

## The Man Who Planted Trees: A Conversation with David Milarch by Awakin Call Editors

Twenty some years ago David Milarch hovered above the bed, looking down at his motionless body. Years of alcoholism had booted him out of his life. An inexplicable cosmic commandment would return him to it. His improbable charge? To clone the world's champion trees - the giants that had survived millennia and would be unvanquished by climate change. Experts said it couldn't be done. Fast-forward to today, and Milarch is now the keeper of a Noah's Ark filled with the genetics for repopulating the world's most ancient trees. Founder of the Archangel Ancient Tree Archive he is on a mission to restore the lungs of the planet -- a mission that now reaches close to 300 million people each year. "Spend a couple of days in an old-growth forest, you'll come out different from when you went in. Those trees affect our physical, mental and especially our spiritual bodies. Redwoods have been on this planet for 400 million years longer than humans. I believe that trees have a soul, they have a conscience. And I do believe that anyone, everyone can learn to communicate with them." The following is an edited version of an interview with David. You can read or listen to the full version of the interview [here](#).

Samir Patel (moderator): Thank you everyone, for giving me the opportunity to host this conversation. My first point of contact with David and his work was when I was living at the Gandhi Ashram. I was at a farm and came across this book called "The Man Who Planted Trees" by Jean Giono. At that time, it was a book that inspired me to plant a lot of trees at the Gandhi Ashram. More recently, I came across another book with the same title, by Jim Robbins, which is focused on the modern day work of David Milarch. I was very inspired to think that this man is living right now! David seemed like a legendary figure to me and I reached out to him to have a conversation -- that's how we first connected.

David, all of us here, at ServiceSpace are interested in hands-on action in different areas, including the environment. To start this conversation off, could you first give us an idea of how you grew up and what your early years were like?

David: I was born and raised in Livonia, Michigan, a rural suburb of Detroit. I was born in 1949 so I grew up in the 50s and 60s witnessing the transformation of Detroit, which was called the Paris of Trees back in the 20s, 30s and 40s because the streets were so beautifully-lined with large trees. My father had a nursery at our home in Livonia. So as soon as I was able to walk outside, when I was 5 years old, I was asked to do the weeding of small plants and that started my journey with plants and trees. Then the late 60s came around with the war and Vietnam and political turmoil -- there were riots back then; a lot of the young people were dissatisfied. I found my solace during those times when I was working alone as a teenager, with plants and trees, especially the trees. But by the time I

was 21 years old, the city had gotten its tentacles into me. I was abusing drugs, riding with a motorcycle gang, doing a lot of fighting, and I was at war with myself. So that summer when I was 21, I grabbed a small tent and my motorcycle and went 250 miles north near Traverse City, Michigan to camp out. Something I'd never done before! I was trying to figure out who I was, what was going on and why had the Creator put me on earth. It wasn't for the negative things -- so what was it I needed to do? So I camped alone on the edge of a small lake that entire summer and by the end of that summer, I had come into my own. I had found out that our Mother Earth was being abused every way that you could abuse her, in the name of greed. And I was really, really sorrowful. I was angry and thought there must be something I can do to help. I moved to a very small area called Copemish -- a village of 150 people. There are lots of rivers, lakes, trees and forests, but it's really quite isolated. And it's very rural and very poor.

Samir: In your camping trip you mentioned that you discovered who you were. What did you discover?

David: At that time, though I didn't know it, I was an initiate, for my life's work in this mission I was given to plant and conserve old-growth trees. But all of us listening would agree that you have to find a quiet place to be able to listen to your inner voice, and the other voices coming through from the divine, giving us a hint of who we are, why we were born, and what our mission might be. But if we stay busy in what I call the "monkey brain" chasing your tail around cities, rushing around doing things, it's difficult to listen to who we are, why we're here and what we could do to help. So, meditation helps.

Samir: It's the difference between being a witness and doing, right? Fast-forwarding a little to 1993, I heard you died then. If you died, who are you right now? Describe that experience to us.

