

The Serpent and the Dove: Wisdom for Navigating the Future

by Andrew Harvey and Carolyn Baker

At this moment, much of the America and the world finds itself in a profound state of shock and even disbelief as a result of the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States. Few would conclude that this has been a 'normal' election or that Trump is a 'normal' President Elect. In fact, 'normal' is precisely what Trump abhors and what he was determined to eradicate by running for the office and winning.

Unequivocally, we recognize that millions of people in the United States were hurting on a variety of levels and ached for change. They have been disenchanted with, and often devastated by, the old guard—neoliberal, globalist policies that shafted them and declared the wellbeing of corporations sacrosanct. Thus a candidate who promised that he would make the demise of that system his personal mission in life was deliciously irresistible.

We also understand that due to the protracted dumbing down of the culture, that is, the deconstruction of education in the United States, a clear analysis of issues was not within the grasp of the average American unless they exerted an effort to educate themselves accordingly. And even if they were to do so, what would be in it for them? As Gary Younge notes in his ["How Trump Took Middle America"](#) article, "When people feel the system is broken, they vote for whoever promises to smash it." Their vote for Trump was a cry for help, but at the same time, similar to the frantic tantruming of a toddler, flailing with rage.

Sadly, it is just a matter of time until the disaffected wake up and realize the extent to which they have been conned. As Paul Waldman's Washington Post article states, "The greatest trick Donald Trump pulled was convincing voters he'd be 'anti-establishment.' Well, maybe not the greatest trick. But in a campaign full of cons, it has to rank close to the top. This was near the heart of Trump's appeal to the disaffected and disempowered: Send me to Washington, and that 'establishment' you've been hearing so much about? We'll blow it up, send it packing, punch it right in the face, and when it's over the government will finally be working for you again. And the people who voted for Trump bought it. After all, he's no politician, right? He's an outsider, a glass-breaker, a guy who can cut out the bull and get things done. Right? But the idea that he would do this was based on a profound misunderstanding of what the establishment actually is, and who Donald Trump is."

Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of the Catholic social justice lobby, Network, writes in her article, ["America Must Allow Its Heart To Break Before It Can Heal:"](#)

As I traveled around the country in advance of the election, I heard stories from so many people. Among them were two white middle-aged men who were avid Trump supporters. They felt that though they had worked hard, they had not prospered the way they expected to. They also saw that their children were having even more difficulty than they were. These men feel betrayed by the "American Dream," and if you scratch the surface, a bit ashamed that they have not "measured up." It now seems this shame fueled a blazing anger that is at the heart of Trump's electoral victory — but the anger is misdirected, and it will become increasingly toxic unless we can find a way to engage in conversation across the political chasm.

This anger and vulnerability is the result of an economy shaped by "trickle-down economics," which privileges the already wealthy at the expense of those in the middle and at the bottom. These Republican policies betrayed our people. But rather than holding the politicians who passed these policies accountable, or turning their blame to the people who voted these politicians into office, some Americans instead blame the "other" — immigrants, women, people of color, Democrats.

Nevertheless, we believe that Donald Trump is a far more dangerous example of proto-fascism than merely a triumphant proponent of populism. An enormous and terrifying aspect of America's dumbing down has been the adulteration of its educational system in all disciplines, particularly with regard to the study of history. As a former professor of history and psychology in numerous colleges in recent years, I was appalled by the resemblance of US history textbooks with People Magazine, which like most entertainment driven media, were designed to distract, rather than educate.

Few Americans under the age of 50 have a grasp of fascism or the history of fascist movements in modern history. Hitler and the holocaust mesmerize the culture with horror, yet a fundamental understanding of fascist ideology is absent. We believe that the election of Donald Trump, surrounded as it is by the primacy of corporate capitalism, emboldened by Tea Party ideology, mindlessly sanctioned by an uninformed electorate, and mirrored in numerous neo-fascist movements around the world, is a watershed moment in American history—in fact, the ideal combination of ingredients that is likely to result in a full-fledged fascist American state.

