



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

Creating a Spiritually Mature Relationship

Guest: Marianne Williamson

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Marianne Williamson.

We're going to be exploring the spiritual context within which relationships happen. We'll talk about how to respond to and work with relationship triggers and ultimately what it means to be mature, what it means to be a grown up.

I'm sure many of you will know who Marianne is, just to give you a bit of background, for over three decades, Marianne has been a leader in spiritual and religiously progressive circles. She's the author of 14 books, four of which have been number one "New York Times" bestsellers.

Marianne founded Project Angel Food, a nonprofit that's delivered more than 13 million meals to ill and dying homebound patients since 1989. The group was created to help people suffering from the ravages of HIV and AIDS. And she ran for Democratic nomination for president in 2020.

So, Marianne, thank you so much for joining me. I was very excited when I received your suggestion in terms of where we'd go in the conversation, because often what can happen is relationship can feel like it's something that's just happening between two people. And people can very easily get pulled into their stories, their reactions, their drama together, but of course, there's a broader context. There's a bigger, deeper meaning within relationship.

And so maybe we could just start a little bit by what is the spiritual context within which relationships happen?

Marianne Williamson

Well, in my experience, it doesn't seem that the problem is that people see their relationship only about between the two of them as opposed to the larger world. The problem is that the individual sees the drama as only about their story as opposed to the story of the other person, which is just as significant.

So from a spiritual perspective, the idea is, imagine that the universe is intentional. Imagine that the universe is programmed in the direction of healing. That just as the acorn is programmed to

become the oak tree, the bud is programmed to become the blossom, all of us are internally programmed to reach our highest level of self-actualization.

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Relationships are part of that larger, because remember, in a spiritual context, it's not a random universe. That's one of the main differences between a spiritual and a non spiritual perspective. A spiritual perspective recognizes that this is a meaningful rather than a random universe, that every relationship is an assignment, that everyone you meet, you were meant to meet, no one you meant to meet will you fail to meet, and that people are brought together for maximal soul growth opportunity.

So what does that mean? Does that mean that everybody I meet will be someone who makes me feel good? Not necessarily. It is someone with whom the opportunities to heal in the places where I am now wounded are the greatest. So the places where I am the most tempted to constrict the perfect relationship for me, then my ego doesn't like this. But my ego likes to think that the perfect relationship for me is someone who acknowledges, understands and caters to my wounds.

But the universe understands that the person who is best for me is someone who understands enough but will not cater and will not coddle. And in relationship with whom I'm given the opportunity to be strong, where I've been weak before, to practice forgiveness and love, where I have practiced bitchiness and negativity before, to be expansive, where I have been controlling before. If I do that, then whether with this person, or maybe they're a step to the next person, I will move along the trajectory of growth and greater happiness.

If all I do is show up in this relationship the same way I showed up in the other ones, being negative where I'm in the habit of being negative, being bitchy in the habit places where I'm tempted to be bitchy, being whatever in the habits where I'm tempted to be weak, all I will do is reenact the same drama I have reenacted many times and never move along the path of wholeness. Rather, my ego will be able to say nothing ever changes. I always meet the same kind of guy. The problem is with them.

And that's why when I said before, the issue is realizing you're not the only person here, I have learned, not just theoretically, but experientially, 90% of the time when I have a problem in my life the best advice I can give myself is, oh, Marianne, get over yourself. This is not just about you. And in intimate relationships, counter intuitively, we're tempted to think this is all about my childhood drama, my stuff.

And you get, by the way, you get a lot of social permission these days for judging other people that you're in intimate relationship with. Or somebody, this is an interesting little ego game we play with ourselves, oh, I know it's my fault, I pick the wrong people. Which actually is just masquerading judgment. Maybe the universe picked the exact right person and that person triggers you and pushes your buttons because that's where you need to heal. It's just like an acupuncture needle.

Alex Howard

It's interesting. There's a bunch of different tangents I want to go down right now, but I particularly want to take that point around being triggered and being reactive in relationship, which of course happens for all of us. And I think you made a really interesting point that there's almost a cultural

permission these days to blame you for my trigger. And because I'm activated and I'm triggered, you need to change your behavior.

[00:06:42] Marianne Williamson

Absolutely. Let's say he went on a camping trip and his phone goes out of cell range and you're living in a place of, my father left my mother so I have abandonment panic. And he knows that. He knows that about me. So if he loves me, he would just make sure at least once a day that he would leave the campgrounds, and he would find where there was a phone and call me or text me because he knows that about me.

