



Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change

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War is no way to resolve our most problematic group, community, and societal issues, but neither is a peace that simply sweeps our problems under the rug.

To create lasting change we have to learn to work fluidly with two distinct, fundamental drives that are in tension: power—the single-minded desire to achieve one's solitary purpose; and love—the drive towards unity. They are seemingly contradictory but in fact complimentary. As Martin Luther King put it, "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic." Using revealing stories from complex situations he has been involved in all over the world—the Middle East, South Africa, Europe, India, Guatemala, the Philippines, Australia, Canada and the United States—Kahane reveals how to dynamically balance these two forces. Just as when we are toddlers we learn to shift from one foot to the other to move ourselves forward, so we can learn to shift back and forth between power and love in order to move society forward.

Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change Details

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From Reader Review Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change for online ebook

Michelle says

Great book with lots of examples of power and love side by side. I had always struggled in reconciling the corruption of power with my own desire of connectedness. I also love Adam Kahane's honesty at his supposed failures and the insights this has given him.

I was lucky enough to meet Adam at the recent Creative Innovation conference. He gave me a piece of advice I will always treasure "Know your gift & use it. Connectors are needed in this fragmented world"

Chris Riedy says

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.

~ Martin Luther King

Of the many wonderful quotes in Adam Kahane's book Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change, the one above by Martin Luther King provides the pithiest summary of Kahane's central thesis. His simple argument, elaborated at length in the book, is that we need both power and love to achieve effective social change when faced with tough challenges. When we let either of these drives dominate, we stagger and stumble. Only when they are in balance can we walk successfully and find resolution to complex social challenges.

Some definitions are needed to give this argument its full force. Power and love are common terms with a heavy weight of cultural meaning, so what does Kahane mean when he uses these terms? He draws his definitions from the work of Paul Tillich. Tillich was a Protestant theologian and philosopher. He defines power and love as follows:

Power is the drive of everything living to realize itself, with increasing intensity and extensity.

Love is the drive towards unity of the separated.

So we are not talking about power in the narrow sense of power delivered through politics, celebrity, position and wealth. For Tillich (and Kahane), power is a universal drive to achieve your objectives and realise yourself as an individual. Love is not merely romantic love but the urge towards community with others.

Those who are familiar with Ken Wilber's work will recognise these universal urges. Wilber argues that reality is composed of holons, which are simultaneously wholes and parts. As individuals, we are a whole, but we are also part of a community, for example. Wilber argues that all holons have four fundamental capacities: self-preservation (agency), self-adaptation (communion), self-transcendence (eros) and self-dissolution (thanatos). These are some of the twenty tenets that Wilber outlines in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* and *A Brief History of Everything*.

Power, then, can also be seen as the urge towards agency and self-transcendence. Love is the urge towards

communion and self-dissolution (i.e. losing oneself in the whole). If we focus too much on our individual agency when trying to create change, we can come across as arrogant, leave people behind and fail to connect with people where they are. But if we focus too much on communion with the group and not enough on actual achievements, then our work can be ineffectual.

The challenge of balancing power and love, or agency and communion, is very clear for climate change. According to Kahane (p.114):

Climate change epitomizes, in the extreme, everything we know about tough social challenges: how they arise, why we get stuck, and what it takes to get unstuck and to move forward. It demonstrates the extreme fullness of our world and the global interdependence this produces. It exemplifies extreme dynamic, social, and generative complexity: cause and effect interlinked and separated by decades and continents; deeply differing perspectives and priorities among the worldwide actors involved; and a situation that no one has ever faced before. And it provides an extreme answer to the question of what it is that belongs essentially together and that is therefore driven to reunification: all of humanity, plus the ecosystems on which we depend.

Climate change demands that we co-create new low-carbon social realities on a scale and at a speed that is without precedent. It demands that we learn how collectively to exercise 100 percent of our power and 100 percent of our love.

