

Surviving Africa

An essay by Ian Weinberg

In the Beginning

Once, so we are told, our ancestral parents were African living in Southern Africa. It was a time of plenty where the land gave generously of itself. And so our grandparents and parents two thousand times removed were at one with the land, the plants and all the wild animals that roamed freely. And what they needed they took. There was no need to plant or to herd. They lived fully in the present for there was no need to worry about tomorrow. Seasons came and went and they derived comfort in the predictable cycles of life. And always there was the confidence that the land would sustain them.

But then occurred a time when the rains never came and a drought threatened their very survival. The people gathered together with their elders to decide how best to deal with the great stress which had befallen them. From this great dialogue, two camps emerged. The first camp were those who still had faith in the land and its seasons that would again provide. The second camp however were those that feared that unless they moved on to find new pastures, they would succumb to the perils of the killer drought. And so inevitably the people of the second camp sadly bid farewell to their brothers and sisters, not to be re-united with them again in their lifetimes. For in fact it would take another fifty thousand years for the two camps to re-unite again.

The Great Migration

And so the people of the second camp began their long and hazardous trek into the perils of the unknown. The lands were foreign to them while the climate became colder and intemperate. Slowly their trust and confidence in the environment waned and was replaced with fear. Daily life was now beset with the fear of ensuring their tomorrows. The people of the second camp now became pre-occupied with planning their existence to minimize the fear. To ensure adequate nutrition they began to sow crops and to keep herds. They had moved from a world of trust and confidence to one of unknown perils in which planning and ingenuity was vital for their survival. So the people of the second camp withdrew from the joys of living confidently in the present and entered a place of stress where all efforts were directed at ensuring their tomorrows. They became dependent upon their own ingenuity and slowly lost the connection with their heritage.

The people of the second camp developed their skills over many years in many hostile lands. In this way they invented machines of labour and organized themselves to efficiently ward off the perils of the environments and ensure their survival. They also created ships to travel the seven seas. And with their weapons and gun powder they began to conquer the world to ensure that their lives were sustained for all their tomorrows.

The Return

And so it came to pass that after fifty thousand years the descendants of the second camp landed on the shores of their ancestral home and met their brothers and sisters, descendants of the first camp. And each saw the other as being strangely different. For while the descendants of the first camp roamed freely through their homeland and took what they needed for each day, the descendants of the second camp were fearful that the land would not offer up enough for their future needs. And their fear was a fear based on a heritage of hostile environments. So to appease their great fear the second camp descendents carved up the land and put up boundaries. They built dwellings upon the land and sowed crops and raised herds of animals within their enclosures. The obsession with the insecurities of tomorrow caused the second camp descendents to build or import machines to produce more. They produced much more than they needed. But this was good because they could accumulate wealth which would further appease the fear and anxiety of not having enough for tomorrow. This accumulation of wealth by the second camp required great planning and design and management. All this activity required that many facts be recorded together with the plans and designs for the future. To enable the generations of the second camp to function in this way they needed education in reading, writing and in arithmetic.

Now the people of the first camp lived by day and trusted the land and the elements to provide for tomorrow. They believed that the land belonged to everyone and that you took what you needed on each day. In their lives there was no need for plans and design or for recording and calculating because they believed in the land which they knew so well and with which they were so deeply connected. But now their passage on the land was obstructed by the descendents of the second camp who laid claim to vast tracts. And when they took what they needed they were punished and murdered by their brothers of the second camp. They died in great numbers because they fought with their hunting weapons. They were no match for the guns of the second camp whose great fear of tomorrow had given rise to the development of efficient killing machines.

The Conflict

Inevitably the second camp suppressed and controlled the lives of the first camp by brute strength and efficiency borne out of fear. The second camp became intoxicated with their power and they truly believed that they could control all that was within their environments including the people of the first camp. And they looked down upon the people of the first camp and regarded them as savages with inferior intelligence. For the people of the first camp could neither read nor write nor could they invent, plan or manage. But they had had no need for this for they were deeply connected to their land and all that lived on it.

