

A Review of

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## ***THE SECRET***

(DVD) Directed by Drew Hariot. Drew Pictures. 2006.

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*The Secret* has become an absolute sensation in the United States since its release in 2006; the DVD is a cultural phenomenon and the book is a runaway bestseller. Oprah dedicated two shows to *The Secret* with Ellen DeGeneres and Larry King soon following with their own. Oprah's Midas touch heightened and solidified its popularity. As she stated on her show of February 8, 2007, "my guests today believe that once you discover the secret that you can immediately start creating the life you want whether it's getting out of debt, whether it's finding a more fulfilling job, even falling in love. They say you can have it all and, in fact, you already hold the power to make that happen."<sup>1</sup>

Oprah interviews Rhonda Byrne, the Australian writer and producer responsible for *The Secret*, as well as several of the other "teachers of the secret" who make appearances in the film. Oprah states on the show, "I realized I've always lived by the secret, I didn't know it was a secret."<sup>2</sup> Her statement hints at the almost pathetic simplicity of *The Secret*, which is based on what the film calls the Law of Attraction. The Law states that we attract into our lives what we feel and what we think. If we believe that we will pass an exam, we elevate the possibility of it actually happening. If we feel that we are not qualified for a job as we enter the interview session, that negative energy will heighten the probability that the interviewer will think the same thing. In other words, as Byrne tells Oprah, "whether we realize it or not, the Law of Attraction is working all of the time."<sup>3</sup>

Individuals like Jack Canfield, co-creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, have, in subsequent interviews, laid claim to several famous people as practitioners of the secret: Mother Theresa, Plato, Emerson, Shakespeare, etc. The "teachers of the secret" are in a very secure position: if individuals are successful, then it is because they used the secret; and if they are not successful, then it is because they do not know the secret or are using it improperly. Thus, the only way to know for sure whether the secret works is to look at successful people. Someone for whom the secret does not work is simply not using it effectively. Thus, the secret can never be proven wrong because it is backed by a circular logic. As Byrne states in the film, "you see Law of Attraction evidenced in your society when you see that the one who speaks most of illness has it, when you see that the one who speaks most of prosperity has it...everything that you bring into your experience, you bring because of this powerful Law of Attraction."<sup>4</sup>

The premise of *The Secret* places an enormous amount of creative power in the individual. For

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<sup>1</sup> "The Secret," *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Oprah Winfrey, Rhonda Byrne, et al. American Broadcasting Company, February 8 2007, 01:06-01:24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 03:15-03:19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 03:45-03:50.

<sup>4</sup> *The Secret*, DVD, directed by Drew Hariot (Australia/USA: Drew Pictures, 2006), 11:45-12:16.

example, a woman is shown in the film looking into a jewelry store window and coveting a particular necklace. The next frame of the film depicts her partner presenting her with that exact necklace. In other words, the covetous energy that she sent out into the universe somehow brought the necklace to her. Most of us would consider this a coincidence or evidence that our partner knows us very well. *The Secret*, however, sees every thought, positive or negative, as a particle of energy that has powerful magnetic qualities.

Viewers of *The Secret* should be reminded of a similar film released in 2004 entitled *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*<sup>5</sup> Many individuals featured in *What the Bleep* also make appearances in *The Secret* and both films tout virtually the same message: you are the creator of your own reality. Watching both films again, I started to think that the only real difference between the two films is that *Bleep* uses the word "create" while *The Secret* uses "attract." *What the Bleep* makes four interrelated arguments: (1) quantum mechanics is about possibilities. The wave-particle duality has shown us that electrons can behave as waves or as particles depending on whether or not they are being observed. (2) This essentially means that we are creating our daily reality as we choose moment-to-moment one among the countless possibilities available to us. (3) We keep creating the same realities for ourselves because we fail to recognize that we can create something better. (4) By envisioning something better and by maintaining a healthy attitude, we can create new realities for ourselves. Better choices will lead to a better life. *The Secret* is also firmly based on the truth of these four claims.

As physicist Amit Goswami states in *Bleep*, "Quantum physics, very succinctly speaking, is the physics of possibilities."<sup>6</sup> This belief rests on the wave-particle duality of quantum mechanics: electrons may behave as waves or as particles. As waves, they have no locality but exist in a 'probability field' or as possibilities. When electrons are not observed, they exist as waves in these fields of possibility. When they are observed, the probability field collapses and takes on the form of a particle with a solid existence in space and time. In other words, it is the mind that exerts power over nature; the mind is more than a passive recipient of signals sent from the outside world. Both films repeatedly attempt to reform our thinking in relation to the world around us. As Goswami states in *Bleep*, "we all have a habit of thinking that everything around is already a thing existing without my input, without my choice. We have to banish that kind of thinking. Instead, you really have to recognize that even the material world around us, the chairs, the tables, the rooms...are nothing but possible movements of consciousness. And I'm choosing moment to moment out of those movements to bring my actual experience into manifestation."<sup>7</sup>

