

highly charged ritual setting which is both secret and separate, during which initiates (both male and female, mostly separately) are temporarily removed from everyday circulation. Debate and challenge are not countenanced. The individual progresses through stages of specialized learning and graduates or comes out as a person of different ritual and social status with new knowledge, new privileges and new responsibilities. This change is universally accepted by the group whose acceptance enforces the person's new role and responsibilities, derived directly from the ancient wisdom of the group and sanctioned by ritual whose origin is attributed to the prototype set down by the ancestral beings who are held to be directly responsible for the well-being of the group (Idem.).

While the authority of ancient wisdom, as interpreted and transmitted by the elders of the group, forms the cornerstone of Aboriginal spirituality, it does not mean that this world view is therefore changeless and sterile. Some cultural attributes mitigate against this. The first of this is the recognition of the need for balance: that life has both good and bad aspects and that these are inseparable. This applies not only within the sphere of human relations, but also to the relationship between humans and nature and even the wider cosmic order. This is amply demonstrated in the stories of ancestral beings who are not removed from everyday life, but who experience both the heroic and less noble foibles of human nature while carrying out their creative tasks. Balance also means accountability for one's actions and the need to pay for one's misdeeds. Rules are known and there are penalties for violating the moral order. Diversity and difference are recognized and respected, but must not run counter to the harmony and balance that is the hallmark of well ordered living. All things are interconnected and impinge on one another: there is recognition of the need for internal integrity and harmony just as there is interconnection between all things, past, present and future. Time is not linear but cyclical.

These attributes formed the basis of classical (pre-European invasion) indigenous Australian spirituality.

Due to the inherent diversity of Aboriginal cultures and the devastating impacts of colonialism — dispossession and dislocation from ancestral lands, repression of native languages, denial of cultural practices and forced assimilation — not all Aboriginal groups today can tap into a viable