

Australian indigenous cultural and religious perspectives

Leanne Simpson (2000) writing about Canadian indigenous communities has listed seven principles which she believes are common to all indigenous worldviews:

- Knowledge is seen as holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships with strong links between the living and their ancestors.
- There is no single version of truth as truth is relative to individual experiences.
- Everything in nature is alive.
- There is universal equality.
- The land is sacred and every individual has a close bond with the land.
- The relationship between people and the spiritual world is crucial and on-going.
- Human beings do not enjoy any particular importance in the world.

Simpson, L. (2000). Anishinaabe ways of knowing. In J. Oakes, R. Riew, S. Koolage, L. Simpson, & N. Schuster (Eds.), *Aboriginal health, identity and resources* (pp. 165-185). Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Native Studies Press.

The Primal Worldview

The primal worldview can be found on every inhabited continent. It is also sometimes titled as the tribal worldview. While each tribal group has different gods and totems, there is striking similarities in the general worldview of tribal people. In Australia, the traditional worldview of our Aboriginal brethren is closely aligned to the primal worldview.

Key Concept	Worldview Response
The Cosmos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Created universe is a total unity.• Non-material as real as material - a 'complex and dangerous world of seen and unseen powers and beings'.• Created and influenced by spiritual beings, and sometimes a distant 'Supreme Creator'.• There are usually totems based on the flora and fauna of the area that are used to represent these spiritual beings.• Humans must maintain the 'balance of nature' through appeasing or appealing to spiritual beings.
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasis is on the society rather than the individual.• Soul has possible external existence outside the body.• The soul has several 'souls' that can be separated or stolen.• The ancestors are always superior.• Death is a change of existence – from world of the living to the world of the ancestors.

Key Concept	Worldview Response
Knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must follow the path of the ancestors as they know how to survive in a hostile world. • Mythology conveys practical truth and wisdom. • Most important to know how to avoid disturbing the spirits. • All things have a spiritual cause.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value lays in your community not the individual. • Family obligations are the highest responsibility. • Socialising is extremely important in any interaction. • Elders are revered and consulted in decision-making.
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two dimensions – past and present. • Future or forward thinking is impossible. • Time is not a valued commodity.
Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related to the family or social group. • To disagree is betrayal and ultimate punishment is expulsion. • Barrenness is the greatest curse. • Traditions of the forefathers are 'good' and 'right'. • Witchcraft is evaluated on the basis of its benefit to the community – sorcerer is 'bad' but witchdoctor is 'good'.

(Burnett 1990, pp.57-69)

It has been suggested by Jim Dumont (2005) that the crucial element which distinguishes the aboriginal worldview from others lies in the centralising tendency by which all matters are viewed as inter-related and inseparable into independent components. There is a strong belief that spirit, mind, body and heart (relationships) are united into one the integral whole and determine how all humans function.

Dumont, J 2005: Regional Health Survey (RHS) Cultural Framework downloaded from <http://www.rhs-ers.ca/english/cultural-framework.aspa> - accessed 11th December 2012