Oxford Professor [James McDougall](#) in his article "[No, This Isn't The 1930s, But Yes, This Is Fascism](#)," with reference to the election of Donald Trump writes:

This is a new fascism, or at least near-fascism, and the centre right is dangerously underestimating its potential, exactly as it did 80 years ago. Then, it was conservative anti-communists who believed they could tame and control the extremist fringe. Now, it is mainstream conservatives, facing little electoral challenge from a left in disarray. They fear the drift of their own voters to more muscular, anti-immigrant demagogues on the right. They accordingly espouse the right's priorities and accommodate its hate speech. They reassure everyone that they have things under control even as the post-Cold War neoliberal order, like the war-damaged bourgeois golden age last century, sinks under them.

The risk, at least for the West, is not a new world war, but merely a poisoned public life, a democracy reduced to the tyranny of tiny majorities who find emotional satisfaction in a violent, resentful rhetoric while their narrowly-elected leaders strip away their rights and persecute their neighbours.

How then shall those who understand the rise of fascist movements and their devastating consequences respond? Facing the likelihood of limitations on the freedom of our expression, freedom to protest, and even freedom of movement, what recourse do we have? We suggest three crucial responses to the current moment.

Reconnection

Initially, we wanted to use the word "Reconciliation" as the first response, but we reconsidered. "I just saw President-elect Trump with President Obama in the White House and it gave me hope," [said](#) Oprah Winfrey. And MSNBC anchor, [Chris Matthews](#), shrieking in his near-falsetto screech, "I'm just determined to find an optimistic note here. There's got to be a pony in this crap pile." In other words, we must move toward reconciliation and hope. But both statements by Winfrey and Matthews reveal an irrational rush to provide an unearned uplift to the situation—a compulsion that seems to characterize American culture with its institutionalized, cheerful optimism. In fact, authentic exultation is not born from ignoring the horror of any situation but from suffering it clearly without surrendering faith in the mysterious movement of the sacred. The utterances of Oprah and Chris Matthews are the very reason we feel compelled to redefine reconciliation. Their vision of unearned uplift brings to the situation a fake medicine in the name of healing that masks, for a time, the symptoms, and so prevents a cure.

Attempts at reconciliation are important, but we need to be very cautious because the word “reconciliation” is not stringent enough. The notion of reconciliation can easily continue the kind of comatose, fake inclusiveness that makes us vulnerable to deceit. The wise words of Jesus come to mind in which he counsels his followers to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. In the current situation, we must beware of New Age sopiness and “let’s love him no matter what” sentimentality. There is no authentic reconciliation without authentic discernment and without the other opening their arms.

Naomi Wolf outlines in “[Fascist America: In Ten Easy Steps](#),” the progression of fascism for which on many levels, the stage has already been set. As the malignancy of fascism advances, it usually does so gradually and seemingly harmoniously. Lacking the wisdom of serpents, the innocent revel in reconciliation while chanting, “let’s at least give them a chance.”

As Professor McDougall notes, “The spread of fascism in the 1920s was significantly aided by the fact that liberals and mainstream conservatives failed to take it seriously. Instead, they accommodated and normalised it. The centre right is doing the same today. Brexit, Trump and the far right ascendant across Europe indicate that talk of a [right-wing revolutionary moment](#) is not exaggerated. And the French presidential election could be next on the calendar.”

CNN Republican commentator, Ana Navarro writes that “[It’s hard to give Trump a chance when he staffs his White House with racists](#).” Comedian Dave Chappelle recently stated on [Saturday Night Live](#) that he was willing to give Donald Trump a chance, but he asked that Trump give him a chance as well. Only in this kind of scenario can authentic reconciliation occur.

For this reason, we prefer using the word Reconnection as the first response we must make toward the rise of fascism, and this reconnection is not even primarily focused on the adversary. Reconciliation grounded in discernment can only occur when we are deeply connected with the sacred self, with Earth, and with our trusted allies. Likewise, we must be willing to dialog with people of very different political perspectives. Michael Moore has brilliantly modeled this for us in his pre-election movie, “[Trumpland](#)” in which he skillfully gathered Trump and Clinton supporters, along with undecided voters, to discuss their concerns with authenticity and heart. When we stand on the ground of our own integrated empowerment, we become increasingly discerning and capable of bearing witness to the entire landscape before us, not merely observing the desirable qualities of the adversary that we selectively choose to perceive.

