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## Helping Australian Aboriginal Youth – In Turn Helping Australia

George J. Toepfer

Since 1967 there has been a concerted effort in some quarters to understand and acknowledge the first inhabitants of Australia, the Aboriginal nation as people. It has taken over forty years for most Australians to realise the rich traditions and vast wisdom of life and connection to the land that has been with the Aborigines for over 40,000 years.

Help has been sourced from many avenues to improve the lot of Aboriginal children and youth to give them a better future. The latest support has come from an interesting quarter with the launch of “Generation One” in March 2010. The date, the 20 March, may thus become a significant date for the future of Aboriginal youth. “Generation One” is an initiative of a group of high-profile entrepreneurs, who were prepared to put in their own financial backing and advance a movement led by Andrew Forrest (Forrest founded Anaconda Nickel Ltd, now known as Minara Resources, and was in-

augural chairman of the Murrin Murrin joint venture, one of Australia’s largest mineral exporters); James Packer (Packer inherited the family company, Consolidated Press Holdings Ltd, which controls investments in Crown Ltd, Consolidated Media Holdings, and other companies); Kerry Stokes (Stokes is an Australian businessman. He holds business interests in a diverse range of industries including electronic and print media, property, mining, and construction equipment. He is most widely known as the chairman of the Seven Network, one of the largest broadcasting corporations in Australia); Rupert Murdoch (Murdoch, is an Australian-American media mogul. He is the founder, a major shareholder, chairman, and managing director of News Corp); Russell Crowe (is a New Zealander and naturalized Australian actor and musician) to name a few and the movement supported and endorsed by the “Young Australian of the Year” – Tania Major. Their aim is to donate their own money, time, and expertise to encourage corporate Australia and governments to help Aboriginal youth break out of the unemployment cycle.

The question needs to be asked. Why now? Andrew Forrest a reluctant spokesman for “Generation One,” said at the launch that he had worked with, lived, and was cared-for by Aboriginal families, and found they have so much to offer if given the opportunity that had been privileged to “the Whites” in our country.

What do we know of these Aborigines that have been *fighting* their way into “our civilisation”? Are they so different as the years of misunderstood perception have indicated? The theory being, that for nearly 90% of Australians it was not necessary for them to know who the Aborigines were, because it was not seen as important in *their* lives. Not many knew, or deemed it necessary to know, of the rich culture, the handed down traditions and beliefs and did not understand the important sense of identity and purpose of life.

The Aboriginal culture of Australia is one of the oldest living cultures in the world and has its origins over 40,000 years ago. Australia was populated by this nation, albeit not one united group, with various cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions across this vast land and including the area between the continent and Papua and New Guinea. In essence, Australia has two indigenous peoples – the continent Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. It is also worth considering a third group – namely the Tasmanian Aborigines who came from a different background to the now island from afar, and their isolation for over 12,000 years made them a distinct group too.

There are shared cultural traits, economic and ceremonial dealings, and a customary system of land-tenure law. This was not always the case with the Tasmanian Aborigines. The land bridge between what is now Victoria and Tasmania disappeared after the last glacial period about 12,000 years ago and not enough is known of their true origins nor are there any authentically recorded studies to justify my belief that the Tasmanian Aborigines be awarded that third category.

It is very misleading to try to separate Australian Aboriginal religious experience from other aspects of their life, culture, and history. It is also difficult to speak of origins, because an Aboriginal conception of time connects past actions and people with present and future generations. Time is circular, not linear, as each generation relives the “Dreaming” activities.

The Aboriginal concept of time is best described by Bob Randall from Central Australia (2003). Bob Randall, he is Anangu, a *tjilpi* (elder) of the Yankunytjatjara people and a traditional owner of Uluru and a former “Indigenous Person of the Year,” describes Aboriginal life as *kanyini* – the connectedness which underpins their belief systems, the land, spirituality, and family – take away the *kanyini* and the Aborigine is nothing and “you may as well be dead as you have no purpose in life.” He is quoted in saying that no matter what period of history anyone picks like the time of the Pharos, “Aborigines were in the moment,” in the time of Jesus Christ, “Aborigines were in the moment.” They were and are “in the moment” but this is slowly being taken away from them even if little chip by little chip. In his book “Nyuntu ninti” (What You Should Know) by Bob Randall and Melanie Hogan (2008), Bob says,

“Uluru” is the largest rock in the world. When I see her, I feel as though I’m home – I belong here ... Life was very disciplined. We were trained to look after the ceremonies, the land and each other. *Us mob* believe that the bush is my home, my *ngura*. The trees are our family, all the animals that live with us are our family. Growing up with the oldies – our parents, grandparents – they always said we are connected to everything ... You’re never lost and you’re never, never alone – you’re one with everything else that there is. The purpose of life is to be part of all that there is. My people have always been part of the earth. Every single *inch* of this land and its waterways is sacred land.

Although Aboriginal beliefs and cultural practices vary according to region, all groups share in a common worldview that the land and other natural phenomena possess living souls.

The “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime” (*altjeringa*) is the English name given to the intimately connected but distinct strands of Aboriginal belief; they refer not to the historical past but a fusion of identity and spiritual connection with the timeless present.

The expression “Dreamtime” is most often used to refer to the “time before time,” or “the time of the creation of all things,” while “Dreaming” is often used to refer to an individual’s or group’s set of beliefs or spirituality. For instance, an Indigenous Australian might say that they have “Kangaroo Dreaming,” or “Shark Dreaming,” or “Honey Ant Dreaming,” or any combination of “Dreamings” pertinent to their “country.” However, many Indigenous Australians also refer to the creation time as “The Dreaming.”

