



Eucalyptus rubida

Newsletter of The Centre for Ecology & Spirituality,
183 Burns Rd. Glenburn, Victoria, Australia. 3717
Ph: 03 5797 8532 Email: centreecology@bigpond.com
www.edmundrice.org.au/glenburn

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Fungus is nature's prime decomposer, and is often found on soil debris and rotting trees. This beautiful family of yellow fungus must appear awesome to foraging rabbits, wallabies and wombats.

Gaia is a metaphor for Earth. This resurrection of the name of one of the Goddesses of early Greece was the brainchild of scientists James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, when they were researching the interaction of the living systems of Earth's functioning. They saw systems within the planet that were so self-healing, so regulating of many kinds of balance, and so synergistic, that they suggested that Earth parallels much of the systems of our human bodies. In this sense they likened Earth to an organism, and gave it a name – Gaia. This is not too far distant from the insights of the early Greeks who did something similar, only elevating Gaia, Earth Goddess, to the status of a feminine divinity.

This was a beautiful perception for the times. Our own perceptions of divinity came from early ancestors like the Greeks, talking and thinking about this over maybe 40,000 years, and even now we are only still scratching the surface of theology and metaphysics and making it work for us. We really have not been very successful, in recent millennia. With due humility we really ought not to think that our two or three thousand year of religious development has exhausted the spiritual insight. I find myself admonished by the frank statement of Lynn Margulis:

To me, the human move to take responsibility for the living Earth is laughable - the rhetoric of the powerless. The planet takes care of us, not we of it. ... Rather we need to protect us from ourselves.

Ecopsychologists like Theodore Roszak have even suggested that in a spiritual sense Gaia is again wooing us to return to a lost intimacy with

Gaia

her. This is metaphorical language, but what language is not and what religious terminology is not? It is not heresy to say that God comes to us through the natural world, and to figure God as 'lover' is a common theme of many of the mystics, not only Christian ones. For example, Paul Kelly arranged the John Shaw Neilson poem *Surely God is Lover*, for aboriginal singer Jimmy Little.

*Surely God was a lover when He bade the day begin
Soft as a woman's eyelid - soft as a woman's skin.....*



Flame Fungus

There is a Sufi mantra: *Ishq Allah Mahbud Li'llah* which is translated 'God is Love, Lover and Beloved'. This mantra is sung to a dance movement becoming popular with multi-faith groups across the world. The movement is known as 'Dances of Universal Peace.'

I am coming across more and more people who have found that the 14th Century Sufi poet Hafiz has helped revive in them the mystical dimensions of life. Spirituality seems to be having a revival in mysticism as opposed to language or ritual based forms of prayer. By this I mean the experience of sacred moments in all sorts of life events, as compared to routine fidelity to prayer forms.

Hafiz' poetry is noted for its deeply imaginative ways of revisioning God, and the relationship of the human to the divine:

*Like two lovers who have become lost
In a winter blizzard ...*

*God and I have built an immense fire
Together
We keep each other happy
And warm*

Gaia, as a metaphor for Earth has a certain attraction in that it gives a feminine perspective with which to view our awe and reverence for the natural world, of which we are a part. It puts a stress on Earth as Mother of life and as the substance of all plant and animal life.

It does not suit us well to consider ourselves as separate from Earth; rather we are a part of it, part of the Universe. As Matthew Fox said:

The Universe, blessed and graced is the proper starting point for spirituality. ...the time has come to let anthropocentrism go.

Trevor Parton

Reading:

James Lovelock: *The Ages of Gaia*
Lynn Margulis: *The Symbiotic Planet*
Theodore Rosak: *Voice of the Earth*
Hafiz: *The Subject Tonight is Love* (Tr. Ladinski)
Matthew Fox: *Original Blessing*