

Human Dreaming  
Tucker Orbison  
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The aboriginal peoples of Australia believe in an a unique worldview known as the "Dreamtime." The Dreamtime is a spiritual realm, but more importantly, is an earthbound philosophy that connects all clans of Australia. The ideas of the Dreamtime are spread through the culture by ways of art, dance, and song. Assigned at birth, your Dreaming, kind of like your name, dictated your diet, territory, brotherhood, and over-all sense of self. My last name is Orbison, and I descend from other Orbison's, so in these terms, I have an Orbison Dreaming. This Dreamtime philosophy, you might say, was the Aboriginal instruction manual for life, and nurtured their culture for over 65,000 years.

Aborigines believe that at the beginning of time, our Earth was devoid of life and landscape, and that beneath the Earth's crust, the Ancient ancestors of All Life, lay sleeping in the Dreamtime. On the morning of that first day, the Sun, feeling the urge to be born, rose out from the earth, and flooded the land with light and warmth. As each drowsing ancestor felt the warmth of the sun on their eyelids, they felt themselves giving birth to their children. The Snake Man felt snakes slithering out of his navel. The Cockatoo Man felt feathers, and the Honeysuckle felt his leaves and flowers unfurling. Each erupted out from the Earth and opened their eyes to witness the children they had born. Then, while taking that first step into the world, opened their mouths, and called out in an ultimate act of self declaration, " I AM!" I am snake. I am cockatoo. I am Honeysuckle. With the second step they called out second name. And another step, with a third name. They named the river, the mountains, the ghost-gum tree, the kangaroo, calling all things into being, and weaving their names into the verses of the song. The Ancients sung the entire world into existence, and wherever their tracks led, they left a trail of music. They covered the earth in a quilted patchwork of what are called "Songlines", and at last, when they were tired again, they sank back in the ground, where they remain. Left behind in those tracks were mountains, fire, deserts, fields of grain, the waxing moon, and all the constellations in the sky.

In his book, 'The Songlines', Bruce Chatwin writes about these tracks of music, and how the Ancients had been poets in the original sense of 'Poiesis', meaning creation. They had created the landscape out of the song, and therefore the song was actually a physical description of the landscape itself. These songs, passed down from generation to generation through tribal elders, were essential to the survival of the aboriginal human.

Each song is particular to a specific totemic clan, or 'Dreaming'. Each particular totemic ancestor was thought to have traveled through the country, leaving a trail of words and musical notes along the line of his footprints, and now these Dreaming-tracks, or Songlines, lay over the land as ways of communicating between the most far-flung tribes.

Clans also illustrate Dreaming tracks through intricate, storytelling artwork, made of dots, slashes, lines, spirals, circles and human figures. Originally created in the sand or dirt, it was thought that a dot could represent a proven water source, the distance between two

curved lines would represent a days walk, but it is also known that Aboriginal artists abstracted their paintings to disguise the sacred designs so that the real meanings could not be understood by Westerners.

A song was both map and direction finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across the country. Knowing your song was essential to survival, for if you strayed from your Songline, you could be lost forever. As long as you stuck to your track, anyone who you encountered would be your kin, for they would also share your song. Your song would tell you where to find a yam, or better yet, a watering hole. Often times, the edges of these tracks would run along a line of unfailing watering holes, so the watering hole became kind of a ceremonial center, where people of many different tribes would gather. Songlines were also trade routes, but not for material goods. Aborigines thought of most material goods as evil, and actually preferred bartering in useless, personal objects. Trade goods were more thought of as tokens of intent: to meet again, trade again, to intermarry, to dance, or to storytell. A seashell might be traded hand to hand over thousands of miles, generation after generation, for hundreds of years. But most importantly, the waterhole was a place to trade song.

See, no aboriginal was born landless, since everyone inherited, as his or her private property, a stretch of the Ancestor's song, and a stretch of country over which the song passed. A persons's verses were their title deeds to their territory. They could lend verses to others, or borrow them in return, but he could never sell them, or get rid of them. To share your song with another, was not just to further your own survival, but theirs. Learning more verses would expand your options for water, shelter, and even a spouse, but would also connect you to the people who lived in the territories surrounding yours. You could walk into a new territory, recognise others singing your song, and learn those lyrics too. Even though the lyrics are different, the melody remains, and is, in fact, the same song. Singing the lyrics in reverse literally would take you back to where you had started. The song would carry you through the landscape of life, and to know more of the song, was to know more of your world, and how to navigate within it. To forget the song, would be surely mean the loss of your life.

Aborigines believe that rather than biological paternity, there are self-supporting spirit children, who are always on the lookout for earthy mothers. The first moment that a mother feels her child kicking inside of her is the moment the aborigines believe the spirit child enters the body of the woman, and starts its life as a human. The mother would then mark the particular location where she felt this first kick, and the tribal elders would assign the child a Dreaming, based on the Ancestral significance of that location. As the child grows, they learns more and more of their world, preparing for the ultimate test. The Walkabout.

During the early years as a young man, between the ages of 12-16 , an aboriginal boy as a rite of passage, must head out into the outback alone, with only the knowledge of the land to survive. He must be prepared for this, and his entire life at this point has been leading to this ultimate test of survival. Only by having a deep understanding of your own song, would you be able to thrive in this environment.