Now, is the perfect man the one who says to his buddies, she really has an issue, her father left her mother. She has a real abandonment thing. I've just got to do that? Or is he a man who comes back from the camping trip and says, honey, I really understand that you have this issue, and I really understand that there's a lot of trauma from your past in this. And I really understand that it really triggers you if I'm out of cell phone range. Darling, get over it. That's the man for her. I understand. Have compassion. Get over it if you want to have an adult relationship.

Alex Howard

It's really interesting, because a lot of my work is in the world of trauma. We do the biggest conference in the world around trauma with lots of conversations around trauma, but you're speaking of something that I think is really important, and I want to really dig deeper on this point. Because the increased awareness and recognition around trauma and how we're impacted ultimately can be helpful because it allows us to do that healing work.

The point that you're making, the problem is when we almost weaponize that awareness. It's like, I see I have this issue, therefore everyone around me has to change to accommodate my issue.

Marianne Williamson

We have two parts of the mind, the spirit and the ego. You can call it the primitive and the evolved, whatever language we want to use. So the spirit brought forth collectively a conversation about trauma so that we would all understand ourselves better. The ego, however, is very sly. We get to talk about ourselves. It will use anything. Make it about me. Make it about me. Make it about me.

The way to heal your past, including the trauma in your past, is not by living in your past, but by living fully in your present. Allowing life to provide an opportunity for you to be the person that your trauma in the past kept you from being.

This is the deal, we're all traumatized. It's an insane world we're living in today, and we're all wounded therefore. And the issue in life becomes, I'm wounded, I have wounds. There's a spiritual perspective that would say you wouldn't have been born if you didn't have these things to work out. My choice is whether or not to act from the wound.

And my healing will not come from living in the past. My healing will not come from just further analysis of the wound. You don't analyze the darkness to get to the light. You turn on the light, and you recognize that in this present moment, even though I don't feel like acting like a conscious, elegant, sophisticated adult who has not been traumatized in the past, I can fake it until I make it. I

can remember the line often said in Alcoholics Anonymous, "It's easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than it is to think yourself into a new way of acting".

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And what I find in my life is when I do take responsibility, Marianne, the people in your life are not responsible for the fact that Daddy didn't love you quite the way you wish he had. That's not their responsibility. And if you just use that wound almost as an excuse to spew your pain, all you will get is further trauma because you will be perpetuating it.

And what I've noticed, Alex, is if you have this conscious awareness and you say, God, I don't know how to act in this moment because I was so traumatized in my past that I don't have a synapse. I wasn't cherished, I wasn't accepted. I don't have the synopsis of what a person who is whole in that area would act like. I've seen it over and over again. I'll find myself in a room and I'm in the presence of someone who clearly does not have that childhood wound.

Now they probably have other wounds. There might be other areas where I've got it together more than they do, but in that one particular one, they clearly are unscathed. And they smile where I've been in the habit of frowning, they lighten up in the habit of where I've gotten all heavy and deep. They don't even talk about themselves in a place where I make it all about me. And you start trying it on and it's amazing what can happen.

So we are at choice what to do with all that trauma. And the collective ego is very big right now on turning into further reasons for weaponization mainly against ourselves. A victim mentality is an expression of self sabotage and self hatred, not self compassion.

Alex Howard

I want to track back to something you said, to bring it in here as well. You talked about relationships as an assignment. And one of the things that I think is really interesting is how, and there's many different levels of how this works, but we end up often attracting certain types of people into our lives. We find ourselves in certain repetitive dynamics that become familiar and are often familiar in the frustrations and the difficulties that are consistent. Walk us through this idea of assignment. It's really interesting.

Marianne Williamson

In "The Course in Miracles" it says that there are three levels of assignment, teaching learning situations. One is just a casual situation. You are next to someone in an elevator, a child drops their ball in front of you. Even there, there's an opportunity to work on your personality, which is really what we're talking about in relationships. And you can either be kind and gracious or you can be dismissive of other people as though they don't exist. And then you go around later talking about how you can't meet anybody.

The second level of teaching is where you're brought together for a fairly intense period of time. It could be a month, it could be a year, it could be a decade. And then there comes a time when, in the language of the course, "Physical proximity no longer serves the further sold growth". That doesn't mean necessarily the relationship was a quote, unquote "failure". It might have been a great success. "Physical proximity will no longer serve the highest growth potential".

