

The Seekers Forum Transcript

# Speaking Truth to Power: An Interview with Peter Buffett

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The Seekers Forum  
Awaken To Your Life

Peter Buffett is living proof that compassion and power can go hand in hand. The youngest son of investor Warren Buffett, Peter is an Emmy Award-winning musician and author who cares far more about healing the planet—particularly addressing the plight of women and girls—than he does about ego, status, or wealth. He is the co-chairman of the NoVo Foundation, an organization dedicated to catalyzing transformation in global society by moving from a culture of domination and exploitation to one of equality and partnership. Along with his wife Jennifer, Peter helps guide NoVo’s vision, strategic mission and program development. His first book, *Life is What You Make It: Find Your Own Path to Fulfillment* was a New York Times bestseller published in 2010 and translated into 15 languages. In the wake of the presidential election, I caught up with Peter to talk about the enigma of Donald J. Trump and the importance of speaking truth to power.

**MM:** Welcome, Peter Buffett. It’s so good to talk to you again. Thanks for taking the time.

**PB:** Absolutely. Thanks for having me on again. I appreciate it.

**MM:** Great. I’d like to talk today about power. There’s such a conflict and tension right now with the presidential campaign and this great power struggle that’s happening in our country ideologically as well as socially. I’d like to start by telling you something I heard the other night. I was having dinner with some other folks and somebody said that today, influence is the new power, that influence over money is really the new paradigm of power. Would you agree with that or disagree?

**PB:** Well, I guess I see it may be as part of a layered cake in terms of how people – it’s like an action step of power. Influence over things means, I think, that you have power over how different kinds of energy might be released in the world because when you hear someone saying that’s influence over money, that’s influence over – and I always hate to sound a little too New Agey or something – but it’s the energy of money being released into the system and where you put that. Now, that’s where the garden will grow. So, yes, I think influence is one way to exercise power, essentially. I think the challenge is whether – and this is a well-worn phrase at this point – whether it is power over or power with. I think to get right to the heart of it, I think that’s what I hope can be a shift in the world essentially.

**MM:** Say more about that, Peter: “power with, as opposed to power over.”

**PB:** Well, I think power “over” is pretty worn out at this point. It seems to be driving our very young species into a ditch because it’s from an old competitive, “there may not be enough” kind of framework and scarcity. So, power is used to control resources and, basically out of fear, there not being enough. Power “with” is you’ve already assumed there will be enough and that equitable distribution of things, whether it’s power itself or the various things we need to get through our daily lives, is shared because there is enough, because you’re actually thinking abundantly and safely as opposed to in fear. So,

I think power “with” is hopefully, and I think probably necessarily, evolutionarily where we’re going, where we need to go as a species to survive, frankly.

**MM:** Yes.

**PB:** Not to put too fine a point on it.

**MM:** No, I completely agree with that. What you’re talking about is a new paradigm of power which isn’t about self – us versus them; it’s a connective, empathic, more of a global look at power. Am I hearing you correctly?

**PB:** Yes and no. It is shifting a paradigm, absolutely, and shifting what you could also call the consciousness around what power is, but I think it’s actually going in reverse and saying that really true power, true collaborative nurturing, safe power that is a combining of forces can only, I think, happen on a pretty small scale. I think that what’s going on around us is a product mostly of scale and that things are too big and too centralized and too disassociated to be in relationship to each other. We don’t know where our food comes from. We don’t know a lot of things, finances. You could go on and on about centralized and, again, a “power over” kind of feeling.

So, I think that part of whatever shift is necessary is also very dependent on the scale on which it can be implemented, which is to say small, which is to say community and family and local and all these things that we seem to in our culture right now think that everything must be growing and bigger to matter, and therein lies a problem.

**MM:** So, it’s the power of small, smaller?

**PB:** It is. It’s small power “with” as opposed to big power “over” and the power, it’s still there but it emanates and disseminates in a very different way.

