



Book Review

***A Politics of Love: A Handbook for a New American Revolution* by Marianne Williamson, HarperOne, New York, 2018, 160 pp, ISBN-13: 978-0062873934, price (paperback) £16.99**

Reviewed by **Jim Robinson**¹

This wonderful book lands on a deep debate within me about whether or not to engage in politics. It is a passionate call for action that is infectious and inspiring. As I write people are getting arrested in London protesting about our unfolding climate crisis. Family and friends are involved, and I question intensely what my take is on this. Why am I not there getting arrested too?

Williamson argues that what is needed is people to commit to working hard for change whilst still maintaining a position of 'Love', by not getting hooked into the 'fighting' that identifying with one end of a 'stick' usually leads to. Her statement, 'Our task is to replace a politics of fear with a politics of love' (p. 205) is so 'spot on' and wonderful. Whilst the need is to hold our hearts open and connected to love, avoiding the trap of getting caught into 'fighting', the problem is just that it is so hard to do. It is such a sophisticated and developed place to embody. The forces pushing most of us, me included, towards identification are difficult to avoid getting caught up in.

This is what I am struggling with just now, struggling to find the space to live 'in question',

to embody the awareness of how this world is defined by polarities, to start to embody the consciousness of my non-separateness. My heart feels open and resonates strongly with messages in the book about how 'We should participate in politics with the same level of consciousness we bring to intimate love and therapy, parenting, and all of our most important and meaningful pursuits. We should bring all of ourselves to politics...' (p. 216).

I almost envy those who commit themselves, to whatever it is, because they don't have the discomfort of sitting on the fence of not knowing. Yet surely, I hear myself say, 'Inequality, hate, unfairness, bullying, manipulation, poverty, and all the consequences of the lack of Love and compassion on our societies and our suffering planet, all need to be fought against! What's your problem; how can you sit on the fence in relationship to these issues?'

However, I hear the 'shoulds' in that statement and in Williamson's words above. Instinctively now, I have to refuse them and return to the fact that my resistance exists. Is my resistance

laziness, or fear of committing, or just a lack of energy (I am after all getting old!)? Is it that my work as a therapist uses up what resources I have? Or is it more to do with a healthy sense of needing to attend myself at this moment in my development? Maybe this is partly about personality types, about ‘horses for courses’ – the world needs those who go ‘out’ as well as those who go ‘in’?

This is not anything about resistance to the values that flow from awareness and love and compassion, which are undeniable and radical; it is about resistance to getting involved in political action for myself at this time. It feels as though my journey is inwards just now. I hope that later it will be more outwards.

A recent post by Gangaji talks about how ‘self-doubt is the last thing to go’ before we can realise our non-separateness and find that way of living which is deeply free and open-hearted. She is not referring to giving up on living in question, but to letting go of living with insecurity.

My whole journey since being a young teenager has been about searching for a way to heal my insecurity, and my work as a therapist is about helping others to come to terms with theirs. I am aware of time starting to run out for me (and of the paradox implicit in saying that). My sense is that I have to put myself first, as selfish as that sounds. I feel that I am close to letting go of my insecurity, a different relationship to life feels near, I have glimpses; so I trust that I might be able to join Marianne, and others, soon, from the place of freedom and love she articulates.

As she says, ‘A nonviolent revolution begins with facing the, and surrendering, violence within ourselves’ (p. 216). Insecurity is that violence – it is the doubt of ‘shoulds’. Also, ‘What we need now is our spiritual might. The real war is not without, but within: between ego-based fear and spirit-based love. That is the contest that matters most ...’ (p. 213) Yes – my point exactly!

So, I guess my criticism of the book is that it does not allow enough space for those, like me, for whom it is not the right time to plunge into action. The book inevitably sets up a ‘should’, that if you don’t act there is something wrong with you. I also think it underestimates the difficulty of finding the

degree of integration of the self that is needed to be able to stand on the free, open-hearted ground of love that she correctly identifies as being the only sane place to stand.

Then again, as she emphasises, time is running out, ‘the end of the world is nigh!’. Well it may be, but I also know that the work people do in healing their insecurity changes the world as profoundly as anything else. On both the psychological and spiritual levels. Psychological / emotional healing is such a helpful preliminary to the ‘spiritual level’ transformation that is possible, with its movement into embodying non-duality with an open and loving heart.

