

# Reclaiming the Land

*What for each of us is our 'Land'? Where do we stand? What gives us stability and rootedness? Some reflections on the symbol of Land—so relevant and critical in an age of global movement, personal upheaval and Identity crisis.*

All aboriginal peoples lived close to the land. In Australia rock-formations, caves, waterholes were to them the dwelling-places of Beings (states of being) which infused the land with sacredness. Sacred places are places of remembering. When you enter one, the silence, the atmosphere created partly by the geomorphology (often striking or beautiful), and partly by the accretion of human awe and attribution, reminds you that you exist within bigger spheres of existence-- if you choose to acknowledge it. By visiting a sacred place with reverence, you are making that choice. Briefly, you are touched by a greater context. Briefly you stand within it, and the humdrum and banal falls away. You leave it refreshed.

Probably all our ancestors lived close to the land—we see the remnants in Britain and Europe in stone monuments, and in surviving peoples like Native Americans and Aborigines who have retained something of the culture. The great civilizations, almost by definition, have moved further from closeness with the raw land, but retain the same spirit and acknowledgement through temples, art, and the creation of religious edifices, physical and ideological.

## **Inner Land**

Taking a lead from the simpler examples, what is important is not the land itself, but the relationship of the land with the human psyche of its inhabitants.

The land is a reflection, a mirror of the aspirations, intuitions, and inner knowledge of the human spirit made manifest in the environment. Whatever the physical characteristics of that environment, places within it have particular effects on the people who live there, and so are marked off as places to go to remember the spirit. Those places grow in significance as they are used. They begin to cohere into formations in the collective psycho-morphology. Individuals can tap into the collective psyche for strength, remembrance, elevation, which is the role of any form of religious expression, sophisticated or simple. It is all about growing in soul, or 'growing the soul', just as accurate a description. Nothing grows without nourishment and attention.

So the physical landscape becomes a mirror of the inner landscape of the psyche. This relationship can be acknowledged deliberately, as with our forebears living close to the land, or simply happen willy-nilly, by virtue of the inescapability of the relationship between us and our environment.

We actually cannot escape this reflection. Just as every modern home is a reflection of the occupants' values, beliefs and tastes, so every Country produces a different mix of cultural attributes formed by the characteristics of geography, climate, racial lineage, historical progression etc. which conditions the inhabitants whether they are aware of it or not. We are all conditioned, especially by the land of our birth and its culture, but in modern times of migration and movement, by *all we pick up and identify with in our journey through life*.

At issue is the fundamental, indissoluble nature of the relationship between the human and the land. This word 'Land' extends to include all the cultural attributes which have grown from Place and Time –that is, from roots in a particular physical space. The Land is a symbol. The Land is both a physical outward Terra Firma and an inward Terra often-not-so-firma!

And that brings me to the real significance of all these reflections. The relationship between the outer Land and the inner Land or domain of the psyche (both individual and collective) can be read like a book. If the outer reflects the inner, and vice versa, there are lessons to be learned. *There is information*. There are many implications which can be grappled with and used, particularly in the endeavour to grow the soul.

### **Modern Land**

It's clear enough in the simple cases of imbuing the landscape with sacredness: caves, mountains, canyons.

But what of a 21st century inhabitant of a global megopolis like New York, Tokyo, London? What about the man and woman squashed into a commuter train, senses inundated by advertising, mind pre-occupied by financial wizardry and domestic stresses, ears tuned to the beat of someone else's music, news of faraway disasters and zany entertainment pouring into the inner space through multiple media inlets?

What sort of landscape does such a person inhabit? What is sacred in this Land?

These are very fundamental questions. Taking the relationship between the psychological and environmental as a principle which applies universally, we can note first of all, the absence of true sacred places in 21<sup>st</sup> century Land.

Rather is it highly complex environment, full of shifting sands (ie.values), fluid and full of rapids in some areas, prone to emotional floods, terrified by volcanic eruptions over which there is no sense of control, and fearful shakings of the ground on which one has tried to establish a firm habitation; it is dry and desolate in some quarters, racked by starvation and the longing for real nourishment; but in other parts there are cosy corners of self-preoccupation and self-interest exist, with little or no attempt to acknowledge anything beyond the immediate and pleasurable.

