

MY WORK: 2016-2017

Elizabeth Rabia Roberts



We are entering a time of intensifying disorder.

We can't pretend any more that the political and economic foundations of our society are sound. The sudden takeover of much of the U.S. government by the Trump administration (and similar right-wing movements overseas) has knocked us on our heels. Entrenched moneyed interests are working hard to resist the birth of a sustainable and just world.

But we know that those forces represent an old story that is crumbling. A new life-enhancing civilization is trying to emerge, but it has yet to take shape clearly enough to influence policy. We are in a liminal time of unknowing and chaos — but it is also a time of extraordinary promise and potential.

I have spent my life as a teacher, speaker and citizen activist engaging in actions that bring a spiritual, moral witness to bear on the myriad problems that we

face. My years of work in different parts of the world have given me a deep understanding of how change occurs, and of the crucial importance of the power of the feminine in creating a better world.

This background has prepared me to respond with hope and energy to this time of Trumpism and its consequences. In the next pages I describe two priorities for my work in the coming year: **citizen activism** and **empowering women**.

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This is my vision and my prayer for the year ahead. I would love to hear about yours. If you feel inspired to help support me at any level that you are able, I would be deeply grateful. Together we can still save large parts of this beautiful world for our children and grandchildren — if we act together now.





Citizen Activism

As we brace for assaults on everything we care about, we need to remember we are not powerless. Seldom has an out-of-power opposition been able to count on more resources — in broad support, political clout, and moral authority.

Some of the most important ways my own activism shows up is through my speaking, teaching, and writing. I speak to groups constantly, wherever I am invited — women's groups, spiritual sanghas, churches, and conferences. I write a blog, "Rabia's Riffs," and publish essays in journals and anthologies. I mentor younger women in leadership and activism.

Another way it finds expression is through taking part in, and reporting on, direct actions. Protests, vigils, and large scale citizen actions can change policies, and they often have. Throughout American history, and in other countries, ordinary citizens banding together have triumphed over governments, even when a single party holds control.

I've studied nonviolence and taken part in citizen actions since I was 19 and walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma with Dr. King. I served with Witness for Peace in Nicaragua during the Contra War, and went to Iraq twice to stand in solidarity with the Iraqi people in advance of the U.S. invasion. I've been part of actions in places as far away as Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Syria, Iran, Palestine/Israel, and Afghanistan.

I am convinced that direct citizen action is, and will be, essential as we engage the challenges ahead of us. Through my years of activism I've learned the

art of bearing witness — bringing a spiritual, moral witness to bear on the injustices being exposed — and I've written and taught about it extensively. I've been uniquely trained to contribute to this aspect of our common work.

This past year, Elias and I had the opportunity to join in two different direct action campaigns. In April, we traveled to Washington, D.C., joining more than 10,000 people participating in "Democracy Spring," a week of teach-ins, non-violent trainings, demonstrations, and sit-ins to protest the role of Big Money in politics. It was the largest display of civil disobedience in America in 50 years. Democracy Spring now has groups in most states and regularly calls for direct actions.

In November, we drove to Standing Rock, North Dakota, where we camped out in freezing weather with thousands of other Americans to block the construction of the DAPL oil pipeline crossing Native American treaty lands and threatening their water source. This extraordinary occupation happened because a handful of young Native Americans decided that the change they believed in was worth changing their lives for, and their example inspired many thousands of us to support them.

In the coming months and years, more and more citizens will be taking to the streets determined to make their voices heard. I've been trained for this time. Helping to bear witness to injustices, spreading the word, teaching and mentoring, this is what I'm called to do.



Women Will Save the World

Working with and for women is my deepest passion. Throughout my life I have spoken out, and put myself on the line, to improve the role and status of women in countries around the world. *In the past few years women's rights and women's place in society has grown from an issue of social justice to the most important issue there is.* The economic and cultural changes that must come about for women to gain their full authority are the very changes that will help to avert the destruction of planetary life.

The extreme challenges we face are forcing us to think outside the patriarchal box in every system we are part of. Connection, communication, relationship, service, caring, wholeness, other-centeredness, and farsightedness: these are some of the terms used to describe tomorrow's leaders. They also exactly describe the capacities that are hard-wired in women, the capacities that women naturally develop.

Of course, women are not perfect and must build a new society with men, but if women do not receive from men the sincere encouragement to step up and take charge, to express their unique beauty, wisdom and vision, there is a good chance the world will not be saved.

"Saving the world" is not about switching political parties or making a few changes here and there. We know that isn't working. We need a complete change of heart and a better understanding about how life works and our place within it. This kind of transformation needs the skills, guidance and instincts that women possess.

The politics of the past year have brought into full relief the continual diminishment, harassment and abuse that women still endure. On the positive side, Trump's vulgarity has unintentionally given a hand up to the third wave of the American Women's Movement. Young women who believed that feminism was passé are now looking for resources to empower the critical changes that didn't come to pass in the second feminist wave of the 60' and 70's.

To serve this growing awakening among women, I ran a popular spiritual school for women, called "Body and Soul," in my home between 2011-2013. I now feel the time is right, both for me and the community, to launch a new and larger **Women's Wisdom School** starting this winter. The curriculum is entirely new and is based on a synthesis of 45 years of scholarship and teaching – a legacy for our granddaughters. The lectures of the school are drawn from the companion book I am writing entitled **HerStory**. Some of the topics of **HerStory** include:

- **Why the Patriarchy Is Still Here**
- **The Evolution of Femaleness**
- **Neolithic Times**
- **When God was a Woman**
- **The Legacy of the Spirit-Matter Split**
- **The Women's Movement in the West**
- **Why Great Women are Great**
- **Motherhood**
- **Women's Spirituality**
- **Our Shadow Side**
- **Saving the World**



How to Navigate the Time of Trump

How can we best respond to this crucial moment in history? What do we need to remember? What do we need to do? Very briefly, here's what I see:

1. Don't normalize! Don't normalize what's happening. Don't assume that this is how things are now, just another flavor of the usual. It isn't. The scapegoating, racism, greed, patriarchy, and lack of empathy that is now claiming dominance is the anxious grasping of people caught in the old dysfunction. Don't think we can just coast along with it. We can't.

2. Remember! Remember what we stand for. Remember what matters, what we value. The earth ethics that we want the world of the future to live by will only manifest if those ethics are here, now, in our hearts and actions. History shows that the popular movements that succeed in bringing about change visibly hold the moral high ground. Always remember the high ground.

3. Resist! Resist the climate deniers, the lies of the fossil fuel industry, the political takeover by Big Money, the destruction of a safety net for the vulnerable, and all the deeply rooted racism, sexism, bigotry, and ignorance wherever and whenever it shows up. Provoke it! Call it out! Don't be shy! Don't retire! Say No when No must be said.

4. Reveal! Don't stop with resistance. Reveal the possible. Always look for relationships. Use the problem to show the generative capacity of the alternative. Point out the larger systems involved. Look for the whole that is trying to emerge. Affirm the beautiful. At the point of resistance don't "other" or demonize the ones who don't yet see what is possible. Reveal it with your love.

"Thank you Rabia! As usual you go straight to the point of what we need to see and know in order to act with our own particular energy."

— JOANNA MACY

"Rabia's work is imbued with a stunning moral consciousness and will. She tells us with every word that we have cause to feel deeply."

— SARA LENNON

"I've felt your inspiring and grace-filled impact on my life for a long time. You provided me with a model of courage, conviction, and integrity by the way you walk the path and share it with the rest of us. It's a path of action: action against none and in the interest of all. Thank you!"

— SPENSER TURNER

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