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And then there are lifetime assignments. But I love how in "The Course in Miracles" it says that doesn't mean you'll necessarily like each other. It just means that you have a lifetime full of opportunities for growth, think of family members.

Now there's a line in the course... So first of all, you start from that. You start from the idea every encounter is a Holy encounter. "The Course of Miracles" says that relationships are the Holy Spirit's laboratories of reform, but they are the path to heaven or the path to hell. Sartre said, "Hell is other people". So is heaven. There's no walking to heaven except with another person because heaven is an awareness of our oneness.

So you start with that. You start with the realization and you definitely feel this when you fall in love or when you feel particularly attracted to someone. But the important thing is to remember it's also true with relationships that you think are, quote, unquote, "unimportant". Because if you're not working on your self actualization in the regular relationships of life, where do you expect to build your musculature of graciousness, understanding, deep listening, compassion, selflessness that you're going to need in those big relationships?

If you don't do kindergarten, elementary school or middle school, how are you going to have the skill for that PhD, which is the high level romantic, intimate relationships?

So you begin with, for those of us who pray, Dear God, I just met somebody and I'm really attracted, help me because I know if I play my games that I played in the past, I will blow it like I have blown it in the past. So I am praying, and whether you see this in a religious context, spiritual context, secular context, you ask a higher power to take this relationship. You put it on the altar. The altar is in our minds. That what you put on the altar is then altered. Because the ego mind is the default positions, I'm going to play it the same way I played the last ones.

Now this is what "The Course of Miracles" says, if you do not take 100% responsibility for your experience, you pay a very high price. And the high price you pay is that you will not be able to change it. So it's so important to do an exit interview with yourself at the end of relationships.

Now where psychotherapy, traditional psychotherapy is such a spectacular failure is that there are many therapists you would go to and they would help you understand what you're doing wrong that you would attract a person like that. No. The spiritual coach, what I call the miracle minded coach, is someone who's going to say, what part of you, maybe it was 90% their issue, but they're not here so we're here to talk about the 10% of it that was your issue. What part of you sabotaged this relationship? What unconscious part of you showed up and was either disrespectful, needy, controlling, bitchy, self centered, dismissive? We've all been in relationships, we know what these games are.

Now the issue then to say, well, you're not a kid anymore so it's probably fair to say that if you could heal this by yourself, you would have done it by now. So for those coming from a spiritual, religious perspective, it's Dear God, please make me gentle where I have been harsh. I have this habit of showing the sarcasm and disrespect to men. They don't like that. Dear God, help me change that. I give these character defects. There's a line in "The Course in Miracles" where he says, "I cannot take from you what you will not release to me". And it's usually a little bit humiliating, a little bit embarrassing, but that's what the sacred therapist, coach, etc should be, is a

safe place to take a good look in the mirror. Because if you don't change, it's not going to be any different next time.

[00:18:19] Alex Howard

It's really interesting. I want to go back a little bit before we come to this more. You were talking about different types of relationships. Relationships which are for a period, relationships that are for lifetime.

And one of the challenges I think people can have is to know which is which, and to know when a relationship actually is a source of growth that they need to stay with and do the hard work with, versus when actually a relationship is toxic and harmful and they need a very clear boundary and a very clear no. I either don't want this person in my life at all or I need very clear proximity distance from this person.

And it's not always clear. And particularly with those family... I can tell in my family relationships, people that I've had very difficult relationships with for many years and it's been important to stay with those and work through those and others where that proximity distance was really important and healthy. I wonder what your thoughts are around, how to navigate some of these complexities.

Marianne Williamson

Well, there are two issues here. First of all, if only there were a handbook. There wasn't one. If they say this or do that, stay. If they say this or do that, leave. It's not simple.

However, from a spiritual perspective, you're looking to internal guidance. That's what the whole spiritual context is. Whether you call the Holy Spirit, thought adjuster, higher power, internal guidance, intuition, you look within for that answer.

Now, this is the bigger issue. Relationships are in the mind. So when you say, okay, I'm just going to end this, I'm not going to see them anymore, they still live in your head. So until you clear, until you take responsibility, until you get to total forgiveness, it doesn't even matter if you quote, unquote "end it", they're going to show up in the form of another person.