David: Well, my body died. I didn't die. But I had total renal failure, which means my liver and kidneys stopped functioning. About 3 or 4 days into that ordeal, you sort of swell up, turn yellow and are violently ill from the poisons you can't get rid of. You have high fever. I was home and I had two small sons, 6 and 8 years old. I refused to go to the hospital. I said I got myself into this, I will get myself out of this -- I was that stubborn. So about the fourth day, my wife Kerry called my best friend, Larry Roundtree and he came over and said, "You're in bad shape, looks like you're dying. You need to get some help." He picked me up out of my bed, threw me over his shoulder, and drove me to the closest hospital. I was in full renal failure and there was so much fluid around my heart, it was stopping. And they said, "We need to reduce the pressure from around your heart"; so they take these very large needles and stab them into my chest and draw out the fluid, so I don't have a heart attack. That seemed to help quite a bit. Then they said you need a blood transfusion because your blood's not coagulating, but if we do that you'll probably hemorrhage to death; but we need to try. They were doing all kinds of things. I was grateful for it, but when they were finished with those procedures they said you're going to have to go on dialysis immediately and maybe we can keep you alive for 24 hours. I said to them, "No I don't think that's what going to happen. I want to go home." And the doctor got really violent and said, "You're going to die. You can't go home." I said, "No, I want to go home." So I asked them to get my friend Larry. Much to the displeasure of the hospital and the doctor, he put me back over his shoulder, put me in the car and drove me home. I told the doctor, "I'm

not going to die." He said, "Yes, you are." And I'm happy to report that we were both correct! Later that night, my body died, but, of course, your spirit doesn't die at all. And I left this earth plane and I went to the next dimension.

Samir: What did you see in that dimension and how did that transform you?

David: Well, it transformed everything. Mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually---it's a very profound experience, when you actually do cross over to the other side. I knew I was dying. I was full of sorrow because I had small sons and I wouldn't be around to raise my boys. I was full of sorrow for all the people I had misused or hurt. And the moment came when I was lifted up, out of my body, and much to my surprise, I was conscious. I knew who I was, I felt like I did when I was in the human body, and I started to get really afraid, like I wanted to reach back down and get back into my body. And right about then, an angel came and said, "We're here to help you, don't be afraid." And there was a lot of compassion and them trying to comfort me. Then, I was led into a 10-12-foot diameter tunnel of light that ran at an angle on a horizontal plane. And I went into that tunnel of light -- it had really bright, white walls and on the edge of the walls or in the walls was the DNA helix. One was a salmon-colored ribbon of light. The other was a light blue ribbon, going in the opposite direction. All of a sudden, it was like being shot out of a cannon. And through the tunnel of light we went and I don't know how long it was. But the angels hung on tight because they knew I'd be afraid. And a little while later, we arrived. Bang! Just stopped like an elevator. And I stepped out into a dimension that looked like you were on the edge of a big city. But in this city, the buildings were pretty much all white. The sky was beautiful and had colors that I haven't really seen on earth. The best way to describe it is the most beautiful sunset I've ever seen, over the ocean in Florida or the Gulf of Mexico. And there was a harmony, or a feeling -- wave after wave of unconditional love. It was like rapture! And some more light beings came, and I thought I was going to walk over to the city. I was just trying to hold on because of the wave after wave of unconditional love washing over me -- but it wasn't scary at all.

Samir: Wow -- so all this brought you back to trees in some way, right? I'd love to hear more about how trees anchor our ability to live on this planet. Like, why trees?

David: Well, trees are one of the main anchoring systems of almost every ecosystem on earth. The roots of trees grow deeply into the ground and the tops reach for the sky, or the heavens. So they are of heaven and of earth. I was sent back from my near-death experience. They told me that I had to go back and had work to do.

I know now, that sometimes we need to go through extremes like that, Samir. And everyone who is listening -- if you're in an extremely difficult situation, whether it be your physical or mental health, or if you are in a difficult situation with your partner or your family where you're really under duress, look on it as a blessing. I know that sounds very, very difficult to understand. But if you're being tested and challenged, know that there's important work for you to do.

Samir: Yeah! And I think, Kahlil Gibran in 'The Prophet', said (paraphrasing lightly): the deeper the pain carves the cup, the more water it can hold...