Kahane has some suggestions on processes that can help to balance power and love, particularly the idea of change labs (p.124):

The change lab is a controlled environment within which a group of people experience, become conscious of, and then develop strategies for how to cope with the turbulent and fast-moving dynamics of a modern society. In comparison with the "real world", the change lab aspires to be a space within which it is safe to do things differently, be that shifting power relations or fostering a culture where mistakes are the basis of learning. The fast-changing nature of society today means that in some ways the strategies developed within the change lab are themselves less important than having the environment and the capacities with which to continually develop new strategies in response to the ebb and flow of social challenges.

I like this idea and I'm keen to try it out in my own work. Climate change is an issue of such breadth and complexity that we cannot hope to know in advance what will work well in responding to climate change. As such, we need to create spaces where we can experiment with different responses, both technological and cultural, and come to understand what works. Climate change requires us not only to build new technoeconomic systems but to create new socio-cultural systems based on different ways of relating to each other.

Kahane's book is an easy read and quite short, but packed full of interesting ideas, so I recommend it. Has anyone else read it? What do you think? How successful have you been at balancing power and love in your own life?

See also <http://chrisriedy.com/2010/11/power-a....>

Mark Haines says

Good concept, definitely observed in my career supporting social and environmental change in BC, but in

the end, there wasn't enough substance to make his concepts practicable.

Nora says

This book gave me a lot of ideas about how to think about power in my work. I'm aware of it, I talk about it, and I understand that working with the dynamics of power are essential for social change work. But I'm somewhat more comfortable thinking and talking love, and hadn't thought about the relationship between power and love in this particular way. I also thought he offered useful definitions for the concept(s) of complexity.

Joey says

As an attorney, one of the most fun things I get to do is put on my “Attorney at Law” persona and advocate on behalf of people being taken advantage of. I get to slap a state bar number at the end of a letter and get people’s attention. Because of that, I think there’s an assumption that I like to fight. In addition to being an attorney, I’m also a mediator, aka “peacemaker”. As a mediator, I try to step into the lives of strangers in conflict and help them find a way out. Also relevant – a lot of my career has been spent in politics. All of those have mixed together in my mind a kind of philosophical smoothie of how to best handle conflict interactions and how to bring meaningful healing to broken relationships and situations.

Unfortunately, it’s hard for me to articulate what I believe, and so when I use words like “civility” and “agitator” people think I mean something different than what I think I mean. Maybe I don’t know what I mean. Adam Kahane’s Power and Love artfully explains how both strong advocacy and open-armed love work together as one, and he articulates specifically how we need both for meaningful social change. The book helped me clarify and raise my own thinking on this relevant topic.

Utilizing Paul Tillich’s definitions of power (“the drive of everything living to realize itself”, with increasing intensity and extensity”) and love (“the drive towards the unity of the separated”), Kahane draws on his experience consulting in leadership and conflict situations around the globe to show how the two work together. I believe he became enamored with this idea because MLK was into Tillich. In Kahane’s own words:

Our power makes our love empowering instead of sentimental and anemic. Our love makes our power unifying instead of reckless and abusive. Our power and our love both become fuller and more generative, and the two intersuffuse and become one.

The book is both philosophical and practical in nature. Kahane lets you learn from his mistakes, as well as from some successes. If you care deeply about healing the world, I’d consider this short and quick read.

Ilyhana Kennedy says

I give this book four stars for its importance in the development of western thinking around social dynamics, more than its literary value.

It is a work of non-fiction, a historical and searching account of Adam Kahane's work as a high profile facilitator of groups seeking to find solutions to significant problems. Adam Kahane has worked on projects at the very grass roots level of social planning to the level of government policy development, and in highly diverse settings.

This is an important book both in defining theory and in offering a way forward in the field of group dynamics that fits more naturally with what really happens, rather than attempting to impose a set recipe for a particular outcome. Adam Kahane's experiences are rich resource material.

The book is not long. It's written quite well, though somewhat repetitive in conveying its central message.

Bruno Andreoni says

Lets talk about development by people that balance love and power to do it.

Glenn says

Probably one of the most inspiring and useful books I've ever read, especially paired with his first book, Solving Tough Problems.

