

SEEING BEYOND SEEING

By Madeline Duckett RSM



As I begin to write this first reflection for 2026, the massacre at Bondi has just taken place, and news outlets are buzzing with the sensationalism of this seemingly senseless killing of innocent people. In the days that followed the media continued to keep the tragedy before our awareness as they delved deeper into the details and the possible reasons for such a shocking occurrence. For days stretching into weeks, the happening was kept alive in our consciousness, like episodes in an action-drama series.

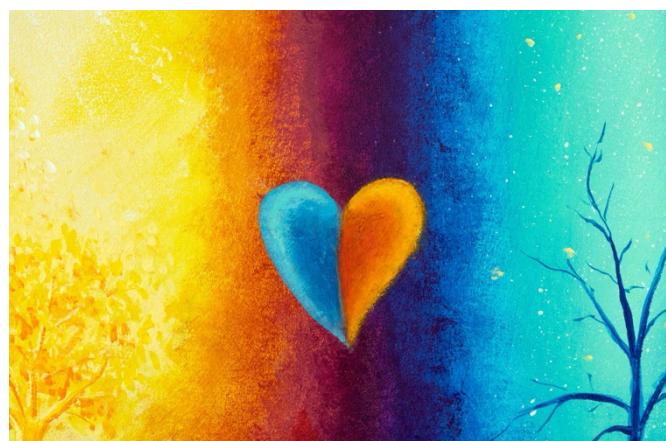
Such tragedies have also happened and continue to happen with similar treatment. We are bombarded with the stories that keep us alert to sensed darkness and danger in our midst causing our consciousness to be attuned over and over again to danger, violence and tragedy. Often unconsciously, we are being shaped by forces around us to live in a constant state of alert, fear and despair at the negative energies in our midst beyond our control.

Yet, this is the world which the Word chose to enter. Amid a not dissimilar darkness, a small child, seemingly powerless and vulnerable, ushered in a whole new mindset that Christians believe can ultimately overcome the forces of darkness. The peace and joy of Christmas defy the harsh realities that surround it and implant a seed of hope, if we allow this possibility to enter our consciousness. This focus of light outweighing darkness is not just a Christian belief and hope. It was what was being celebrated in the Chanukah lights being lit at the time of the Bondi massacre. This belief and hope is all around us but often do not receive the media coverage of more sensational, darker events.

If we are not alert and awake, we can easily forget our origins and allow fear to take hold within, blinding us to what we deeply know and hold true. As the words of the beautiful Christmas Carol "Each Winter as the Year Grows Older" put it:

*"...the chill sets in a little colder
the verities we knew
seem shaken and untrue.*

*When race and class cry out for treason,
when sirens call for war
they over-shout the voice of reason
and scream till we ignore
all we held dear before." ⁱ*



As we begin a new year, it is important to remember, reaffirm, live into, and rejoice in "*the verities...we hold dear.*" These "*verities*" lie deep beneath the surface of any darkness, violence or felt despair that may rise to the surface when stirred by outer events and media coverage of fear-engendering happenings.

Many years ago, Ira Progoff, the great Jungian psychotherapist, spoke and wrote at length on the importance of reflecting on the experiences of our lives. He compared our lives to wells which must be plumbed by means of reflection and self-discovery. He taught that if we go far enough down the



wells of our lives through the reflection process he proposed,ⁱⁱ we will reach the river that lies at the bottom of these wells. This river is the All...the More...the deep Other that we seek knowingly or unknowingly in everything. When we learn by practice to live from this place, we are in the deep waters of the mystical and mystics, where life is experienced as a oneness of being. To live from and into this profound reality gives an untold depth, meaning and purpose in life. It also gives us a great calmness in the face of whatever is happening outwardly.

In the Bondi happening and similar events around the world, the immediate reaction is often shock, outrage, raised voices of judgment, and the need to find someone(s) to blame. Our deeper "*verities*" are shaken to the core, and the media prolong that 'forgetfulness' by reporting loudly and frequently the thoughts, slogans and actions of the loudest voices. These, in turn, evoke similar reactions in others and so gather momentum.

And yet...and yet...when we reach deeper than the immediate outrage and judgement by going to the silent place within—the river place—we discover there the essence of our being, the root of our very existence, where we sense a oneness with and compassion for those suffering. We may also discover that we too are capable of acts of violence on others...that we, too, in our less than perfect moments, can be perpetrators of darkness, violence, judgment, and blame. When they are unrecognised within ourselves, we can often find ourselves projecting them onto others.

It is in this place of quiet depth discovery that the "*verities*" we hold dear can surface from our own wells and be reaffirmed, no matter what news outlets are saying. This depth or river place is not just an individual place or realisation. It can come tangibly alive and be sensed in a group which seeks and enters the silent depths together. This is the power and purpose of the CEN experience and practice—to sense and know the deeper "*verities*" as still present and alive within us...beyond loud voices raised in outrage. These "*verities*" hold that we are spiritual beings and we are all connected at our spirit core...we are one! As the words attributed to Teilhard de Chardin put it: "*We are one, you and I. Together we suffer, together we exist, and together we shall recreate each other.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

Our world today is so much in need of the 'river experience' where the deep centre of essential being is known and lived. This knowing enables a new consciousness to slowly rise in the larger world. The new consciousness is the lens through which Jesus saw and from which he then acted. We are invited

into this same 'seeing' which is beyond ordinary 'seeing' of events, facts and interpretations. It is seeing with the eyes of another world view.

Walter Brueggemann, in his classic work *The Prophetic Imagination*,^{iv} speaks of the importance of our imagination as enabling us to see (or imagine) an alternative world to the one being promoted in the society around us. The media usually projects the 'imagination' of the dominant culture, its values and rhetoric. We, as contemplatively aware and practised seekers of depth realities and "verities", are invited to bear prophetic witness to another consciousness, another imagining, another world view that is wider, deeper and totally inclusive of all, without exception. This consciousness Jesus called '*the kin(g)dom of God*'—the realm of Divine being which dwells within and beyond our own small imaginings, rhetoric and judgements. Yet our rhetoric is important as Brueggemann affirms: "...rhetoric [is] generative [of] imagination".^v

Although our actual contemplation, alone and together, is important for touching into the alternative unseen world and growing a larger field of this alternate consciousness, how we engage with the outer world is also critical. Our rhetoric and expressed attitudes can help shape the alternative world and can also help defuse the power of the iron-like grasp of strident words in the prevailing culture. This culture too often enjoys uncritical dominance. We critique its dominance by both our contemplation and by our spoken responses to situations confronting us that often generate immediate reactivity and judgment in the surrounding environment. We can infuse hope and possibility into even the darkest happenings by **seeing** truly.

So, it seems that 2026 provides us with a focus, a challenge, and a direction for what is to come. We are invited to utilise the HOPE we sought to cultivate last year and bring it to bear this year on a *SEEING BEYOND SEEING*. Here we focus on the transformation happening within and beneath the chaos and messiness of what seems. Where there is lack, we see potential abundance, and where there is intense suffering and pain, we see an emerging new life that cannot be extinguished.



ⁱ Marty Haugen, "Each Winter as the Year Grows Older", GIA Publications 1975

ⁱⁱ Ira Progoff, "Intensive Journal® Method of Self-Development", 1992

ⁱⁱⁱ Attributed to Teihard de Chardin but actual source unknown.

^{iv} Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* second edition, Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2001

^v Ibid p. xi