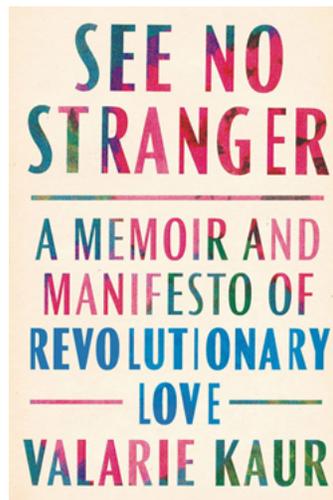




READER'S GUIDE: *SEE NO STRANGER*



In *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*, Valarie Kaur presents revolutionary love as the call of our time—a radical, joyful practice that extends to others, to our opponents, and to ourselves. In this guide, you'll find discussion and reflection questions as well as practices designed for you to dig deeper into Valarie's stories and into the framework of revolutionary love. We invite you to use this guide as a way to build community and integrate the practices of revolutionary love into your daily life.

Chapter-by-Chapter Discussion Questions & Practices

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Love for Others

Chapter 1: Wonder

- How does Valarie define revolutionary love? In what ways is this definition similar or different to the ways you were taught about love?
- How do Valarie's experiences as a woman of color, a Sikh, a mother, an activist and lawyer, inform her framework of revolutionary love? How do Valarie's life experience shape your understanding of revolutionary love?
- Valarie's religious identity as a Sikh influences her childhood and her interactions with others. How do you feel your identity (i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation) affected your childhood and your perspectives?
- In Chapter 1, Valarie writes, "Individual acts of love are not enough" (Kaur, 2020, p. 29). What do you think Valarie means by this statement? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- "The Sikh ideal was the *sant-sipahi*, the warrior-sage. The warrior fights. The sage loves. It was a path of revolutionary love" (Kaur, 2020, p. 15).
 - What does the warrior-sage mean to you? Are there any people in your life or leaders past or present that you consider a warrior-sage?
- "I had fallen for the great bribe of white supremacy: the promise of acceptance for people of color who put down other people of color" (Kaur, 2020, p. 16).
 - Are there times in your life when you've fallen for the bribe of white supremacy? For fellow people of color, how did this moment resonate with you?
- What does the practice of wonder look like in your life?
- Valarie writes, "Who we wonder about determines whose stories we hear and whose joy and pain we share. Those we grieve with, those we sit with and weep with are ultimately those we organize with and advocate for" (Kaur, 2020, p. 311). What group of "others" are you prepared and able to wonder about?

Practice: Wonder

- ❑ Writing exercise: In what ways was I taught about love? Who are the people in my life who taught me about love? What did I learn from them? In what ways do I express or show love to others?

- ❑ Daily practice: A simple exercise, with massive repetition, can help us to orient to the world with wonder. Seeing people in our daily lives and saying in our minds, "Sister, Brother, Sibling, Aunt, Uncle" can help us to wonder about each person. Or we can say, as we look upon other people's faces, "You are a part of me I do not yet know."

- ❑ This repetition can help us re-train our brains to "see no stranger." Notice what biases arise in this practice, and commit to the lifelong process of unlearning these biases.

- ❑ Explore histories that focus on groups who have traditionally not been included in our history books. Great places to start include [Zinn Education Project](#), [Facing History](#), [Facing Ourselves](#), *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi, and oral histories from [Voice of Witness](#).

Chapter 2: Grieve

- What was most surprising or memorable to you about Valarie's stories, post September 11, 2001?
- Valarie writes: "When we are brave enough to sit with our pain, it deepens our ability to sit with the pain of others. It shows us how to love them" (Kaur, 2020 p. 44). Are there times in your life that you've sat with your own pain? What did you learn from that experience?
- Was there a national moment of grief that you felt that the country did or did not grieve together properly? What could have been done differently?
- Valarie writes of the hate violence after 9/11 (and continuing to present day), "It did not have to be this way" (Kaur, 2020, p. 63). What could grieving with *all* Americans have looked like, after 9/11, including Sikh and Muslim Americans, "the ones who looked like the people we feared" (Kaur, 2020, p. 63)?
- Valarie writes, "It takes bravery to grieve well" (Kaur, 2020, p. 63). What does grieving with bravery look like? How can you be brave with your grief?
- What would it mean to grieve as a country with the families and communities that are losing people to police violence? How would that look different than today's experience? And how might grieving as a country change the course of our nation?

