



*When the World Breaks Open*  
A Memoir by Seema Reza  
ISBN 978-1-59709-744-4  
Binding: Tradepaper  
Size: 5 x 8; Pages: 240  
Price: US \$15.95  
Pub Date: March 8, 2016



Seema Reza

A *New Pages* Editors' Pick!

Recent media in NPR, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Elephant Journal*, and *Entropy*.



**For more information contact:**

Alisa Trager  
Marketing Associate  
Marketing@redhen.org

Rebecca Baumann  
Publicist  
Publicity@redhen.org

Distributed to the book trade by:  
Ingram Publisher Services  
Tel: 800-252-7012  
ips@ingramcontent.com  
ipage.ingramcontent.com

# *When the World Breaks Open*

A MEMOIR BY  
Seema Reza

---

In this poignant and unabashed self-examination, Seema Reza uncovers the lessons she learned through motherhood and a failed marriage, and how she used her discoveries to make a meaningful difference in the world.

---

*When the World Breaks Open* is a non-linear narrative memoir that traces Seema Reza's journey from being a suburban mom to using her own lessons to build a unique writing and art program in military hospitals. Reza exposes her triumphs and fears and regret through the dissolution of a dysfunctional marriage, and investigates her own experiences and societal attitudes towards loss, love, motherhood and community, undermining the idea that strength requires silence. There is a revelatory quality to the writing, as Reza exposes her own weaknesses and regrets and investigates their sources. As she wonders, she displays a trust in the intelligence of the reader, providing space to explore these themes alongside her, inviting both identification and immersion.

## **Praise for *When the World Breaks Open***

"*When the World Breaks Open* is one of the best books of 2016."

—*Words on a Wire*, NPR

"The author writes with self-lacerating honesty. . . . Blurring boundaries, Reza exercises literary license and often writes with poetic power."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Reading *When The World Breaks Open* at first pleases; here's a poet who actually took her time and gave the word integrity the serious treatment it deserves—after all, the book is infinitely universal, as it is about human relationship, love, betrayal, trust, defiance, empowerment, sorrow . . . one could go on; one respects not only her precise craft but also her thoroughness. . . . Read it, pass it on, share it with your friends, savor it, smell it, throw it, embrace it, pick it up and read a little and lay it down within reach to pick up another time—it's one of those books, there when we need it to shed a little light on life's ups and downs."

—Jimmy Santiago Baca

## **Biographical Note**

Seema Reza is a poet and essayist based outside of Washington, DC, where she coordinates and facilitates a unique hospital arts program that encourages the use of the arts as a tool for narration, self-care and socialization among a military population struggling with emotional and physical injuries. An alumnus of VONA and Goddard College, she was awarded the 2015 Col John Gioia Patriot Award by USO of Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore for her work with service members.



*When the World Breaks Open*  
A Memoir by Seema Reza  
ISBN 978-1-59709-744-4  
Binding: Tradepaper  
Size: 5 x 8; Pages: 240  
Price: US \$15.95  
Pub Date: March 8, 2016



Seema Reza

A *New Pages* Editors' Pick!

Recent media in NPR, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Elephant Journal*, and *Entropy*.



**For more information contact:**

Alisa Trager  
Marketing Associate  
Marketing@redhen.org

Rebecca Baumann  
Publicist  
Publicity@redhen.org

Distributed to the book trade by:  
Ingram Publisher Services  
Tel: 800-252-7012  
ips@ingramcontent.com  
ipage.ingramcontent.com

**More Praise for *When the World Breaks Open***

“Seema Reza delivers. *When the World Breaks Open* is a searing song of motherhood, love and redemption through art. Her sons, the death of her marriage, the birth of her courageous artist self is a testimony in which she finds the skin, questions faith, reverberates a familial tongue and rises, yes—rises in a stumbling glory.”

—Mahogany L. Browne

“You would be hard pressed to find a debut book with as much guts, honesty, and wisdom as Seema Reza’s *When the World Breaks Open*. Written in sparse, atomic epiphanies, she focuses the lens inward, and the result is a raw, emotional ethnography of the human heart. . . . As with Jong, Cisneros, Rich, I predict that Reza is a name we will hear and follow for decades to come.”

—Tim Z. Hernandez, author of *Mañana Means Heaven*

**From *When the World Breaks Open***

*Homeostasis is the ability of the body or a cell to seek and maintain a condition of equilibrium or stability within its internal environment when dealing with external changes.* All horrors can be absorbed. Even the shock of poverty wears off. Before this happens, every sight feels like a slug to the chest. It takes more than an hour to travel three miles by automobile in the city at some times of day, and through the windows of the car I watch children carrying babies on their hips. Thirty-six percent of the population in Dhaka is under twelve. Kids tap on my window and beg and wave sheets of cheap stickers that I buy. I watch a child of two or three squat and have a bowel movement on the sidewalk. His mother picks up a green foil potato chip bag from the gutter and wipes him with it and then picks up the feces. Every day, I cry.

At a point in each trip, my heart begins to encase itself in armor: the working children who serve tea and cold drinks in households I visit socially, the mothers begging for rice to feed their babies, the haggard looking men and women breaking bricks by hand in the hot sun become nearly invisible. I realize the magnitude of the problem, recognize my own limitations and then give up and go about my own business. I talk on the phone or read a novel in traffic. I dip an edge of my cotton scarf in perfume and breathe through it when we pass through an especially malodorous part of the city. I adapt.

Soon, I begin to pick out beauty, find reasons to smile. The flowers, sticky fragrant, arranged in baskets to fan like peacock displays in neighborhood shops on nearly every main street. I admire the painted designs on the backs of bicycle rickshaws, the strings of lights spilling over the sides of wedding halls, the colorful bolts of checkered woven and floral printed fabrics stacked in the markets. I make offerings of paper boxes of milk and foil packages of biscuits to children in the street to ease my conscience, and feel good about what I’ve done. This skin of optimism is thin, permeable. I go shopping with my mother and am suddenly faced with a child of nine or ten, the same age as my older son, pulling antiques from a case and presenting them to me. I smile and ask whether he goes to school. His smile fades, and I realize I have embarrassed him. My chest constricts.