Moreover, it is sobering to realize that all this can be taking place in one individual psyche—yours and mine, as we go about our everyday lives!

## **Land and Environment**

Perhaps this imagery is best utilised by drawing a distinction between the environment and the Land. Environment is a given, an inescapable surrounding context, and while it is important to work wisely, care for and try to enhance whatever surroundings one finds oneself in, 'Environmental' pre-occupation may distract from more ultimately pressing and deeper obligations. The 'Land' as a symbol stands for a conscious creation, an emotional foundation, an arena for growing the soul and acknowledging one's place within a greater context than personal.

The Aborigines called it the Dreamtime, by which in this context they didn't mean sleepy dreams or wafting fantasy, nor merely a previous time when the world was first created, but rather a creative time and place which is present to those who know how to 'dream'. You 'dream' in this sense when you enter a sacred place and make contact with that beyond the visible and sensory. You dream when you touch on the grand, the deep and the other-than-ordinary. You dream when you make contact with stillness, and can hear the sound of creation. You can participate in creation through awesome stillness, waking up to forces at large structuring the universe.

Forces at large, both physical and psychological, are acting whether we are aware of them, or not. We are subject to large forces and tides determining our actions, and also battalions of tiny clattering hordes pushing and pulling us throughout the day. Gremlins of the modern city-dweller, these petty forces and pressures rule absolutely any environment given over to them. Often contradictory, restless and dictatorial, there is no inherent direction in their activity. It is difficult to map or value an environment shaped by such forces.

If this can be descriptive of a typical person's inner environment, it is interesting to reflect on how the complex artefacts of a global cyber-culture mirror it outwardly: in canyons of concrete and steel, geo-political manoeuvrings, telecommunication tools at our fingertips. We are creatures of this environment, formed by it, making our homes within it.

And wondering where to look for a sacred place, a space to make contact with the Other, the Creative, the Lasting and True for all times and places.

We are searching for the Land, our own homeland, the Land promised throughout the ages by sages and visionaries, and those who have made the journey. We have heard of it, read about it, and seen glimpses when the clouds part - as if an eternal city hovers just out of view. We know others have found it because they have left traces and messages with great artistry - images, constructions, mythical tales and sober edifices of philosophy which explain the route in great detail but reveal nothing to the casual observer.

However, these are the products of other Lands in other times, and we are looking for somewhere to place our feet now; somewhere to stand; somewhere from which to take bearings and set a direction in the current confused world we live in. Somewhere the inner gremlin hordes can't invade and take over with petty squabbles and demands.

The Land has to be first found, then cultivated and inhabited regularly by any who wish to call it home. There is no other option, no short cut for the rich or needy, no button to press or screen to tap to establish it as a reality for the global-world dweller. Like the pioneers of old in the New Worlds, it takes “sheer bloody hard work” to conquer and cultivate a new terrain.

First of all it must be located. And secondly, in establishing one’s own place to stand, it is not obligatory to trash the Lands previously established by others.

Once Aborigines roamed over a wide, empty, basically flat landscape and operated within it. Now we 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens roam over a vast spherical land-and-sea-scape, veiled with cloud and extending at least as far as the moon where we have put feet and a flag, and even further out into a multi-galactic universe which we have incorporated firmly into our psychosphere through science, technology and Star Trek. The jump in physical scale has to be reflected internally. We can no longer go back to a small and simple view—that way lies Fundamentalism.

*We have to learn to walk the Global Land with courage and mastery, to shape and cultivate it, and stand firm in adversity with a constant heart and sense of direction.*

In other words, we need to establish a habitation for the individual soul to develop and grow. Such a habitation is a shelter, a foundation, a resting-place enabling us to stand in the presence of whatever force/ forces we are capable of recognising, collectively and individually, no matter what name or image we use to acknowledge the Creative, Sacred, Generative Reality reachable through the human psyche. For all names and images are but symbols.

