

Outback Anthroposophy-- An Australian Conference on "Rediscovering the Secret Sacred in Contemporary Professional Life"

Van James, Hawai'i, USA

The rusty red center of continental Australia is an abrupt and chilling place in July. Its vast desert landscape is punctuated by ancient *dreaming* sites, rock outcroppings and stark geological features, that tell the tales of legendary-cultural events. The clear night sky is spectacularly sprinkled with still-older signatures of cosmic stories so far away and yet incredibly close. In this exceptional natural setting of the southern hemisphere a unique event took place, a conference on "Rediscovering the Secret Sacred in Contemporary Professional Life," on July 8-12, 2012. Jointly sponsored for the first time by both the Anthroposophical Society in Australia and Steiner Education Australia (SEA) the conference was an historic event on several levels. It was both an anthroposophic conference and a teacher's conference. It was also a public conference for those interested in the challenging theme.

How can esoteric spirituality, the hidden sacred, be brought into the light of everyday life in the form of practical activity for the benefit of those in all walks of life, particularly on this primeval continent *downunder*, where both old and new cultures meet so dramatically? This was the question that brought nearly 200 participants together in Alice Springs, a small desert, *outback* town in the sparsely populated Northern Territory of Australia. Presenters offered 45 workshops on themes arising out of education, health and medicine, art and architecture, the environment and agriculture, social transformation, science, math and music. Keynote speakers spoke on "Rediscovering

the Secret Sacred," "Esotericism and Hidden Knowledge," "Health and Diversity for the Earth," "The Return of the Sacred to Australia," "A Morphological Pathway to the Sacred," and "The Secret Sacred in the Individual and the Collective." Some speakers were not anthroposophists, a first for a major Australian anthroposophical conference, and freely gave blunt advice as to what could be improved within and around the Society and Waldorf schools, and what, from anthroposophy, could help the wider contemporary community.

The days opened with eurythmy, Bothmer gymnastics and singing--warming and waking everyone up; they closed with story telling, music, eurythmy, and improvisational theatre; preparing everyone for a good nights sleep. Nearly 100 participants went on a pre-conference bus trip and toured sacred aboriginal sites and natural wonders, camping in the frosty cold desert *bush* at night. Their adventures readily flowed into the conference as a whole (see poem by Lindsey Gallon).

The conference was an opportunity for teachers, Society members, and friends from all over the country to get together in a truly central area, though distant to most everyone. Class Holders of the School of Spiritual Science had a meeting and the new co-General Secretaries, Peter Glasby and Jan Baker-Finch, shared ideas on communication throughout Oceania with the General Secretary of New Zealand, Sue Simpson, and Land Representative from Hawai'i, Van James. Peter and Jan, together with SEA CEO, Tracy Puckeridge, and a helpful team of organizers put together this stimulating conference, and must be heartily acknowledged. The one thing that could have been wished for was more participation from the Aboriginal community. The handful of local Aborigines who were present and contributed to the conference were greatly appreciated.

We saw examples and heard of situations in the lectures and workshops where both suffering and healing have been brought about by means of human deeds. In the end a pic-



John Blackwood lectured on the theme of "A Morphological Pathway to the Sacred," at the Alice Spring's conference in Australia.

ture emerged that Australia's plight is a picture of the world's plight, its fate and destiny requiring similar, immediate action, and that a science of the spirit is both desperately needed and thankfully active within both. Discovering and making apparent the sacred aspects of our work in the world is a current theme for all of humanity today.



Peter Glasby, General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in Australia, with one of the local Aboriginal participants, M. K. Turner, at the conference on "Rediscovering the Secret Sacred in Contemporary Professional Life."



All mandalas in this issue were drawn during a "Secret Sacred" conference workshop.

