

# Reconnecting to Country in the Anthropocene

Some reflections about the October long weekend  
sent to participants as pre-reading for the weekend  
by Arjuna

This year I'm proposing this as the theme of our Spring Renewal dance retreat at Jamanee Gunya. After the Balagawan Ran Festival at Milton in January<sup>1</sup>, when Nicola and I, spoke and led a workshop on connecting with our indigenous ancestors, and after attending the Queen's Birthday long weekend with Uncle Noel and Trish and Dr Shaun Matthews, it seems to me that more than anything in this time on the planet we are needing to reconnect to Country.

Many of us whose ancestors came from other countries to this country, may have felt a sense of being disconnected from Country in an Aboriginal sense. My own Jewish ancestors have suffered some 2000 years of disconnection from their Holy Land. Several people in our workshop in January expressed such a disconnection. Many ways of connecting to Country were presented at that festival in Milton including Aboriginal agriculture, Ayurvedic medicine, Yoga, Aikido, Agni Hotra, Biodynamic farming, herbalism as well as a guided visit to Uncle Noel's Country near Lake Meroo by some 80 people.



On the Queen's Birthday long weekend camp several people came who were at the Balagawan Ran Festival at Milton. We visited a number of significant places to Uncle Noel and his family, we collected pipis on the beach, oysters and biblers (clams) from Burril Lake, we learnt about how to make various tools like stone

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<sup>1</sup> Read report at <http://www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/ziraat-news>

axes and several people made music sticks. As well we visited the Grandmother Tree, which was awesome for me to revisit<sup>2</sup>. As well we visited a large cave that had been desecrated by some archaeologists from the ANU some 20 years ago that Uncle Noel said was a very painful experience for him, and it was suggested that the cave needed healing. I then proposed that this could be part of our October Long Weekend Spring Renewal Retreat. People thought that was a good idea and so on the Sunday of our retreat we will be doing a healing ceremony for this cave.



After a meeting with Nicola and a conversation with Karen the theme for this retreat emerged as part of our process of working with our relationship to our ecology of culture. The theory of an ecology of culture emerged from my doctoral research into anti-racism through drama education working with youth, youth workers and teachers from indigenous, multicultural and British backgrounds in Sydney. I came to realise that for indigenous people there was no separation between their culture and their ecology. What this means is that for Aboriginal people the natural world and their culture are completely interconnected. Every tree, every rock, every river, every mountain, every animal has their story. Whereas for people of European the natural world is considered as separate from their culture because the ecology that created their also comes from Europe.

As a person of European descent with my Middle Eastern Jewish heritage, my cultures emerged from different ecologies like Romania where I was born, Austria where I lived as a young child and Israel where my Jewish ancestors came from. Living in Australia I have felt a need to connect to this country and the indigenous people of this country, as part of my healing from my disconnection from Country. Growing up in Australia I learnt about British culture from the dominant Anglo Australian community, Jewish/Israeli culture from the

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<sup>2</sup> See more pix of The Grand Mother Tree at: <http://dancesofuniversalpeaceaustralia.org/2016/11/>

Jewish Community, as well as Romanian and Austrian culture from my parents. After some 17 years of formal education in what were considered some of the best schools and universities I knew very little about Aboriginal culture.

As part of my personal healing, for a number of years now I have been working and studying to correct that lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people, culture and Country. Part of that healing process has involved the Dances of Universal Peace and the Universal Sufi practices that inspired the dances. Another part of my work involved yoga, drama, music, photography, shamanism, Chi Gung, Zen Buddhist meditation and the Kabbalah. All of these practices have informed my feelings and thoughts about this coming weekend at Jamanee Gunya, which literally means 'happy camping ground'.

As this is the 4<sup>th</sup> time the dances community have chosen to be there and the 3<sup>rd</sup> time this year that I personally have been there, I sense that connection Country is deepening, as part of a healing process for my dance community and for myself.

Finally let me address the term the *Anthropocene*. This is the term that geologists are proposing as our current geological era. Now this is an interesting phenomenon, because geologists are scientists who study rocks. Through this study they have come up with a number of geological ages<sup>3</sup>, like the Jurassic Age, the time of the dinosaurs that was made famous by the film of that name. Up till now, us humans have not been part of that geological picture of the Earth, but this has changed in the last 150 years or so.

Let me explain – the current age has been called the Holocene, which has lasted for the last 12,000 years or so and grew out of the last Ice Age. This also coincides with the invention of agriculture and with separation of the New Guinea and Torres Strait islands and Tasmania from the Australian mainland. However with the industrial revolution we humans have begun to play an ever-increasing role in the Earth Functions of our planet. Through the damming of rivers, excavating giant mines for minerals, polluting the rivers and oceans, setting off atomic bombs, chopping down vast areas of forests (like on the east coast of Australia which has affected the Great Artesian Basin), pumping great amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere which has caused climate change and which in turn has destabilised weather patterns. As well ecologists and others scientists are calling this time the 6<sup>th</sup> extinction, not since the Jurassic age with the extinction of the dinosaurs has our planet seen so many species become extinct.

Thus the naming of this era as the *Anthropocene*! Now this is a serious matter as we are changing the Earth functions of our planet and its ability to support life in

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<sup>3</sup> Read more here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geologic\\_time\\_scale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geologic_time_scale)

a very destructive way. However, the recognition that we humans have affected the planet also draws our attention to the possibility that there are things we may be able to do to begin to heal this serious illness of the Earth our Mother, as she is referred to by Aboriginal people. What I am proposing is that our dance weekend is part of this healing process.

As it says on the dances website: “ People worldwide yearning for Unity have found in the Dances of Universal Peace a renewing and inspiring practice. ...The Dances open us to remembrance of the natural human state - unguarded, authentic and free.”<sup>4</sup> As such the dances can help us to heal both our disconnection from Spirit and our disconnection to Country. This will be of great benefit for us to be on the Land once again and to connect and learn from the traditional people of this Land, like Uncle Noel and his Budawang family. Through this healing we can also begin to contribute to the healing our Mother the Earth of her illness in the *Anthropocene – the Age of Humans*.

see the flyer on the website for more details at

<http://dancesofuniversalpeaceaustralia.org/events/>

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<sup>4</sup> from <https://dancesofuniversalpeace.org/intnew/about.shtm>