

The Dirty Secret

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By now, many of you have seen the film, "[The Secret](#)", which is all the rage among New Agers and Oprah fans. There is much to like about this film. It explains, perhaps for the first time to a mass audience, the powerful "*law of attraction*" and how you can use it to manifest success and abundance in all the domains of your life: money, career, relationships, etc. Of course, the idea that this law is a secret is more than a bit hyperbolic. The law of attraction has been well known for ages and well documented by many philosophers and theologians. The fact that the film and its accoutrement—books, CD's, and the like—pull on the rising credibility of quantum physics for sustenance is also a bit of a stretch. Quantum physics theories demonstrate that the mind of the observer does, in fact, impact the thing observed, but only when doing experiments at a sub-atomic level.

It has never been shown that our thoughts can actually influence a plane flying overhead (thank God for that, eh?) or stop a car crash. The idea that focusing your thinking on manifesting a bigger house will actually bring you a bigger house, well, no quantum physicist is going to consider this anything more than New Age bunk. No matter. The point of the film is still valid: what we manifest and experience in the world is very much a result of how we think/feel about it, and this is something that we can actively CHOOSE on a minute-by-minute basis.

So, in sum, I like the film. I will recommend it to my clients, especially the parts about practicing gratitude, visualization, and believing. In fact, the part of the film where the narrators talk about how to use these practices in a practical way, by starting each day with an attitude of gratitude, visualizing life as they would like to live it, and then feeling into that experience, in real-time, AS IF it has already occurred—these are powerful practices, and they work.

But—and this is a big BUT—there is a catch (of course, you knew that I wasn't going to let this pseudo-Hollywood extravaganza get off the hook that easily!). Underneath all the fabulous imagery of fancy cars and big houses and sex-doll girlfriend/boyfriends lies what I consider to be the dirty secret of "[The Secret](#)": no matter how powerful the law of attraction may be, using it to acquire more stuff does not necessarily bring joy, or happiness, or calm or peace or anything else remotely close to what we might call "human fulfillment".

In fact, constant attention on HAVING MORE may bring just the opposite: stress, effort, fleeting pleasure then emptiness, and a gnawing, anxious feeling of "never enough". I don't think it particularly hyperbolic to say that the shadow-side of "[The Secret](#)"—the emphasis on always wanting MORE—may be downright hurtful—to our souls, to our intimate relationships, and ultimately, to the fragile earth itself (imagine a planet where 6 billion people all clamor to live in a \$4 million dollar mansion like Jack Canfield!!).

So where does the film go off track? Not with the description of the law of attraction, that is all well and good, if not particularly scientific. No, the basic theme of the movie is fine and laudable. Where it disconnects from its own goal and integrity (which the skeptic in me thinks was intentional—designed to SELL MORE books/DVDS) is with the question: “what do you want?”

If you watch closely starting from the point where the narrator instructs the viewer to use the power of the law of attraction to “get what you want”, you will notice that from here on out what we want (what the producers of this film would argue) is a new bike, a fast car, a mansion, a sexy, beautiful girlfriend/boyfriend (read: object), etc. Nowhere did I hear that we might want any of the following: to be loved, to make a difference, to help others, to give back, to share our talents, to love more fully, to live in peace, to relax, or just to have more time for fun. The focus of the film, and the use of thinking, feeling, and intention/visualization (the “toolset” of the law) is all on how to “acquire” a life-style...and specifically one that would show well on “Lives of the Rich and Famous”. Yikes!

Well, you may say, what’s not to like? We all like having nice things, and the nicer the better, right? Well, true enough, but here’s my beef: many of my clients already have fancy cars, nice homes, vacation condos, and more than their fair share of sexy significant others (at least for a short time). Yet, are they happy? Are they feeling fulfilled? Hardly. Many of them become so attached and identified with the “life-style” of prosperity that they think/ behave like addicts (more, more, more) losing sight of who they really are and what they really want.

It is only when you step out of the acquisition game for a moment, and ask the deeper question—*who do you want to be?*—that the law of attraction really goes to work FOR you. By focusing your thoughts and visualizations on WHO AND HOW YOU WANT TO BE in your life, rather than what you want to HAVE, the universe responds with large and small gifts—bringing us teachers, taking us places, and offering up opportunities for us to *practice being* what we most value in the world.

I am all in favor of people living prosperous lives. There is nothing inherently “bad” about having nice things or living a life of abundance. But what, deep down in your heart, gets you out of bed in the morning? The house, the car, the wardrobe? For me, what I most want to attract—using my thinking, my intention, my gifts, and my passion—is the opportunity to help others live lives of joy, ease, and vitality. What about you? What question might really foster a “life-shift” in your sense of who you are and why you are here? Is it “what do you want...to have?” I doubt it. Instead, try living, breathing, and using the “law of attraction” to discover your own inner secret. Ask yourself: who do I really want to be in the world?!

Check out the film and let me know what you think...

Cheers!

Dr. J

ps. I want to share a little vignette with you as an “add-on” here...because in retrospect I see that it spawned this entire blog:

Yesterday as I was riding the crosstown bus in midtown Manhattan, all the while thinking about the film, “The Secret”, and pondering why it left me so unsatisfied, I happened to witness the following scene playing out before me.

Glancing up from my seat in the third row of the bus, I noticed a very old gentleman with a cane sitting across from me. He had to have been about 80, maybe older, but he still looked pretty vital, if rickety on his cane. Just then a younger man—around 60 or so—ambled on to the bus, and facing down this older guy, seemed to do a double-take. “Excuse me sir,” said the ‘young’ one, “Are you the Dr. Hamilton that used to teach classes in architecture at the New School?” Looking up from his perch, the old man smiled—as if he’d heard this a thousand times before—and simply said, “Yes, I suppose that’s me. What can I do for you?”

“Well, wow!” exclaimed the new arrival, “I always wondered what happened to you and whether I would ever see you again...and here you are. I always wanted to thank you for your wonderful class and tell you how much it meant to me. I wound up going on to graduate school and becoming an architect and I have really loved my career. In fact, I’m actually now wondering what to do in the face of retirement because I don’t really want to quit. And in no small way, much of my success can be traced back to you!”

I never did hear the response that the old teacher gave to the no-longer-young student because my bus stop arrived just as he finished his little soliloquy. But as I stepped off the bus, I glanced back to see a swelling smile, and a redolent glow of joy (and a little embarrassment) surface on the wrinkled face of the teacher. At that moment I knew exactly what was missing from “The Secret”: a deeper truth—perhaps a *deeper secret* that the blossoming countenance of this octogenarian revealed for all to see: **WHAT REALLY MATTERS** at the end of life. What will you be smiling about when you’re 80?