

Aboriginal Religion

Aboriginal religion, like many other religions, is characterised by having a god or gods who created people and the surrounding environment during a particular creation period at the beginning of time.

1. [] This form may be that of a particular landscape feature, an image in a rock art shelter, or in a plant or animal form.

Landscape features may be the embodiment of the deity itself, such as a particular rock representing a specific figure, or they may be the result of something the deity did or that happened to the deity in the Creation Period, such as a river having formed when the Rainbow Serpent passed through the area in the Creation Period, or a depression in a rock or in the ground representing the footprint or sitting place of an Ancestral Being.

Aboriginal people do not believe in animism. This is the belief that all natural objects possess a soul. 2. [] They believe that many animals and plants are interchangeable with human life through re-incarnation of the spirit or soul, and that this relates back to the Creation Period when these animals and plants were once people.

There is no one deity covering all of Australia. 3. [] These *Wandjina* are responsible for bringing the Wet Season rains, as well as laying down many of the laws for the people. As one travels east, this function is taken over by *Yagjagbula* and *Jabirringgi*, The Lightning Brothers of the *Wardaman* tribe in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory, then by *Nargorkun*, also known as *Bula*, in the upper Katherine River area, and by *Namarrgun*, the Lightning Man in the Kakadu and western Arnhem Land regions.

Aboriginal deities have many roles and no single description or term can describe all of these. Based on their primary role, they fall into three main categories, and any one deity may belong to one, two, or all three of these categories:

(a) **Creation Beings** (also: Creation Figure). Many are involved with the creation of people, the landscape, and aspects of the environment, such as the creation of red, yellow or white pigments, so can be called "Creation Figures" or "Creation Beings".

(b) **Ancestral Beings**. In many examples, these deities are regarded as the direct ancestors of the people living today and so they are "Ancestral Figures", "Ancestral Beings", "Ancestral Heroes", or "Dreamtime Ancestors". [...]

4. [] So an Ancestral Being may have the appearance of a plant or animal, but have done deeds similar to a human in the past.

(c) **Totemic Beings**. / Totemic ancestors. A Totemic Being represents the original form of an animal, plant or other object (totem), as it was in the Creation Period. The concept of a Totemic Being overlaps with that of a Creation Being and an Ancestral Being because the Totemic Being may create the abundance of species, and people see themselves as being derived from the different Totemic Beings.

5. [] Every individual has come from at least one Totemic Being, and these help define a person's origins and connections with the world, their relationships with the past, present and future. [...]

I. Complete the gaps 1-5 with the missing parts of the text A-E:

- A. Even though regarded as ancestors of the people, such deities may not appear in a human form, but may be plant or animal, for example. In Aboriginal religious belief, a person's spirit may return in human, animal or plant form after death.
- B. They do not believe that a rock possesses a soul, but they might believe that a particular rock outcrop was created by a particular deity in the creation period, or that it represents a deity from the Creation Period.
- C. Aboriginal people are very religious and spiritual, but rather than praying to a single god they cannot see, each group generally believes in a number of different deities, whose image is often depicted in some tangible, recognisable form.

- D. Society is divided into two groups, called moieties, each with specific Totemic Beings belonging to it. Every person belongs to one or the other moiety. These moieties are further divided into sections or subsections, sometimes based on totemic beings.
- E. Each tribe has its own deities with an overlap of beliefs, just as there is an overlap of words between language groups. Thus, for example, the *Wandjina* spirits in the northern Kimberley of Western Australia belong to the *Ngarinyin*, *Worora* and *Wunambal* tribes.

Ceremonial Life

To this day, ceremonies play an important part in Aboriginal life. Small ceremonies, or rituals, are still practised in some remote parts of Australia, such as in Arnhem Land and Central Australia, in order 1. _____ of plant and animal foods. These take the form of chanting, singing, dancing or ritual action to invoke the Ancestral Beings to ensure a good supply of food or rain.

The most important ceremonies are connected with the 2. _____ of boys and girls into adulthood. Such ceremonies sometimes last for weeks, with nightly singing and dancing, story telling, and the display of body decoration and ceremonial objects. During these ceremonies, the songs and stories connected to each of the Ancestral Beings are told and retold, some being “open” for women and children to see and hear, others being restricted or “secret-sacred”, only for the initiates to learn.

Funeral ceremonies. Another important time for ceremonies is on the death of a person, when people often paint themselves white, cut their own bodies to show their 3. _____ of their loved one, and conduct a series of rituals, songs and dances to ensure the person’s spirit leaves the area and returns to its birth place, from where it can later be reborn.

Burial practices vary throughout Australia, people being buried in parts of southern and central Australia, but having quite a different burial in the north. Across much of northern Australia, a person’s burial has two stages, each accompanied by ritual and ceremony.

The primary burial is when the corpse is layed out on an elevated wooden platform, covered in leaves and branches, and left several months for the flesh to rot away from the bones. The 4. _____ is when the bones are collected from the platform, painted with red ochre, and then dispersed in different ways. Sometimes a relative will carry a portion of the bones with them for a year or more. Sometimes they are wrapped in paperbark and deposited in a cave shelter, where they are left 5. _____. In parts of Arnhem Land the bones are placed into a large hollow log and left at a designated area of bushland. The hollow log is a dead tree trunk which has been naturally hollowed out by the action of termites. [...]

II. Fill in the gaps 1-5 with the suitable words and phrases A-E:

- A. remorse for the loss
- B. initiation
- C. to disintegrate with time
- D. secondary burial

E. to ensure a supply

Ćwiczenia na licencji Creative Commons



Mgr Maria Lisiewicz