

Submission for “Space for Reflection” in the April 2 edition of The Current

The Secret to What, Exactly?

Have you heard the buzz about *The Secret*? It’s currently #1 on both *The New York Times* Best Seller List in the advice category and on Amazon.com’s DVD bestseller list. Oprah dedicated two shows to the subject over the past month or so. Apparently, first there was the DVD, then came the book, and now there are several related audio and hardcover books and study “kits,” including “The Ultimate Attractor Pack” for either men or women. When a NSU professor, Dr. Debra Nixon, offered to lead a discussion about *The Secret* and Christianity in the Spiritual Life Lounge on April 4th, I realized it was time for me to check out this phenomenon for myself.

Watching the DVD, I felt a wide range of emotions: curiosity, skepticism, irritation, inspiration. The message is presented documentary-style. A series of clips from interviews are interspersed with highlighted points about what the secret is and how it works. Those interviewed include the creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series, the author of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, and various motivational speakers.

The speakers on the DVD don’t claim to be presenting a new concept, but rather insist that their message is based on a universal principle: the law of attraction. One speaker refers to it as “like attracts like.” Another uses a phrase from the familiar children’s story of Aladdin and the magic lamp, and asserts that the universe is always saying to each one of us, “Your wish is my command.” The idea is that our thoughts—conscious or unconscious, positive or negative—determine our experience.

There are parts of *The Secret* that resonate with me. I do believe that our thoughts have an impact on our experience. I do believe that as we are consciously grateful, we see more evidence of good in our lives. I can also appreciate the idea that unless we clearly identify our hopes and goals, it is hard to achieve them. So to the degree that *The Secret* empowers viewers/readers/listeners to have hope and to see themselves as able to positively impact their own lives, I support it. It’s hugely important for people to be aware of the content and quality of their thoughts—not only for themselves, but for the larger society. I found myself agreeing when someone on the DVD said, “When you want to change your circumstances, you must first change your thinking.”

Other aspects of *The Secret*, however, strike me as immature, materialistic, and simplistic. Those interviewed on the DVD affirm that “everything that comes into your life, you’re attracting into your life by the images you hold in your mind.” Does this apply to Jessica Lunsford, the eight-year-old Florida girl who was kidnapped from her bed, raped, and buried alive in a plastic bag? Did she bring that into her experience due to her thoughts? Did Elizabeth Edwards cause cancer to return in an incurable form? To me, it’s cruel to suggest that; it’s a form of blaming the victim.

The promoters of *The Secret* say this philosophy is based on science and that “it always works; it works every time, for every person.” It presents a woman looking intently into the window of a jewelry store at a necklace, and later shows a man giving her that very same necklace. Does this mean a woman living in a refugee camp in Sudan who holds in her mind the thought off the coast of southern France on a luxury yacht will

have that come about if she just believes hard enough? The answer according to *The Secret* is Yes! The speakers liken it to placing an order out of a catalogue.

The process is described as including three steps: Ask, Believe, Receive. One speaker calls this “the creative process.” I am not dismissing this. I have had the experience of praying over a desired step, gaining the conviction that it was the right thing to do, and going forward based on faith with successful results in spite of challenging circumstances. So I have seen the power of acting on good intentions. For me, the power came from the fact that the desired goal was in line with God’s will, as I understood it. But much of what is presented in *The Secret* seems petty and selfish. The DVD advises looking at the backs of your hands, closing your eyes, and imaging yourself driving your dream car. You have to be sure and really feel it, though! Before you know it, you will be driving that car. Stop thinking about debt, start picturing checks coming in the mail, and you will surely start to get checks in the mail. In another scene, one of the experts counsels a man who wants a more active love life to paint a picture of himself with three women. One year later, he brags that he is dating three different women every week, and that they are all fighting over him. And this is good for whom, exactly?

I guess my last comment reflects a moral judgment, and I think that’s where some people have problems with *The Secret*. Is it appropriate to urge someone to pursue whatever he wants, if what he wants could hurt himself or someone else? Is it really the purpose of the universe for us to focus on our materialistic desires? For those who are oppressed by structural violence, or by warfare and poverty, does it make sense to speak in terms of simply asking and believing in order to receive health and wealth?

The Secret has some valuable, practical insights. I can see why it’s popular. But I’m really glad Dr. Nixon is providing a forum for the NSU community to look at some of the questions raised by *The Secret*. It should be a great discussion, and I hope you will be a part of it on April 4th at 5 PM in the Spiritual Life Lounge.

Robin Cooper
G.A. for Multicultural and Spiritual Affairs
robicoop@nsu.nova.edu
954-262-7253