David: Exactly! It makes perfect sense in my situation. After I came back, I wasn't able to walk and had difficulty in even drinking water. I'd lost 100 lbs. through the ordeal. After about a month, I was able to get out of bed and take a few steps. And it wasn't too much longer after that -- it was the middle of one night that the bedroom lit up like a flash bulb had gone off. It woke me up -- it was about 2 in the morning. And it actually kind of scared me. I said, "Oh boy, are we going back through the tunnel of light?" And a voice said, "We want you to go out in the living room and sit in your leather chair and get a yellow pad and a pen." I said, "I will, if you'll turn the light down". So the lights went down to where I could take my hands off my eyes and I did what was asked. And that's pretty much all I remember. But 4 hours later when I woke, on that yellow pad was the outline for this project. It was about an 8-page outline that was perfectly written. As luck would have it, my wife teaches English at university. I never took university-level English and she knows I was not capable of doing that. When she woke up, she wanted to know what I was doing out in the living room. I handed her the pad. She looked at it and said, "You didn't write this!" But it was in my writing! She said, "What's going on?" I said, "I don't know." And that was actually how the outline for the project came through, which we're still following 23 years later, today.

Samir: Wow! Yeah, in the Hindu tradition that I grew up in, they always talk about people being an instrument of God. Like you surrender to God, and he uses you as he needs to. I wanted to read you a quote from a climate scientist, Gus Speth. He says: "I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. And I thought with 30 years of good science, we will address these problems; but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy." And to address environmental problems, he now feels we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. Especially with the current administration hiring climate deniers, it's going to be hard for scientists to do their part. What do you think?

David: I totally agree with that statement. That statement has come from a higher plane of wisdom. And it goes to the root cause that's revealing itself in the environmental challenges we're currently having worldwide. But human beings have a very poor track record of taking care of Mother Earth. What we've been very successful in doing is taking what is a gift from God and abusing that gift for self-use and greed.

Samir: So how do you advise us to consciously change our lives, on a daily basis? For me, for example, I have to drive a car because I have to get places. Sometimes, I have to take a flight. But what can people like us in Silicon Valley and in other cities do, given that we are aware of what's going on.

David: Well there's a long answer to a lot of different aspects of that question. But number 1, you have to change yourself. You have to get in touch with your inner, higher, spiritual self. And you have to be not afraid to take a look at the way that you're leading your life and ask how much of your life is in service to others and Mother Earth, and how much is engaged in consumption. The only way we can change the outcome for Planet Earth is by changing ourselves inside. In most of the world, the ego is in charge and we have to learn through discipline and positive acts of love to subjugate that ego to the higher will -- the dimensions that always work with love, fairness and equity.

My second answer is to adopt a life of service to the earth and world. We have all consumed and still consume a lot, including me. Till new systems, which honor the earth and all living beings arise to replace the old systems, we could each choose a life of service to pay back what we've consumed. And I don't care where you live -- there are so many areas of people, of planet, that we could be of service to. People who have it much, much more difficult than we do right now. So we need a shift in consciousness.

Samir: Hmm...Well, I think one other question for you is what was your experience like, reaching out of your own self? So one of the things I have found challenging is this notion that I am Samir Patel, separate from trees and air and the rest of the world...

David: No you're not!

Samir: No, I'm not! But there is an illusion of separateness and I'd love for you to comment on that.

David: Well, I think probably the biggest question for every individual that's listening to this call, and every other human being that's on the planet is -- who am I and why am I here? And until you can answer those questions fully, with wisdom, you're still on the quest. And ego would like us all to think that we don't need any help. But you have to put the ego aside and ask the Creator/Higher Beings/Something much more powerful, divine and wise than us, to please help. Some of us are so stubborn that the universe has to let us get to a situation where there is no way that we can help ourselves and all is lost. Then they've got your attention. It's like they say, "There are no atheists in foxholes".

Samir: I think we are at that point, right, in a way, with the new administration. The Keystone XL pipeline is going to be approved, right. Massive swaths of priceless public lands are being opened to fracking and drilling. We might withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord...

David: I would say that all administrations have not done what they needed to do, all along. We knew about this back in the 60s, when I was a teenager, thinking about going to college. We knew what fossil fuels and agribusiness farming was about, about using chemicals and sprays.

Samir: Yeah, the time when Silent Spring came out.