The cruel suppression of the first camp by the second camp increased so that able bodied people were removed from their land and enslaved. In this way the descendents of the first camp lost their land, their extended families and all the connections with their heritage. They were forced into lives of toil where they were incorporated into the plans of the descendents of the second camp. But never were they compensated – either in payment or in receiving the value of education which was at the core of the second camp heritage.

For many years the oppression of the first camp prevailed. The might and controlling influence of the second camp descendents created a world whose systems and values were those of the second camp. In that world the prevailing fear of tomorrow created an insatiable hunger to accumulate and hoard. Wealth became the only value worth living for. Self-esteem and purpose of life was measured in material gain. But the price was great. The accumulation of wealth trivialized the forgotten values of the first camp – respect for the land and all that live on it as well as the respect for other people whose uniqueness in the group contributed to the collective value.

The Liberation

And then it came to pass that processes were set in motion that culminated in the liberation of the descendents of the first camp. A people that had been forcibly removed from their land and families and who were not afforded the right to education and schooling in the way of the second camp, now inherited their ancestral land. But the land was now a second camp land irrevocably changed from their first camp heritage.

Again a new stress befell the people of the first camp. How were they to govern this second camp land which aspired to the world's second camp values when they were inadequately schooled in the ways of the second camp? And the land was further troubled by the product of first camp descendents whose families had been destroyed and who had toiled for the second camp descendents for generations. The first camp descendents had lost their own heritage, their land and its connections and were displaced. And there had been no compensation in

the form of schooling to prepare them for integration into the world of the second camp. Despair descended on the first camp and their self-esteem was dangerously low. They had become victims of a great injustice. When they were not able to succeed in the second camp world they were labeled as inept and of inferior intelligence. But these were the descendents of the proud first camp!

The despair borne out of a poor self-worth and self-esteem created a dangerous mind state in the survivors of the oppressed first camp. They felt that if they couldn't succeed then no one else should be allowed succeed. Therefore they began to disrupt all that was part of the successful second camp and to take by force that which they felt was rightfully owed to them. And again they were regarded as uncivilized savages.

Return to Wisdom

In this way the descendents of the first camp who were now governing, reached a point of despair. For the centre was in jeopardy of giving way - how to correct the great ills which had befallen the land? And so they approached the elders of the descendents of the great first and second camps. After fifty thousand years the two camps sat together as one. For several days they deliberated and eventually proposed the solution. This is what they said:

We are all brothers and sisters, children of our ancestral parents. Fifty thousand years ago we were separated by events of that time. We come together now many years later with two unique experiences. On the one hand is the heritage of a deep connection with the land and the elements and a belief in its eternal sustenance. These are the people of the first camp - optimistic, accepting, confident and living fully in the present. Then on the other hand are the people of the second camp with a heritage of struggle in hostile environments. The prevailing fear had forced them always to plan for tomorrow. In this way they became fearful and anxious people with a need always to define and understand the environments so that they could plan and control their tomorrows and thereby alleviate their fears and anxieties.

We come together now and must reconcile through mutual respect, devoid of prejudice. Each camp has something unique to offer the other. The collective will be more powerful than the some of its parts. The second camp must acknowledge the qualities of the descendants of the first camp – benevolence, optimism and being fully connected in the present where they perceive far more of the environment than the descendents of the second camp (who are too pre-occupied with tomorrow). Likewise the first camp must acknowledge the qualities of the second camp – planners, designers and administrators. And as they embrace each other in mutual respect devoid of prejudice, they will walk each other along a common path, sharing their experiences and forging a new union. But it must be stressed that only by acknowledging the qualities of the other and

by accepting the weaknesses of each, can progress be made. Inherent in this process is the need to relinquish excessive material wealth as a value and as a requirement for self-esteem. Real value and elevated self-esteem arises from the distribution of excess wealth to those deprived of a living wage. In this way will a new order emerge, one which truly acknowledges all the qualities of the two camps - a comprehensive foundation for a new epoch.