So this idea that we have of, just end it, you don't end it, they're alive in your head for years. And then, by the way, when you get to that place where you say, it doesn't matter if I'm supposed to stay or leave, I have to take responsibility for my stuff. I have to get to complete forgiveness and see only the innocence in this person, that is when I'll know. Until I've done my own work, I don't have clarity, so I can't really know. And until I've done my work, it doesn't matter if you stay or leave, you're going to be redoing the same cycle, whether with this person or with someone else.

Alex Howard

It's really interesting. Just as you're speaking, I'm reflecting and I realized that part of my barometer has been when I feel reactive or I feel rigid, often it's a clue that I'm not in a healthy place with it.

And there's a particular relationship that I think about where it's very complex, a lot of mental health issues and things I won't go into now, where actually I felt a lot of softness but I also have a very clear boundary. And that boundary gets checked in with from time to time.

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And somehow I think it opens up this idea of forgiveness, because often people can think that forgiveness also means forgetting. I forgive you therefore everything's fine. And then what I notice is sometimes people will go and do, they'll do a deep piece of therapeutic work in a workshop or in therapy, and they'll forgive all these people in their lives. They'll forget everything, and then they'll get retraumatized, or they get re-wounded because their assumption is that I've done all this healing, therefore that person is now fixed and safe.

Marianne Williamson

Now, the fact that I love you does not mean that we're going to have lunch. But the kind of softness that you mentioned, if it wasn't spiritually connected, it was just on a superficial level, I feel soft about them, but there's no serious vertical work that went in there. Serious vertical work means I'm aligned with the thoughts of God. I'm aligned with the will of the universe. If it doesn't serve me to have further contact with you, it actually doesn't serve you either.

So if I'm really in the space of love that's not just fluffy, but serious, like I forgive, then actually I'm more capable, not less capable of owning my no as well as owning my yes. Sometimes love says no. Sometimes it's when we get to that work where I have forgiven. I have owned my stuff. If you're really in that place, you are more capable, not less capable of healthy boundaries when healthy boundaries are what needs to be set.

Alex Howard

And somehow I think also there's a lack of emotional reaction. Because I think what can happen is when people become, going back to triggers we talked about earlier, when people have been triggered, yes, they can weaponize their triggers, everyone else needs to change because I'm being triggered, but what can also happen is the trigger is we're just constantly in a reaction and we're then fueling that drama between us.

Marianne Williamson

Well, that's why meditation matters. That's why you always want to include the mystical third by whatever name you call it in your relationships. The issue of a trigger is not just whether or not you are triggered. The issue of a trigger is whether or not you're going to act on the trigger.

The path of healing is not a path from trigger to no trigger. The path of healing is from trigger that puts me into a completely unconscious place, I say things, do things, text things, tweet things that are like, oh my God, I can't believe I did that, to, wow, I feel this but due to my meditation this morning, due to my healthy skills, personal skills, I know enough to keep my mouth shut. I'm not going to text, I'm not going to tweet. If I reach out to anyone, it will be to the person who is safe and healthy to reach out to in this moment.

I still feel the trigger but I'm able to witness it. I'm not at the effect of it. I'm able to rise above and go, wow, this really hurts. Honor that, own it, but not self sabotage by acting out of that wound.

And it will continue like that. And one day you will notice, oh my God, if that had happened 5 years ago, I would have been a crazy woman. And you realize the things that, okay, I feel it.

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And then one of the steps, like I said before, is even get to the point where I'm triggered and I feel crazy, but I'm actually going to be capable of saying the right thing. It's the work you do.

And then one day somebody will say to you, you know what I love about you is that you don't have that kind of issue some people have. And you're thinking to yourself, oh, honey, you have no idea how much work I had to do.

And by the way, then there's a really profound spiritual issue here. It's the prodigal son that the father loved the son who left and came back more than the son who never left. The idea that a bone that has been broken is actually stronger in that healing place. When you heal from these traumas and these triggers, there is a light in that place in your personality, having been someone who had to go through it and got to the other side.

It's like in AA, the person who has gotten sober is the best coach for the person who is sober. I know when I went on to an organization where people were counseling vets, military vets, and they said, well, what we really need are people who have seen combat because they understand.

So for those of us who are healers, for those of us who are counselors, coaches, therapists, etc, if we ourselves have experienced something, it might even just be a look on our face like, yes I understand, that carries a level of healing power that wouldn't even have been there had we not ourselves known that pain.

