



Body and Beyond – Scientific and Spiritual Perspectives on the Subtle Body

Eleanor Stoneham

Rebuilt in impressive Victorian Gothic style in the mid eighteenth century following massive fire damage, Latimer Place in fact dates back to the twelfth century when its surrounding 30 acres of ground were probably a deer park. Set in the heart of the Chiltern's beautiful countryside north-west of London, it was here that 100 of us gathered for the third conference in the highly successful Body and Beyond series, to explore aspects of the subtle body; that part of us beyond the physical body, as indicated by different spiritual traditions and our own experiences. There was a good representation of both non members and international delegates, and from a very unscientific straw poll on the opening evening half of us admitted to having "out of body" experiences or OBEs.

Prof. Bernard Carr and **David Lorimer** opened the proceedings with a few reflections of their own. Can physics expand to accommodate dreams, Near Death Experiences (NDEs), apparitions, and other phenomena associated with the subtle body?

It is clear that conventional science cannot explain many paranormal experiences and there is a need to expand the boundaries of science. It seems we have to arrive at an expanded idea of consciousness and reality to accommodate the different stories we hear of individual experiences.

But of course anecdotal cases cannot be repeated in the scientific sense, and so we have to take a more legalistic approach to gain credibility. That is, can we accept the evidence beyond any reasonable doubt? This was a maxim recognised throughout the conference.

Where better to start on Saturday morning, after our usual meditation session, than with a historical framework for the extensive work on parapsychology, especially OBEs and related phenomena, ably provided by **Carlos S. Alvarado**. The subtle body is a very old concept. The earliest known recording of an apparition was apparently by Vespasian, Roman Emperor from AD 69 to AD 79. Since then there has been a vast body of anecdote and speculation around the concept of what Carlos called the "double", the idea that there is an etheric counterpart to the physical body, as supported by accounts of OBEs, apparitions, deathbed observations, NDEs, etc.

With plenty of supporting research material, Carlos led us through the historic discussion, debate and speculation as to the nature of these experiences, as to whether they are physical or ethereal, and showed us how these concepts have developed since the mid-nineteenth century.

Sandie Gustus then spoke of the consciential paradigm work of Dr Waldo Vieira and the science of Conscientology, based on the recognition that our reality is multi dimensional, that consciousness has an existence independent from the body. SMN members, whilst familiar with the concept, may not all be aware that this is such a huge scientific discipline - with 70 sub-disciplines, such as parapsychology, communicology, telepathy, cosmoethics, parabiology and paragenetics, all engaging research scientists.

Sandie's mission is to translate Vieira's work into a more accessible form, to bring this work to a lay audience. She has been researching into OBEs for the last 10 years in conjunction with the International Academy of Consciousness, an organisation associated with Vieira's work. Much of our fascination was with her ability to invoke her own OBEs, to be able to sense the power of positive energy, and her strong conviction of the existence of the subtle body from her personal experiences.

Prof. David J. Hufford was unable to be with us in his physical body but we experienced a most satisfactory link with his image via Skype, over which he delivered his lecture on The Subtle Body in Near-Death Experiences, After Death-Contacts and Sleep Paralysis, all now





known to be common and normal occurrences. Back in the 1960's the belief in spirits was widely regarded as irrational. But he cited Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Ebenezer Scrooge experienced a ghost, and Henry Fuseli's great 1781 oil painting *The Nightmare*, where sleep paralysis is clearly illustrated. We need, Hufford told us, to question deeply two centuries of assumptions about the non-empirical and non-rational nature of spirit beliefs. He has himself done much work on such phenomena, including a study in Newfoundland with the sleep paralysis experience, where it is called the Old Hag. He showed us that these experiences present the same core features across many cultures and prove to be independent of any expectation, with no significant correlation to pathology of any kind, indicating them to be "real" events.