Resistance

In “[Autocracy: Rules For Survival](#),” author Masha Gessen who lived in autocracies most of her life learned a few rules for salvaging one’s sanity and self-respect:

Rule #1: *Believe the autocrat.* “He means what he says. For all the admiration Trump has expressed for Putin, the two men are very different; if anything, there is even more reason to listen to everything Trump has said. He has no political establishment into which to fold himself following the campaign, and therefore no reason to shed his campaign rhetoric.”

Rule #2: *Do not be taken in by small signs of normality.* “Panic can be neutralized by falsely reassuring words about how the world as we know it has not ended. It is a fact that the world did not end on November 8 nor at any previous time in history. Yet history has seen many catastrophes, and most of them unfolded over time. That time included periods of relative calm.”

Rule #3: *Institutions will not save you.* “Of course, the United States has much stronger institutions than Germany did in the 1930s, or Russia does today. Both Clinton and Obama in their speeches stressed the importance and strength of these institutions. The problem, however, is that many of these institutions are enshrined in political culture rather than in law, and all of them—including the ones enshrined in law—depend on the good faith of all actors to fulfill their purpose and uphold the Constitution.”

Rule #4: *Be outraged.* “If you follow Rule #1 and believe what the autocrat-elect is saying, you will not be surprised. But in the face of the impulse to normalize, it is essential to maintain one’s capacity for shock. This will lead people to call you unreasonable and hysterical, and to accuse you of overreacting. It is no fun to be the only hysterical person in the room. Prepare yourself.”

Rule #5: *Don’t make compromises.* “In an autocracy, politics as the art of the possible is in fact utterly amoral. Those who argue for cooperation will make the case, much as President Obama did in his speech, that cooperation is essential for the future. They will be willfully ignoring the corrupting touch of autocracy, from which the future must be protected.”

Rule #6: *Remember the future.* “Nothing lasts forever. Donald Trump certainly will not, and Trumpism, to the extent that it is centered on Trump’s persona, will not either.”

We *must* resist because the consequences of twenty-first century fascism are unimaginably horrific. Unlike Germany’s fascism of the 1930s, we possess today nuclear weapons, biological weapons, massive surveillance infrastructures, a gargantuan military industrial complex controlled by [Dark Money](#), and a servile media. We have never had fascism on Earth in this context.

On the one hand, we cannot and must not reconcile with the forces of evil, and at the same time, any violent resistance will be used to justify brutal retaliation. Hitler gave us the map. This is why non-violent resistance is so important.

While it is important to resist through external activism, it is equally important to resist through soul-searching inner activism. To this day, Andrew and Carolyn continue their journeys of reconnection and resistance with parents who could not be more opposed to us on issues of social justice. Andrew’s parents served the British Empire in the South of India and believed that Empire was humanity’s salvation. Carolyn grew up in a fundamentalist Christian home where racism, use of the “N” word, and a rabid belief in American exceptionalism were sacrosanct. Both of us have experienced significant reconciliations with family, but it has come with a price. For all of our adult lives we have struggled with the question: How can our parents be good people at heart, yet be so hypocritical? We have been and remain today in the fiery crucible of healing with our parents which compels us to practice love, compassion, and forgiveness. Knowing our parents’ stories and their trauma helps us make sense of their behavior, but we have come to understand on a bone-marrow level why so many people refuse to work on their own trauma. We have for many years experienced the wrenching toil of that work, but also the grace and glorious healing that can occur if one is willing to do it.

With or without the election of Donald Trump, the human species is annihilating planet Earth. Catastrophic climate change now has a life of its own, and is being accelerated by the madness of humans who refuse to acknowledge its reality.

Business as usual is completely over.

The resistance of which we speak is spiritual warriorhood, and in no way will it guarantee a return to business as usual because there is no business as usual to return to. Both Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were wise

as serpents and harmless as doves which was the source of their incomprehensible power. Likewise, the Dalai Lama has taught non-violent resistance among Tibetans in order to avoid a bloodbath.

