
A HERITAGE OF DIGNITY

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Today, more than ever before, men are seeking self-dignity.

They are looking for a means of achieving personal growth in keeping with their temperament, capacity and inherent cultural and spiritual potential. It is in this search, with its sometimes painful experimentation, that we perceive the importance of the indigenous cultures, ancient traditions and traditional frameworks.

The shallowness of his own life is highlighting for modern man the depth of experience inherent in systems devoid of the hustle and bustle of contemporary living. The search for a fundamental experience of reality and an understanding based on truth is no longer thought to be irrelevant. Thus, slowly, acknowledgement is being given to the perfected life-styles of the older civilisations and the knowing emphasis they place on consistency, ethical disciplines, respect and faith. Such original cultures showed a natural appreciation of the principles of living and a deep insight into personal development in terms of emotional stability and psychic capacity.

A simple, purified and fruitful mode of living is the trademark of the ancient cultural traditions: the Indian Adevasis, the New Zealand Maoris, the Australian Aborigines, New Guinea natives and many others. All of these people who preceded so-called 'civilization' and the pre-Christian era, related totally to nature and adopted a practical austerity which became the cornerstone of their peace and happiness.

For these truly cultured folk, life had a harmony and beauty.

Unlike modern societies, they demonstrated a genuine interest in the welfare of all; no one was so unimportant as to be neglected. Only the law-breaker was punished. They did not feel the need to plunder or possess and every day was treated with reverence as having a special significance.

The picture changes when we consider the modern community. Individuals fighting for survival, destroying life and nature and ignoring the society on which they depend: such is the position in our so-called civilization.

Full of distrust, contemporary man still exhibits this self-centeredness. Without faith or interest in the welfare of others, he is showing total irresponsibility towards his community and towards posterity.

Those among us who are genuinely interested in finding some answers, and not just carrying out superficial reforms, must turn full circle and return to the ancient systems. And in our search for some sort of cultural basis and self-understanding we cannot help but be impressed by the simplicity of the forest dwellers, the desert nomads and the wanderers of the bush, even envying

them their dignity and tranquility. It is with a renewed sense of hope that we realize the potential for guidance of the traditions of our country's original inhabitants.

It is our hope that, somehow, the dignity and stature of the natural man may be restored and learnt from. Peoples such the Aborigines have, through their elders and wise men, developed a lore full of wisdom and understanding, a tradition which has great relevance to the cultural and spiritual evolution of man. An investigation of their life styles will reveal a firm foundation from which we could gain great understanding. And yet one cannot help but feel that such an investigation is already too late for many of the Aboriginal people. Already their heritage is shattered and their dignity debased, their cultural values bypassed and their traditions considered irrelevant to this country.

Thus, when we pose the question: What is Aboriginal culture? there comes no clear answer. Modern man's arrogance and unwillingness to listen and bridge the gap between Western and Aboriginal thinking has destroyed a priceless cultural gift. Men must overcome their selfishness and arrogance if they are to appreciate and learn from the spirituality and dignity which the native man has developed, and which now lingers precariously in the experiences of a precious few.

The major step forward which this would constitute is analogous to modern man becoming responsible to life itself. If this could be accomplished by a return to the values of natural, indigenous man, then we could look forward to the future with hope and optimism. A failure to return to the spiritual life would, however, negate man's evolution and thereby threaten peace and happiness for the world at large. This, therefore, is a challenge that all men must face. In particular, I would ask whether the world could be led by Australia, whether the black versus white complex can be dissolved into a unified search geared to the betterment of all, and whether the militant leaders could sublimate their anger and join a crusade for non-violence and peace.