The theme continued through Saturday afternoon and the evening film, *Nightmare*, a documentary about sleep paralysis and spirits. Fortunately this did not seem to affect anyone's sleep unduly and we all gathered again on Sunday morning to hear anthropologist **Geoffrey Samuel** provide us with an exploration and comparison of subtle body concepts in both Asian and Western thought. He highlighted the tension between academic and experiential understanding in the materialistic West, where our mode of thinking and language are not ready for accepting the idea of a subtle body occupying the intermediate space between mind and matter.

We enjoyed the benefit of Geoffrey's in depth studies of subtle body practices in Tibetan Buddhism, as he showed us a complex and sophisticated tradition - illustrated with just a few of several thousand practices in Tibetan Tantric rituals in Buddhism.

Buddhism treats the self as provisional, and ultimately illusory, with three levels of body, speech and mind, not separated as in the Western Cartesian distinction of mind and body, where the mind has been regarded as subsidiary to the material body. Indeed we even try to define all things as matter simply because any other explanation of our experiences does not fit with our Western mode of thought or even with our language.

So the subtle body is not just about the individual, but also rather with what happens between us. It connects us with the environment, with society and with the cosmos. Prof. Samuel hopes that his work will bring healing into medicine, a matter dear to my own heart and explored in some depth elsewhere.

To conclude what had proved to be a fascinating and stimulating gathering, **Dr. Edi Bilimoria** gave us the benefit of his vast understanding of theosophy - the divine wisdom, the wisdom of the gods, a state of limitless consciousness - pointing us to the great work of H. P. Blavatsky.

Modern man, he reminded us, is a physical instrument, but he cannot produce beautiful music if he is broken. There is one human territory but many anatomical maps, and he explained the different aspects of this one being - from the two fold Pauline

split of the being into spirit and psychic bodies, the three fold Platonic split into eternal immortal spirit, the soul or psyche and the physical body, to the seven fold occult classification from the highest divine self or atma, to the lowest at the level of physical body. But these must not be thought of as layers of a cake, with distinct boundaries - in fact all layers blend seamlessly into one another.

He gave a compelling metaphor adapted from Ramana Maharshi of our being within the rooms of a house. There is the inner chamber with the door ajar through which the light of the spirit or divine self shines into the next, outer room onto a mirror, the brain or mind. From this mirror the light is reflected onto the external verandah, our physical body, through five dirty mirrors, representing the five physical senses. In this incarnation our job is to open that door as wide as possible, to keep the mirror as dust free as possible and to keep the windows clean, so that the transforming divine presence can shine through for a better world. If we work on our physical senses, by cleaning the windows first, the rest will follow. Edi spoke of greed, of what he calls the aural pornography of noise, of the need to pay attention to our myths, and he urged us to purify our senses by exposure to nature, science, beautiful music - and yes - great wine!

As always at these events the open forum at the end gave plenty of opportunity for discussion, debate and for further ideas to be aired.

For me there were two important messages to take away with us from the weekend. First, might it be possible that these various extra sensory and subtle body experiences may provide an empirical basis for some of our traditional religious and spiritual beliefs, making them rational? Secondly, for the sake of the future of humanity we need to all become more aware of our connectedness, at all planes of our existence, at all energy levels, which would facilitate the much needed cooperation between all humanity on a massive scale. For this to happen we need to be not only better informed but also wiser. For me this conference was one significant step along that path.

Dr. Eleanor Stoneham is the author of *Why Religions Work: God's Place in the World Today*.





Report on the Annual Gathering, 2012

David Rousseau

The 24th Annual Gathering was held on the 6th – 8th of July in Horsley Court in East Horsley, Surrey. Horsley Court is set within the grounds of Horsley Towers, a mansion built around 1830 in the style of a Bavarian Castle to a design by Charles Barry, later the architect of the Houses of Parliament. It is surrounded by 70 acres of parkland and has been home to the 1st Earl of Lovelace and later Sir Thomas Sopwith, the aviation pioneer.

