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## **Amazing Grace—African pilgrimage—2012**

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The Sun's rays were just peeking through the clouds in the early hours of the morning somewhere outside of Johannesburg. The cabin was dark, our fellow passengers asleep. A flight attendant briskly reached across and pulled down the shade of our passenger window. I winced but then realized that the bright light from our window might disturb the sleep of the passengers around us.

When the door opened for disembarking in Johannesburg, the flight attendant announced "Welcome to South Africa." These words were warm and resonant with delight in welcoming the world to his wondrous land.

Upon arrival, we met up with Linda and Russell Delman, Christine Holmstrom, Sue Gimpel, Susan Kirchoff and our host for the day, Lorraine Forbes, who had flown in from Cape Town.

During the round of welcoming hugs, Linda Delman shared the mysterious account of how "somewhere on the flight across Africa" she had been watching the approaching sunrise when suddenly she began to perceive a flowing, golden stream of light, like a golden river lifted up out of the cloud cover, and beyond peeking through were the distinct shapes of two pyramids—a profoundly evocative, supersensible invitation to the unfolding of a mystery which was about to begin.

### **The Cradle of Humanity**

Lorraine provided a driver and treated us to a visit to the Sterkfontein Cave, where the cranium of a 2.3-million year old hominid—nicknamed "Mrs. Ples"—has been found, together with another complete skeleton of a hominid called "Little Foot" reckoned to be some three million years old. The cave had been excavated sometime in the distant past, and the ancient skeletal remains discovered there are now receiving painstaking care toward preserving and reassembling their forms. Archeologists work in two-hour shifts due to the strain of working in the poor light of the darkened cave. It was quite touching to hear of the dedication and delicacy of the ongoing archeological work that continues there.

Next we were treated to a visit to a Museum housing an educational, interactive experience of the beginnings of creation, followed by the "four extinctions" and the development over time of the human species. Many of the major discoveries concerning so-called early man have occurred along the 31° east "Nilotic" longitudinal meridian that we were about to explore.

The museum offered little to ponder concerning early humanity beyond the Darwinist standpoint but did seriously present the crisis point that has been reached in regard to humankind's lack of caring consideration for the earth. Are we in fact moving to a final destruction of the earth as we know it? The presentation was very educational and awakening for the public. This was the first thread of a theme that is to be carried throughout this "telling"—the theme of small endeavors of goodness that serve toward the health of the whole, one could liken this to the work of the white blood cells in the organism of the human body.

That evening we had dinner with Lorraine, who would be celebrating the founding of the Sophia Foundation of South Africa on the following weekend. Lorraine had come across some of Robert's writings concerning Sophia and had felt called to dedicate her life toward the service of Sophia. Together with the strong support of a Christian Community priest in Cape Town, whose founding speech was included in the Advent 2012 issue of *Starlight*, the newsletter of the Sophia Foundation (available as a free download from this website), Lorraine has held fast to a strong desire and sense of purpose and not without difficulty has secured a portion of her family trust toward "helping where help is needed." We send her our blessings and thanksgiving and the depths of our most moral prayers

### **The First Camp**

The next morning, after meeting up with the rest of the Sophia Foundation group, we headed north, arriving at our destination late in the day. We were privileged to be the invited guests at Linda Tucker's family summer retreat compound. Antique memories from summers past greeted us as we entered our dimly lit assigned guest cottages.

Paintings by Linda's mother and other family memorabilia adorned the walls. Documents of education and professional attainment framed her father's writing desk. Evidence of familial warmth pervaded all the living spaces.

Bush babies screamed in the trees surrounding the guest cottages. Bush babies are tiny monkeys whose call sounds like a wistful baby's cry and are known to enter guest's rooms and play havoc. So we slept with closed windows whilst envisioning Linda and her siblings dancing about under the starlight in earlier times.

### **Stella**

Stella, the South African coordinator for our group, sat with us around the fire after dinner, as we shared our hopes and intentions for the trip. We were most fortunate to have Stella, a lovely, refined and capable young woman.