Although both films argue that we are the creators of our reality, only *The Secret* lays out an action plan. The film states that the creative process has three stages: (1) ask for what you want. You must think about what you want, write it down, and go on acting as if you already have it. As Joe Vitale, a 'metaphysician' featured in the film states, "This is like having the universe as your catalogue and you flip through it and you go 'well I'd like to have this experience,' and 'I'd like to have that product' and 'I'd like to have a person like that.' It is you just placing your order with the universe. It's really *that* easy."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*, DVD, directed by William Arntz, Betty Chasse and Mark Vicente (Portland, OR: Lord of the Wind Films, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 04:08-04:19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:57-26:31.

<sup>8</sup> *The Secret*, DVD, 24:35-24:50.

The second stage is (2) the universe responds to what you are asking. "And the universe will start to rearrange itself to make it happen for you."<sup>9</sup> The teachers in the film state that the universe will *always* give you what you ask for. But, there is a third stage, which is (3) receiving. "You must bring yourself into alignment with what you are asking for."<sup>10</sup> What this cryptic statement means is that you have to generate inside of you the feelings you would have if you actually had what you were asking for. In other words, as the film states, "go test drive that car, go shop for that home, get in the house. Do whatever you have to do to generate the feelings of having it now and remember them."<sup>11</sup>

*The Secret* also features various "powerful processes" by which individuals can begin to realign the way they live their lives. The first process is maintaining a constant state of gratitude for the things you already have instead of simply focusing on what you lack. Another powerful process is visualization. As in *What the Bleep*, the argument is made that the brain cannot differentiate between what it sees and what it experiences. Both films recount the experiment where certain individuals were hooked up to PET scans and asked to *imagine* various objects as scientists examined the areas of the brain that became activated. These same individuals were then asked to *look at* these objects. Scientists found that the same areas of the brain "light up" regardless of whether the individual is looking at something or simply imagining it. Thus, by visualizing what you want, you can prepare yourself for actually receiving it. Both films also make clear that positive thinking alone is insufficient, one must also *feel* all of the emotions you would feel if you already had what you desired.

Emotions are very important for the message of both films. They serve as a "feedback mechanism" telling us that certain thoughts are in line with what we want. Esther Hicks, a channeller, motivational speaker and author, states that "there are only two emotions from our perspective, one feels good and one feels bad. You call them all sorts of different things but essentially all of those negative emotions whether you call it guilt, or anger, or frustration, all feel much the same. They do not feel good. And all of those are guidance saying that which you are thinking about right now is not in line with what you are really wanting."<sup>12</sup> Bob Doyle, author of *Wealth Beyond Reason*, states it even more succinctly: "What am I attracting right now? How do you feel? I feel good! Well good, keep doing that!"<sup>13</sup>

As other commentators have noted, both films are closely tied to the New Age movement in the United States. The perennialist, individualistic focus on spirituality that both films exemplify arises out of seeds planted during the New Age movement, particularly the Human Potential Movement. Instead of taking direct action to help cure the ills of society, members of the Human Potential Movement seek to elevate themselves as individuals and reach their full potential as a necessary first step towards societal transformation. The Movement does not have a single founder or a single place of residence, but it has been a significant presence in American culture for the last few decades. One of its fundamental characteristics is its syncretistic nature; there is an eager borrowing and melding process that is foundational to the movement. Both *The Secret* and *What the Bleep* are undoubtedly the offspring of the Human Potential Movement, creating a synthesis of various elements including quantum physics,

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:07–25:12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 26:07–26:12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:31–27:40.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16:36–17:03.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:31–17:34.

individualism and Eastern religions.

Members of Human Potential Movements generally speak of being focused on the attainment of happiness, of moving away from self-erected roadblocks, and practicing gestalt consciousness. Gestalt consciousness is focused on achieving greater insight into the self and one's body, on feeling one with the universe, nurturing a sense of wonder, enjoying the sacredness of everyday occurrences, and achieving one's true potential. So, what the bleep should we do now that the secret is out? Jack Canfield summarizes: "Decide what you want. Believe you can have it. Believe you deserve it and believe it's possible for you. And then, close your eyes everyday for several minutes and visualize having what you already want and feeling the feelings of already having it. Come out of that and focus on what you're grateful for already. And really enjoy it. And then go into your day and release it to the universe and trust that the universe will figure out how to manifest it."<sup>14</sup> In other words, learn to be effective creators and your destiny will be what you make of it.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 44:16-44:45.

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