Practice: Grieve

- ❑ Sometimes, we may find that the stories of those we wonder about are too painful. Valarie says that sometimes, “I make excuses to turn back—‘It’s too overwhelming’ or ‘It’s not my place’—but I . . . remember that all I need to do is be present in their pain and find a way to grieve with them. If I can sit with their pain, I begin to ask ‘*What do they need?*’” (Kaur, 2020, p. 311).

- ❑ Think about who you feel the need to pay attention to in this moment. This may be a child, a coworker, or an organization. Begin to ask them, “What do you need?”

- ❑ If you are grieving others, especially members of communities harmed in acts of violence, send messages of love to those harmed. If possible, show up in person or online to public memorials or rallies to grieve with the living. Donate to funds to support these families and communities if you are able. Explore these communities’ histories to learn more about patterns of both historical violence and resilience.

Chapter 3: Fight

- Brynn and Valarie speak of “ancestral solidarity” (Kaur, 2020, p. 76). What does this term mean to them and how is this related to fighting against injustice?
- Have you experienced ancestral solidarity in your own family? Did your ancestors face injustices as well? How have your experiences of ancestral solidarity shaped your motivations in your life?
- What motivates you to show up and fight for a cause or to protect someone?
- Do you feel connection, empathy, and willingness to fight alongside others when you begin by grieving with them? If you have grieved with others how has that prepared you to fight for them?
- What are some national moments of grieving that motivated you to fight for others? What did you do to fight alongside them? (i.e. Columbine, school shootings, Orlando club shooting, Eric Garner, George Floyd, Oak Creek shooting, #OurThreeWinners)
- In this chapter, Valarie writes about fighting against injustice using the language both of love and of war (warriors, wielding swords and shields). Do you think these ideas are compatible? Why or why not?

Practice: Fight

☐ Writing Exercise:

☐ In what ways were you taught about fairness and justice? What issues do you care most deeply about?

☐ What skills and gifts do you have to offer to those you love? Who do you protect and fight for? What is your sword and shield? How will you fight?

What will you risk? If you feel overwhelmed, ask yourself, "What is my role in this moment?" (Kaur, 2020, p. 312).

In Valarie's words, remember that

you only have to shine your light in your corner of sky (Kaur, 2020).

☐ Work in solidarity with other communities by learning how to act as a strong ally or accomplice. Know that the act of allyship (or acting as an accomplice or co-conspirator, as Indigenous leaders offer) is necessary and requires both commitment and humility. One starting place is to follow activists and leaders on social media and then listen and learn, without intervening, about what communities need from allies. Follow those instructions. ***Do not expect communities who have experienced enduring violence to educate you about their experiences.

Love for Opponents

Chapter 4: Rage

- Valarie chooses the term “opponent” as opposed to “enemy” because enemy implies permanence but opponent is fluid. Valarie says, “we have a range of opponents at any given time, distant and near” (Kaur, 2020, p. 312). Have you experienced a time when those closest to you became opponents?
- Rage and love are often considered to be emotions that are incompatible with one another. Why is rage an important practice in loving opponents? In loving ourselves?
- Valarie says, “Just as we need accomplices to hold protected spaces where the most traumatized among us tend to our grief, so, too, do we need accomplices to stand by us when we express our rage, *and* help others to understand it” (Kaur, 2020, p.134). Who are your accomplices? How can you be an accomplice in others’ rage?
- Valarie writes,

Lorde asks us to tend to the rage within us as a symphony, ‘to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment.’ It is a rhythm: step away to *rage*, return to *listen*, and *reimagine* the solutions together. It becomes a kind of dance—to release raw rage in a safe container, in order to send divine rage into the world, like focused fury.” (Kaur, 2020, p. 134)

How do you understand this “dance” that Valarie describes?