Alex Howard

It's interesting. I find myself thinking as you speak, that one of the things that's been most healing in my life has actually been my own children, because having had a pretty difficult childhood in quite a lot of different ways, there was something about going, I am going to wholeheartedly do this differently, and the same for my wife in her way as well. And there's something that is deeply feeling and beautiful about, and it doesn't mean we get it right all the time, but about that intention and that showing up in that way. And it is a very heart feeling thing.

Marianne Williamson

You also hear that from men, and this is usually men simply because of the age component, who have families and then have a second family and realize I didn't do it well with my kids the first time, and I want to try to be the dad who shows up at the meetings and the ball games this time.

I have often pointed out that a generation, and I don't know if this would be true in England, but it's certainly true in the United States, a generation which has made more noise about our childhood trauma than any generation in the past is more neglectful of the children of this generation collectively that has been any generation in the past. This is an example of how making it all about you, I don't care what you went through, is never the answer.

Alex Howard

It's interesting, one of the things that I noticed around, having spent a lot of time in the last 20, almost 25 years now around spiritual circles, is one of the things that I've noticed is some of my

quite dearly loved spiritual friends, saying this publicly, are not very good parents because they're so indulged in their own process and their own journey and their own emotional need and their own needs for space, that there's a absence of showing up and doing the hard work of boundaries and holding.

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And of course, that inner work is important. I don't want to advocate that you just make it all about children. That creates more brats in its own way. But there's something about that balancing of doing one's own work, but also being able to put oneself to the side and show up to the hard work of the job.

Marianne Williamson

Two things. First of all, what I found as a mother is whatever issues you have in any relationship, you have in every relationship. So I found some of my intimacy issues that I had romantically showed up in my relationship with my daughter when I made it too much about me, all of that kind of stuff.

But also there is a line in "The Course of Miracles", one of the lessons is there is no love but gods. We have this idea of categories. This is the parental child relationship, this is the romantic relationship, this is the employer employee relationship, this is the friend relationship. The deeper spiritual principles are the same no matter what.

Am I showing up fully? Am I showing up fully for the other person, not just making it about me? Am I seeking to bless rather than blame? Am I being a space where I'm holding for the possibility of the other person being everything that they can be? Or am I taking up all the oxygen? All of those things are the same, no matter what the form of the relationship, whether a person is 5 you're dealing with or a person who's 50.

Alex Howard

There's a common theme in a lot of what you're saying, and you actually spoke to it specifically earlier on as well. This idea of relating through our ego versus relating through who we are, which is more than our ego.

Obviously meditation is a very helpful tool here, but say a bit more about what helps us get out of ourselves, in a sense. Particularly when we're triggered by the stuff that's happening, what helps us?

Marianne Williamson

The issue, yeah, you can't wait till quote, unquote "stuff" is happening. You have to make it a daily practice. It's like if you are wanting to climb 50 stairs, you can't say, oh, I better go to the gym. If you have been going to the gym, you have the musculature with which to take on those stairs.

So spiritual transformation isn't just a slogan I use here or a self help tool I use there. It is a willingness to completely convert in terms of our internal operating system. Just like you go to the gym, or whatever your physical practice is, to strengthen your physical muscles. You go to spiritual

or religious practice to strengthen your attitudinal muscles because there is attitudinal energetic, emotional, and psychological gravity, just like there's physical gravity.

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And what do you do? If I don't workout this is going to get really flabby. If I don't work it spiritually, the flabbiness will show up in my self indulgence, my neediness, my controllingness, my negativity, etc.

The word religion comes from the word, the Latin root religiō, which means to bind back. So the spiritual process is unlearning. The ego dominated, fear dominated mindset which prevails within the world, to unlearn it and to accept instead a thought system based on love.

Now there are three categories, probably four categories of people listening to this conversation right now as I say this. Number one, people are saying, yes, she's right. That's why I'm in AA. That's why I do Kabbalah, that's why I do "A Course in Miracles", that's why I do mindfulness, that's why I do mystical Christianity, that's why I'm a Hindu, whatever it is. Some people say, yes, she's right. She's right. And I do it. And I work on it every day. That's category one.

Category two. That's right and I notice when I do it, it works. And when I don't do it, it doesn't work. And I really should do that more. I mean, I'm meditating three times a week, but she's right, I really do need to make it more of my morning practice. And I'm doing it and I do know the path that's right for me, but I'm not disciplined with it. And I remind you that the word discipline comes from the same root as the word disciple. That's category two.

