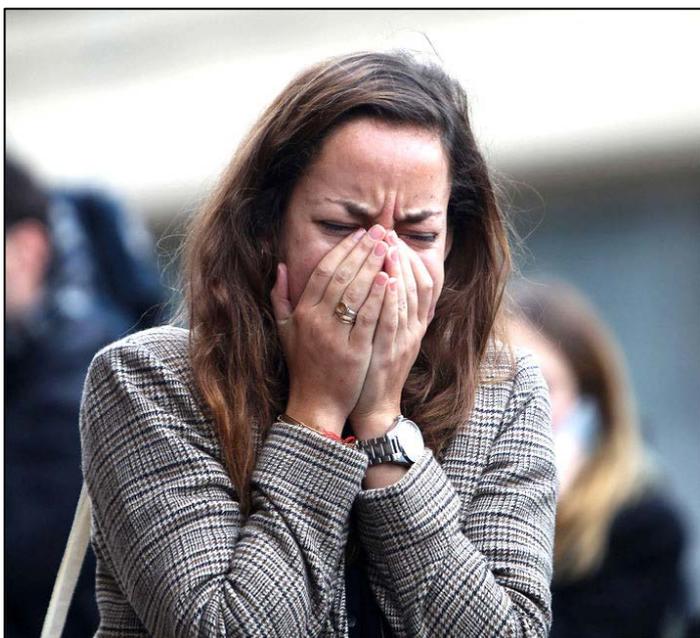


Vulnerability and Power



In our hemisphere it is winter. Trees are bare, and much of life has gone underground for warmth and shelter. Hidden from view, a good deal of nature is hibernating until the first touch of warmer days calls it forth to share new riches with us once again. Winter speaks loudly and clearly of the profound vulnerability that lies at the heart of life. To be alive is to be vulnerable - to pain, to suffering and ultimately to death. We see it starkly in nature. We know it in our own lives. We see it in the workings of our earth and in the world at large. Contemplating this mystery enables us to know from the inside the underlying truth that life is made up of endless paradox. It is fragile yet resilient, the forces of nature are harsh at times yet exquisite beauty can arise from within the harshness and new life can emerge out of seeming destruction.

Nature's rhythms speak of the fact that something bigger is going on than the death and letting go of leaves from trees, the disappearance of flowers and foliage, the hibernation of animals and the migration of birds and sea creatures to warmer climes in winter. There is an inbuilt 'knowing' that this is the way things must be in order for life to continue to unfold to newness and greater diversity of life forms. It is a cyclic process that we take for granted and do not question. We sometimes can feel with the pain and vulnerability of elements in nature that must let go of life for other life and new life forms to show their faces. The very vulnerability of these elements to decay and death are actually the powerhouse of new generation, new creativity, new beauty, new expressions of life and the life force.



