

Tjukurpa

Tjukurpa is the word that *Pitjantjatjara*-speaking *Anangu* use to describe the force which unites *Anangu* with each other and with the landscape. *Yankunytjatjara*-speaking people use the word *Wapar*.

Tjukurpa embodies the principles of religion, philosophy and human behaviour that are to be observed in order for people to live harmoniously with each other and the land. The fundamental principle of *Tjukurpa* is that people and the landscape are inextricably one.

In *Tjukurpa* times (creation time), the great ancestral beings travelled across the land performing remarkable feats of creation and destruction. They formed the landscape as we know it today.

Anangu life revolves around keeping *Tjukurpa* alive and strong. It is clear to see why *Anangu* reject the labels such as ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’ to describe this living, driving force of daily life. *Tjukurpa* is no abstract dream – *Tjukurpa* lives in the land and the people.

When learning about *Tjukurpa*, *Anangu* ask visitors to listen clearly. Let the knowledge you hear come through your ears, into your mind and then settle in your heart.

TJUKURPA AS WORLD VIEW

Tjukurpa is not simply a story that explains how physical things like rocks and trees came to be. *Tjukurpa* also details how important parts of social behaviours and the proper ways of doing things originated.

It contains the way that the social and physical world came into being, as well as the form which the land and human relationships took in the beginning. *Tjukurpa* provides an explanation for how these things are and it is the basis for the ‘world view’ of *Anangu*.

When we talk about ‘world view’, we are talking about how people fit the elements of the world together. We might talk about the economy, the environment, science, the nuclear family, religious values, power and trade.

For *Anangu*, *Tjukurpa* provides this world view, by recording everything that is. The *Tjukurpa* description of reality has the weight and validity which European peoples give to scientific papers.



Australian Government
Director of National Parks



TJUKURPA AS AN ETHICAL BELIEF SYSTEM

Apart from describing the physical world, *Tjukurpa* contains propositions of what is right and wrong. Like other systems of morality and justice, it provides *Anangu* with an ethical system for working out what should be. For example, *Tjukurpa* can be understood as metaphors and symbolic stories, much as the parables of Jesus Christ serve as ethical guides for Christians.

Most *Anangu* find no conflict between *Tjukurpa* and Christianity and many, having grown up on Mission stations, are devout Christians. One familiar Bible passage, for example, translates from *In the beginning was the Word* to *In the beginning was Tjukurpa*.

With most *Tjukurpa* stories, the more you know about *Anangu* culture, the more levels of information the story has. The story of Lungkata at Uluru is a good example of this kind of ethical guide.

For children, this story is a simple parable about greed and stealing. For adults, it describes complex laws relating to the ethics of hunting. Understood in context with hundreds of other stories it forms part of a complex belief system about the right way to live.

THE LAW

Tjukurpa is not simply a religion – it is also a legal system containing rules which guide correct procedures for dealing with and judging problems. It sets out the nature of possible problems, as well as penalties for transgressing rules.

Anangu have had to substantially modify some of the penalties set out for offences against traditional law since they came in contact with the broader Australian community. For example, it would no longer be considered acceptable to spear tourists who entered Mala Puta. Instead *Anangu* have explored how the Australian legal system can help them to deal with punishing people who transgress *Tjukurpa*.

This is done by accessing Australian laws in different areas. For example, sacred sites that have entry restrictions stipulated by *Tjukurpa* are now surveyed and fenced so that people who enter them can be prosecuted under Regulation 12.02 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Some sacred sites are also registered under the *Aboriginal Sacred Sites (NT) Act*.

Cultural practices such as the inherited rights to forage and hunt on traditional lands including the Park are guaranteed under the lease with the Director of National Parks. Traditional designs are protected under Australia's copyright and intellectual property laws. Heritage legislation protects ceremonial objects and sites. The motivation behind all of these legal measures is compliance with the laws of behaviour set out in *Tjukurpa*. At Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park, *Tjukurpa* is an essential guide to what activities and developments are considered lawful inside the Park.