The category three. I think there's something to that, but I don't even know what that would be for me. I don't even know what that would be. To that person I say, just ask for it in your heart, and books are going to fall at your feet over the next few days. Somebody's going to invite you to a lecture. This stuff is mainstream now. If you just ask, say, I am willing, I am ready but I need a teaching. It's going to show up.

And then the fourth category is people who think this is all bullshit, but they might not have been listening this far anyway.

So in other words, we're living in a time this stuff is mainstreamed. There is one truth spoken in many different ways, but we do need a teacher. That doesn't mean an external teacher, although some people work with external teachers. But the spiritual coach these days is the new priesthood. So it's really a priestly function more than a teaching function.

Alex Howard

Yes. But it strikes me that, if we go back to the difference between categories one, two and three, say category four they're...

Marianne Williamson

They're not here. I just want to make sure.

[00:34:26] Alex Howard

So for me, a big part of the difference is a level of courage and willingness to do the work, particularly do the work when it's difficult.

Marianne Williamson

So this is what I've learned, and I think age does this for you and messing up enough does it for you. When you are clear that when left to your own devices you blow this. When life has taught you one night being stupid caused me months, if not years, of pain. When you've had enough experiences where you realize that getting this wrong causes a lot of pain. My kids don't talk to me anymore, it might be with some people. I got a divorce, and I think we wouldn't have gotten divorced if I had it more together, whatever it is. And you get serious, then you are willing and you are courageous because you prefer the sharp pain of self awareness.

And I said to you before, it involves some embarrassment to look at yourself, some humiliation, some grief. If only I'd known this or whatever. I have no one but myself to blame. All those things we go through. You get to the point, I'm willing, because the alternative is a dull ache of unconsciousness, lack of self awareness and constant self sabotage that I don't want to live with for the rest of my life.

Alex Howard

There's also a place for Grace in this, isn't there?

Marianne Williamson

That's what Grace is.

Alex Howard

Because what comes to my mind as you were talking there is that, I remember when I first got together with my wife. The whole story is a long story, but the short version of the story is that I'd been on a big journey around relationships and not sticking around with relationships, and I'd met someone that I knew I was in love with, but she fell pregnant very quickly. I think our first daughter was due on our one year anniversary, which means that she fell pregnant when we'd been together three months.

And I was the product of a father that left. So one thing I wasn't going to be was the father that left. And because of that, and because I loved her, we worked through stuff that I don't think we would have worked through otherwise. I think what would have happened is we would have loved each other. It wouldn't have worked out. And after a few years, it would have sort of...

And there was something about the beauty of the wisdom of Grace to construct circumstances. And we have three kids, 10 years married later, but there's something about that surrendering to life, because I had all kinds of plans.

Marianne Williamson

Absolutely. And that's why, we were talking before about the intentionality of the universe. It's like the universe had to come up with a situation that left you no choice.

[00:37:16] Alex Howard

Right.

Marianne Williamson

I thought that when I wrote my first book. I got a book contract, and I realized if I hadn't gotten a contract and I needed to do this, I would never have gotten it together to do it.

No, absolutely. And I also think that these days, somebody said to me something interesting about his marriage. We were talking about the time people take. That it's important not to rush into marriage, that it's important to give it enough time, you need to go slowly. And he made a comment, but the problem can be if you go too slowly, too. Because if you go too slowly, you give yourself too many reasons.

Because it's not like it's ever going to be a perfect person. It's not like that exists. It's not like it's ever going to be a situation that has no difficulties in it. So if you take too long, your ego comes up with reasons why this must not be right.

Alex Howard

You see, I was a bit of a product in those days of a lot of self development and spiritual work, which was that you've got to follow your bliss and do what you love and have the career and have this. And the idea of settling down and having children and being a grown up in that way was not the thing that I was choosing, and yet it was the thing that I needed to grow.

Marianne Williamson

You know, this issue of that particular issue is huge. I grew up in a generation that said what you just said. And what I came to understand is having children is how you grow up. So people say, I want to grow up before I have children, not realizing if you want a maturity path, if you want a path that teaches you how to be a grown up, have a child.

And you also realize that nature had a very good idea. And I say this now as a woman. I had my daughter at 37, which is fine, but when I look at it now, I go, okay, so nature has it so that if you look at the years when nature has the highest fertility factor, that would be that you're young enough that first of all, you're able to be down on the ground with them playing, which the older parent can't quite do the same way and you really feel the difference.