Diederick Janse says

I like this book's premise: that both power and love are necessary ingredients for successful social change, particularly in situations characterized by high complexity in terms of cause and effect, relationships, and change dynamics. However, I felt there was too much repetition and too little deepening of this rich topic. It's essentially a story of how Adam Kahane became aware of these dynamics and how he's seen them play out in some of the work that he's been involved in as a facilitator. I had expected a little more here. Good, but could have been much better.

Gregory Peterson says

Adam Kahane, Managing Director of Reos Partners, is one of those rare change agents whose remarkable work has touched the lives of people throughout the world.

Kahane tells powerful stories. It's not because of his delivery (which is understated) but because of his unerring ear for capturing the heart of a situation -- in a quote, a phrase, a memorable anecdote -- and using his observations to show us new ways of thinking. He projects a world-weary credibility built through a career of immersion in the world's most challenging problems — not from the distance of academia, but up close and personal on the front lines of intractable social conflicts.

“The benefit of having done this work for a long time is that I've had a lot of trial and a lot of error,” he says.

Equally important, however, is that those trials, errors and successes are not lost on Kahane. He is reflective, analytical and innovative – mining his experience for ways to help his clients, colleagues and readers make sense of their own conflicts.

Archetypal Positions At Copenhagen Climate Summit

At a gathering to launch Kahane's new book, "Power And Love," the author began his remarks by reflecting on his experience with the gnarly issue of climate-change. Kahane gave his impressions of last year's Copenhagen Climate Summit, that (for someone whose career is devoted to "big picture" conflict resolution) was "...like being at the Olympics." He relayed a friend's comment on the intensity of those climate change negotiations: "It was like being in a class in which each student was deeply interested in the subject and everyone had read all the assigned materials."

Kahane described how the climate change conflict seemed to organize around the positions of two broadly opposing camps: The "Power" archetype and the "Love" archetype. In the "Power" camp, Kahane included major actors such as the U.S., China, and "Big Oil" — whose interests were driven largely by the imperatives for growth, development, sovereignty and security. (Discourse among this group focused on growth...their growth.) The "Love" camp included the "Greens," the Danish hosts, a multitude of smaller nations and the complex patchwork of NGOs and grassroots organizations. (Discourse within this faction focused on themes of interconnectedness and planetary health.)

"Shadow Sides" Of Power & Love Archetypes

Where there was conflict, Kahane observed, the archetypal "Power" players tended to view the archetypal "Love" players as unrealistic and irresponsible. For their part, "Love" players saw the "Power" block as often tyrannical and repressive. As Kahane reflected on the negotiations, "which were poised between breakdown and breakthrough," he saw an extreme example of the dynamics that characterize many other areas of conflict. On the face of it, balancing power and love may seem simple, but this process is made infinitely more complicated by the "shadow sides" of these archetypes. (When power is not tempered by love, it can degenerate into forms that are reckless, mechanical and abusive. When love is not tempered by power, it can degenerate into forms that are sentimental, anemic and without vitality, the author observed.)

"Choosing either power or love is always a mistake," Kahane said. "It is essential to balance power and love – and one must do this first as an individual before one can do it as a leader." How best to achieve this balance? Through awareness, practice and consciously strengthening the weaker of these two primal capacities. (Kahane told an anecdote about an Alcan corporate executive who was highly regarded for his managerial skills. When asked the secret of his success, the executive replied: "When I'm tempted to be tough, I counsel myself to be compassionate. When I'm tempted to be compassionate, I counsel myself to be tough.")

The central metaphor of "Power And Love" is "walking" – where power and love constitute the two "legs" necessary to move forward. (Having one really strong leg simply cannot get us where we want to go.) In this construct, people (and organizations) must be comfortable in "a perpetual state of imbalance" moving from one leg to the next. Within this framework exist organizations that have "fallen," are "stumbling," or are "walking" – and Kahane's book offers case histories and stories illustrating each of these states.

"Power And Love," is a field manual for social change — but don't expect to find a set of group exercises or tactical plans. Instead, you'll come away with a new "lens" for viewing conflict – a way of seeing that is easily grasped and applied, but whose subtleties will provide a never-ending source of questions and course-

corrections along the way.