- How does Valarie define “divine rage” (Kaur, 2020, p. 133)? How do you understand or relate to divine rage? Where are we witnessing or experiencing divine rage in the world right now?

Practice: Rage

- ❑ Writing Exercise: Valarie encourages us to engage our rage because “rage carries vital information” (Kaur, 2020, p. 313).
 - ❑ What safe ways can you engage your rage? Valarie encourages us to express our rage in a safe container: “a place where I can express my emotions that will cause no harm” (Kaur, 2020, p. 312). What or where is your safe container? This may be weeping, meditation, journaling, creating art, music, dance, therapies, rituals, or ceremonies. This may be a “planned tantrum” when you lie on your back, gently move your head left and right, pound the floor with your hands, and release whatever sounds emerge.
 - ❑ Ask yourself: “What information does my rage carry? What is it telling me? How do I want to release and/or harness this energy?” (Kaur, 2020, p. 131).
- ❑ Read about the transformative power of rage, especially the rage of Black women like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Brittney Cooper, and others. Recognize and name the roles of white supremacy that have suppressed the rage of people of color, throughout history and in present time.

Chapter 5: Listen

- Valarie writes, “No one should be asked to *feel* empathy or compassion for their oppressors. I have learned that we do not need to *feel* anything for our opponents at all in order to practice love. . . We just have to choose to wonder about them” (Kaur, 2020 p. 139). How do you relate to this statement? In what ways, if any, does this statement resonate or not with your experience?
- Valarie writes about the white evangelical man who tells her, after a screening of *Divided We Fall*, “you and I are not that different. I, too, am seen as an outsider” (Kaur, 2020, p. 147). Valarie writes that she offered an incomplete response to this man and instead “let it be a feel-good moment” (Kaur, 2020, p. 148). What do you think about their exchange, and Valarie’s reflections? How might you respond in a dialogue like this, and why?
- Valarie writes, “We can have all the empathy in the world for a group of people and still participate in the structures and systems that oppress them” (Kaur, 2020, p. 144). Can you think of examples from your own experience where you’ve seen this to be true? How could we make sure that our empathy translates into action?
- After Valarie’s encounter with the men at El Porto, she writes, “I had decided in the restaurant that it was safe enough for me to walk over to the men’s table. . . Someone had to tend to their wound. I’m just not sure it had to be me” (Kaur, 2020, p. 158). How do you understand Valarie’s statement? If you had been a bystander to this conversation, what actions (if any) might you take?
- What do you find most challenging about the practice of listening to opponents?

Practice: Listen

- ❑ If you are not in harm's way, ask yourself: Which opponents can I listen to? This could be someone in your family, a neighbor, or a social media influencer. How can my listening to opponents ease the burden of listening from those who might be directly harmed? Focus on listening as a way to inform your actions for justice, and be open to the possibility of cultivating additional, and sometimes unlikely, allies.
- ❑ Valarie says, "tending wounds is the practice of a community, not the sacrifice of an individual" (Kaur, 2020, p. 314). What does that mean to you? How can you practice love for an opponent without making a martyr of yourself?
- ❑ Writing Exercise:
 - ❑ What are your opponent's unmet needs?
 - ❑ Where does your wonder about your opponent lead you? Do you feel yourself tending to the wound?

Chapter 6: Reimagine

- Valarie writes, “We could resist with all our might and never deliver such a future. We needed to do more than *resist*. We needed to *reimagine* the world” (Kaur, 2020, p. 171). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? How is *reimagining* similar and different from *resisting*?
- What interested or surprised you about Valarie’s stories in fighting the East Haven Police Department, or her experiences at Guantanamo Bay, or Northern Supermax Prison? What did these three experiences teach Valarie about reimagining our world?
- How did you feel when you read about the prison guard’s comments about imprisoned people and his own experiences? Did it make you have more or less empathy for him?
- Valarie poses the question, “What would it take to free *all of us*—victims, oppressors, and witnesses—from institutions that organize violence?” (Kaur, 2020, p. 200). How would you respond to this question? What do you think it will take? What institutions need to be reimagined right now? What steps can you take in your life to free all of us?
- What do you think *reimagining* the world involves? If you could reimagine the world, built on the core values of justice, equity, and revolutionary love, what would that look like? What would that require of us, today, to build that world?
- How can we redirect our rage against racism from targeting individual people to targeting policies and systems?