Stella had recently returned to South Africa after working thirteen years in Melbourne, Australia. She shared how she had been longing for a more meaningful contribution in her life. Then it was upon a visit home and to the White Lion Trust project that Stella had decided to come home and take up the work of serving as

Linda Tucker's assistant. In this way she could contribute to an "endeavor of significant goodness."

Stella told of how heart breaking it had been to discover the condition of the tribal families and of the incredible devastation due to the spread of AIDS and the HIV virus, leaving thousands, possibly millions of orphans trying to survive. She told of how she had visited one family where the head of the household was six years old, left to care for a baby and younger sibling. She added that South Africa has been in this condition for well over ten years even though educational efforts have been taken up. Apparently, babies born of infected mothers do not contract the virus at birth but rather the virus is passed on through the breast milk. Education is thus vital as well as support from non-infected mothers to supply breast milk.

### **Adam's Calendar**

Next morning we set off for Adam's Calendar. The terrain was so brutal that one wondered how the vehicle could persist. I have new respect for Land Rovers. Ours was open backed and we were huddled close, bracing against the chilled early morning wind. Standing up, we had to hang tight to the railings for support, taking care not to lose our hats. The harsh winds and misty cold seemed somehow awakening and refreshing in the light of what lay ahead.

Mysteries have their way of presenting themselves in right timing. This mystery, that of Adam's Calendar, was only officially discovered shortly after the turning of the millennium (2003) by Johan Heine, a rescue pilot who was searching for a small aircraft that had crashed in the area. Five years of research—two years of collaboration with Linda Tucker's friend Michael Tellinger—resulted in the book *Adam's Calendar*, introducing these remarkable discoveries to the world.

Linda Tucker described how the ancient stone circle, now known as "Adam's Calendar," was at one time aligned with the equinoctial points (now 3 degrees off) and stood in alignment with the rising of the three stars in Orion's Belt. Amazingly, she then turned to point out two distinct pyramids peeking through the mist in the distance, which she described are located exactly on the 31° east "Nilotic meridian" in direct alignment with Timbavati, home to the mystery of the White Lions, and also in an "as above, so below" alignment with the Sphinx and the Cheops pyramid in Egypt. A golden mean spiral perfectly links Adam's Calendar with the two pyramids—located seven miles away in the Barberton impact crater, which is three billion years old. Linda Delman's supersensible vision of an etheric "river of gold" and "two distinct pyramids peeking through the clouds" had been accurate and we were participating in the unfolding of a mystery.

I remember Linda Tucker's prayer while standing in the center threshold between two enormous stone pillars, one smaller than the other. Linda asked us to join her in a most powerful prayer of protection and Sophianic guidance for her friend Michael Tellinger who was at that moment going through court proceedings in Johannesburg. Michael is taking on the corruption in the South African banking

system—having filed suit to unveil the greed and unlawful actions that have been perpetrated against the citizenry of South Africa, causing the loss of homes and means of survival for many people.

I was reminded of Valentin Tomberg's writing concerning the third beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Meekness, as described by Valentin Tomberg, is a state of being love filled and in service so that one is met by spiritual powers and given strength and ability. The intensity of this soul condition then leads to a longing for righteousness, the fourth beatitude, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

We were witnessing the tremendous courage of two mighty young warriors, Linda Tucker and her friend, Michael Tellingner, who were demonstrating righteousness.

Linda too has had her day in court so to speak, having managed with tremendous effort to convince the South African government of the importance of protecting the white lions from the hunting industry—only to have the newly passed law overturned soon after, due to large bribes from powerful private sectors promoting game-hunting.

One by one, we each stood in the threshold center of the Adam's Calendar circle and offered up our heart-felt prayers. Daybreak burned away the mist and we turned to behold the extraordinary valley that plunged deep into the bowl formed by the surrounding mountains. Our voices became hushed in response to the immediacy and sheer beauty of the scene. We lingered in the mystery of the moment—as Linda announced that this was a region that had been discovered to have "Unicorn portals"—doorways to other dimensions. This would be our afternoon excursion.

### **Unicorn Portal**

A participating eurythmist gave an exquisite description of the quality of this excursion as a perfect "ts" sound (pronounced in the same way as the "c" in the word dance), the sound for Libra—the quality of lifting density and of discovering that the lifting is effortless and that the density is filled with light. This is the lightness that lifted my feet as they danced up that mountain.