What is certain is that “Ancestor Spirits” came to Earth in human and other forms and the land, the plants, and animals were given their form as we know them today. These spirits also established relationships between groups and individuals, (whether people or animals) and where they traveled across the land, or came to a halt, they created rivers, hills, etc., and there are often stories attached to these places.

Once their work was done, the Ancestor Spirits changed again; into animals, or stars, or hills, or other objects. For Indigenous Australians, the past is still alive and vital today and will remain so into the future. The Ancestor Spirits and their powers have not gone, they are present in the forms into which they changed at the end of the “Dreamtime” or “Dreaming,” as the stories tell. The stories have been handed down through the ages and are an integral part of an Indigenous person’s “Dreaming.”

Each tribe has its individual dreamtime although some of the legends overlap. Most “Dreamtime” originates with the Giant Dog or the Giant Snake, and each is unique and colorful in its explanation. Legends of the “Dreamtime” are handed down by word of mouth and by totem from generation to generation. It involves secret rituals and rites, and some classified as “Men’s Business” and some as “Women’s Business.” Colorful, symbolic, and enthusiastic dancing and corroborees are used to pass on the stories of the creation.

The Australian Aborigines speak of *jiva* or *guruwari*, a “seed power” deposited in the earth. In the Aboriginal worldview, every meaningful activity, event, or life process that occurs at a particular place leaves behind a vibrational residue in the earth, as plants leave an image of themselves as seeds. The shape of the land – its mountains, rocks, riverbeds, and water holes – and its unseen vibrations echo the events that brought that place into creation. They

believe that everything in the natural world is a symbolic footprint of the metaphysical beings whose actions created our world. As with a seed, the potency of an earthly location is wedded to the memory of its origin.

The Aborigines called this potency the “Dreaming” of a place, and this “Dreaming” constitutes the sacredness of the earth. Only in extraordinary states of consciousness can one be aware of, or attuned to, the inner dreaming of the Earth. However, many Indigenous Australians also refer to the creation time as “The Dreaming.” The “Dreamtime” laid down the patterns of life for the Aboriginal people.

The separation of the link between Aborigines and the land has alienated them from their spiritual need of their life, the “Dreaming.” In 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip claimed the land *terra nullius*, mistakenly thinking the land was “empty and uncivilized.” The first settlers from the British Isles in the main, believed they had rights to the land, as the Aborigines did not use the land for farming or permanent housing. As the culture of life was so vastly different, it did not occur to them that there may have been an alternative to a way of life they knew.

During “White settlement,” the Aborigines were forced to move into neighboring lands, fringe camps attached to rural properties, or on the outskirts of town – in some cases little has changed. As this occurred they could not fulfill their religious obligations to protect the land and conduct spiritual ceremonies which was, and still is, essential to life and the “Dreaming.”

The early explorers and colonists failed to see anything they could call a religion among the Aboriginal peoples. They could see no references to a God or gods, there were no churches or other sacred buildings, there were no accessible scriptures and no priests as they knew them. Therefore, they assumed they had a “clean slate” and an opportunity to civilize and Christianize these primitive peoples into Western culture and beliefs. At the time there was no willingness to understand the beliefs or the rituals, nor any meaning they may have had. Aboriginal spirituality is an appreciation of their essential relationship with their environment, something that has been largely lost on Western-Christian society. For many years the Western settlers could not understand the “Aboriginal connectedness” with their world of which they were an integral part.

It is hoped that with this growing knowledge and understanding that the “Generation One” movement may turn around the future of Aboriginal youth. Andrew Forrest and his team are proposing, in part, to change many misconceptions and urban myths to provide opportunities for all Australians, which in-

cludes the marginalized Aboriginal youth, to share in a better future from which all Australians would benefit.

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## Das Motiv des Gottesschutzes in “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” im Vergleich zu ähnlichen Motiven in jüdisch-christlichen, gnostischen und finnischen Traditionen

Bożena Gierek

“St. Patrick’s Breastplate” (Sankt Patricks Brustplatte) ist eine Art Gebet, das *lorica* oder *caim* genannt wird, was “Gebet um Schutz” bedeutet. Die *breastplate* war eine Art Schutzschild, der wie ein Zauberwort wirkte. Man glaubte, dass die Person, die diesen Text mit einer besonderen Kraft rezitierte, immer vor allen Gefahren geschützt sein würde. Dieser Glaubenspanzer sollte den Körper und die Seele vor dem Satan, anderen Menschen, den Vergehen und sogar vor dem Tod schützen. Die Person, die ihn jeden Tag fromm singen würde, sollte so auch die Sicherheit für ihre Seele nach dem Tod gewinnen. Die Gebete um Schutz waren sehr populär im alten Irland, lange bevor das Christentum dort hinkam. Sie wurden von der keltischen Kirche übernommen und zu einem fast unerlässlichen Element des Mönchslebens.

“St. Patrick’s Breastplate” wird dem Hl. Patrick zugeschrieben, obwohl das älteste erhaltene Exemplar auf das 8. Jh. (3 Jahrhunderte nach Patricks Tod) datiert wurde. Doch die Form der benutzten Sprache<sup>1</sup> deutet einen älteren Ursprung an. Es ist zweifellos die Fortsetzung einer älteren keltischen Tra-

1 “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” wurde auf Altirisch geschrieben; nur das Ende ist auf Latein. Sie ist eine Variante, neben “Fáeth [Fáed] Fiada”, des Hymnus “Lorica des Hl. Patrick”.