### **Reclaiming**

One sense of ‘reclaiming the Land’ could signify reclaiming a universal symbol (Land) as a basis for practical work to cultivate the soul. In another sense it could point to the need to reclaim one’s own Land, the true Land of one’s birth which gets quickly overgrown with conditioning so that we lose sight of it and forget it is there.

Outwardly ‘Land’ has poignancy for modern man, who may move far away from his country of birth for all kinds of reasons, or end up a nomad with many stamps on the passport and nowhere to call home. Many of us have two or more lands we genuinely call home, the roots in them going deep, the cultures and landscapes loved. It is perplexing to sense the overlap and differences between several such deep-rooted identities, but identities are like garments to be worn at different times. None of them are the person.

In fact, this is the very heart of the issue. The Land refers to a place which is right at the heart of Person, where the individual meets the greater.

### **Establishing a Land –some steps....**

On the earth, two posts can stand upright and demarcate a particular location as an opening, a gate or doorway, able to be passed through, provided the earth beneath is not chaotic or

shifting. If there is firm ground in the psyche, such a 'gateway' can be a magical place of meeting of here and there, a sacred ground of potential, a holy space outside the ordinary because it contains a portal to the beyond. A portal can close up again. Often. And as often be re-opened by dint of establishing the ground for it to be.

Only *two* items are needed to demarcate a gateway.

But properly establishing a Land might need work in *six* areas, covering symbolically all the quantifiable interactions of *three* primary propulsions in the observable universe: viz. action, reaction and result. Visualise a universal threesome: something creates, something responds, something results/ integrates/holds in balance. Without threeness, nothing would come into existence. Two forces merely opposing or balancing each other are static. Only the entry or stimulus of a third changes the game, and in the human world the third is usually connected with consciousness, either in the setting up or in dealing with the result of an interaction.

We can identify these forces at work in every moment of our lives, in every action, in every sphere of creation and at every level, from the processes at work in star-formation to sub-atomic quantum interactions\*. Any three can interact in six different combinations or orders, but only in six. So we have the possibility of designating six different regions of activity in the task of establishing the Land: six areas of work, six demesnes composed of the same 3 basic forces but dominating in each differently so different characteristics are displayed, and different challenges are to be met before being truly at home in that demesne and ruling it properly.

These symbolic numbers are at the root of practical inner work which can be found in genuine esoteric and mythological traditions.

### **Common Land**

In summary, I see the symbolic activity of 'reclaiming the Land' as a vital activity for our Times.

It's possible that the pace of modern western society (in generalization) is a response to sensing the force-field of a black hole at the heart of the global meaning-sphere. Entertainment is the best way to forget the drag of this hole, or vacancy, where previously solid bits of belief-structure gave everyone a place to stand and build on. That land has gone, swept away by the quantum revolution which paved the way to an explosion of technology and the birth of the digital era.

Weight is added to the evidence by observing the political forces of nationalism and linguistic revival across the globe, in which, at the grass-roots, the impulse of the 'populace' is now tending away from grand pan-national political unions and back to reviving smaller national identities, customs and languages. Small countries are prepared to fight for their independence. The European Union, propelled by the issue of the common currency (it always comes back to money!) is now visibly coming apart at the seams. People are desperate to claim back their land and its customs as an attempt to define a secure identity and boundaries. Reclaiming Land is truly a hot potato!

Perhaps reclaiming a national identity based on a particular geographical location and history is a manifestation not just of a trend, but of a need. However, if it is not taken as an end in itself, whereupon it turns rapidly into ugly intolerance, upholding national identity may have value and a useful role. To identify with the strengths and beauties of the land of one's birth is a way to affirm certain things, but I think it is also limited.

We are born, whether we like it or not, into a global land, citizens of a global culture. A new inner landscape is forming as a reflection of the outer highly complex rapidly changing world-scape. We have to keep up, to affirm the values belonging to this evolving landscape, to establish a Land and place to stand in ourselves, which is in keeping and therefore contributes to Our Common Land.

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