There is a case of a man around 1900, who walked from Arnhemland, in the northern coast of Australia on Walkabout, singing his way through the landscape until he knew no more of the lyrics. Upon the Songline, he encountered others, willing to share in their land, and lend their verses. He walked the entire width of the continent, and arrived on the southern coast, where he married a girl. Together, with his new bride and new-found brother-in-law, they sang and walked all the way back. The brother-in-law then married an Arnhemland girl, and together they sang their way back to his home on the south coast. By the end of their journey, the entire cycle of the Songline would have been sung from beginning to end.

Most of us, if we were thrust out into the Australian outback would surely perish within a short period of time. We would be unequipped to deal with the elements, unprepared to find our own food, or the mental state of panic and fear that would ultimately prove unmanageable in such an unforgiving environment.

I know many of us feel like we were thrown out into the world wholly unprepared for what was waiting for us , just over the horizon, that we just couldn't see.

This knowledge and deep understanding of nature, and of our human connection to it, told through these songs and stories, I believe, allowed for a true peace of mind. \*We as modern humans are filled with anxieties. About where the next meal might come from, or where we are going to sleep, or if we ever will be truly loved, accepted, or understood. We're filled with fear about how were going to pay the next bill, or what the politicians of our world will say, or do next. We've created a very complex system, that although does provide us with certain safeties and conveniences, also provides us with the source of our own, human made, unnatural, fears. What fears do we hold, that we ourselves, are the architects of?

Aboriginal writer Bruce Pascoe, in his book Dark Emu, explains aborigines were not just hunter gatherers like we once thought, but in fact had been managing the land extensively for thousands of years. Descriptions of "stoked" grain fields, tilled yam patches, and terraced hillsides, changes the way the modern mind needs to view the entire culture. We need to think about this type of land management as life management. To be managing the land through controlled burning, planned agriculture, and knowable, and better yet, shareable boundaries, meant they were managing their time. The less time you spent out in the field chasing a kangaroo, the more time you could sit around with your family and neighbors, and sing about how to easily find another kangaroo. To know the land, was to survive. To know your own song, was to know your path, your diet, and your sense of peaceful connectivity with nature, and other humans.

There is a giant white whale in the middle of remote Australia, well, it's a giant white stone that looks like a whale, but in aboriginal culture it represents a great story. It's a story of how aboriginal people survived the rising of the seas, and how the whale told them to move away from the ocean as it rose, but the whale also warned the people that they would then enter the lands of their cousins, and that they would have to negotiate the new population of that land with their cousins, and they would have to do it with peace. Surely one of the few times in human history, when people have moved into another's territory, and not

fought over it. I believe we need more whales in our world, reminding us how to sing together.

So what does this all mean to me? Why am I here talking to you all about this? \*Well my song brought me here. Here to this very room. Two years ago this week I walked through that door, lead here by my twin brother, Charles, who wanted me to meet Reverend Linda, who he had a deep respect for. But I want to back up a bit.

I grew up in western Pennsylvania, in the middle of the woods. During the summers, my parents would rent a house in Sconset, and the best parts of my childhood happened right here on this island. When I was 18, I left home. I didn't go to college because I didn't know what I wanted from life. Charles went to Duquesne and studied psychology, and afterwards moved to Sconset to rent a house on Lily St. He spend his summers here, and his winters in places like Kathmandu, Guernsey Island, and Belarus. I bounced around the country for almost ten years, living in Appalachia, the swamps of coastal North Carolina, and most recently San Francisco Bay. In March of 2017, Charles called me and asked me if I would move here to Nantucket to live with him. Having come from a broken home, and having a tempestuous relationship with my family, I've always struggled with my own sense of belonging. Where was my home? Where was my territory? Where did my songline go? And how could I learn the lyrics I didn't know, if had no one to teach me? When Charles invited me to come to live with him, he said to me "I'm inviting you to come home." I was deeply touched by this, and was one of the definitive moments when I decided I wanted to move here. When Charles invited me back to Nantucket to live with him, he, more than anyone, was aware of my loss of direction, and he, more than anyone, felt quite lost also. He felt it so much, in fact, that in June of 2017, Charles stopped singing, and took his own life. \*Charles struggled with himself since he first attempted suicide at 15 years old, and it remained dormant in him, only to erupt out every few years in the form of an attempt. Charles struggled with housing stresses on the island, and was always looking to for a way to better navigate the change of the seasons. He struggled with mental health issues, depression, and drug use.

And when he left my world, I couldn't make any sense of it. \*Surely this wasn't part of the song I wanted to learn, but I had to, because my song is my life. And I have to know these words, as painful and complex as they may be, if I'm going to survive. \*

Over the last two years, I've reconnected with the footpath, with nature in all her beauty and chaos, and I have been on my own Walkabout, my own journey of discovery and survival. My ultimate test. And I know now, the people of this island have taught me my new lyrics. Along the way I've learned the names of those cousins who were there to help guide me along, Aleks, Nancy, Linda, Willie, John, Ezra, Tobias, Daragh, Melville, Rogers. I'm better for having learned the Song of those whom I love, and for sharing my song with others. \*And I'll keep walking too, because this is my life, and with one more step, I'm further in this life than I've ever been before.

Talking to you all today was a huge step for me. If we can all learn what it means to share our song, to share our lives, with each other, regardless of territory, clan, or god, or border, I firmly believe we will all find what it truly means to be complete. We can only do that with each other. So before I take this next step, out from behind this podium, let me take a

moment to declare this. I am Tucker, my Songline is right here, and I have a Human Dreaming.