TRUTH, MORALITY AND THE TJUKURPA

For *Anangu*, *Tjukurpa* is the tool used for making decisions about what is right. For example, artwork and photographs are judged as being good if what they depict is correct according to the *Tjukurpa*. When *Tjukurpa* forbids someone to see a site or an object, it is also wrong for someone to see photographs of the same thing. Such photographs are seen as bad or immoral. *Anangu* are unable to view them as good pictures, no matter how pretty or well taken they may seem to non-*Anangu*.

Anangu also think scientists are strange when they ask why an animal behaves in a certain way. They often answer 'because that is the way it is' and also mean 'because that is the way it should be'. Because *Anangu* do not question such things, regarding them as truths, they find it hard to comprehend that scientists do.



Mala

TJUKURPA AND CREATION

Tjukurpa tells of how creation ancestors erupted from the featureless surface of the earth and travelled across it, having adventures and leaving their mark on the landscape in many forms. Some ancestors travelled thousands of miles across the country and their trails link sites across the country of many different Indigenous peoples. Others stayed in one place and brought their special effect to that area alone.

The ancestors were certainly people, although only some of them were human. Many of them, like *Mala* (rufous hare-wallabies) and *Kuniya* (woma pythons), could change form into animal or plant. One way that *Kurpany* (monster dog-like creature that attacked the *Mala* at Uluru) successfully snuck up on the sleeping *Mala* people was to change into the form of the trees and the grass as he travelled.

At Uluru, the most important of these ancestors are the *Mala*, *Kuniya* and *Liru* (poisonous snakes). All three groups of ancestors travelled thousands of kilometres before and after they came to Uluru. These stories can be found at the Cultural Centre.

OTHER TJUKURPA AT ULURU – ITJARITJARI AND TJINTIR-TJINTIRPA

In addition to the four main *Tjukurpa* at Uluru, the activities of *Itjaritjari* (the marsupial mole woman) and *Tjintir-tjintirpa* (the willy wagtail woman) are also seen in features of the rock.

At *Itjaritjariku yuu*, the start of the *Mala* Walk, you can see the cave that this playful and industrious old woman carved for herself, and the waterhole that she used.



Itjaritjari

TJUKURPA AT KATA TJUTA

Like Uluru, the landscape at Kata Tjuta was greatly affected by the activity of powerful ancestor beings in *Tjukurpa*. The ancestors responsible for Kata Tjuta were also responsible for many ceremonial areas relating to the initiation and further ceremonial education of men.

Kata Tjuta is still very important in the religious education of *Anangu* men, so the *Tjukurpa* associated with the creation of this beautiful landscape is restricted. Tour guides should also be aware that *Anangu* women may sometimes access areas at Kata Tjuta for gathering various plants and animals, however this is done away from men's business areas and when men's business is not in progress.

Visitors to Kata Tjuta can use the opportunity to get an appreciation of flora, fauna and geology of the area. Published accounts that tour guides might find about the mythology of Kata Tjuta will invariably contain major inaccuracies and major omissions and these should not be presented to Park visitors as they are inconsistent with the law and *Anangu* cultural beliefs.

Guides should instead focus on information about geology, plants and animals, rather than cultural information, while visiting Kata Tjuta.

PASSING ON TJUKURPA

Tjukurpa is an oral tradition and there are obligations to pass on this knowledge to the right people.

Ceremonies play an important role in the passing on of this knowledge to specific people or groups in a kinship system who have responsibility to maintain different sections of *Tjukurpa*.

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 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 is also recorded in various designs and paintings, such as the 'dot' paintings of the Western Desert. These designs are often sacred, and use and creation is restricted to specific groups or individuals.

Some sounds are associated with particular *Tjukurpa*. The sound of the bullroarer, for example, is associated with secret men's ceremonies. It is for this reason that *Anangu* don't want bull roarer-like objects sold to tourists in the local area.

Tjukurpa is extremely important to *Anangu*. They can share some information with non-Aboriginal people, but the secret, sacred information must be protected and remain only with senior *Anangu*.

Uluru place names derived from Tjukurpa