**MM:** Tell me, Peter, as a deep thinker, somebody who has a foundation, you’re involved in philanthropy as well as being an artist, when you look at what’s going on with this presidential campaign, what do you feel? Do you feel fear, do you feel dread, do you feel optimistic? What’s your gut sense?

**PB:** My gut sense is it’s necessary. There’s something necessary going on and if I’m too fearful or angry or scared (that’s fearful) I feel like I’m feeding it. Although it’s important to react to it (and if you see something, say something, in terms of what’s going on) at the same time, it’s got everybody to sit up a lot straighter and go, “Wait a minute, what is going on?” And where does this come from, and how did we miss that much anger and frustration and fear in a sector of the population that we kind of thought was okay in a way, or whatever. We didn’t think about it at all. I think that’s part of the point that nobody has fully voiced before, and I’m talking about now obviously Trump: a disaffection amongst a demographic that was clearly quiet in some way or another. So, it does feel, again, sort of like it’s necessary and it is borne out of a flawed – a wonderful idea, America – and all the things that have sprung forth over the past few hundred years

but also that there were some deep flaws in the beginning that now are starting to really show up.

**MM:** What you are saying is this anomaly of Trump, the rabble-rousing that's been going on has actually had an empowering effect on the left and on the consciousness movement?

**PB:** I think it has. I hate to give it too much credit. I do think that when things come into sharper focus, it gets everybody more focused as well, more clear on things that maybe were just under the surface or, yes, just somehow skewing along. It was a hundred years from the Civil War and civil rights. These things percolate or not depending on which end of the rope you're on. They can go on for quite some time until finally somebody says, "Hey, wait a minute." And it's too bad that it takes egregious behavior or some kind of crisis to get people to sit up and take notice. But if that's what it takes, well here we are. It's time to do something about it.

**MM:** Great, great. Tell me, Peter, I just want to change subjects for a bit. Is there an antidote to greed, do you think?

**PB:** What a great question. I think the antidote to any symptom, which I think greed must be of ultimately fear, scarcity – I don't know where patriarchy falls ultimately within that, whether it's a symptom of fear or the other way around – however it works, I think it's ultimately love, bottom line, and then compassion, understanding, respect, honor and all those things that come from a loving place. So, greed is, again, just a symptom of this larger force that can only be dispelled through a loving and kind nature. It's basic Buddhism, I guess. I think that's the only antidote. I think that we have to be in abundance and recognize that we're just a small little piece of this big thing that's moving along the biosphere, earth, evolution, consciousness and we'd better humble ourselves and start loving each other. Again, I feel like I'm a hippie in the woods but, yes, I've become a hippie in the woods.

**MM:** Actually, it makes total sense. It's very sane and that was beautifully said. Tell me, Peter, what can man learn from women about power?

**PB:** Well, again, I try and shy a little bit away from making it a gender which I understand why you do that and why anybody would do that. But the thing I've learned is that we are whole, each one of us, and that includes a masculine and a feminine side that is slowly or not so slowly rung out of us, depending on which gender you are. But specifically men at an earlier age, I think, get the feminine aspects of them which does make them whole rung out of them in a variety of ways.

So, what men can learn from women about power is... how do you say that? It's really acknowledging maybe what constitutes a power in relationship and in, again, loving relationship and life force versus power that is fearful and afraid. Women are – they give birth. They have a connection to life form, life force, nurturing. They have a connection that men don't have. It doesn't mean one's better or more important or whatever; it's just

that it's a difference. That's where men can learn what attention to life force or nurturing life force can do for all of us

How do I say it? I mean, it's – you know, what I've seen is women essentially martyr themselves for the good of the future and the good of their children and, again, the good of love. And that's not good. That shouldn't be happening but it shows you the strength of it and the power of it, and the fact that it will take over oftentimes a woman's sense of her own survival. In fact, men have taken advantage of that for hundreds and probably thousands of years. So, men can learn a lot about the importance of nurturing and, yes, just a loving nature and being in relation to life force versus fear, and power “over,” again.

**MM:** I remember years ago you said something I've never forgotten. You said men are afraid of women because of their intuition, that men fear women's intuition. I'm wondering about intuition and power. What's that connection, do you think?