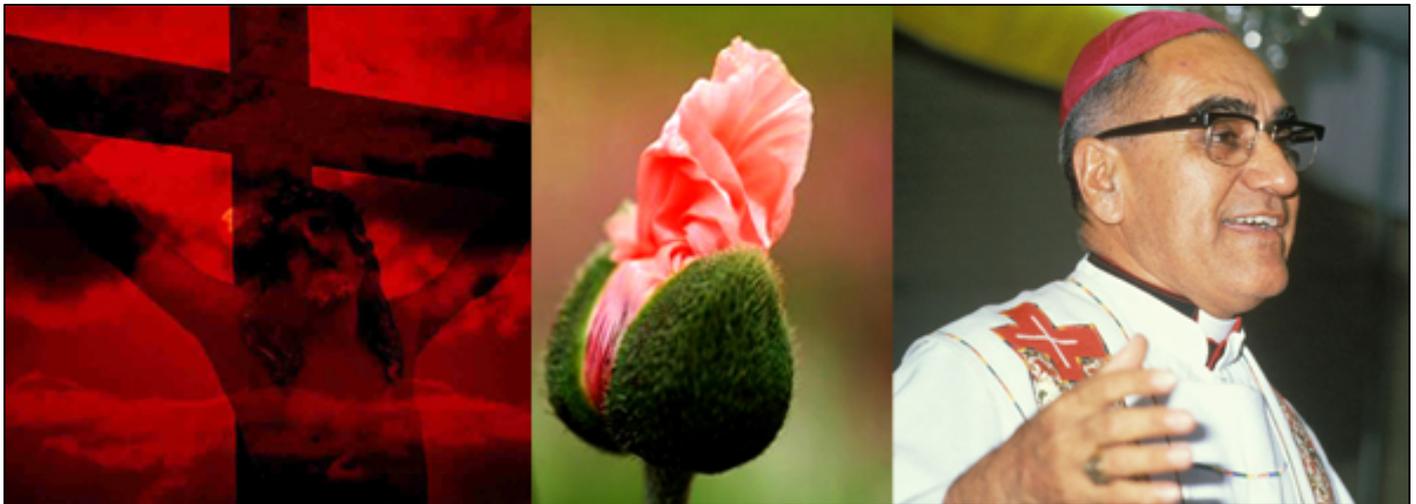
As we experience our own vulnerability in illness, ageing, the death of family members and friends, the letting go of a job, an institution or work in which we have invested much energy or even helped to build from its beginnings, we feel the pain, the loss, the chaos, the instability and impermanence of everything around us. Yet at the heart of this grand movement, we sense that there is something much larger and more mysterious taking place.

In our Contemplative Evolution Network we hold the mystery and the pain of all of this at the personal, local, national, international and ecological level. We hold the deep suffering, loss and vulnerability of all of life as we watch or listen to newscasts each day where we see and hear the impact of war, displacement of peoples from lands, the degradation

of the earth, terrorist activities, poverty, food and clean water shortages, the effects of climate change on the weakest species and poorest peoples. We can at times experience an intense feeling of vulnerability surrounding us everywhere. And we can empathize with others and with natural elements themselves precisely because we know this vulnerability within our own bodies and within our own lives. In our contemplative time together we reach across the distance between ourselves and all that is vulnerable and suffering around us by standing on the common Ground of the Love that holds all of life at its centre. In doing this we know the power of a greater Love enfolding us from without and holding all life from within.