Practice: Reimagine

☐ Writing Exercise:

- ☐ Imagine, collectively, the world that you want to see. Be as specific as possible. What does this world look like, feel like? What do systems of care, governance, justice, education, and healing look like?

- ☐ Work backwards from this vision: What do we need to do in present time, to move towards that world? Who is already doing the work and how can we work with or alongside them? How will we care for each other while we labor, so that we all will last?

- ☐ Read the works of visionaries and activists who model the power of radical imagination and action, such as Grace Lee Boggs, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, Adrienne Maree Brown, Mia Mingus, and others.

Love for Ourselves

Chapter 7: Breathe

- Valarie uses the metaphor of birthing to describe the practices of loving ourselves. In what ways, if any, does this metaphor speak to you?
- How does Valarie distinguish “love for ourselves” from other definitions of self care? In what ways is loving ourselves a form of labor? How do we transform self-love and self-care into a collective practice of love for ourselves?
- Valarie writes, “Listening to a story about mass violence is labor. But labor is bearable when we breathe together” (Kaur, 2020, p. 217). Do you have people who you can labor with in this way? When you are holding something heavy, what practices do you have?
- What moved or surprised you about the story of Oak Creek?
- Valarie writes, “For those of us who live in bodies that are denigrated by society, breathing like this is a *political* act. The world sends a barrage of signals that our bodies—as women, people of color, women of color, queer people, trans people, and disabled people—are not beautiful or strong or worthy of love” (Kaur, 2020, p. 216). How can you give yourself and your body acceptance, gratitude, and love?
- How do you understand *Chardi Kala*? Have you ever experienced this, or something like it?
- Valarie writes, “When asked why we should practice radical care for ourselves, Angela Davis responded with one word: ‘Longevity’” (Kaur, 2020, p. 248). How do you practice radical care for yourself to preserve your longevity?

Practice: Breathe

- ❑ Writing Exercise: Do a free write in response to the quotes below. Then spend some time reflecting on the ways you do or do not prioritize self-care. What gets in the way? What are some simple steps you could take to incorporate collective care in your life?
 - ❑ Audre Lorde said: “Caring for myself is not an act of self-indulgence, it is self preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (Kaur, 2020, p. 248).
 - ❑ When asked why we should practice radical care for ourselves, Angela Davis responded: “‘Longevity’ . . . As we struggle, we are attempting to presage the world to come,’ she said. ‘If we don’t start practicing collective self-care now, there is no way to imagine, much less reach, a time of freedom’” (Kaur, 2020, p. 248).

- ❑ Explore ancestral practices that might guide us in breathing collectively: How did our ancestors breathe together? What were their practices and rituals? Focus on practices from your own cultures.

- ❑ Protect a few moments daily to slow down and focus on taking one slow breath after another. If the physical act of breathing is difficult, consider these actions from disability justice educator Bianca Laureano: close your eyes, relax your face, loosen your jaw, curl your toes, scream, sip cold water.
 - ❑ Resist the practice of “spiritual bypassing”— the belief that we are changing the world by investing in our own spiritual wellness, even as we continue to participate in the same systems that cause harm to others. Ask yourself: In what ways does my wellness come at the expense of others? How can I support and fight for vulnerable groups so that we can all breathe, rest, and thrive?