**PB:** Well, I think that women are, because they're so trained – and, again, I'm generalizing and somebody could take this and turn it all upside down and the wrong way – but women, because they are so connected to life force, their intuition is stronger because they are trained to be on the look-out and protect, among other things. Men do too but there's a different quality to women. If you can intuit well, you're essentially meeting the future faster. I think that's what I said before too; you are tuned in, in a way, that I believe all of us were early in our development and we've lost it over time as other things have come into play. Yes, it's very powerful if you can hone and improve, really trust, ultimately, your intuition and its strength.

That is powerful and I think that men have shunted that in so many ways over the past few hundred years, in particular, but really science and certain things that are good and important but they square off the circle of life. I don't know how else to explain it, but, yes, there's great power in that and I think men do fear that. I also think that men – I might be going off on a tangent here too much, so stop me if you have other questions you'd rather ask.

**MM:** No, go right ahead.

**PB:** It's become clear that since the Industrial Revolution, you know, two hundred years ago, we were all farming, we were all busy, we all had a role to play. We worked hard. The home was a unit of production really; food and all the things we needed we made and we were connected to and, again, we felt purposeful in our evolution and taking care of our kids. When the Industrial Revolution came along, it did all the work that most of the men did, or a lot of the work. So, suddenly in the early twentieth century there were thousands and thousands of men with, essentially, nothing to do because the farm work was being handled by machines and all the other work too was being handled by machines. So, it's no surprise that if you look at the development of the economy, of consumerism, of all these things that have gotten out of hand over the last hundred and something years, it's when men were purposeless, when they didn't actually have a

legitimate reason quite literally to be moving the species forward because the machines were doing all the hard work.

I think what you've got is a current system that's made up – now, science and technology and certain things still leave some gaps, so it's not as if everybody was sitting around doing nothing – but the bureaucracy and the whole structure of our culture is basically built out of men trying to be legitimate and making things up so they look important.

**MM:** That's so interesting.

**PB:** It feels somewhat undeniable. The more history I read, the more everything seems to point to the same thing. It's like we have got a whole bunch of men trying to be important. Of course, what would come up with Trump better than that? It seems almost inevitable that you'd end up getting this guy blowing himself up in terms of how important and amazing he is.

**MM:** That's absolutely true. Let me ask you one last question, Peter. It really concerns conscience. You're in a unique position to be able to help. I wonder, is there ever a struggle around whom to give to, whom to help? How do you square that circle, so to speak?

**PB:** It's incredibly difficult because of the time we're in, more than anything else. There are so many people in the communities in need, organizations in need, people that are getting up every day, fighting a fight and doing amazing, beautiful things just to keep the world from not hurting a little bit more today than yesterday and so it's difficult. What you try to do is create an organization that is some reflection of the world you want to feed better, make better. I don't know how to say it. It's to create conditions, we talk about creating conditions for change. It's growing vegetables. The farmer doesn't grow vegetables; he creates the conditions so the vegetables can grow themselves.

We have a staff at the organization that has a deeply felt knowledge and understanding of some of the communities we're going into to try and support. Then you also start from the bottom up, so you ask people themselves. You don't walk in like a colonial mindset and say, "We know your problem and we're going to fix it," and all that. You shift the dynamic as much as you can, so you're hearing truth from people that have lived experience and then you try and identify where can the money go to really create conditions for true systemic change. That's the hardest part because we're all inside a structure and it's not easy to get structural with everything but we try our best so that we're listening intently and honoring the experience and then looking to see what may be on the surface looks like one thing but it's actually a much larger thing. Can we get to that? Can we shift the leverage there? And we're constantly learning and trying to get better at that.

**MM:** Great. Well, you do fantastic work in the world, Peter, and I wish you great luck. I'll talk to you again really soon.

**PB:** Thank you so much. I wish us all luck at this point. Yes, may we have a beautiful, great future ahead of us.

**MM:** Absolutely, my friend. Thank you.