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# COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 24

**SPANX: NO INVESTMENT, NO DEBT, \$1.1 BILLION IN VALUE  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

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MARIANNE WILLIAMSON "THERE ARE NO SHORT-CUTS  
TO ENLIGHTENMENT" TIME TO GET OVER YOURSELF

NO-ONE SUSPECTS THE BUTTERFLY





WAKING UP  
WITH

MARIANNE  
WILLIAMSON

  
@mariannewilliamson

*“There’s NO SHORTCUT to enlightenment.”  
No one dishes out wise words (and tough love) quite  
like MARIANNE WILLIAMSON. Just ask Oprah...*

WORDS HANNAH SILVERTON

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW ROLSTON

It’s Tuesday night and, in the name of research, I’m watching YouTube videos of Marianne Williamson on repeat. What on earth do you ask the woman who Oprah herself turns to for spiritual counsel? Will my questions be profound enough? Just as the fears of inadequacy begin to run riot through my mind, the words Marianne has arguably become most famous for pop into my inbox: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

Penned in her 1992 *New York Times* bestseller, these two lines are commonly misattributed to Nelson Mandela and, when I bring it up the next morning, Marianne doesn’t seem too fazed, implying she’s merely a portal for someone’s (or something’s) much higher message, anyway. (Despite being Jewish by birth and upbringing, when Marianne speaks of God and other theological terms, it isn’t in a religious way, but as symbols of what she considers universal truths.)

It’s been nearly 40 years since Marianne first stumbled upon *A Course in Miracles*, the set of three blue books that would ultimately transform her life and shape her career. Fifteen years later, she wrote her reflections on them in *A Return to Love*, which went on to have a similarly transformative effect on many others, racing to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. Later, Marianne would be listed by Oprah as her favourite author of all time.

“Actually, I don’t think I thought of myself at that time as even wanting to write books...” says Marianne of her days as a lost and confused 20-something working in a bookshop in Houston.

“It took me a while to get pregnant with the idea, let alone give birth to it.”

In the decades since, Marianne’s been at the forefront of the self-development world. What was then a baby-boomer subculture is now an ubiquitous multi-billion dollar industry. But surprisingly, she’s not as critical of this commercial development as you might expect.

“I think that a universal spiritual search has become a mainstream cultural impulse and this is a very good thing,” says Marianne. “There are those who would argue that turning the search for enlightenment into a pop culture phenomenon makes it appear all too easy. But it’s better that it comes across as all too easy than it comes across as all too hard. We all enter through different doors but the point is to enter and all new doors should be celebrated.”

Marianne has her fair share of pop culture fans with Nicole Richie, Eva Longoria and other Hollywood royalty among her avid supporters; their endorsements forming a significant feature in her 2013/2014 campaign for California’s 33rd congressional district. Bridging the spiritual and political spheres proved to be no painless task, but coming fourth in the race certainly hasn’t diminished her devotion to progressive politics; if anything, she’s sticking with her mandate even more, saying during her campaign, “If you know what changes a heart, you know what changes the world.”

Becoming known for speaking with unwavering conviction, there’s an unshakable calm balanced with a sense of urgency in her messaging, which seems

to have intensified over time and age.

“It’s counter intuitive, the older you get theoretically you shouldn’t care as much because you won’t be here 40 years from now,” says Marianne.

“But it doesn’t work that way. The older you get, the more you are concerned for future generations. I also think that at this particular time, no matter how old you are, a conscientious person should be able to see the urgency of this moment.”

“Our entire civilisation is organised according to economic principles rather than humanitarian principles,” she says of the greatest risk currently faced by humanity. “As a species, we’ve made money, rather than love, our bottom line.”

Over the years, in response to society’s “unsustainable” direction, Marianne’s voice has become even more fervent.

“Unsustainable is not an ugly enough word. It means if we continue in that direction, the system will crash... period.”

Unlike the flower-crown-wearing, dreamcatcher-making camp that many cynics may group her with, a poised, suited and candid Marianne clearly doesn’t put a rose tint on anything that doesn’t deserve it. She’s a straight-shooting Texan after all. >

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But her global perspective is not all doom and gloom. Marianne grants there's much to be hopeful about at this moment in history, especially in the revival of grassroots, community-based initiatives like the Wake Up Project, which she partnered with for a series of events in Australia recently.

Despite being a celebrated orator and leader herself, Marianne insists, "This is not the age of the soloist, this is the age of the choir.

"The kind of collective change of heart and real revolution of love that's so necessary now does not rest on a few individuals, it rests on a field of consciousness emerging... it's an all-hands-on-deck type of moment and every one of us needs to see ourselves as responsible for doing our part."

There's no doubt Marianne has been trying to play her part. Alongside her hefty professional commitments, Marianne has invested a vast amount of energy into founding three socially minded organisations: Project Angel Food, a meals-on-wheels program that grew out of the 1980s AIDS crisis; Sister Giant, a series of conferences encouraging women to run for political office; and The Peace Alliance, a not-for-profit based on her ongoing interest in the intersection of spiritual values and politics.

As for that intersection, Marianne says she remains "deeply convinced that there'll be no outer peace until inner peace becomes a more consistent goal amongst more of us".

So how does she suppose we reach that goal? Meditation. Regular, non-negotiable, show-up-no-matter-how-you're-feeling meditation. Not just a dabble here and there when you're at a spa in Mexico, but a practice integrated into your daily routine and way of life.

There are no shortcuts, she asserts.

"Enlightenment is not a 'how to'.

Enlightenment is not three easy steps. I think we lack humility towards God,

towards source, towards the divine when we're looking for 'can you just give me three little things I can do?'

"Spiritual exercise is like physical exercise, you never get to stop. So if I'm not working on keeping my muscles up, my muscles are headed down. If I'm not working on keeping my thought forms up my thought forms are headed down. I don't get to look in the mirror and say, 'Well, I like the way my body looks so I don't have to exercise anymore'. Until we get to the point of total enlightenment – a point I have not reached – I don't get to say, 'Well I'm peaceful and loving today so I don't have to meditate anymore.'"

And with addiction to instant gratification in the 21st century – or as she calls it, "this assault of modernity" – Marianne believes ancient wisdom traditions like meditation are more crucial than ever.

"There's this barrage of meaningless information that's coming at us all the time in today's world... You wake up in the morning and you take a bath, you

take a shower. Why? Because you don't want to take yesterday's dirt on your body into the day. Well, if you don't pray and you don't meditate you are taking yesterday's stress into the day. If you wake up in the morning and you turn on the TV or the news or computer, then you're not only taking yesterday's stress from your life but the lives of people from all over the planet. Without [meditation] we're all bound to be a bit ADD... distracted and unfocused. And

that's not a very creative way to live, it's a very stressful way to live. And so whether you're writing a book or doing anything else, your creative capacity will be greatly diminished."

According to Marianne, a creative miracle is a perfectly reasonable thing to

ask for, receive and acknowledge, and she talks of them like they're a normal, everyday occurrence. For Marianne and other *A Course in Miracles* devotees like Gabby Bernstein, Wayne Dyer and Robert Holden, miracles are not confined to supernatural phenomena, but often the most natural things in the world, like a bud turning into a flower.

"Look outside the window, look at anything happening, the world is clearly filled with miracles," she says, before adding that miracles are simply shifts in our perception, though that doesn't mean it's easy. "If it were easy, we'd all be enlightened masters." ■

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WE COULDN'T FIT IT  
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