



# Eucalyptus rubida

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Blue Tongue Lizard from Brachina Gorge, Flinders Ranges (Photo Mary White)

## "Find Profound Joy in Life"

The above words are attributed to Brian Swimme, in answer to a question from an audience member at a conference a few years ago. The question from the concerned person was along the lines: "In view of the disaster we are facing, what should we do?"

At first glance it is an enigmatic answer, and indeed it was followed by more pragmatic ideas. However I wanted to focus on the first response. Certainly we are faced with crisis and catastrophe in terms of climate change, extinction of species, religious and cultural disfunction etc. The future is full of uncertainty and ominous signs.

We need to confront our challenges with a mixture of anger, desperation, resolve and creativity, but the flip side of all this is a need to re-engage our heart with this wounded reality that is our Earth. Our best resolve and creativity will come from a deep love for life, a love that needs expression and nurturing.

When a person has the sublime privilege of ministering to a dying friend of relation, love deepens and reaches depths unimagined before the crisis. So, folks, make time for life and Earth. Cherish it while we have the time, because we are facing and experiencing losses and extinctions that we will never recover.

Life as we know it is a one time event. Life will evolve and go on, and what is lost is truly lost in one sense - but we can carry some of this loss into our future in a positive sense. I believe, and you may also, that there is a dimension outside of time and space in which nothing beautiful is ever lost, and a beauty cherished in the human mind has a unique presence to the future. Why else are we filled with emotion when we hear a beautiful symphony or view Bernini's Ecstasy of St Theresa.

This tension we now experience - the tension between the joyful and tearful times of life is well expressed in the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's poem *Please Call me by My True Names*:

*My joy is like Spring, so warm*

*it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth.*

*My pain is like a river of tears,  
so vast it fills the four oceans.*

This same sentiment for joy, some will remember in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's term 'zest for life' or the scholar of myth, Joseph's Campbell's 'follow your bliss'.



The Book of Proverbs says:

*I was at his side, a master craftsman,  
delighting him day after day,  
ever at play in his presence,  
at play everywhere in his world.*

There is a precious mystery talking to us here - how to be present joyfully in the midst of personal and global diminishment. This mystery or secret the mystics talk about, and it can leave us 'mystified' (sorry about the pun, but it might be instructive).

As crunch time draws nearer for humanity to chose its proper place in the community of life and to determine what kind of future climate it wants, we certainly do not want to withdraw into a fairy land of pretend

contentment, but the motivation for personal transformation will come from:

1. an assertion of the value, joy and beauty of life.
2. letting go of what drags us down instead of up.
3. calling forth the innate strength and creativity of our life-force.
4. embracing the ever present divinity within us to carry life forward.

Some readers might just recognize here the four-fold way of spirituality that is attributed to the medieval mystics Meister Eckhart and Thomas Aquinas: the *Via Creativa*, the *Via Negativa*, the *Via Creativa*, the *Via Transformativa*.

Every day in our newspapers we have two forces claiming our attention. One is the ever present diminishment of human and global values. The other is the frequent revelations of marvellous happenings in the human sciences and the beautiful images and discoveries in space. We need to take notice of both in order not to be too discouraged. Brian Swimme says in his book *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*:

*There is always a strong emotional and bodily experience in any entrance into the universe. Such moments are after even tinged with a kind of ecstasy. And unless this full-bodied experience is pursued, we are settling for an abstract understanding rather than a full initiation into the universe.*

This speaks of the transformation (*Via Transformativa*) that comes from entering into the experience of life with our spiritual eyes open, and our creativity itching to express itself in new ways of love-making, and god-making in our precious shared moment of life.

Trevor Parton

Reading:

Brian Swimme: *Hidden heart of the Cosmos*.

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Essential Writings*

Joseph Campbell: *The Power of Myth*