

## “I felt so powerless”

I found myself using these words a few weeks ago. I can no longer remember the precise cause of the feeling: it could have been television news, perhaps shots of a hospital in the midst of a bombing raid by Syrian government forces; or a refugee camp; or rows and rows of coffins in Italy; or something nearer home perhaps - a friend who is ill; or nearer still: I can no longer take a bus into Oxford and have coffee with a friend.

And the powerlessness comes close to being in a state of fear, because one thing is certain: when all this is over, the world will be a different place, and I will have had no control over the changes that will have taken root.

Sometimes the powerlessness can lead to action, which may slightly counteract it. I make a donation to UNICEF; or I sign a petition, or go on a march. I focus my thoughts on “the others”, whoever they may be, and allow my righteous anger to have a meaningful outlet. I join an organisation such as Amnesty, or Extinction Rebellion, and take part in their campaigning. That may even make me feel a little better.

But all these things miss the fundamental point.

There is a scene in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, when Pierre is taken prisoner by French troops and locked up. He becomes friends with Platon, a simple Russian peasant who is also imprisoned. Platon, the peasant, has a profound effect on Pierre, the Count, and causes him to change radically. On the surface, he remains powerless. But at a deeper level he finds a power that is life-changing. And the interesting thing is that he doesn’t have to do anything to tap into these changes - almost the reverse in fact.

I had a coaching client a few years ago who had a senior position in a UK government body. He said to me, while we were talking about management issues, “the way to have power is to keep giving it away”. A good example, for me, of how we are helped by clients we are supposed to be helping.

How do we tap into this powerful powerlessness?

The answer is different for each one of us. But for everyone there are common factors. We must live from the Spirit. We accept our powerlessness. We search for, and eventually find, our spiritual home. We open our hearts to all that happens, moment by moment, just as Platon did. We each live by faith, prayer, and meditation, in whatever way is right for us. We send out our love to all other people, including those who seem to be diametrically opposed to us, such as Messrs Putin and Trump. We learn from them too, and from every single situation. We send out love, we receive love, weeping with those that weep, rejoicing with those that rejoice.

The powerlessness dissolves, as does the Self.

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