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Shift: Change Your Words, Change Your World

Janet Smith Warfield
Janet Smith Warfield, illustrator
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Exploring the power of words to shape experiences in the world, Smith Warfield, an author, poet, attorney, mediator, mother, and grandmother, acknowledges, “There is only one rule: use your words in ways that serve yourself, others, and our planet, not in ways that harm.” Like spending an afternoon with an exceptionally insightful friend who wears her mysticism with practical shoes, reading *Shift* opens readers to possibilities, clearly the author’s intention.

One of the author’s methods for unlocking those possibilities is questioning herself and readers throughout. Questions serve as wake-up calls to stir awareness and consciousness, as they address another challenge: The mystic experience is difficult to express in words. Questions can point the way.

The author shares some of her own mystic turning points in anecdotes and poems, asks questions, and explores dualities that sometimes get in the way of non-dualistic consciousness, her term for mystic experiences. She examines sixteen pairs of dichotomous terms including despair and joy, death and life, falsehood and truth, and science and religion, here concluding, “Both, if properly applied, are valid, creative vehicles for improving the human condition …Why not simply practice mutual respect and non-violence?”

Later chapters include insights on anger and inner peace, “Anger is always a messenger telling you there is something in your life you need to change.” She moves readers to consider, “Do you want to hang onto your anger and frustration?” She explains why focus can be so powerful saying, “When you focus on what you want and how you’re going to get there, your mind isn’t able to focus on what you don’t want…”

One of the most innovative discussions—possibly troubling to readers with fundamental religious views—covers functionality and nonfunctionality as more productive terms than good and evil. A BMW, she notes, when its tires are flat, its battery is disconnected, and is out of gas is not “evil.” It’s just not functional. So, too, with humans: The parts have to work individually and together. She adds, “Focus on becoming more functional…Stay serene and detached when others are upset and fighting.”

As much as she tries to clarify, the territory she claims in this book remains mysterious. Mystical experiences are not easy to put into words, although the author’s poems interspersed throughout give readers a richer experience and a taste of what the words point to. She addresses heady ideas like “transformed consciousness” in multiple ways, encouraging readers to embrace their own processes and possibilities for encountering mystic experiences, saying, “We are all on different paths to the same unifying consciousness.” Mysticism is ultimately experiential. To tread in this territory, it’s advisable to have as patient and wise a guide as Smith Warfield.
BOBBYE MIDDENDORF (June 7, 2007)

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