David: Silent Spring, yes. We were aware of it. We just -- it wasn't just the administration -- the collective will of the human family decided to go the easy route. We can't play the blame game. When you point your index finger at someone else, if

you look down, there's three fingers pointing back at you -- we can't change others; we can only change ourselves. We can't blame others; we can only blame ourselves. So if we're looking for the guilty party that got us into the current mess, go look in the mirror. If you want to change the situation and out-picture a more verdant, beautiful, loving climate on earth, first we have to learn how to love ourselves, learn how to love each other and learn how to love our Mother Earth, which gives us all of our wealth, our air, our food, every single thing. Especially now -- Mother's asking for our help. Mother is in trouble. In my opinion, Mother Nature always has the last vote. So whatever she needs, that will come about. If that means that many, many humans need to leave because they won't listen, won't change their ways, won't revere themselves and others and the earth, then a lot of people will be leaving. But it's not too late. It isn't too late. But the first thing we need to do, all of us, is remember that there's help available right now to solve all of these problems. We just have to ask for that help and then get quiet long enough to listen. What is my role and what is it that I can do? And when you ask, you'll have a whole list of things. You'll be the busiest you've ever been in your life, living a life of service.

Samir: David, thanks for putting the responsibility back on each of us. That sounds like something that will help me heal myself and will be useful and inspiring to the world. I can see that in your own example, right. Despite everything, you kept going in so many ways.

I had another question, more around how technology is shaping our life. I feel like there are 2 flows right now - one is centered around technology (artificial intelligence, singularity, trying to figure out how man and machine can be one, SpaceX etc.) and the other around a simpler, older way of life (how the natives lived, nature worship, seeing the interconnectivity of all beings etc.). I wanted to get your thoughts on the role of technology -- what are the drawbacks and positives?

David: Well, what I see is, there's a war going on, on planet Earth and other dimensions around Earth, of good and evil, light and dark. That's my perspective. To me, the darkness would like to keep us busy, playing with our gadgets so that we're too busy to take the time to explore ourselves and discover the all wise, all powerful, inner beings, that we really are.

Because it's my belief, that every human being on earth, including the administration and the oil industry, are here for a purpose. Now you can either serve the purpose of the ego, or you can be still and listen for guidance on the mission that you were sent here to do. And usually they are diametrically opposite (serving the ego vs. serving our inner being). So turn off all your electronics and go out into nature - the redwoods/ a park/ the lake/ the ocean, and be still. And have enough courage to say, "I don't know who you are or where you are. I don't know what you want of me but could you help me, please. I need to know why I'm here. I need to know some of the mysteries of life." And if you ask, and give your permission, you will get answers. Because on Planet Earth, prayer or asking, is one half of the coin. The other half of the coin is giving your permission to be guided. When you ask and give your permission, things will start to move. We have to realize that we're not our bodies, we're not our houses, and we're not our jobs. And we have no bosses other than what we give our free will to!

Samir: That is very inspiring and very touching to hear... The other question I had was more around action, for people who understand certain things. For example, let's say I get to know about an environmental problem. I learn about it and get inspired; the next step is to turn my intention and inspiration into action. How does one do that?

David: Every single human being that I know has a love in their hearts that holds deep meaning to them. For some, it's the oceans and the preservation of ocean mammals. For some, it's water quality and to make clean, fresh water wherever it is on earth, available to the women and children and people that live there. So first, do a little self-examination for what really resonates with you; what would you like to set your hand to, to make a bit better. In my case, it was trees. And for our trust, we have a website, Archangel Ancient Trees Archive which I would really encourage everyone to take a look at. We're cloning some of the world's largest and oldest trees, trees that are thousands and thousands of years old, for the first time. We have been successful where others have failed.