There is a real tension between the profundity of living deeply in the here and now, facing and accepting life’s deficits, triumphs, pains and joys – and of living attached to some future fantasy, identified with some future that we want. Whether this is about being in or out of the European Union, the possibility of a socialist utopia, winning the lottery, along with all the other myriad of reactions, identifications and attachments that lure us away from taking responsibility for ourselves to live in the here and now.

Alan Watts argued this point about the difficulty of finding the sane, grounded place from which to take political action, over 50 years ago:

For as things stand we have nothing to give... peace can only be made by those who are peaceful, and love can only be shown by those who are love. No work of love will flourish out of guilt and fear... just as no valid plans for the future can be made by those with no capacity for living now. The separate person is without content, in both senses of the word. He lives perpetually in hope, on looking forward to tomorrow.... (1966, p. 101)

By ‘separate person’ he means those of us who have not yet managed to embody non-separateness. Those of us who still get hypnotised looking at form without seeing the space between, whose hearts are still healing from trauma’s insecurity. This is why, I think it was Gurdjieff who said it, that ‘ten fully conscious people could change the world’, and why revolutions tend to create the opposite of what was intended. This is why I take

refuge in ‘healing the world one heart at a time’, as the song goes.

Freeing ourselves from our past and completely letting go of any identification with the future, including letting go of hope, can lead us into an extraordinary place of embodying consciousness and love in the depth of ‘here and now’. This transcending (and including) of our ego is our potential, and on the face of it, it is at odds with political action. It is a place of deep acceptance, ‘what is, is’ and ‘everything is only as it can be, right now’. What engaging in politics from this place looks like I can only glimpse at. However, as the author argues, the likes of Gandhi and Martin Luther-King have shown what a magnificent thing it can be.

The book is quite heavily US focused, exhorting Americans to reclaim their radical heritage around the Liberty, Equality and Freedom enshrined in their constitution and history. Not being American, I found this a bit of a shame because the underlying message is very relevant to all Western democracies, and I think the book would have been more powerful had she used the local emphasis to illustrate her message, rather than making it as central as she does.

She also argues that

Something is rising up from the depths today....
It’s the evolutionary lure of a sustainable future,
calling us to remember who we really are.... It is
a hunger felt among all the people of the world...
to align ourselves with something truer and
deeper than mere bricks and mortar or dollars and
cents....

Indeed, in the news just now as I write, there are powerful demonstrations going on all over the world – it does seem like a time of change.... But then it felt like this 50 years ago.

However, I do think that much has changed in the 50+ years since Alan Watts was writing. Capitalism has clearly shown its limitations and negative consequences; ‘trickle down economics is seen as the ridiculous falsehood it always was; the pathological psychology of neoliberalism can be seen for what it is (<https://tinyurl.com/s8eulpg>);

and the sophistication of the emerging consciousness around alternative ways of organising society is heart-warming, especially compared to the naïveté of the 1960s’ ‘peace and love’. Psychology and therapy have seeped deeply into the world’s consciousness over this time, as has the increasing awareness of the intolerability of inequality.

My optimism argues that the current global rise in right-wing populism is like a regressive episode that leads towards healing because it brings greater clarity and choice around what is *not* wanted. We all resist, and are pushed to our desperate edges, before we can shift into a new, more integrated way of being.

I agree with the author about the depth of our need for love (that comes from our psychological understanding and spiritual connection), to increasingly inform this movement. The risk is that chaos overwhelms us, then our default ‘fight, flight, freeze’ responses only make everything worse.

My deep appreciation and admiration go to anyone who has the energy and capacity to plunge into the maelstrom of politics whilst embodying the ‘politics of love’. Marianne Williamson is clearly leading by example.

Note

- 1 Jim Robinson is a Gestalt psychotherapist in private practice in the South-East of the UK. From his teens he’s been searching, exploring philosophical, psychological and spiritual paths, and since starting therapy in his early 30s, he’s been committed to understanding the relationship between the psychological and the spiritual – which together make such a practical path towards realising our human potential. Email – jim@jim-robinson.co.uk; website – www.jim-robinson.co.uk.

Reference

- Watts, A, (1966). *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are*. London: Cape.