, loud speech, loud noises, 'strong' gestures are considered rude, uncouth, foreign.

He used the word '*kampong*', a Malay word which means village. He knew very well that the few houses and few people of his settlement was not really a *Kampong*, but in context I think he meant the 'extended family' of the settlement I called *Three*.

new knowing, that Ahmeed could not help me after I left Malaysia and continued my life elsewhere, but he was aware of what it must be like for me. He cared.

Ahmeed had been talking for at least half an hour: unusual for him. When he paused, I thought he was done. I moved to stand up, but he put his hand on my arm, as if to say, No, not yet. Nothing was said for several minutes, but I knew what he was saying to me. Not in words. Not even in images. I sensed warm, supporting energy coming from him to me.

After a while he said again, turning full face to me, "Strong." (Be strong).

We both got up, needing to stretch, walk around a bit. I knew we would continue, but one part of what Ahmeed needed to share with me, was done. We needed a break before going on. He told me some news about *Three*. Someone had a baby, but the baby was born *too quickly*, he said, and so she did not live. Another woman was pregnant. "Strange," he said, "two babies in a row. Very unusual." He asked about my family. This was intermission, social time. We chatted about people, about things that had happened, about daily life.

As we sat down again he continued, in a different tone of voice, it seemed. Deeper, almost like the voice he had used when he was in trance.

"*Harimau...*," he began, and then paused for a long time. Tiger...

For him, the *animal that helped him* was Snake, he said finally.

"We (Sng'oi) do not talk about that," he added.

"We *never* talk about that."

Then he said, "Snake show itself..."

Large snakes do not cross a path in broad daylight. This snake had 'shown itself' for Ahmeed's sake (and, indirectly, to help me see). I knew he meant to say that the snake showed itself because Snake is the animal-that-helps-him: if he had not been there with me, the snake would not have been there.

"That knowing is in my heart," he said.

The knowledge that Snake is his helper is inside of him, in his heart, locked up, his alone. He was sharing something with me he would not share with anyone else.

"That evening, after we eat we walked a little ways so that others would not hear about your *Harimau*," your Tiger.

Now I understood. He meant to tell me that I could not share my feeling for Tiger with anyone. Tiger is the animal-that-helps-me, and that knowing is in my heart, I should not talk about that.

I had questions. I wanted to ask, *why*... (the first word in the western vocabulary). But I stopped myself in time. I would have to learn by myself. There would be opportunities later to talk perhaps, another time, different circumstances. This evening was too full of meaning to spoil it by asking questions. He had not talked during what I thought of as my training. Now he

talked and I could not break the flow.

It was very dark outside, stars were glittering overhead. There was no moon.

He shivered a little. Not because he was cold, I think, but because of the solemnity of the moment. At last he turned to face me, relaxing his body, as if to say, 'the ceremony is over, relax', looked at me, and said, again,

"You are alone."

Yes, I was alone with my new-found knowing, without a society, or a culture to support me. Then he added, "Strong," you are strong... Or, I must be strong. I thought of a coach, telling a player who is walking to the field, 'you can do it!'

This had been my Initiation, a solemn occasion, even though it was not a public event. I felt as if he had passed on some ancient knowledge. I was intensely grateful for what he had given me, and just as grateful for the way he had shown me: I learned what *learning* is.



Over the years my sense of the knowing I am a part of this world became stronger, it became a life line. I felt safe in the knowing that I am part of everything that is on this earth. I have a strong connection with trees and through trees I am connected to all the natural world. Trees have become a sort of anchor to the natural world for me. I am energized by trees as other people feel energized by rocks, or by ocean. When I stand with my back pressed against an old evergreen tree, I feel energy coursing up my spine. That is not a mystic experience, it is a way for me to reconnect with the natural world of which I am a part and so it is an affirmation of my humanity.

Of course I never knew whether I had learned what Ahmeed knew. I am not even certain that what I call 'knowing' is what Ahmeed calls 'seeing'. I do know that Ahmeed helped me regain a sense of being human as part of the natural world, a sense of belonging that, probably, all the Sng'oi and many other people have naturally, but western people often lose.

He knew I lived in a different world, that 'knowing what he was' would be different for me. He taught me a most valuable lesson, without words! And he gave me his support and his blessings.