

The Green Bough

"If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come." -Chinese proverb
Weekly postings by Oriah, author of the bestselling books *The Invitation*; *The Dance*; and *The Call*. Oriah will post on Wednesdays, and occasionally check for and respond to comments. For more information see her website www.oriah.org by clicking on her photo below.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2012

➔ Getting Conned: Reflections on "Karmageddon"

When I posted a link to the trailer for *Karmageddon* on FB (see link below)- a film made by my friend Jeff Brown about his personal journey and struggle with becoming enamoured and then disillusioned with a guru- I received a number of messages from folks wondering how anyone could become a devotee of any guru. Many implicitly or explicitly asserted that they would *never* find themselves in that position (because they are smarter, more savvy, educated, connected to Spirit and self-aware than "those people" who do.)

There is no them and us. It's all us. We are "those people." Who amongst us has not bought something we did not need and/or could not afford because we were "sold" on it or fallen in love and imagined growing old with someone who turned out to be other than they seemed? Beguiling gurus and tempting teachers are, above all else, skilled and often naturally charismatic sales people who read others well.

Years ago I worked with a spiritual teacher who was a brilliant healer and shaman. He was also a human being- deeply flawed in ways that, as so often happens when imperfect humans have power over others, lead to actions that harmed some. He, like Bhagavan Das, the guru Jeff chronicles in *Karmageddon*, was open and honest about his proclivity for having sex with students. For both men, honesty was their alibi, a way to justify the narcissistic misuse of others.

There are three primary reasons why people- intelligent, savvy, heart-full people like us- commit to a teacher or path that is not quite what it seems: 1) Early on in our encounter we have an experience that profoundly moves and opens us; 2) We have a genuine desire to make a deeper commitment to a life centred in spirituality and to loosen the grip of adhering to social and psychological "shoulds;" and 3) We are seeking healing for early wounds through the usually unconscious projection of mother or father onto the teacher/guru (as we can also do with projections onto lovers, therapists, husbands, wives, friends, celebrities etc.)

In the film Jeff says about Bhagavan Das, "When I'm in

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photo by Sophie Hogan 2009

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that man's presence, I feel he is connected to the Mother like no human I have ever encountered!" That's what happens: a direct experience of Spirit that cracks us open. Oh, it's easy to point out that this experience is not something the teacher or guru gives us, but our own connection to Spirit- but the understandable impulse is to want to stay close to the setting, teacher or practices where we have been given a glimpse of the divine, been cracked open to our own deeper experience.


We want to commit. Completely. In some ways the more the teacher lives in a way that defies cultural norms the more he or she seems to offer an opportunity to live our desire to devote ourselves to what matters more than social convention and mundane daily concerns. What saved me was that I had children- and nothing trumped my love for them. When the teacher with whom I was studying began to ask for a commitment that compromised mothering my sons, I woke up and walked away.

In this film we journey with Jeff as he struggles with the guru's inconsistencies, as he travels to seek counsel from others, some of whom waffle all over the place, while others- Sean Corn, Wah! and Ram Dass- offer clear, heartfelt honesty about the damage that can and often is done by ordinary humans masquerading as enlightened beings. Jeff had already done a lot of psychological work and so is somewhat known to himself, aware of his own wounding. With this awareness, realizing the truth of his relationship to Bhagavan Das is as inevitable as it is painful.

Jeff offers us a great gift in taking us with him on this very personal journey in *Karmageddon*. If we can watch the film and resist the urge to distance ourselves, to pretend we have never been or could never be fooled, Jeff's story offers us insight and prompts reflection into the places where we have "bought" what was false out of a genuine hunger and sometimes momentary unconsciousness that makes us vulnerable to con artists within or around us.

Oriah (c) 2012

(Trailer is at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=wEn8EiF8pb8)

Posted by Oriah at 8:12 AM 

32 comments:



Becky [June 27, 2012 8:35 AM](#)

Wonderful blog this morning, Oriah, thank you so much. This of course is my story as well; I was in a 12 step recovery program for many years. I loved the connection I found, and followed their dictates without questioning anything for a long

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