Secondly, by the time they're teenagers, bye, Mom. Bye. Go do your thing. You're still young enough to go off and have that career, etc. So I'm not saying it's a better way, but I am saying that this illusion we had, that waiting until we had done all these things ran counter to the plan of nature that maybe was not as unwise as we thought or was not as random as we thought.

And I'm sure that you agree what a blessing it is that you've had those children and once you do have children you say to yourself, what was I thinking that I ever thought anything was more important than this? What was I thinking? What bill of goods had I been sold that I ever thought that any name on a door or letter after my name or money or whatever could even begin to match an importance or significance or meaning or happiness? What is involved here?

[00:40:41]

Now that's not to say everybody should have children. That's not the point I'm making. But for those for whom it is clearly a part of this Dharmic journey, I realize as someone who was raised in a generation where there was a strain of faux feminism, and I certainly think of myself as a feminist, but it was a faux feminism strain that actually made the idea of motherhood, a homemaker, even wife seem less than. I'm one of many women who ultimately paid a price for that and realized it was some very wrong minded thinking.

Alex Howard

I think there's also something around choosing an easy path. Going back to the conversation of relationships, going back to the conversation around children, going back to the conversation around really showing up in a way that's mature in our life, that often what seems like the easy path in the short-term may be easier in the short-term, but it doesn't necessarily nourish us. It doesn't feed us in the way that those often harder choices do.

Marianne Williamson

Absolutely. And that also gets to how much more social permission you get these days for taking what is ultimately not the highest path.

You and I, in this conversation, we were talking about trauma. Now we're talking about maturity. We need to move into a society that takes a conversation around maturity as seriously as we take the conversation around trauma.

Because what's wrong in this world is not just that we are traumatized adults, but that we are immature adults. Too many men are behaving like boys. Too many women are behaving like children, like girls. And I also think being a parent matures you.

But also some people might say, well, you have to work through your trauma to become a mature adult. Actually, you don't. You become a more mature adult, and as you are doing so, and even when you are, you continue to work on your trauma because there are a lot of hours in the day.

Alex Howard

Again, there's many directions we can go. I'm also mindful of time. I wonder if we draw it back to some starting points. Because I think we've talked about a number of pieces here and some pieces that, they're challenging, they're hard to do.

For someone that's watching this or listening to this, and what you're saying is landing, they're feeling a sense of, yes, I can feel the place this is true for me, how do they work with that? What are some next steps for them to bring that to life?

Marianne Williamson

Well, two things. First of all, any serious spiritual path, any spiritual path involving prayer or meditation is going to do it. Something that is a serious conversion of that internal operating system. Your relationship to that higher power is relationship to your own ground of being.

[00:43:42]

Until I'm coming from the strength of my own ground of being, I don't know how to relate with yours. If I'm broken in my connection to my own deeper self, I will reenact that fracture in my relationship with you. So the mystical third, knowing that the relationship with the God of my understanding is key to my being able to show up for you and with you.

Secondly, there are people, obviously like yourself, like me, like I'm sure many people you're having on your summit, this is what many of us are, the kind of work that we're doing. And the material is so mainstream. There's such great material about relationships now, so nobody really has an excuse of I just don't know where to go.

Whether listening to your summit, I'm sure for many of the people this is the news. And either someone is listening right now and going, I'm going to make that call. I'm going to do that or they're open in a way that things will appear over the next few days and weeks and they'll go, that's so interesting. That's exactly what we were talking about on that Alex Howard thing.

Alex Howard

Like a book falling out the bookshelf and hitting you in the face.

Marianne Williamson

Exactly. And it happens, or falls on your feet, because it's an intentional universe.

Alex Howard

Beautiful. Marianne, for people that want to go deeper in your work, you have many books out there, programs that are happening, what would be a good next step for people to explore with you?

Marianne Williamson

Well, if somebody wants to sign up for my Substack, which is my writing as I go along, mariannewilliamson.substack.com

If people want to go on to my mailing list at marianne.com

I'm doing some classes for something called the Indiel Series. I'm pretty out there. I don't think it's too hard to find me if somebody wants but those things are the way for the work I do.

Alex Howard

Wonderful. It's been a real joy to have this conversation. Thank you so much.

Marianne Williamson

It's wonderful talking to you too. God bless. I hope it goes really well. Thank you.

[00:45:47] Alex Howard

Thank you.