The mystical atmosphere created by the goal of our quest to locate a "Unicorn portal" was enhanced by the drizzle and dense fog that had settled over the surreal landscape, inhabited by massive stones seemingly formed by sea currents from an age long ago.

When we reached the summit, my climbing companion, Linda Delman, and I turned intuitively to the right, as though guided by an invisible hand, and there before our eyes was a rather large stone circle. The vibratory frequencies that could be discerned through our feet and hands indicated that this was a powerful "out-breathing" point for the earth.

Karen Rivers had been requested to bury there a prayer for the healing of the horse spirits written by Linda Tucker's friend Angela, a benefactor of, and a co-worker with, the White Lion Trust. Angela is a gifted animal intuitive and had recently rescued two incredibly abused horses from a property near to her home in Germany.

Gathered there in the cold and the mist, we offered our prayers toward the healing of the mistreatment of animals and the transformation of consciousness. We were modern Druids doing our work through the power of love expressed in our gestures and the sounding of the sacred word and were greeted by heart-shaped stones that we interpreted as talisman and omens, indicating we had found the right place.

Linda Tucker had mentioned that often you would find a horseshoe shaped ohm sign (omega sign  $\Omega$ ) impressed in the area of a portal as evidence of the "unicorn connection" and amazingly, just as we were leaving the circle, Linda Delman discovered a perfect omega sign formed by the mossy green lichen growing on a large heart-shaped stone marking the edge of the circle.

### **Kruger Park—Headed North toward Timbavati**

Our scheduled visit to the "window of the world" site was weathered out and it was recommended that we drive through Kruger Park instead. We were a little disappointed, however, that our visit to Kruger Park would be short, because of the stipulation that we must exit from the reserve before 6 pm. This meant that we would have a rainy, four-hour excursion rather than an all day trek in the sun.

Imagining that all the animals would be snugly tucked away in some dry corner of the park, we felt doubtful that we would be able to see anything due to the weather. In this mood we spent an unlikely amount of time viewing a watering hole in which someone had spotted the points of pink ears, the rounds of pink eyes, and the arch of an upper jaw bearing two pink nostrils. Somehow the pink just stood out from the murky brown sludge of the water.

We watched with total captivation the submerged hippopotamus, feeling sure this might be "it" as far as wild life sighting that day. I remember the soft plumage of a pair of Egyptian heron "stepping" the sand bar along the edge of the water and the iridescent blue-green coloring of the smallish black starling that flittered here and there.

Could it be that this "less is more" introduction was educating us—as Sophia does—in the art of "beholding the given" with a sense of wonder and appreciation?

Little by little more pink ears, round mounds with pink eyes, and arch-bearing nostrils appeared. We realized we were observing a pod of hippos with their upturned faces all nuzzled together in a tight little huddle. How they managed their enormous bodies in such a compact congregation we could only imagine.

Eventually, hilarity broke out as Russell Delman imagined witnessing the birth of the first white hippo. This brought our first hippo sighting happily to a close.

Now the theme of being schooled by Sophia continues along with the theme of endeavors of goodness, large and small, and a new theme of beholding the unity of all things.

So, we're driving along fretting further about would we see anything or not and little by little we spotted many, many creatures—monkeys, zebras, elephants, wildebeests, various types of antelope, a herd of African buffalo, a cheetah, a rhinoceros—of the “big five”, we were missing only the lion and the leopard.

At one point we asked Sue Gimple, who was an excellent spotter, “Sue, what would you like to see?” “A giraffe,” she said, without hesitation. Immediately, a pair of impossibly long-necked giraffes stood just ahead, waiting to cross the road. All vehicles came to a respectful halt as we allowed this elegant pair safe passage. Reminding one of the animals entering Noah's Arc two by two, the juxtaposition of their necks and the rhythm and pattern created by the foursome of their legs is something I shall never forget—something akin to the marriage of art and music. Something that would be remembered later in the petroglyphs on the ancient cliff walls high in the mountainous region of our trip further north to the Leshiba wilderness project on top of the Soutpansberg.

