Appendix E - Kanyini ~ Uncle Bob Randall

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwuJbJaCltc&oref=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fre results%3Fsearch_query%3Dkanyini%26oq%3Dkanyini%26gs_l%3Dyoutube.12..0l3.32433.33490.0.4 33310.3.3.0.0.289.687.0j1j2.3.0...0.0.Rd63kqeqRlE&has_verified=1

The Indigenous people of Central Australia have a term; Kanyini. The following extract is from ‘Songman; the story of an Aboriginal elder,’ pgs 16-28 by Uncle Bob Randall.

Kanyini

Kanyini: the principle of connectedness that underpins Aboriginal life

Kanyini is the principle of connectedness through caring and responsibility that underpins Aboriginal life, linking four main areas of responsibility: tjukurrpa (philosophy, Law and religion), ngura (country), walytja (kinship and family) and kurunpa (spirit, soul and psyche).

There is us, as humans who have been given the Laws of tjukurrpa to apply kanyini to all people. But this was never a restricting thing because the term ‘people’ means all of us. Right throughout my life, old men would point to a forest of trees or a grove of trees or just one tree and refer to it as people. ‘See that mob over there.’ This way of thinking could be referring to the kangaroos, trees, hills or humans. Any of us could be ‘that mob’ or ‘us mob’ could include the totality of that. Throughout my life I discovered, from other Aboriginal groups with whom I have lived, that having that idea of connecting with all things was quite common through the different Aboriginal nations.

Tjukurrpa is creation, the one time in the beginning when all things were created, and which we need to keep alive in the present. This includes not only the landforms and the original plants, insects, reptiles and birds, but also the social laws, the lore, which we have to live by. All this comes from tjukurrpa. This is the bigger consciousness of something that was and is the way to live, the way to live in harmony with all things. Living this is a matter of how we do things in the present. So when we think about time, it is only the now, the present, that is important. In each and every moment of ‘now-ness’ is where we live out the truth of the connectedness of kanyini.

Recently two psychologists flew out from Vienna to visit me to talk about the Dreaming. They explained that they were doing research on something they called ‘lucid dreaming’. By that they seemed to mean people who can travel in their dreams. But as I explained to them, the Dreamtime, the tjukurrpa, has nothing to do with dreaming. It is much bigger than that. It is our reality, not something we are dreaming about. It is very real. The creation period is not something that just existed in the past. To us it is about part of the present and will continue to exist in the future. When I look at a certain rock, it is not just a rock; it is my link to tjukurrpa and all the stories of creation that exist in that rock. Within a grain of sand I see me and th universe. Only our
way of thinking, the thought that we are not an essential part of the universe, lessens our belonging, or our being part of what is, what has been, and what will always be. For me, I am part of the whole of tjukurrpa. It is the same when I hear the song of a bird, or find the tracks of an animal. When I tell tjukurrpa stories or sing the songs, I too am part of the past, present and future of all creation. Caring for the land by telling the stories, singing the songs and doing the dances and paintings is my responsibility. Separating me from that makes me weak.

My ngura (country) can be my tribal area or my house. It is also the idea that wherever I am at any moment of time, that is my ‘country’, my ngura, and it is my responsibility to get to know my country as intimately as possible. So wherever I go, the first thing I do is to get to know my ngura, and to make friends with all the birds and animals who live there. As a Yankunytjatjara I have special responsibilities as an ‘owner’ of different parts of my tribal country, and as a ‘caretaker’ of other parts. Through my mother’s side, I am one of the traditional registered owns of Uluru, and a senior man (tjilpi) of my people there. My sisters are also senior elders and holders of women’s ceremonial knowledge.

Walytja, our system of kinship, of family relationships, is how we express the connectedness of things through family. When you look at the Aboriginal family, there are many mothers and father, because there are four lines of relationship in our kinship system. One line is our physical bloodline. Another line is ceremony, the group of people who undertake ceremony together. Another line is the totemic line, linking all people who share the same totem. And finally there is the line that links all people who speak the same language. The whole tribal group is family, it’s related, it’s very big and if you break any part of that you are weaker. In modern times we also have the relationship that has developed from shared experience, such as all of us who were stolen, and are known as the stolen Generations. Through our system of walytja we know how to relate to each other, our rights and responsibilities and where we can seek our wives. In Aboriginal society no one is a stranger. Everyone is family, everyone is brought within walytja. If our totem is, for example, a certain bird, then members of that bird family can communicate directly with us. We are of one mind, one family.

Kurunpa (spirit or soul) is the third aspect of our connectedness. Everything has kurunpa. I have got to be responsible for the strength in my spirit; the holiness has got to be mine. It is here right beside me always. We cannot move without each other. If kurunpa is weak and it is hanging back, it affects me physically. Our kurunpa is affected by everything we allow into our minds. For example, because under the Laws of walytja I am responsible for all my family, if I were to refuse to help because I wanted to keep money for myself, for something that I wanted, then my kurunpa would grieve. I would feel a sickness of spirit. A physical being without kurunpa will die.

Linking all of these together is the principle of kanyini, the caring and responsibility for relationship on all levels. My understanding is that lots of lines of communication spread out from me and though me in every direction, just like a spider’s web. That web is kanyini. The
knowledge of this comes from tjukurrpa and it is what keeps tjukurrpa alive in the present. As you spread these lines out from you like a spider’s web, they lead into the knowledge of so many things which benefit you, physically, mentally and spiritually.

In the context of all that this formation has said: why do you think we began the Board Formation ‘Eco Justice’ with the quote from Gandhi, “Live simply – so that others may simply live!”?