

E-BULLETIN #37

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

item 75

Dadirri: the challenge of a great silence



NGANGIKURUNGKURR means 'Deep Water Sounds'. *Ngangikurungkurr* is the name of my tribe.

The word can be broken up into three parts: *Ngangi* means word or sound, *Kuri* means water, and *kurr* means deep. So the name of my people means 'the Deep Water Sounds' or 'Sounds of the Deep'. This talk is about tapping into that deep spring that is within us.

Many Australians understand that Aboriginal people have a special respect for Nature. The identity we have with the land is sacred and unique. Many people are beginning to understand this more.

Also there are many Australians who appreciate that Aboriginal people have a very strong sense of community. All persons matter. All of us belong. And there are many more Australians now, who understand that we are a people who celebrate together.

What I want to talk about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called *dadirri*. It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.

Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call 'contemplation'.

When I experience *dadirri*, I am made whole again. I can sit on the riverbank or walk through the trees; even if someone close to me has passed away, I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words. A big part of *dadirri* is listening.

Through the years, we have listened to our stories. They are told and sung, over and over, as the seasons go by. Today we still gather around the campfires and together we hear the sacred stories. As we grow older, we ourselves become the storytellers. We pass on to the young ones all they must know. The stories and songs sink quietly into our minds and we hold them deep inside.

In the ceremonies we celebrate the awareness of our lives as sacred.

The contemplative way of *dadirri* spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again.

In our Aboriginal way, we learnt to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn - not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years.

There is no need to reflect too much and to do a lot of thinking. It is just being aware.

My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness.

My people today, recognise and experience in this quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all. It is easy for me to experience God's presence. When I am out hunting, when I am in the bush, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong; these are the times when I can simply be in God's presence. My people have been so aware of Nature. It is natural that we will feel close to the Creator.

Dr Stanner, the anthropologist who did much of his work among the Daly River tribes, wrote this: "Aboriginal religion was probably one of the least material minded, and most life-minded of any of which we have knowledge".

And now I would like to talk about the other part of *dadirri* which is the quiet stillness and the waiting. Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth.

When twilight comes, we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun.

We watch the bush foods we gather them. We wait for stage by stage, through their

When a relation dies, we We own our grief and allow right time for our The right people must be in the proper way. Careful don't mind waiting, because care. Sometimes many hours body before an important

We don't like to hurry. There what we are attending to. that we must hurry away for.



and wait for them to ripen before our young people as they grow, initiation ceremonies.

wait a long time with the sorrow. it to heal slowly. We wait for the ceremonies and our meetings. present. Everything must be done preparations must be made. We we want things to be done with will be spent on painting the ceremony.

is nothing more important than There is nothing more urgent

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of *dadirri* (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.

We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways.

We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us - to catch up - but waiting with us, as we find our pace in this world.

There is much pain and struggle as we wait.

The Holy Father understood this patient struggle when he said to us: "If you stay closely united, you are like a tree, standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree, you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn".

My people are used to the struggle, and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves had to spend many years learning about the white man's ways. Some of the learning was forced; but in many cases people tried hard over a long time, to learn the new ways.

We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways.

We would like people in Australia to take time to listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for - respect and understanding.

To be still brings peace - and it brings understanding.

When we are really still in the bush, we concentrate. We are aware of the anthills and the turtles and the water lilies.

Our culture is different. We are asking our fellow Australians to take time to know us; to be still and to listen to us.

Life is very hard for many of my people. Good and bad things came with the years of contact and with the years following. People often absorbed the bad things and not the good. It was easier to do the bad things than to try a bit harder to achieve what we really hoped for.

I would like to conclude by saying again that there are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very Spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The sound is the word of God - Jesus.

Today, I am beginning to hear the Gospel at the very level of my identity. I am beginning to feel the great need we have of Jesus - to protect and strengthen our identity; and to make us whole and new again.

"The time for re-birth is now," said the Holy Father to us. Jesus comes to fulfil, not to destroy. If our culture is alive and strong and respected, it will grow. It will not die.

And our spirit will not die.

And I believe that the spirit of *dadirri* that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves, but in our whole nation.

**copyright to Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann
used with permission**

Miriam Rose was born in the Daly River area of the Northern Territory. She became a talented artist and promoter of aboriginal culture.

Miriam Rose has illustrated a number of books, including the revised edition of Alan Marshall's *People of the Dreamtime*. In 1986 she began teaching back in the Daly River mission school while pursuing higher education.

In 1988 she was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and after further training was appointed Principal of St Francis Xavier school at Daly River.

Miriam Rose gained her Master of Education degree, with High Distinction. The focus of her study was the integration of traditional and western education for aboriginal children and adults.

In 1998 Miriam Rose was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. She went on to be acknowledged for her leadership and example and contribution to the general community by the award of an Honorary Doctorate from the Northern Territory University.

In 2004 Miriam Rose was appointed to Australia's National Indigenous Council, a Federal Government advisory body.

She has currently resigned from teaching and lives in the Daly River community.