Our wonderful guides—their names were Harmony and Justice—allowed ample time at each sighting, long enough to observe species interaction, for example, the ominous approach of an African buffalo herd needing to pass through the grazing grounds of a small herd of zebra. The zebra moved aside and continued grazing. The buffalo—with massive shoulders, heads down, and upward curved horns—went on their merry way! It was fascinating to watch the social behavior of the different species and how they protect the young when perceived danger is near.

Our guides served as our “world” of information. We asked, for instance, how does a newly born zebra or giraffe learn to recognize its mother? This is one of the miracles of nature—if you observe carefully, you can perceive that the patterned fur of both the zebra and the giraffe are completely unique to each animal and this pattern is indelibly imprinted upon the young when suckling takes place. This is how the young find their mom and vice-versa.

I am reminded of the beautiful book, *The Creative Music of the Universe* by Alexander Lauterwasser presenting the research of the sound scientist, Ernst Chladni, in which he postulates the fact that the creature patterns of tortoise, giraffe, zebra, etc., are sound creations—revealing that each creature is a vibrating song.

Perhaps with a sense of joining in this vibrating “song”, we somehow had the notion to sing to a small congregation of elephants. First, they turned their backs to us. Then they turned and advanced toward us, waving their enormous ears at us—a sign of distress, which we interpreted as applause.

Obviously we had much to learn, but by this time we were so exhilarated by our various sightings that our enthusiasm for learning could scarcely be contained.

### **Camp Unicorn**

We arrived at our destination, Camp Unicorn, right about dusk. Our driver, Harmony, stopped before the gated entrance, held up an odd antenna-like metal apparatus, held it outside his open window and turned it around in all directions. Then he carefully disembarked and unlocked the gates marked “Beware of Lions” at the entrance to the *Tsau! White Lions Preserve* founded by Linda Tucker and lion ecologist Jason Turner.

He drove through the first gated entrance and then, after driving for a time through the preserve, he repeated this procedure with the mysterious antenna, radioing to assure there were no lions in the vicinity of the second set of gates. Again he disembarked and unlocked the second set of gates, drove through the gates, then swiftly repeated the procedure with the antenna before disembarking to relock this final set of gates.

In one breath-taking moment we realized that we were inside a lion preserve. Linda Delman humored that the lions might be waiting for us with dinner napkins tied around their necks. There we were at Camp Unicorn, the name of our accommodation in the middle of the *Tsau! White Lions Preserve*.

Our time together at Camp Unicorn was precious— with communal meals served by our wonderful cook, Daniel, daily outings to commune with the white lions, time spent in our cozy rondavels (round huts), topped with thick thatched roofs. The camp staff had painted each hut uniquely, with designs from the various tribal traditions. Elegant sculptures graced the walkways in resonance with the simple, sculptured forms of the monumental cactus trees that artfully punctuated the curving paths.

Camp Unicorn had originally been built as a hunting game reserve, so that the accommodation huts and supporting facilities were already in place when the White Lion Trust purchased the property.

It was beautiful to behold the joy on Jason Turner’s face as he recounted the early days of transition, wherein he and Linda had endeavored to maintain the old staff and to honor the years of contribution they had made and to invite their co-participation in the new project by sharing their valuable experience regarding maintenance of the property. Jason, a lion ecologist, is Linda’s partner and senior scientific advisor for the White Lion Protection Trust.

Respect and gratitude toward the indigenous people were demonstratively evident and considered a vital part of the work of restoring balance and right relationship to the nature kingdoms and local communities.

### **The White Lions**

Each day, pre-dawn and pre-dusk we traveled in open vehicles to commune with the white lions. Our senses were heightened by the crisp cool air, the fresh scents of the African bush and then suddenly, a hush and a rush of adrenaline—there they would be, usually dead out asleep, their bodies blending with the folds of the land at the sides of the road and their huge “raggedy Ann” heads completely given over to Mother Earth.

Making contact is a unique experience. This happened for me one morning on a visit to the “royal couple”, Mandla and his exquisite white lioness, Zihra. Calm settled over the vehicle when Sue Gimpel suggested that we keep quiet and endeavor to make contact with the lions.

