



# Eucalyptus rubida

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Newsletter No.48

Autumn 2012

This demure and freckled sun orchid (Telimithra) appeared late 2011 after an absence of several years.

## The Feeling Earth

The time is 5.15am on Thursday 5th January, 2012. The year has scarcely begun but already Earth is buzzing with activity. As I lay in bed mentally composing notes for this essay, I was contemplating the central idea of one of my favourite philosophers and process thinkers/theologians, Alfred North Whitehead. He proposed that all knowledge comes to us via the medium of 'feeling events.' This is a fairly radical epistemology that has shaken much of modern and postmodern thinking.

For us it is an entrée into another angle of spirituality. Anyway at precisely 5.22am on this Jan 5th. I rolled over in bed and switched on my radio to Radio National's Bioneers program. To my amazement the first thing I heard was the name of Alfred North Whitehead and the presenter was telling about Whitehead's thinking about how to educate children. (See [John Cobb Jr. on Whitehead](#))

Now these synchronicities happen to all of us, sometimes striking and sometimes innocuous. This one shook me a bit and I got up and began typing this essay. You will need however to wait until the end of the essay to hear Whitehead's quite simple but profound idea about educating children.

The dictum of Socrates is well known to all of us: 'Know Thyself.' This takes on a profound angle when we look at it from the perspective of Whitehead. How we come to know ourselves might be explained in a number of ways, but seen from the eye of 'feeling' it provides a beautiful way into understanding ourselves and our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to the world - even the Universe. These feelings are multivalent; they may be feelings of love, hope or even despair, but they are all teachers, and they are all 'feeling' and all bearers of knowledge. Feeling is like the cement that moulds us constantly into new manifestations of the universe.

The biblical language of how lovers come to 'know' each other by loving physical intercourse is right on target with Whitehead's thinking. In many other ways we

come to know ourselves by our loving relationships with people, with nature and with life generally. Martin Buber was also right on target when he wrote:

*The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being ... I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.*

We only ever come into our own centres when we connect deeply into the centre of otherness. Love at first sight is a feeling experience which leads us into a new landscape of knowledge about ourselves. Witnessing the devastation of a beautiful forest of ancient eucalypts can bring many of us to tears, and the knowledge of our innate otherness hits us like a train wreck.

Whitehead's cosmology tells us that the most telling means of knowledge is not by words but by our intuition



which has direct access to our unconscious. We have not been good at valuing our intuition sometimes because having had a moment of deep intuition, maybe a eureka event, then later, when we have come to submit it to our rational consciousness it can look pretty average. Nevertheless, it will likely contain wisdom we could not otherwise have accessed. Just think of an event in the past when you were 'driven' on the spur of the moment (= feelings) to say something or make a stand, or do something creative, and how you felt proud of doing it, in spite of thinking you must have been crazy to do it.

The German protestant theologian, poet and mystic Dorothee Soelle (d.2003) wrote much about spontaneity and regarded it as one our most precious gifts.

Now is the time to access this hidden and often repressed source of wisdom, which sits in the company of the Inner Self and its sacred companions, all illumined by the Source of All Being (= immanent God) It is accessing that realm of consciousness which 'we' had before our evolving egos gradually drew us away from our deeply ecological immersion in nature. If you want to see a glimmer of this intuition, then consult your animal pets and companions. They routinely 'know' things that astound our rational consciousness.

There are people — and women do it better than men — who have trained themselves to include insights from their intuition into daily life decisions. Maybe some star signs do this better than others. It's very likely. Trust your intuition - trust your heart might be good advice for us all.

When it comes to making decisions we have plenty of allies. Whitehead says "The whole Universe conspires to form a new creation". The web of life in which we exist tugs and pulls us continually. Move one part of a spider's web, and the whole web vibrates. We are linked to all that has been is now and will be (sounds like a doxology).

Now about that quote I heard on the radio. It was about the education of the child. From the very beginning of their education, the child should experience the joy of discovery. Whitehead's words: "The goal of education should be to make children fall in love with the world."

Real education, real knowledge, real creativity, real love, is a 'felt' thing. It is about the heart.

Thanks to neighbours Jacko and Patti for posing for the photograph.

Trevor Parton