In this moment, the world is witnessing an unprecedented example of spiritual warriorhood in the civil disobedience at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota.

In a powerful article, Melissa Hellman [reveals](#) what civil disobedience Standing Rock teaches us. We would add to her observations these important realities:

- Resistance is bolstered in our divine identity that resists the seduction of the darkness in ourselves and in the temptation and lies that a proto-fascist system might throw at us. Resistance at Standing Rock is a spiritual and moral act as well as an environmental and political act.
- As we see at Standing Rock, resistance is being defined as rioting, destruction of property, and in many cases, “terrorism.” It requires enormous courage and an unwillingness to compromise.
- We can be part of an organized mass movement of non-violent protest grounded in the deepest spiritual principles of compassion, modeled on Martin Luther King, Jr, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi, and Polish labor activist, Lech Walesa. Such a resistance that holds a high moral ground is blessed by invisible powers and has an extraordinary capacity to shift the situation.

The sacred leader or sacred activist is a *warrior/midwife*. The warrior defends the eternal laws of justice and compassion with courage, passion, stamina, and radical discernment. A midwife evolves and enacts the strategic canniness, patience, and inclusiveness to implement and birth the eternal laws of justice and compassion in reality. We are using the words *warrior/midwife* because what is required is a marriage of the sacred masculine and the sacred feminine. Being one or the other is not sufficient; suffusing both will give us the power, wisdom, and strength to go forward.

This requires *three* marriages of opposites to take place in the core of our being.

- We must marry a profound realization of our inner divine identity with the selfless acceptance of our particular historical mission in time. Self-realization without shouldering the mission in time leads to passivity. Shouldering our mission in time without self-realization threatens us with burnout, hysteria, unhelpful rage, and lack of strategic understanding and wisdom.
- We must marry a radical faith in the innate goodness of humanity, which is a divine gift and the unanimous testimony of all the mystical traditions, with a respectful and shrewd acknowledgement of the potentially devastating power, brilliance, and seductiveness of the dark forces that are active and of the susceptibility of human nature to them. Radical faith in innate goodness on its own leads to idiot compassion in the face of systemic evil and is characterized by the New Age which has rotted the foundations of true sacred defiance. However, acknowledgement of the power of evil and the power of its seductiveness without faith in human goodness can lead to terrible despair and to becoming at worst unconscious agents of the dark which longs for humanity to despair of itself. Only a marriage between these two can provide us with the strength, stamina and canniness that accepts our divine nature and works from that divine nature on the fragility, complexity, brokenness and susceptibility to seduction of our human nature.
- We must marry profound urgency grounded in acknowledgement of the desperate nature of our situation in all levels of the world with the mysterious peace and patience born out of a radical surrender to the intelligence of divine wisdom and divine love. Profound urgency without patience and inner peace will result in actions that the dark powers will use to justify destruction. Cultivation of patience and peace without the inner fire of urgency will result in a fatal inability to act when necessary and a stupor that is justified in fake spiritual terms. If you just develop peace, patience, and

surrender without being prepared to act from the urgent side of yourself, you will become a quietist who does not know that divine love requires wise action.

- As warrior/midwife we need to combine a capacity for heartbreak with a radical commitment to cultivating joy as our essential nature and the source of energy. If all you respond to is heartbreak you'll be paralyzed, and if you try to cultivate joy without the heartbreak, you will be fed counterfeit joy. Jesus warned that false prophets can assume the form of angels. Comfortable happiness is readily available in a fascist state. Thus, we must discern the "morphine drip" of happiness from radical, subversive joy that makes us patient and guided revolutionaries of love.

Of course it is too early to fully imagine what a full-scale Trump Presidency might look like, but there are disturbing, early warning signs that could be harbingers of a destructive and powerful fascism such as we have described above. What is most important to remember is that the potential for a more deadly fascism now exists, and when we add to this climate chaos, the annihilation of the planet is entirely possible and unimaginably probable.