I began to send my love and gratitude to Mandla for all that he has suffered at the hands of humanity, and for the sharing of his life now with the human kingdom so that we might behold the mystery of his coming to the earth. Mandla is the magnificent white lion that Linda Tucker raised \$150,000 to rescue from captivity, in order to follow through on the counsel of the well regarded Zulu sangoma, Credo Mutwa, who has said that Mandla is a true lion-king and a messenger from heaven. Credo had stressed the importance of returning Mandla to Timbavati to re-establish balance on the 31° east “Nilotic meridian,” the “golden river” that Linda Delman had super-sensibly perceived. Jason Turner shared with us that Mandla’s rescue and relocation had been “epic” in terms of its scope and technical complications.

In contemplating Mandla, while engaged in this inner dialogue with him, a sense of warmth began to fill my heart space so that my heart seemed much larger than before. This warmth was a presence that I can tap into even now —it was the presence of a resonance with Mandla’s heart. In the same moment, my awareness was drawn out over all the land in the preserve, encompassing all the animals, and then came the knowing understanding that the sound of the lion’s roar brought a sense of order and balance to the land and all its creatures.

I can still see Mandla’s tilted head, eyes closed, appearing as though he were listening and his sweet smile of contented fulfillment. Mandla is a true king.

Jason Turner had shared with us that over time a relationship would begin to form during these pre-dawn, pre-dusk beholdings. There was evidence of this, as well as of the web of connection that weaves the unity of all things. This occurred one evening upon encountering two brother lions asleep, lined up, head to tail, in a tawny white trail of resting fur. It was pre-dusk, still completely light, and we were full of wonderings. Did they hunt on the previous night? Have they eaten? Will they hunt tonight? Do they look thin? Within seconds, as though in etheric resonance with our questioning hearts, the foremost lion rolled over on his back to expose his beautiful full belly, his hind paws falling softly to rest on the face of his sleeping brother. The sense of brotherly love between them was exquisite, or in Jason’s words, simply “intoxicating.”



One evening we came upon the brothers fast asleep at the fork of a road. Both the right and the left passage lanes had been “trumped,” so to speak, by a sleeping lion. As night fell, Nebu, their sister, announced her presence. I stood up (something that is entirely forbidden) and beheld her, in regal white majesty at the rear of the vehicle. It was breathtakingly beautiful to behold her stretched out, head held high, like a sphinx. Her roar awakened her sleeping brothers.

Then as though coming to life in sudden animation, her brothers rose and began roaring—all of this in a magical split second orchestration with night’s starry veil falling over the land.

Lions from neighboring preserves joined in the roaring. We were surrounded in a cacophony of sound. The rich, deep throated texture and over tones of the lions’ roaring filled our ears and became our world. Jason Turner leaned back and with a twinkle in his eye whispered, “We may be spending the night.” As Jason had described earlier, it was simply intoxicating to be witness to this. At that moment, if we had died, I am sure that our first words to St. Peter would have been, “Oh, St. Peter, we’ve been roared!”

### **School Visits**

Our group visited two neighboring schools, one of them with over 1,000 students, 75% orphans. The smaller school maintains a healthy bio-garden, which supplies school meals as well as take-home food for the children’s younger siblings.

Despite the impoverished conditions of the children’s lives, they were quite radiant and joyful, performing colorful dances, and at the smaller school a play about the importance of protecting the white lions.

Our group gave a modest monetary donation to the teaching staff of each school in support of the school’s activities. At the larger school, in response to the donation, the teachers broke out in joyful dance and song. We were left with a resonance of hope for a healed world.

The White Lion Trust supports these schools as well as a small impoverished orphanage nearby.

### **Shangaan Village**

Our young guide, Harmony, is native to the Shangaan tribe, whose village we visited. He is the revered leader of his tribe, having inherited his title following the tragic murder of his father, the former chief of the tribe. Murder and rape are the shadow reality to the desperate conditions of life in this region.