Upon arrival we all received, together with the usual information, a brochure listing under the name of each delegate a short statement of their current interests and concerns. This was a wonderfully interesting and useful document, which made it easy to connect with others and to help remember new friends made. Many thanks to Charla for preparing it, and I hope that this will become a permanent feature of these gatherings.

On Friday evening we were treated to a showing of the film *Journey of the Universe: The Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth and Human Transformation*. It presented an interesting overview of cosmic evolution leading up to the present, and gave a sense of our place in the Cosmos.

Saturday began with a keynote presentation by cardiologist **Dr Pim van Lommel**, on the subject of *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Near-Death Experience and the Nature of Reality*. Pim won the 2010 *Network Book Prize* for his book *Consciousness beyond Life: the Science of the Near-Death Experience*, which presents a comprehensive survey of NDE research and discusses their wider relevance for our understanding of the nature of consciousness and reality. Pim has been studying NDEs for more than 20 years, and co-authored the first paper on NDEs to appear in *The Lancet*, one of the most respected medical journals.

Pim has a clear and engaging presentation style, and given his evident medical expertise, research competence and personal integrity we were treated to an inspiring and convincing review of how scientific studies into NDEs reveal the existence of a reality that extends beyond the physical. Of particular importance in this regard are the cases where patients report OBEs during which they witnessed unusual events that occurred while they were in a state of cardiac arrest, and which events are later corroborated by medical staff and relatives. These cases suggest that normal waking consciousness is conditioned by normal brain functions but not dependent on them nor produced by them. Such a model was already proposed by William James and Henri Bergson over a century ago, but now there is strong scientific evidence supporting it.

As Pim pointed out, the scientific study of NDEs pushes at the limits of orthodox medical and neurophysiological ideas about the nature of consciousness and its relation to brain function. For this reason, the implications that Pim pointed out are likely to remain controversial for some time to come. However, the NDE-based evidence suggesting a wider understanding of

consciousness is impressive and improving all the time. According to Pim NDEs can no longer be scientifically ignored, and the current materialistic view of the mind-brain relationship is too restricted to allow for a proper understanding of NDEs. It is obviously too early to speculate with any confidence about the nature of consciousness as revealed by these studies, but NDE research has clearly opened up an important opportunity for science to become powerfully engaged with long-standing philosophical problems.

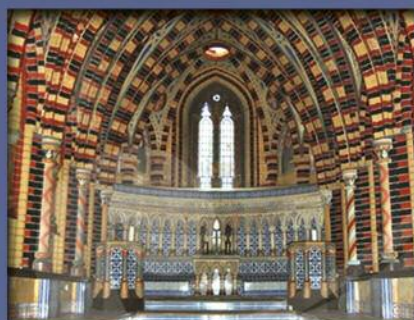
Pim also discussed how the implications of this research go well beyond the mind-body debate, and touch on issues in healthcare and spirituality more generally. For example, at present the approach to many medical and ethical problems is shaped by religious beliefs (or their lack) rather than scientific knowledge. Issues around birth control, abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, organ donation after brain death, and life-prolonging treatment are likely to be viewed differently in the light of the implications of NDEs. Likewise our perspective on our relationship to, and responsibilities towards, other people, other living things and Nature in general is likely to be transformed as we explore the implications of our enduring consciousness.

We were privileged to have present at the gathering two other experts and published authors on NDEs, namely **David Lorimer** and **Peter Fenwick**. After Pim's talk they each presented their own perspective on NDEs and affirmed Pim's view on the significance of NDEs for a wider understanding of consciousness. After this we had an extensive question and answer session between the audience and Pim, David and Peter, taking up the rest of the morning. It was a sign of the great interest the audience had in the subject that they proposed, at the conclusion of the morning session, to continue the discussion after lunch rather than use the planned free period between lunch and afternoon tea to explore Horsley Towers. More than half of the delegates returned for this second session.