"How To Change The World"

Full disclosure: I had the pleasure of having Adam as a client some years ago, when I helped him prepare a major presentation for a FASTCOMPANY conference. You can download the text of that presentation here: [How_to_change_the_world](#). And if you like that speech, you also will appreciate Adam's earlier book: "Solving Tough Problems." Here's an illustrative excerpt:

"We get stuck by holding on tightly to our opinions and plans and identities and truths. But when we relax and are present and open up our minds and hearts and wills, we get unstuck and we unstick the world around us. I have learned that the more open I am the more attentive I am to the way things are and could be, around me and inside me; the less attached I am to the way things ought to be the more effective I am in helping to bring forth new realities. And the more I work in this way, the more present and alive I feel. As I have learned to lower my defenses and open myself up, I have become increasingly able to help better futures be born."

PS: The book launch party was held in Harvard Square's emerging "Democracy Center," a former Harvard frat house that promises to be an exciting (and affordable) gathering space for social change organizations, non-profits and other relevant groups. Sponsor's for the event included The Berkana Institute, Pegasus Communications, the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL), and Reos Partners.

laura says

2.5 stars. The concept is such a necessary one and there are a few gems in the book for reflection and deep consideration. But the methodology of the book is a lot of case studies steeped in international consulting dynamics. 99% of this book is story telling, but stories that don't necessarily land and aren't applicable to most people. The 1% that shares powerful concepts and guidance is really valuable.

Myriam St-Denis Lisée says

Cité par Michel Venne à l'école d'été de l'INM, décidément je crois que ça vaudra la peine!

Gábor Vészi says

Very energizing and important message, but there were too many long and not too insightful examples from the author's carrier that mostly felt like "hey, I talked to world leaders about climate change, my ideas must be true".

Paige says

2 1/2 stars.

I mean, I don't think what he's saying is a bad idea at all; it's great. But I didn't really find the writing to my liking. It's a lot of 'this person did this, this person said that, a quote from a philosopher, love without power is sentimental and anemic!!!' (I cannot tell you how many times he said this last part--"love without power is sentimental and anemic"--I think it must have been at least a dozen.)

Also, I was hoping for more things that normal people could do. He's like, 'oh yeah there were ten of us and we raised millions of dollars.' ?!?! Qu'est-ce que c'est?! By that point I'd hope they already know everything in this book and have a much more rigorous analysis, much more complex ideas and lessons to impart. He gives you a brief rundown of some scenario-planning workshops but doesn't ever really get into any kind of details about *how* you do it--just that you should, and here are some vague examples of it happening, here's an outline of what it should look like, and, well, go on your merry way. I was much more interested in the psychology behind actually doing it, or people working together. I wrote down some names of other authors he cites that sound like they might be a little more up that alley.

Elan Bailey says

A compelling call for an integrated approach to social change and daily life.

Adam gives a compelling foray into the two energies needed to lead ourselves and others to a more generative future. Adam draws on his experiences at Shell, Generon and Reos, and his direct work with some of the world's leading change managers to help us discern the essence of power and love within us and around us. This book provides examples of the various forms of power: power to, power over, power within and power with. It also gives a compelling treatment of what it is to love without power.

Power and Love speaks to our human evolution, although Adam doesn't necessarily use that term. It walks us through the degenerative side of modernist consciousness, where power to without love has led to power over and mass exploitation of people and destruction of the world's resources. We also explore the degenerative side of love without power, where despite its good intentions, post-modern consciousness has largely ineffectual at bringing about the morality, fairness, justice and equality we need. Power and Love speaks to an Integral approach to addressing the problems we have created using a previously one-sided approach of power OR love.

If this book falls light anywhere, it is in not providing more explicit guidance on how to bring about the balance between the two energies of Power and Love. And perhaps that is the journey we each must discover for ourselves. I see power and love at the individual level, as the work we each must undertake as part of our evolution to return to a state of wholeness. And power and love at the collective level, as the work to include a widening circle of the earth and its people in our definition of oneness, and thereby take them into our consideration and care.