Harmony is already a family man with one wife. He said, “A man can have as many wives as he can afford.” Due to the consequences of the HIV virus, there are not enough healthy men to go around. However, Harmony described further, “Wives

are expensive. One must pay 1,500 rand for each wife.” (1,500 rand is approximately \$170.) So Harmony is content with one wife for the time being.

## **Tracking**

Our tracking guide was a leader from the Bushman tribe and also a graduate of the White Lion Trust leadership program.

We followed single file behind him and were pledged to silence so that our senses could awaken more fully to the experience of the natural habitat of the animals we were hoping to track. He led us along a dry riverbed, pointing out tracks from creatures large and small that had crossed through the sandy soil there.

From time to time, he would stoop down and draw forms in the sand depicting various kinds of tracks, illustrating for us how to recognize the particular tracks of the creatures that would most likely be found in the area.

His gentle manner and soft way of speaking had us completely captivated in rapt attention. One could sense the richness of his native inheritance, which had become a part of him, a kind of timeless wisdom, concerning nature’s laws and wonders.

We asked if he could join us at the camp that evening to share the story of his initiation into manhood and perhaps to share some stories and legends typical to the Bushman tradition.

That evening we sat perched on the stones around an open fire pit and listened as he described how during his initiation, an eland had magically come to stand beside him. His father and his grandfather had explained to him that this was an honoring sign from the animal kingdom and an indication of his true spiritual name, “Eland.” We had not yet seen an eland, which is the largest and most magnificent of the antelope species.

Warmed by the fire and enchanted by the magic of the stars, we listened intently as he softly recounted legends typical to the Bushman tradition. Most of the stories had to do with the cleverness of the jackal, which was a humorous way to impress upon the youth the importance of quick wittedness and cunning when in the presence of trickery and deception.

He spoke in the South African language. We were amazed as Stella translated with ease the language that was native to her homeland, spoken by all the tribes, making inter-cultural exchange possible.

Linda Tucker had shared with us her perception that “Eland” was a true shaman in his own right. We were reminded of this and the web of connection through the unity of all creation, when the next morning to our utter delight, we spotted our first jackal. The jackal was guarding her cubs, which were hidden in a small mound beside the road, and we noted her jackal cleverness as she imperceptibly moved them out away from our curious gaze.

Next, just to prove the immediacy of the web of life, we sighted our first eland, a magnificent animal, alone to his kind on the reserve. Jason Turner described how they had tried several times to bring in a mate for the male eland, but due to the size and slower movement of the female elands, they had not survived their predators, the mighty lions.

### **Jessica, the Hippopotamus**

Now, just to illustrate how life tends to come full circle, in terms of resolution for earlier beginnings, we visited a couple who had adopted a hippopotamus as a beloved pet. This story is one of the most amazing examples of healing coming to and through the kingdoms of nature.

Jessica is a hippopotamus, who was rescued by a couple whose property adjoins and spills over into a river which had separated the baby hippo from her pod during a torrential rain storm several years ago. Her rescuers described how they had taken Jessica in and had bottle-fed her several times a day because “otherwise the alligators would have eaten her.”

Now, the amazing thing is that Tonie Joubert, who had rescued Jessica, had been a game ranger by profession for many years and had personally killed, by his own estimate, around “1,700 hippopotamuses” in his lifetime. He and his wife Shirley described how caring for Jessica and bonding with her in such a profound way had changed their lives, giving them a love story to share with the world.

Then in January last year (2011) a miracle occurred when again, during a torrential rain, a flash flood had caused the waters of the river to rise up into the couple’s hillside home, so that they had to escape in a small boat. In the raging waters the honorary game ranger had become separated from the boat in which his wife was settled, and he was close to drowning in the fury of the water. Jessica the hippo came to the rescue and pushed Tonie to the boat for safety and then continued to push the boat further until they were out of danger. “She actually saved our lives,” Tonie said.

Apparently, life has become a little more complicated now for the couple, as Jessica sometimes has boyfriends who come to her home stretch of river to visit—and well, yes, on one occasion it even transpired that Tonie had to be defended by Jessica and was saved through Jessica’s intervention from being trampled by one of her aggressive boyfriends. Now there is a second baby hippo that Tonie and Shirley have rescued and are taking care of. However, Jessica has not yet accepted this new arrival.

