

Eucalyptus rubida

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Left: This Fringe Lily was photographed near the Murrindindi Cascades in March (unseasonal)
Below: Feather from the King Parrot



The Ecology of the Heart

I wish I had invented the above title. However it is used in an article published overseas, and can easily be searched for. The particular perspective that struck me however was its potential to sharpen our appreciation of what we call spirituality. I use the word cautiously now as it can mean different things to different people.

The particular emphasis here is connected to the Teilhardian concept that spirit/consciousness is present right the way through from the inorganic to the organic. This implies that consciousness is spread right across our bodies from our cells and neurons and culminating in our more complex assemblies - the organs, and particularly the heart and the brain. This is in accord with the tradition of the chakra system, of which the heart (love), throat (creativity), forehead (insight), and brain (spirit) are the upper levels.

Ancient mythologies often portray the heart as the birthplace of the spirit, as it replaces or grows out of the more purely instinctual drives of the lower organs - things like alimentation, reproduction, survival. This transformation of consciousness is now the subject of intense interest and study, possibly because there is a growing awareness that our consciousness is an emergent quality of the universe. One of its proper qualities is to take one further step onward from ordinary consciousness, and see it as a subtle emergence from its localised expression in 'human' life, to its deeper connection to the 'divine'. One of the early Fathers, Origen (d.254) is reputed to have declared "Heaven is in the heart."

Readers of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme would be familiar with the concept that we are the Universe become conscious of itself. Poet and philosopher Jean Gebser says it differently:

In origin, the whole is pre-given for man; it takes on for man its conscious character in the time-free present, for consciousness is not restricted to time and space.

Other students of consciousness have named a 'consciousness of the heart'*

and identify this with a very early stage of human emergence. This would have existed chronologically before written language and before what we now refer to as the modern ego. In this sense we might call it ego-less. They suggest it would have been as far back as 9000 BC. Strong tribal identity would have been the norm at such a time, and allowed huge national projects like the Egyptian monuments and Stonehenge to be completed.

This consciousness re-emerged in the 20th century with several totalitarian regimes that caught the imagination (and



heart) of peoples for a time. Once again ego-lessness was required of the people, but this regression did not produce the desired utopia. They got the story wrong. So here we are in the 21st century, and immersed in the emergence of and transformation to a new consciousness based on a deeper appreciation of the place of the human in a universe we have just come to know in an intimate way. We now possess the notion of 'deep time' and this not just as measured in billions of years, but also as beings in whom deep time, past, present and future, is realised in a present mode. Some call this *presentiation* and this can be seen in the works of poets and artists. Rather than being ego-less, the word used to describe this

is *ego-free*.

The intuitive poet Rilke was an inspiration for Jean Gebser, whose epic work on consciousness is still breaking over the English-speaking world today. One of Rilke's most quoted lines gives us an inkling of what presentiation might be:

..wishes are the memories that come from our future.

And from Teilhard de Chardin: *In each one of us through matter, the whole history of the world is in part reflected.*

This reflects a growing sense of identity and compassion with our earthly/cosmic state. I note Jesus' preference for the term Son of Man, and also the line from Teilhard de Chardin, 'I know myself to be irremediably less a child of heaven than a son of earth.'

This is an embedded consciousness that does not diminish the sacred order of life but exalts it. This kind of consciousness which is breaking upon the planet in our time, I see as seed bed of spirituality. It just seems to be happening to people right across the world, and it is coming with good credentials.

Maybe spirituality grows out of a special consciousness where spirit has invaded the mind and heart of an individual, just as it seems to be invading spiritual sub-cultures across the planet.

A consciousness of the heart might be revived with deep meditation on the wordless beauties and ecstasies that can be ours as we ponder our privileged place in the ecology of life. The organ to listen to would be the heart - what it remembers, loves, longs and wishes for, and its compassion for woundedness.

Trevor Parton

Sources:

Gebser: The Ever-Present Origin

*Lachman: The Secret History of Consciousness.

Teilhard de Chardin: Hymn of the Universe