

OF SONGLINES AND ETERNITY

Christine Howard.

As is the custom throughout Australia, every public gathering begins by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered.

We meet, over 30 of us, for a week of silence. The title of the retreat is 'Endless Melody', and the traditional acknowledgment is supplemented by an invitation: to allow ourselves to sink into Silence and listen to the ancient songlines of this area; to hear that which we may have never heard before. We are told that:

*"It is in our DNA to be united,
heart centre to heart centre, in love.
When this happens, we awaken
something new".*

The invitation intrigues me, for, although I have lived here most of my life, my awareness of the purpose and practice of traditional songlines is limited. It's the week between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, and a full moon: the veil between worlds is thin. Perfect, I think, for sitting with Mystery to see where my ponderings will lead.

As I often do when I need space to ruminate, I turn to carving. I take my tools outside and, sitting beneath the shelter of an old Jacaranda, pull out two rough-hewn crosses I've been working on.



As I carve, meditative practice takes over, letting my thoughts meander across all that's been revealed to us this week. I'm drawn to the aboriginal history of this mountain. In my mind's eye I see children splashing in the waterholes on steamy summer days and hear the gentle hum of women's conversation nearby. We heard on the first day that we are, even today, intimately connected to the songlines of this land. Are we, in fact, so very different from the people who lived here 40 000 years ago?

Curiosity aroused, I pack up and move inside to the wifi connection. There's nothing specific online about the songlines of the people of this area. I continue my search:

"a songline is a myth based around localised 'creator-beings' during the Dreaming, the indigenous Australian embodiment of the creation of the Earth. Each songline explains the route followed by the creator-being during the course of the myth. The path of each creator-being is marked in sung lyrics. One navigates across the land by repeating the words of the song or re-enacting the story through dance, which in the course of telling the story also describes the location of various landmarks on the landscape (e.g. rock formations, watering holes, rivers, trees) . . . By singing a song cycle in the appropriate order, an explorer could navigate vast distances, often travelling through the deserts of Australia's interior - a fact

which amazed early anthropologists who were stunned by Aborigines who frequently walked across hundreds of kilometres of desert, picking out tiny features along the way without error."

<https://blog.education.nationalgeographic.com/2016/04/08/aboriginal-songlines-helped-draw-the-map-in-australia/>

Like the Hebrew nation of the Old Testament, these First Nation people's songlines explain their origins. Like the Hebrew nation's songlines found in Psalms and Proverbs, their continued singing keeps them connected, not only to their land, but to their spiritual origin. When arriving at a sacred site, aboriginal people still 'sing up' that place to honor its history and ensure its continued survival.

So, although expressed differently, it seems that Aboriginal wisdom figures know the presence of the Divine in Creation; know too that their singing and dancing are an essential part of the land's survival. They have, like us, experienced shared consciousness across the noosphere in their rites and ceremonies.

The first people of this country are conscious of, and tune into, the endless melody of their existence.

I return to the theme of the retreat, and I ponder: what are the songlines, the endless melody, of **our** origins; **our** cultural memory?

The wisdom of Teilhard and Ilia and Merton and Beatrice and Hildegard; of Proverbs and Wisdom literature like Sirach and Barach greet me on every page of the retreat material. I become increasingly aware that our songlines are deeply linked with those of the first inhabitants of this country. Their affinity with the land, with every rock, stone, creature and animal; while our Genesis and Colossians songlines affirm our mutual awareness of Mystery, Wisdom, in Creation.



For all cultures, the survival of this planet depends on our willingness to connect with Earth's songlines: healing her, being healed by her. Kerrie Hide reminds us that *'Our gaze matters. Simply by our gaze we can affect Creation in a positive or negative way.'* Maintaining a stance of *'open receptivity, gazing with eyes of love, listening and responding from our hearts creates an atmosphere that enables creation to communicate with us, heart to heart, soul to soul.'* We must open ourselves to the timeless and yet to the continuing evolving of her eternal melody, expressed by Hildegard, Eckhart, Teilhard, Merton and others, through their evolving awareness of the divine feminine: Wisdom Sophia.

"The stars rejoice in their setting, and in the rising of the Sun. The heavenly lights rejoice in the going forth of one man to make a new world in the morning, because he has come out of the confused primordial dark night into consciousness. He has expressed the clear silence of Sophia in his own

heart. He has become eternal." (Merton in *Pramuk: At Play in Creation: Merton's Awakening to the Feminine Divine*.)

Like the aboriginal people, we sing the songlines of our cultural heritage; like them we perpetuate the songlines of our ancestors as we sing them down the generations. And, when our songlines for the healing of Place, of the planet, unite with one another through the noosphere, we become "*attuned to the rivers of longing that flow between the divine and human heart*" (Ursula King) and the fragrance of Wisdom's love endlessly flows.



It is the last days of the retreat. I am more conscious of my connectedness to the songlines of this land. I recognize more deeply the importance of continuing to 'sing up' the land, for the healing of this beautiful blue Planet which Sophia graced us to inhabit.

I take up the invitation of that first day, to hear the music of the ground on which I sit, to be united, heart centre to heart centre, with the first inhabitants of this land. The answer lies, as always, through Silence: that space where I hear Sophia sing the endless melody of Love most clearly. I deepen into the Contemplatio, reproduced below with permission, and discover:

The songlines of my heart and those of this land are united in one endless melody of Love.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Find a place in nature and feel yourself immersed in her reverence. If possible, sit on the ground or take off your shoes to feel the earth beneath your feet... Become attentive to the ground of the Earth. Feel yourself drawn to connect with the earth's centre.

Awaken the gaze of the eye of your deep heart and begin to focus, to centre in the centre of the earth's centre. Penetrate through the layers of rock, fire, water, deep into the earth's centre. Become attentive to the rhythm of Earth's heartbeat; listen for the cry of her soul.

When you feel deeply connected to earth's centre, bask in the silence, pause in open receptivity, wait to be invited into closer relationship with Earth, drawn by her longing, her love, her hope, her radiance.

Feel Wisdom's presence further sensitizing your awareness, inviting you to go deeper into the connection between Earth's origins and yours. Involve your eternal memory, and the memory of the first inhabitants of this land.

Softly be present to each other - bask, taste, touch, smell, become lost in wonder. Notice the ebb and flow of healing energy.

When you feel ready, offer thanks and return to your usual environment.

Kerrie Hide