Before leaving we each had the opportunity to give Jessica an affectionate kiss and to place between her enormous two front teeth a small morsel of food.

### **Ritual**

On our final night at Camp Unicorn, we celebrated the *Liturgy to the Etheric Christ* out under the stars—offering our prayers and sacred readings to be carried by the 31° east “Nilotic meridian” as a hope for the future of the planet, intended as a blessing for nature and the “great family of humanity.”

Linda Tucker began our ritual by speaking a powerful shamanic invocation. She briefly held an ankh, the Egyptian symbol for eternal life, in the fire and called for the presence of the white lions to be with us during our sacred ritual. The lions began roaring even as she was speaking out her invocation, ending with the word “Tsau,” the Bushman invocation—from the realm of stars—of the courage of the lion.

We held memories of “First Time” and “First Peoples” close to our hearts in our chorus of song and eurythmy prayer around the circular fire pit. The fire spirits graced the singing of the choir with sparkled glory and the smoke enshrouded the gestures and movement of our sacred prayers in blessed mystery.

This was our offering. This was our prayer. This was hope and vision and thanksgiving.

In gratitude to Karen Rivers and the choir for the preparation of the beautiful songs and to Robert Powell for the weaving together of the sacred texts for this liturgy, which describes for us a condition which will more and more become available regarding our relationship to Christ’s presence in the etheric realm of the earth.

## **Mapungubwe**

Mapungubwe is a day’s journey north of Timbavati. This is one of the most important of the South African regions, and is best known, perhaps, for the small golden rhinoceros, an exquisitely refined sculpture that was discovered in 1931 at this ancient site. The significance of this particular discovery was that it gave an indication of the level of sophistication of the Kingdom of Mapungubwe that flourished there in the thirteenth century AD.

One could say that our visit to the Mapungubwe National Park was an example of a call from Sophia to expand our preconceived notions of the past. Could we bring our “I”-forces into our etheric beholding profoundly enough, so as to receive the “inheritance of the earth” as a memory body? This would require an expansion of consciousness reaching back in time. For, apart from the archeological evidence of the thirteenth century Kingdom of Mapungubwe, there is also the evidence recently discovered by Johan Heine and Michael Tellinger concerning the stone structures of South Africa bearing witness to an ancient civilization that far exceeds the bounds of what is generally imagined to have existed in this part of the sub-continent.

An award-winning museum has been created at Mapungubwe to preserve the story of the discovery in 1931 of the thirteenth century kingdom, which was the largest in the sub-continent before it was abandoned in the fourteenth century. The museum houses relics from the Kingdom of Mapungubwe. The architecture of the museum

honors the tradition of the ancient stone masonry used in the creation of circular forms and was constructed by the local indigenous peoples from the Limpopo tribe, who were recruited to receive special training in order to co-participate in the building of the forms using the ancient traditions and artistry.

The notion of “inheritance,” as comprising earth memories from the past, was reinforced by the predominance in the national park of Baobab trees scattered here and there over the otherwise dry, parched landscape. These trees make a unique impression upon the soul, in that they somehow invoke affection and perhaps even a sense of love. They live hundreds of years and their shapes swirl with the memory of the years they have silently danced with the forces of nature. They have wisely adapted to the dry parched environment that is their natural habitat and are able to retain large amounts of water in their bulbous trunks.

Although seemingly dry and lacking in vegetation, the land in this region supports most of the animal species we had grown accustomed to viewing. In fact, we were told that a white antelope has been discovered in the region. If it is true that memory also bears the future, then the appearance of white animals being born to the various animal species might serve as a “telling” signpost for the mystery of future conditions on the earth.

### **The Leshiba Wilderness**

Turning south now, we traveled toward the top of the mountain cliffs of the Soutpansberg in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

“We are just the caretakers—how could anyone own this beautiful land!” These were the introductory words spoken by the couple from Johannesburg who had purchased the 2,500 hectares (6,000 acres) property from a hunting game preserve twenty years previously. The present project serves as a rhinoceros protection preserve and has been recognized to be a part of Unesco’s newly declared Vhembe Biosphere Reserve.