Before Saturday dinner **Max Payne** gave a talk on the founders and the founding of the SMN, and presented a fascinating insight into the spiritual and scientific motivation and vision of George Blaker, Patrick Shackleton, Kelvin Spencer, and Peter Leggett, later joined by Geoffrey Leytham and Arthur Ellison. Delegates added their own reminiscences in the discussion afterwards, and it was interesting to hear that all the founders had had mystical experiences, and how important this personal insight was to their concern that science was at risk of becoming a scientism that would exclude such experiences from being investigated in an open-minded way. Their commitment was to building a community that would stand for "a non-dogmatic view on reality, a process of total openness, ruthless rigour, and mutual respect and love", and from the discussion it was clear that this commitment remains a central inspiration to current members.



Dr Pim van Lommel



After dinner we had a relaxing evening of casual entertainment provided by members, and this was much enjoyed by all. The high point for me was a poem celebrating the just-announced discovery of the Higgs boson, composed and presented with great charm by Elizabeth and Peter Fenwick; I much regret that we do not have a recording of it on our website...

Sunday Morning was devoted as usual to the AGM and Members' Forum. Chris Lyons reported that the last year showed a significantly reduced loss compared to the previous year, but this was largely due to increased donations and legacies. The shortfall was once again balanced by a grant from the Trustees but even at the reduced level the grant was more than the investment income of the trust fund, so this remains a matter of concern. Last year saw a 20% increase in membership fees but it is too early to say if this will produce a net increase in subscription income as 5% of members resigned and another 17% have yet to renew. Bernard Carr reported that good progress was being made with establishing a web-based MSc in *Consciousness and Transpersonal Studies*, and it is on track to commence this year and the course Director will be Prof. Les Lancaster. He also reported that good progress was being made with the further development of the website and explained its importance for supporting the new MSc course as well as member services.

After the AGM there was an opportunity to discuss members' concerns and suggestions with the board, and this was concluded by a presentation from Oilly Robinson on the findings of the member survey that was recently conducted online. More than a quarter of members responded, so it provides a valuable insight into members' interests and concerns. A report on the findings has now been published in the *Network Review* (#109, p.25), so I will only point out that according to the survey the topic SMN members are most likely to attend a conference on is "NDEs and the survival of consciousness", which tied in nicely with the theme of this year's Annual Gathering.

Dr. David Rousseau is a Systems Philosopher with an interest in spiritual experiences and their potential for scientific research into the foundations of moral intuitions.



Mapping Time, Mind and Space, Drogheda, Ireland, 18th -21st October 2012

Chris Lyons



Brenda Dunne



John Clarke



Robert Jahn



Rupert Sheldrake



Bernard Carr



David Rousseau

In October the SMN held its first joint meeting with the Society for Scientific Exploration. This is a US-based organisation whose interests much overlap those of the SMN, concerning itself, as it does, with topics usually ignored or studied inadequately within mainstream science. The venue was a delightful adult education college near Drogheda, Ireland, set in extensive grounds, and just a stone's throw from the sea.

Seventy-seven delegates attended to hear the five invited speakers and the twelve others who had volunteered to give papers. The meeting began after dinner on the Thursday evening with messages of welcome from the two organisers, **Charla Devereux** and **Erling Strand**, followed by introductions of the two organisations to each other by their respective chairs, **Bernard Carr** and **William Bengston**.