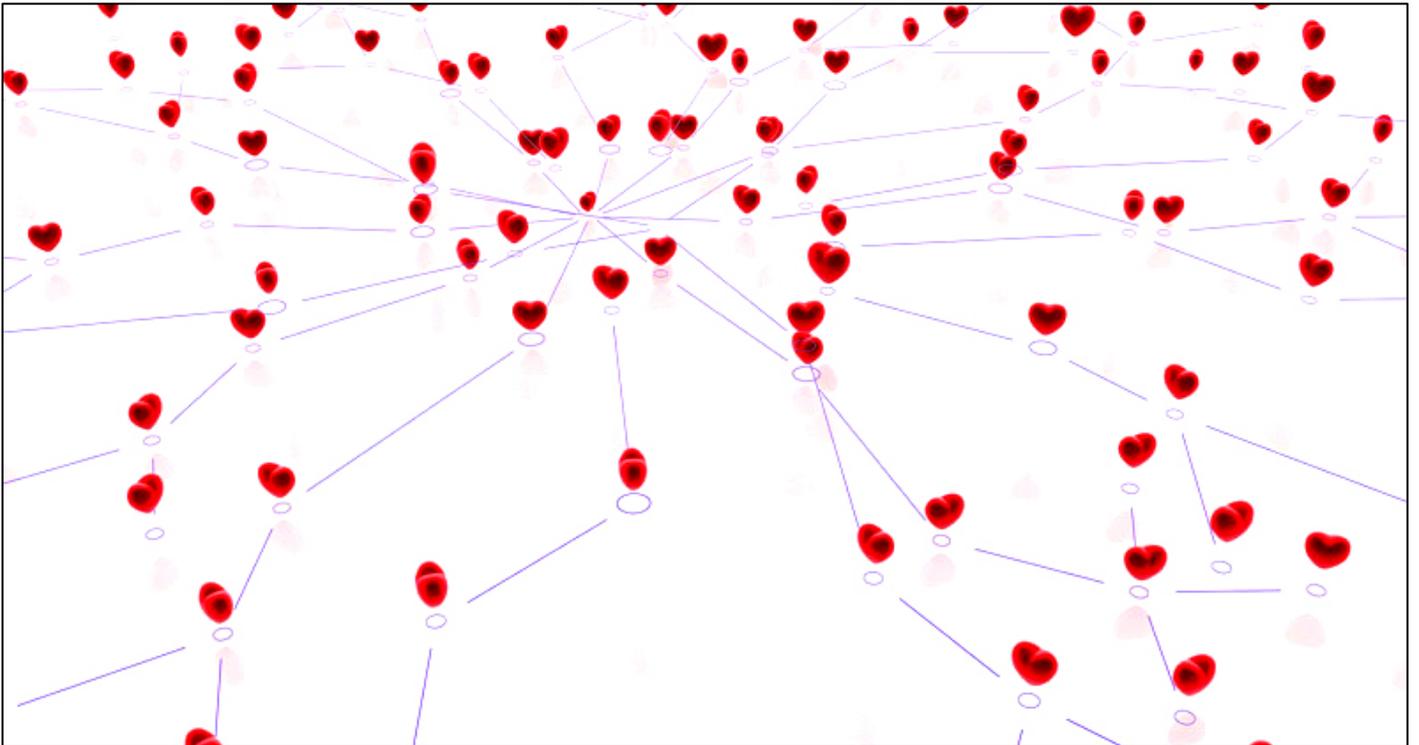
It is only by seeing from this largest of all perspectives that we can move beyond the immediate suffering with which we are confronted and sense the larger unfolding happening and the potential power hidden within the seeming vulnerability. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul receives the revelation that God's "power is made perfect in weakness". Weakness then, and vulnerability in any form allows the greatest scope for the power of the Divine to be expressed fully.

- ❖ What power and potential was released in the vulnerability of Jesus, weak and dying on the cross?
- ❖ What strength and integrity of leadership was heralded as Nelson Mandela stepped out of his prison cell of twenty-seven years announcing reconciliation rather than retribution?
- ❖ What strong action for justice for the poor was galvanized in the masses by Oscar Romero's prophetic words not long before he was assassinated: "If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people..."



- ❖ What beauty and newness is seen as the caterpillar emerges from its chrysalis transformed into a magnificent butterfly?
- ❖ What potential new life delights our hearts when we see buds forming on winter trees, waiting in anticipation for the sun's touch to burst forth into flower?
- ❖ What gratitude and gladness begin to take over from the grief and sadness of losing a loved one when the loved one's grandchild is born and begins a new cycle of family life?

Through all of these memories and experiences and so many more we learn very slowly that harshness and violence in life, vulnerability and pain, loss and diminishment, chaos and confusion, and even death itself are not necessarily the end of the story. They can be the heralds of something new gestating in the earth womb and waiting for birth to occur. Within them lies the seed of a new way of being, a new cycle of life waiting for the right moment to unfold to outer life.



Can I sense this deep movement of life at the core of everything that is? Can I trust that by uniting with others in contemplation together at 4 pm each day we are growing a new connectedness across time and space? Can we see ourselves as the seed of a network of hearts that holds our own vulnerability and that of the world around us in trustful hope? Can we thus believe that we are co-operating with the power of Love that holds all things and inwardly moves all towards greater wholeness? Can we imagine and dream anew that, together with this Love at the heart of all life, we are assisting in some small measure, in changing what is **now** into what **might be**?

Madeline Duckett