

Eucalyptus rubida

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I am not myself without everything else

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Berry, the priest-geologist, whose wisdom and writings have inspired a generation of people searching for a more meaningful story to match the amazing revelations of the sciences our generation has witnessed. The title of this short essay is just one of the epigrams that we can be grateful for from Thomas.

Thomas Berry had the facility to not just recount for us some of the advances in science but also to put them into a cosmological context. This quote in particular speaks to our identity in its relationship to 'everything else'.

To fully understand this you would probably have had to experience a deeply lived moment of union within a relationship whether it be a divine or human to human relationship, or an ecological relationship with say forest, sea, a pet animal, river, mountain. These moments need not necessarily have been ecstatic; they may even have been traumatic, but they told you a lot about being alive and in the grip of powerful energy that embraced you to your core.

We have all had the experience of talking to a baby or a pet animal, even though we know that they are not understanding the words we speak, rather the manner in which we speak. Some of us have had the experience of speaking to a wild animal like the wallaby portrayed in the photo. This is a little different because we have stepped into a wild relationship. On one occasion I surprised a wallaby (maybe this one) in my vegetable garden, and he/she was calmly nibbling on some chick weed among the vegetables. Speaking all the time, I took some photos, and then took to nibbling some chick weed myself. It wasn't bad, and wallaby continued to take little notice of me, before ending the sublime encounter by jumping the fence and making off into the bush.

Apart from sublime encounters like this, can we habitually live in this kind of ecology of mind (Gregory Bateson) so that we are truly mindful of the presences that not only surround us, and nurture us, but that persist in our wider world of experiences, both present and past, and possibly future? And then there are the invisible presences of past loved ones,



whose perceptible support stays with us, defying the finality of death.

Also defying the confines and illusions of space time is the inner revelations of Spirit that 'invades' the mind and heart of the one who has reached the stage of the spiritual search, where the 'accidents' of one's life experience now serve to sharpen the thirst for the total oneness, that was only glimpsed in our earlier sublime events. This state is gift, but space needs to be available for it to happen. If ego fills this space then that's what you will get.

This may sound difficult or even impossible, but this transformation is going on all over the world, both inside and outside of religion, both in believers and so-called non-believers. In the world

of mystical experience, religion as we know it is mostly irrelevant, and probably an obstacle. The discovery of an evolving universe, and the better appreciation that cultural and religious forms are emerging from mythical origins, gives us the opportunity and imperative to participate in their growth. Eastern wisdom urges us to look inward where the true self communes with and manifests the divine.

Sri Aurobindo describes the spiritual experience exquisitely:

All our existence depends on that Existence, it is that which is evolving in us; we are a being of that Existence, a state of consciousness of that Consciousness, an energy of that conscious Energy, a will-to-delight of being, delight of consciousness, delight of energy born of that Delight: this is the root principle of our existence. To exceed ego and be our true self, to be aware of our real being, to possess it, to possess a real delight of being, is therefore the ultimate meaning of our life here; it is the concealed sense of our individual and terrestrial existence. (The Life divine p.713)

Thomas Berry refers to this experience of life as the numinal (numinous = to do with the gods) world as against the phenomenal world, which is what our senses are presented with. He says (in the lecture *Ecobuddhism*) that the phenomenal world is the expression of the numinal world. The numinal world is the sacred world and to live in it is described above so beautifully by Aurobindo.

The Boards of Glenburn, Amberley and EarthSong are supporting a Thomas Berry Colloquium in November (see our program p.3) and those who value Thomas Berry's contribution are invited to attend.

Trevor Parton