The five invited speakers were **Paul Devereux**, **Bernard Carr**, **Bob Jahn** & **Brenda Dunne** (who gave a joint presentation) and **Rupert Sheldrake**. Paul Devereux gave the first talk on *Monumentality: Time, Mind and Space*. He discussed the concept of monuments, and how humanity had used them to map time, mind and space. His talk was illustrated with many slides and focussed especially on ancient monuments, principally the Great Pyramid, Stonehenge and the Neolithic monuments of the Boyne Valley, which we were to visit during the course of the conference. In the case of Stonehenge, some of the stones (the blue stones) are thought to have been transported from South Wales, a hundred and fifty miles away. He speculated as to why the ancients would have gone to such trouble and suggested that it could have been because of the inherent acoustic qualities of the rocks. He also showed fascinating pictures of the Neolithic sites at Newgrange and Knowth, just a short distance from where we were. These consisted of constructed earth mounds roughly three hundred feet in diameter and forty feet high, excavated with passages and chambers, and embellished with numerous carvings. With our interest thus sparked for what was to follow during the weekend, we duly retired to the bar.

On Friday morning Bernard Carr spoke on *Making Space and Time for Mind*. He explained that because science is concerned with the external – particles and their interactions – it is unable to get any purchase on the internal – mind, experience, subjectivity – and suggested that if we are to unify matter, mind, space and time, we will first need to re-conceptualise them, thus seeming to hint at some form of pan-psychism. He went on to say that he didn't consider that Quantum Theory was up to this job and that a deeper theory would be needed – one that underlies both mind and matter – an extension of physics that would provide an explicit model of mind in its normal, paranormal and spiritual manifestations. At the present time though, we seem to be very far from such a model.

On the Friday afternoon Bob Jahn and Brenda Dunne spoke of their experience running the Princeton Engineering Anomalies

Research Lab. This operated at Princeton University between 1979 and 2007 and conducted research aimed at better understanding the role of consciousness within physical reality. During this time they conducted many hundreds of studies on Psychokinesis and Remote Viewing, many of them involving subjects trying to influence the output of random number generators. They considered that they had, in fact, done this and demonstrated that human intention has a slight effect on these machines – about 2-3 events in 10,000, they claimed. When the PEAR lab finally closed, they regarded their work as complete – the data had been collected and nothing would have been gained, they thought, from collecting more.

Rupert Sheldrake spoke on Saturday morning on the theme *Minds Extended in Space and Time*. His talk was based largely on his book, *The Science Delusion*, and, as in the book, he set out what he calls the ten dogmas of science, namely:

1. Nature is mechanical or machine-like
2. Matter is unconscious
3. The laws of nature are fixed
4. The total amount of matter/energy in the universe is constant
5. Nature is purposeless
6. Biological inheritance is material
7. Memories are stored as material traces in the brain
8. The mind is the brain
9. Psychic phenomena are illusory
10. Mechanistic medicine is the only kind that works

Whilst there are things that can be said against all these positions, there are also things that can be said for them, and that seems to be the weakness of his case – it's insufficiently nuanced. For instance, nature actually is, after all, in many though not all ways, mechanical. His overall position, as set out in his book, that "(t)he biggest delusion of all is that science already knows the answers" is, I think, unjustified, but he wasn't the only speaker at this conference to utter this sentiment.

The twelve additional speakers brought a great variety of ideas to the meeting. They each had about twenty minutes to speak and ten minutes for questions.

William Kantz was critical of the prevailing scientific paradigm and its implicit metaphysical assumptions. He considered that direct knowledge was possible and that expert intuitives have access to it. Whether or not this is so, of course, could be put to the test. Intuitions, we all know, are frequently wrong, but there is no reason why the reliability of a so-called 'expert intuitive' couldn't be tested.

David Rousseau gave an interesting talk on the possibility of Spiritual Realism being capable of mapping a scientifically plausible ontology. He discussed the difficulties associated with the different meanings ascribed to the 'S' word, and settled on Spiritual Realism as referring to those deep-seated intuitions that people hold, and asked whether these might represent an ontological realm (like a Platonic or mathematical realm) that could be explored and mapped.

Jim Beichler's talk was far more main-stream. He began by stating that as consciousness interacts with the material world, it must be at least physical in nature. He follows Hameroff and Penrose in regarding the microtubules of neurons to be its source, but regards the mechanism to be electromagnetic rather than quantum mechanical. His mechanism plausibly deals with the binding problem and the unity of consciousness, but says nothing as to how first person experience arises.