98% of the old-growth forests in the US are gone. We didn't even study those trees before we butchered them all for firewood/boards/hot tubs/whatever, for money. We didn't know what they did for the quality of life on earth -- the water, air, shade. And in Jim Robbins' book, "The Man Who Planted Trees," he writes about the new science of trees and what roles they play for all living things on earth. #1. Trees talk to all the other trees, not only in the forest, but also over great distances. #2. Trees feel and register pain, and they express that pain, and other trees pick it up #3. There are critically important aerosols that come out of the needles and leaves of trees that prevent endemic diseases from spreading over the planet. There's ~450 new diseases running rampant around the planet, because our first line of defense -- the aerosol of the trees that negate or kill the pathogens that are in the air, have been taken down. For example, there appears to be great promise that chemicals in the Black Walnut can prevent breast cancer in girls, if young girls take a leaf off a Black Walnut and rub it on their wrists. I highly recommend to everyone who's listening to get Jim Robbins' book to read, to understand more of the latest science of trees. Then go to our website, if you'd like to help. Right now, we have one of the largest projects that we've ever undertaken which is planting redwoods in 26 different communities around the Puget Sound area. It's a pretty ambitious and expensive project. And by the way, AATA gives away all the clones of the biggest, oldest trees that we produce -- we give them away to whoever, or whatever organization or community, in hopes that, in return you would help support our federally-recognized non-profit.

Samir: I would second the opinion on the book since I've read it, cover to cover. It's kind of the best gift you could give yourself and/or your kids.

Comments and questions from other participants on the call follow

Aryae Coopersmith (Host): David, you talked about going through the tunnel of light and you've talked about the work of AATA -- I'm sort of interested in the transition between the two; what happened during the transition?

David: Once you've come back, you realize that you value life. Because life here has a length of time and is not limitless; so every day is a gift. It really is. You really appreciate your family, nature, and beauty. And that does something to your heart. It opens your heart to allow love to come in, fill up and spill out, through you, to those around you. And it gives you a whole different perspective on why you're here and what really is important. You know what is really important if you take the time to tell someone in your family that you love them. If you take the time to see the beauty of a sunset or a flower. I used to be an avid deer hunter. I would not hunt anymore, for love or money. I have no desire to be a hunter. But I do like to help the deer -- bring some hay and corn out to them, once in a while. Everything changes; your whole perspective changes, it takes emphasis off the "I" or the "me", and puts it out into the rest of the world. So it's a pretty profound shift, especially for males, I would imagine, coming in contact with your feminine side. You learn to appreciate the power and beauty in femininity, in Mother Earth. There are many changes that you have to learn how to deal with pretty quickly, because most everything has changed.

Aryae: Looking at the AATA website, it looks like there are a few other people there with your last name. Can you say a little bit about this family enterprise and what it's like having your family involved?

David: Well, we live in Copemish on the family land. And our grandchildren that live on this piece of land are the 6th generation here on this land. So every day we have an exchange of communication with the grandparents, the parents, the children and the grandchildren -- it's a dynamic, give and take situation. As I changed, and as more of the world changed, folks said, "Hey, what you are doing is important. I don't like the way it looks where I live; they've cut all the trees down, it's hot, the air's polluted, we're worried about our water; could you come and help us here?"

So far we've heard that call from people from 147 different countries. And every year we're told that we reach 200-300 million people worldwide and pretty much everyone from all the countries are afraid. They're fearful of the future for fill-in-the-blanks (environment, war, politics) reasons. And they're looking for something positive to do, something that they're capable of doing. You don't have to have your PhD or be a skilled tradesman, but something you could do with your kids or partner or pets is to go plant a few trees! You'll be amazed what that does for you, and others around you when you take the time to go do something that will help the earth. You don't have to have very many skills to shovel, and nurture that tree for a couple of years with water every week.

Samir: I had a quick quote to add here. I had a chance, once, to meet Wangari Maathai, the Nobel laureate, and she quoted, "Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking."

William: I very much want to thank you, David, for the core spiritual approach that you're taking with all of this -- when you advised us to do your inner work first. And what that reminded me of was the story concept, and how every culture communicates to its children and its members through stories. And the story that we've been telling

for a long time in many societies is about building fences to protect our possessions because we need to protect ourselves from hardship, in order to live a good life. And the story focuses on our own survival, rather than the survival of our greater personhood (our larger world community). I'm just wondering what it would be like, if we started telling a new story about finding strength, satisfaction and security in togetherness; a new story about seeing service, hard work and challenge as an opportunity to find our true self-worth.

