

A Sikh Shares Her View of America and Our Problem with Race

Based on *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* by Valerie Kaur. By Marcia Bailey (January 2021)

Feeling breathless about all that's going on means we are awake to what's happening right now.

The Sikh ideal is the warrior sage: the warrior fights, and the sage loves. Truth is high, but higher still is truthful living. We are not responsible for our primal reflex but for the succession of conscious thought that follows. Strangers are people we do not know yet.

The idea of American exceptionalism does not allow us to see our past with open eyes, so we cannot see the suffering it has caused. How can we see that suffering: We grieve for people we did not know by grieving with those who loved them. When we sit with someone in grief, then we can organize together and move forward.

We each have the potential to be the prisoner and the guard. We think we want to kill others but really we want to kill the evil within ourselves.

When we cannot adequately fight, flee, or freeze, the past keeps bleeding into the present. We need to express rage in "safe containers" like shaking, weeping, venting, writing, art, music, or therapy.

We need to rage at people who mistreat us. They are not monsters but wounded people who hurt others out of their own suffering. Kaur's belief is that when we see their wounds, they lose power over us, and to see the wound in them, we have to tend the wound in us.

The aim of divine rage is not vengeance but to reorder the world. When fighting social injustices, rage may be the only way to be heard. We separate to rage, return to listen, and then imagine solutions together.

We need to imagine the world as it ought to be and discern which institutions can be reimagined and which cannot. Prisons cannot be reimagined. They must be dismantled.

We need to listen to our opponents. To do that, we have to feel safe enough to stay curious: “what is at stake?” for the other person.

The purpose of listening across differences is understanding, which may change our world view. In the US we need to confront white supremacy, a widespread belief that white Christians are superior.

Forgiveness is freedom from hate. When someone does us wrong and wants to apologize, they need to consider why they committed the crime, imagine the hurt and suffering they caused, admit specifically what they did and take responsibility for it, and do the work of reparation. Tending the wound is the labor of remaking the world.

In tending our wounds, we show mercy to ourselves and are released from wanting to punish. America needs to reconcile with itself and do the work of apology. We need a new narrative of who we long to be.

Laboring in joy is the meaning of life. Revolutionary love involves laboring for others, our opponents and ourselves, in order to transform the world around us. It is an orientation to life that is personal and political, rooted in joy. When we get overwhelmed, we need to ask ourselves “What is *my* role in this moment? We need only to shine our light in our corner of sky. Love is labor that begins in wondering about the other and loving ourselves.