Resilience

We can safely assume that our future holds a significant degree of violence as those who have unequivocally relied on their government and the conventional values of working hard and playing by the rules to redeem them, discover the extent to which they have been deceived. Add to this, deception, dispossession, and you have a powder keg of rage which if turned upon oneself becomes suicidal and if turned upon others, becomes socially volatile or even homicidal.

Rather than running from the room screaming with our hair on fire, let's use this incredibly teachable moment to learn some of the painful realities and profound existential lessons that this Presidential election is attempting to teach us about resilience.

- Industrial civilization and the paradigm at its core—a paradigm of disconnection from ourselves, from each other, and from Earth—is being shredded before our eyes, and there is no "fixing" it. It's done, and perhaps we're done as a species. Nevertheless, let's get on with service, Sacred Activism, and a recommitment to deep inner work.
- In order to get on with it we must dump our denial and delusion and look squarely in the face of the sobering data not only regarding the state of our culture, but the life-support status of our dying planet. In a recent story from Cosmos Magazine, we learn that "[Sea urchins flip inside out to become an adult.](#)" The story continues by noting that, "The tiny babies spend their early life searching the vast depths of the ocean for a suitable home. But once they find one, they undergo an incredible transformation." It is now time to "flip our consciousness" inside out and become the adults that our catastrophic predicament is demanding us to be. We are going to be tested mightily—perhaps beyond anything we can now imagine within the next four years and perhaps longer.
- How do we grow up to respond to the crisis? After facing the full extent of it, we allow ourselves to grieve. We sob, we cry, we rage, we wail and scream and allow animal noises to erupt from our bodies now wracked with remorse and regret. Yes, we have colluded in creating this crisis, but it's not enough to beat ourselves up. We must recognize that without grieving, it doesn't matter one whit what we do or don't do in response to the crisis because grief is love, and if we don't allow our hearts to be shattered with grief, we will never touch the depths of love that are required for us to navigate the consequences of humankind's deranged choices. Choosing separation instead of love is what got us where we are, and above all else, our predicament is demanding radical heartbreak and astringent love and relentless reconnection with self, others, and Earth.

- Commit to understanding and doing shadow work. For nearly four hundred years, the United States has not dealt with the shadow of slavery. It has not dealt with the shadow of Native American genocide, now revisiting us at Standing Rock. Nor has it dealt with being the first nation to use nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nor has it recognized its repugnant imperialism and its obsessive proselytizing of the globe with corporate capitalism. Donald Trump is a shadow magnet, and like a poultice applied to an infected wound, he has drawn out the toxicity of our culture for all to behold. Many resources abound for doing shadow work. One resource is Carolyn's book [Dark Gold: The Human Shadow And The Global Crisis](#). Most importantly when working with the shadow, we must remember that *not* looking at it will not diminish it but only increase its power until it has our undivided attention. A Trump Presidency is but one example.
- The culture will become increasingly divided. Terrified, hurting people will continue to "other" their fellow humans and the ecosystems. Anger will deepen. Violence will become epidemic. If we are not doing grief work and shadow work, we will become enveloped in vengeance and retaliation, so well modeled for us by our new President. In order to become whole, as opposed to further divided, we must, and I mean *must*, create safe circles of connection and community with each other. Anyone who attempts to navigate the crisis on his/her own or just with "me and mine," will not and cannot.
- At the same time that we face the crisis squarely, engage in grief work, shadow work, and create safe circles of community and support, we must regularly bathe in joy and beauty. In order to do so, it is essential to recognize the difference between circumstantial happiness and the permanent core of joy which lives within us. It may seem strange that humans need guidance in how to experience joy, but in a lifeless, flatline culture, we do. For this reason, we wrote our newly-released book *Return To Joy*—a toolkit for creating and sharing joy as the ultimate essence of our existence, and we chose not to release it until after the election because we knew its message would be needed then more than ever, no matter who won.

There can be no authentic reconnection, no powerful resistance, and no long-lasting resilience without all three being grounded in a radical return to joy as our essential nature. Only through that return to joy will we find the energy to reconnect, the power to resist, and the strength to remain resilient come what may.

[Andrew Harvey](#) and [Carolyn Baker](#) are co-authors of the newly released book [Return To Joy](#) as well as numerous other titles related to the global crisis.