Chapter 8: Push

- What does it mean to *push* as an act of revolutionary love?
- What do you think made Valarie's reconciliation with Roshan possible? What about this process was most striking to you?
- Through Valarie's stories, how do you understand the relationship between healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation? In what ways is forgiveness similar and different to reconciliation? Does one's healing depend on their ability to forgive and reconcile? Why or why not?
- What is the role of accountability in the practice of revolutionary love? What would accountability look like for our nation and its past and present wrongs? To whom do you hold yourself accountable, and how?

Practice: Push

- ❑ The practice of pushing is one of discernment. Cultivate your inner wisdom to be able to answer the cyclical questions: Is now a time for me to rest and breathe? Is now a time to push, for myself and others? Who is supporting me in this labor? Who am I providing support to?
- ❑ Explore and invest in healing practices that best serve you. These may include somatic trauma therapy, meditation, yoga, stretching, dance, running, acupuncture. If you are able, work to make these healing practices available and accessible to communities who need them.
- ❑ Explore the links between inequalities, healing, and justice, and support the work of communities of color actively practicing forms of transformative healing justice in movement building.

Chapter 9: Transition

- What does it mean to *transition* as an act of loving ourselves?
- Valarie describes the birth of her son, Kavi, and the stage of *transition* in the labor as the most dangerous and painful. How do you understand what *transition* means, metaphorically, for ourselves and our nation?
- How can understanding this stage of *transition* help us to respond to our political challenges in present time?
- What surprised or moved you about Rana and Valarie's conversation with Frank Roque? In what ways is this conversation similar or different to Valarie's conversation with Roshan in chapter 8? How do these two interactions (with Frank and with Roshan) illustrate the complexities of healing, forgiveness, and accountability?
- What did you know about Sikhs and Sikh Americans before reading this book? What did you learn?
- Other than Valarie herself, which person in the book was the most memorable or interesting to you? Why?
- Valarie writes of her practice of listening to her internal wisdom, whom she names the Wise Woman. She also names her inner voice—the one who tells her “I can't”—as her Little Critic. Can you relate to these internal voices? What are some of the messages that your “little critic” tells you? What are some of the wisdoms that your wisest self has to offer you? What are the ways you know how to summon your “Wise Woman”?
- Which of the following is most challenging for you to practice: love for others, love for opponents, or love for ourselves? Why?

Practice: Transition

- ❑ Cultivate a practice of listening to your deepest wisdom, the parts of yourself that are wise and brave and unfailingly loving. This might mean protecting a few minutes daily, if possible, to journal, or meditate, or draw or color or create—whatever gives you the stillness to quiet the noise of the world to listen to the wisest voice within you.

- ❑ As with every practice of revolutionary love, we must practice the labor of transition in community. Ask yourself: Who do I need with me so that I can stay in the labor of transition? Who can I support so that they can transition too?

Epilogue: Joy

- What was your experience of reading the book? What was memorable, surprising, or moving to you?
- In what ways do the stories of Joyce's death and Ananda's birth mirror the themes of the book as a whole?
- Valarie writes, "In the face of horrors visited upon our world daily. . . choosing to let in joy is a revolutionary act" (Kaur, 2020, p. 307). What do you think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree? Why? In what ways, if any, does this statement resonate with your experience?
- How do you seek or experience joy in your daily life? What are the barriers in your life to inviting in joy?
- What does the title of the book *See No Stranger* mean to you? What are the challenges and possibilities of "seeing no stranger" in your own life?

Practice: Joy

- ❑ Make noticing and protecting your joy a daily practice. This might start with gratitude for small things: a hot cup of tea, a warm exchange with a neighbor, the voice of a friend or loved one.

- ❑ Notice how joy feels in your body. Perhaps it is a lightness in your limb and sense of calm and ease. Ask yourself what people, places, actions bring you joy and remind you of what is good and beautiful and worth fighting for. Work to protect this joy, and to practice it, especially when things are hard. Share your joy in community.

For additional information about the framework of revolutionary love—including lessons on the revolutionary love compass and a downloadable educator's guide, [click here to explore our online Learning Hub!](#)

To learn more about our work, please visit [ValarieKaur.com](#) and follow along on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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