Andrew Silverman asked what is 'now' and what is 'time', and pointed out that physics doesn't say why there should be a 'now'. He further pointed out that the wave equation for the entire universe shows its total energy to be zero, and that, therefore, no time can occur. He concluded that without 'mind' there is no 'now'. It wasn't clear to me though how his concept of mind related to the universe.

Edi Billmoria took us into deep realms of metaphysical speculation to explore the nature of matter. He brought in the ideas of Goethe and Blavatsky to weave a story, seasoned by Leibnitz, Einstein, Heisenberg and even Brian Josephson, that (as with the Great Chain of Being) sees physical matter as but the lowest part of a continuum that extends right up to the godhead.

Erlendur Haraldsson, an Icelandic psychologist, discussed the investigative work he had done among people who had experienced encounters with the dead. He had conducted 450 in-depth interviews with such people and analysed their experiences according to various categories – visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and vivid sense of presence. He asked whether these experiences might represent something real, and whether, as William James had suggested, there was in fact another world.

We were taken in quite another direction by **Andrew Gallimore**, a protégé, perhaps, of Tim Leary and Terence McKenna; certainly a biochemist with a strong interest in the psychedelic experience. He discussed the phenomenology of the DMT (di-methyl tryptamine) experience. What is peculiar about the use of this substance is that the trip is very brief (often just a few minutes) but extremely intense. What's more, the content of the experience is remarkably stereotyped, frequently involving technologically advanced, elf-like imagery. The substance, of course, is chemically, closely related to the neurotransmitter serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine).

Michal Teplan brought us back to more conventional science with his paper on the electrical properties of acupuncture points and meridians. His work was premised on the assumption that acupuncture is physiologically effective, and he made no mention of recent studies with sham-acupuncture which suggest that the effect is a placebo one. He had attempted to investigate the acupuncture system by vector analysis in the acoustic and radiofrequency range, but had had no success.

William Bengston discussed his work using a healing technique on mice, in which had been induced a normally 100% fatal cancer. He reported that 91.7% of the experimental group were cured, as were 80.55% of the on-site control group, whilst none of the off-site control group survived.

Saturday morning began with **Vanessa Dodd's** talk on *Time Maps of the Narrating Mind*. She began by saying that humans are essentially story-tellers, and then looked at the concept of phenomenal consciousness and how it allows us an idea of past and future. She furthermore explained that time is not real (in the philosophical sense) or physical, but is in essence a mental phenomenon, and that, as such, it can be experienced in linear or non-linear ways. She used examples from the works of Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf to illustrate this. She concluded that waking consciousness is atemporal - a continuous present - whilst in dreaming consciousness time dissolves altogether. Consciousness, she said, is a playful pattern-maker that creates stories about what it is like to be in the world.

Linda Hoy, an author of children's fiction, explained that she frequently experienced premonitions, but, as this suggested that the future had already occurred, it implied that free-will was an illusion, which was something she could not accept. She went on to describe her discovery of the work of J W Dunne, who had suggested that after dying we might have the opportunity to live our lives again and to correct mistakes made in the previous one. This, she thought, could explain premonitions - not as glimpses into the future, but as recall of fragments of a past life, thereby preserving the future as undetermined and retaining the possibility of free-will.

Paul Filmore finished off the lecture programme by speaking on how TRIZ can map time, mind and space. TRIZ is a Russian acronym for a theory of inventive problem solving. It was developed by a Russian patent investigator who discovered patterns of creativity amongst the large number of patents he examined, and from these developed tools for use in future problem solving. Paul described some of these tools and explained how they were of use to modern businesses.

In a lighter vein, we were entertained on one of the evenings by Irish story-teller, **Eddie Lenihan**, a larger-than-life half-man half-leprechaun, who regaled us with tales of mystery, horror and priestly powers unknown to the Vatican. Suitably stunned by the end of his tales, we sought revival in the bar.

