

### Aboriginal activist, educator and artist

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# *Dadirri*

## *Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness*

*A reflection by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr*

The word, concept and spiritual practice that is *dadirri* (*da-did-ee*) is from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia).

**Permission to use *dadirri* can be sought from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr.**

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 reflection 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.

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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 and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly.

We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings. The right people must be present. Everything must be done in the proper way. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting, because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony.

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We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for.

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...

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.

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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.

If you have benefitted from this reflection please consider making a donation to the Miriam Rose Foundation which is a not-for-profit organisation working to empower Indigenous youth through education, art, culture and opportunity in the Daly River region.

**[www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au](http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au)**



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