The land had originally been maintained and farmed by the indigenous peoples of the Venda tribe who were forced off the land by wealthy proprietors seeking to use the land for game hunting. It was impressive how the present owners have honored the original tribal people by inviting them back to help in the restoration of their native Venda village and to serve as staff and co-workers in the various projects there.

Our early morning hike with Peter Straughan—botanist, herbalist, archeologist, lover of the natural world—as our guide was magical. With his seven year old son running, jumping, climbing and weaving amongst us, we set out, receiving lessons on the healing properties of the plants and trees we were passing all along the way. Weaving slowly, in and out and around, up through the bush we came eventually to a narrow rock ledge at the cliff face, to behold ancient petroglyphs depicting ritual celebrations, which indicated the ancient Bushman practice of maintaining contact with the spiritual world.

This is where my first giraffe sighting, reminiscent of the marriage of art and music, took on a new meaning, coming to life again now, as dancing, stick-like forms with elongated, truncated bodies reaching toward the stars for illumination.

Peter recounted how he himself had documented over four hundred sites with similar petroglyphs, sometimes in co-ordination with archeologists from the local universities, but most often on his own.

As we walked back to the Venda Village across the plain, one could feel the peace that had settled over the land, the peace that one feels when a place has been well loved and tended over many years. We stopped eventually to gather under a great old tree, which Peter affectionately introduced as the “marriage tree.” Then to our utter delight and surprise, we were joined by a herd of twelve horses, which we had seen grazing further up along the path. Astonishingly, we beheld their massive bodies surrounding us, weaving among us—bringing their heads face to face with each of us and allowing their beautiful forms to be stroked—much like when one visits a healthy family, how the children are eager to welcome friends who come to visit. One by one they were introduced and something was said about their unique characteristics. Then suddenly, they raced off—chasing the family dog, as he had playfully nipped their ankles.

We were gathered there at the “marriage tree” which had witnessed the marriage of Kathy, the owner’s daughter and Peter. Together they have managed the various projects taking place on the reserve and have built the place up over the years into the retreat center it has become.

They have raised their four beautiful children on this land and have danced for rain yearly under this very tree. Kathy does the dancing, sometimes accompanied by a female friend and drumming from the Venda tribal community.

“There is a time of year, when the land just aches for water,” she said, “so we dance—but we need to be mindful of the powers we are beseeching! Last year the answer to our prayer for rain came as a terrific storm, which was quite devastating for the land and animals.”

Our safari troupe followed suite and on the last day, despite cold and misty rain, danced in linked procession through a stone circle labyrinth, singing, “Ishe Oluwa”—“The work of God can never be destroyed.”

This was the outdoor closing for our indoor celebration of the *Liturgy to the Earth* in which we read the sacred texts honoring several different religious traditions of the world (Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Christian) and each of the four elements, accompanied by songs and hand gestures, giving expression not only to each element but also as an honoring of all we had encountered on our journey and all that lived in our hearts as a prayer to Mother Earth.

## **Closing**

When I think back over our visit to South Africa and this momentous time in world history, I feel such gratitude to Linda Tucker for the inspiration she has awakened in our hearts toward respect for the “mystery,” for the invitation to behold the wonders of the animal kingdom in a new way, and for the noble demonstration of stewardship toward the reestablishment of “right-relationship” to the earth, to nature and the animal kingdoms and toward the partnering of cultures in building a better world. I am grateful for the way our trip was planned, offering us the opportunity to visit projects that were dynamic and courageous and righteous.

And how grateful I am to now be able to carry the wondrous continent of Africa, formerly unknown to me, affectionately in my heart and prayers. I can say that I now have had an indication of the mysteries of “first time” and “first peoples” and most of all—there is now within me a heartfelt sense or presentiment of the beat of the Mother’s heart. The golden realm of Shambhala, I believe, is somehow connected to the mystery of the “etheric river of gold” that is connected with the 31° east “Nilotic meridian” running through the Great Pyramid, the Sphinx, Great Zimbabwe, Adam’s Calendar, and Timbavati, the land of the white lions.