One of the highlights of the conference was the trip we made to the Neolithic monuments of the Boyne valley. These five thousand year old earth works were impressive in their size, and elaborately decorated with megalithic artwork. The purpose of the monuments, whether tombs, temples or astronomical observatories, is still in contention, but they provide a fascinating glimpse into the world of the pre-historic agricultural community that built them.

Dr. Chris Lyons is a GP and Treasurer of the Network. He also has an MSc in Consciousness Studies and Transpersonal Psychology.





Rumi: A Talk by Andrew Harvey

Hugh Salvesen

The Beshara School at Chisholme House, 8 October 2012

Many of us have special things stuck to the door of the fridge. Picture postcards from friends on holiday. Shopping lists. Magnetic words arranged in a semblance of poetry. In his lecture at the Chisholme Institute in the Scottish Borders on 8 October, Andrew Harvey told his audience that his fridge door displays a verse by the subject of his talk, the Sufi mystic and poet Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi:

‘ The grapes of my body can only become wine
After the winemaker tramples me.
I surrender my spirit like grapes to his trampling
So my inmost heart can blaze and dance with joy... ’

Why, Harvey asked, is Rumi now read more than any other poet? Because, he argued, he articulates like no other writer how we should confront the uniquely threatening crisis of our time, characterised by greed, arrogance, environmental despoliation and its “tremendous ignorance of the sacred”. Some respond to the crisis by retreating into the illusory serenity of what he disparaged as “New Age narcissism”. But, as the verse on Harvey’s fridge door tells us, this is not Rumi’s way, and in Harvey’s view it is not the way that will save us.

In one of the most engaging passages in his lecture, Harvey recounted how Father Bede Griffiths had told him that he saw three possible outcomes to the crisis facing humankind. One was that the human race would recognize the gravity of the crisis in time, and change its ways. On the evidence so far, this seems unlikely.

A second is that we carry on regardless and destroy ourselves and the planet. This is possible; but Father Bede at least thought that God in His divine mercy would not allow it. The third possibility is that the crisis itself will form the crucible for an unprecedented transformation of consciousness. This will entail our passing through a dark night which, as we are trampled by the winemaker, will be acutely painful, but from which we shall emerge at the beginning of a new, divinely embodied humanity. “The dark night will root out the madness”.

In Harvey’s understanding, Rumi’s verse finds so many readers now partly because it expresses the divine passion and the transfiguring power of love which we shall need to carry us through the dark night ahead, but also because it adumbrates the mystical renaissance of the new humanity beyond. It is poetry for us now because the crisis is now greater than ever, but also because of the new evolutionary mysticism which is being born in our time.

Andrew Harvey’s response to this moment of greatest danger and greatest possibility is what he calls ‘sacred activism’. Copies of his book ‘The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism’ (2009) were available at the lecture. Written in the aftermath of Obama’s victory in the 2008 Presidential election, hailed at the time by so many as a turning point in the birthing of a new politics and even a new humanity, it is faintly depressing to read these bits of it in 2012. Obamaphoria is over.

But this is not to discredit the idea of sacred activism itself. There are clearly many ways in which to ally spiritual vision with a practical drive to bring about change in the world. Andrew Harvey’s chosen focus for his own activism in the world is his campaign against the abuse of animals, and in particular on behalf of the threatened white lions of South Africa. It is for each of us to find our own.

It is your turn now

*It is your turn now,
you waited, you were patient.
The time has come,
for us to polish you.
We will transform your inner pearl
into a house of fire.
You’re a gold mine.
Did you know that,
hidden in the dirt of the earth?
It is your turn now,
to be placed in fire.
Let us cremate your impurities.*

From: *Hush Don’t Say Anything to God: Passionate Poems of Rumi, Translated by Sharam Shiva*

