

Tjukurpa

"Tjukurpa panya tjamulu, kamilu, mamalu, ngunytjulu ngana na ungu, ku runpangka munu katangka kanyintjaku.

This Law was given to us by our grandfathers and grandmothers, our fathers and mothers, to hold onto in our heads and in our hearts."

Quote from Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre

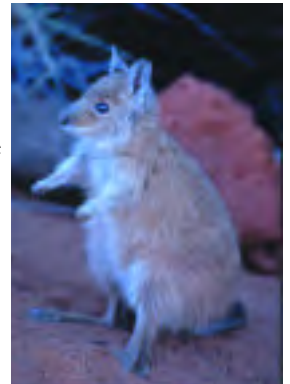
What is Tjukurpa?

Tjukurpa (pronounced like Chook-orr-pa) is the foundation of Anangu life and society. It has many complex but complementary meanings. Tjukurpa refers to the creation period when ancestral beings, Tjukaritja, created the world as we know it now. It is also the law for relationships between people, plants, animals and the land. It is the past, the present and the future. It is also the stories that hold this knowledge.

'Dreamtime' or 'dreaming' is often used to describe the way indigenous Australian see their origins. This translation suggests that the beliefs are unreal and easily forgotten. Tjukurpa is no dream and Anangu do not use the word 'dreamtime' in Anangu languages. There is not one English word that conveys all the meanings which is why the Pitjantjatjara word Tjukurpa is used in the Park. Yankunytjatjara Traditional Owners use the word Wapar (pronounced wop-arr).

The Creation Period

The world was once a featureless place. None of the places existed until Tjukurpa ancestors, in the forms of people, plants and animals, traveled widely across the land. Then, in a process of creation and destruction, they formed the world as we know it today. For Anangu the land is inhabited by dozens of ancestral beings. Their journeys and activities are recorded at sites linked by iwara (paths or tracks). These iwara link places that are sometimes hundreds of kilometres outside the Park and beyond Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara country. The Mala Tjukurpa, for example, involves three groups of mala (rufous hare-wallaby people) who travel from the north to reach Uluru. Two groups then flee south and south-east to sites in South Australia. Kuniya Tjukurpa involves the travels of the woma python from the east. Many other Tjukurpa such as kałaya (emu), liru



(poisonous snake), lungkata (blue tongue lizard) luunpa (kingfisher) and tjintirtjintirpa (willie wagtail) travel through the Park. Other Tjukurpa affect only one specific area. Many exploits of Tjukurpa involve the creation beings going underground.

Evidence of Tjukurpa stories can be seen at Uluru. For example the battle wounds of Liru and Kuniya Tjukurpa can be seen on the face of Uluru near Mutitjulu waterhole.

Land, 'mapped' through the events of Tjukurpa, is therefore full of meaning. Tjukurpa is the basis of all Anangu knowledge.

They identify themselves through the Tjukurpa. Where they are born, where they live and where they die are of great significance. When Anangu travel across the land, they do so with the knowledge of the exploits of the ancestral beings. Their knowledge of the land, and the behaviour and distribution of plants and animals is based on knowledge of Tjukurpa. This is recounted, maintained and passed on through ceremony, song, dance and art.

Social Structure

Anangu refer to sites as being 'my grandmother' or 'my grandfather' because they are part of the land. They identify with land and Tjukurpa shapes their relationships with other people.

The kinship system, based on Tjukurpa, prescribes a range of proper behaviour within the immediate family and with other relations. It gives rules about marriage, and other relationships between men and women, young and old. Family obligations extend to the entire language group and into other language groups. Anangu can work out their obligations to each other even if they have never met. Anthropologists describe the kinship system as a 'classificatory' system, that is, all members of the language group are 'classified' as relations.

Moral Belief System

Tjukurpa provides beliefs and morals with which to judge right and wrong. Tjukurpa guides daily life through a series of symbolic stories and metaphors. It gives people information but also obligations and responsibilities. The stories are not simple stories, but represent technically complex explanations of the origins and structure of the universe, and the place and behaviour of all elements within it. Understanding of such stories increases throughout Anangu lives. For a child, a story may be a moral tale about greed, while for an adult it may provide very complex explanations of ethical behaviour.

Law

Tjukurpa establishes the rules used to govern society and manage the land. It dictates correct procedures for dealing with problems, and penalties for breaking the Law. The proper way of doing things is the way things are done in Tjukurpa. Since the coming of non-Aboriginal people Anangu have had to modify some of the penalties under traditional Law. They have also adapted non-Aboriginal law to help enforce Tjukurpa. Sacred sites are protected under Commonwealth and Northern Territory legislation and hunting and foraging rights are protected under the legislation and lease agreement with Parks Australia. The *Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Plan of Management* helps protect Tjukurpa by using it as a guide for making management and policy decisions.

Passing on Tjukurpa

Tjukurpa is not written down, but learned by living and memorising. It is a cultural obligation to pass on this knowledge to the right people. Ceremonies play an important role in the passing on of knowledge. Specific people or groups in the kinship system have responsibility to maintain different sections or 'chapters' of Tjukurpa. These chapters may relate to a specific site, or a section of an iwara (ancestral path). This knowledge is carefully passed on to people who have inherited the right to that knowledge through, for example, their birthplace, or earned the right, for example, by progressive attendance at ceremonies.

There are many interrelated devices for remembering Tjukurpa, such as specific verses of inma (songs), site related stories, ritual dances or rock art. The iwara (ancestral paths) are recalled in long sequential lists of sites, sometimes including sites beyond country which has been visited, and including sites belonging to other people. Tjukurpa may also be recorded in physical forms such as objects. Some objects are created for a specific ritual and then destroyed, others are very old and passed on from one generation to the next. Tjukurpa is also recorded in various designs and paintings such as the 'dot' paintings of the Western Desert. These designs are often sacred and their use is restricted to specific groups or individuals.

Tjukurpa is extremely important to Anangu. They say they can share some of its information with non-Aboriginal people, but the secret sacred information must stay only with Anangu.