David: I think that the riches and abundance in your life, in many ways, would be so profound, you would wonder why you ever hesitated to do exactly that. Because as we all know, there is really no protection and no soul-satisfaction in stacking up money and seeing how much we can stack up, to try and protect ourselves. Or to stack it up to compare egos. Is that really soul satisfying? I think not. If we look for our happiness outside of ourselves in objects or things, you're looking in the wrong place, in my opinion. The place where all the beauty emanates from is within. And we're all connected, all of us, all of nature, so whatever we do for ourselves, we do for others. It's a matter of putting a toothpick in the bird feeder so a bee can land on the toothpick to get a drink of water. Because as it gets hotter, why not help the bees, just give them a place to land in the birdbath. It's the small things. It's taking time to smile at someone. Just stop and say, "Hello, how's your day going?" Just take a moment to express a little bit of interest, in someone else or something else. That's where we begin.

Dorsay: Are your trees being planted on private and/or public lands and how does that contact come about? I know you've spoken a little bit about that, but is there anything further you'd like to say.

David: Yes first and foremost, you need to plant the trees that are native to your area wherever you're listening, whatever country, whatever part of the country or region you're in. What you need to do is look for the biggest, strongest, best native trees, that were in the native forests that got cut down and start to put them back. Redwoods aren't for everyone, everywhere. They happen to be the most iconic, beloved tree in the world but Archangel works with over 120 different tree species from all over the United States and now in Ireland. We hope to do work, with funding, in the UK. We have a huge project underway in southern California in the Sierra Nevada, with the Giant Sequoias.

Now, last year at this time in Sarasota, we stayed in Siesta Key and were asked to try and clone a 3000-year-old cypress - there are only 1 or 2 of these ancient cypresses left in Florida. The 3000-year-old cypress, I'm sad to say, a person with a drug problem burnt that tree down. So we cloned a 2000-year-old cypress, to start to put back the great cypress forests of Florida.

I would ask everyone who's listening, to visit our website, look at our work and to write us. I see everyone that writes in and we write back. And if the spirit moves you, if you're in the position, and feel that it's something you'd like to do to help our work financially -- we need your help now, more than ever. We've stepped out in faith on some big projects. We just made 15000 more redwoods and giant sequoias, on faith. We're being asked from countries all over the world to please bring our

technology and our message and our hands-on way of doing things. We have a new tree school. We teach K-12 children how to do what we do. We'd like to kick off tree school around the world for the young people. We have our needs. It's a little difficult for me to ask, but you can go to our website -- it should be easy and I guarantee it will pay dividends.

Kozo: Thank you so much for sharing your story and your guidance. It occurred to me when you were talking about how trees feel pain when they are cut down or are injured, that trees have a soul. A lot of us, listening on this call, are meditators, and I was thinking one day that the best meditators in the world are trees. Right? Because they sit for thousands of years, withstand storm and heat, but remain in stillness. And they truly are our elders. I'm wondering if you get that sense working with these trees that they are our spiritual elders and if you've had any communication or guidance from them, in that manner.

David: Yes and yes. We've had newspaper reporters from all over the world come do stories on us, and I say to everyone that when you go and spend a couple of days in an old-growth forest, you'll come out of that forest different from when you went in. Those trees affect our physical, mental and especially our spiritual bodies. Redwoods have been on this planet for 400 million years longer than humans. I believe that trees have a soul and they have a conscience. And I do believe that anyone, everyone can learn to communicate with those trees. They would love to help you with some of the answers to some of your questions because they definitely are divine beings. That's my own personal experience. I know that might shock some people. But I think the more time that you spend in the forest, especially old-growth forests, you'll have some revelations. I believe that it's also a tremendous way to get our nervous system back together as well as a way to address some of our physical challenges.

Aryae: David, we traditionally have a final question that we ask our guest. I think you've already answered it on one level so I want to ask if you have any further thoughts on how we can, all of us here as a community, support you and your work?

David: Well you support us in our work by stopping and taking a look at trees, and all the wonderful things they do. Then back up that support, by taking your children/friend/lover and plant a couple of trees. Give back to Mother Earth and pay it forward for the future. And if you're really, really excited about all the jabbering -- I've talked an awful lot, thank you for your patience, go to our website and there's ways you can help us continue our work.