

## **Newsletter: Summer 2009**

### **An Invitation to Deep Conversation**

When I was in highschool I organized discussion groups for teenagers at my church around questions that occupied my mind and my writing when I was alone. Questions like: Who or what was God? If God had intervened to save the drowning child last week what was He (it was, after all, the early 70's and I was in a small town in Northern Ontario) doing when a local family died in a house fire the week before? If we thought God was guiding us, how could we be sure the guidance wasn't just our own self-importance, wish fulfillment or fantasy? Why were we here? Would an all-knowing, all-powerful being really take an interest in what I did or did not do sexually? (Or at least what I was hoping to do, someday, sexually!) If we had real faith wouldn't we sell everything we had, care for the poor and trust that God would provide?

I didn't expect the discussions to give me definitive answers to these and a thousand other questions. What I wanted was deep conversation with others. (It did not dawn on me until years later that many, if not most of the others who attended these groups, were there primarily because it was one of the few events that their parents would allow them to attend on a school night.) And the conversations did help. Hearing others raised new questions, highlighted inherent paradoxes and provided insights. Participation in conversation helped me discern what I thought and felt, get a glimpse of the vastness of what I did not know, and find the end of threads that intrigued me

I've been thinking about this lately as I feel called to offer workshops (see below for venues) and wonder why. For while, years ago, I taught the ceremonies and teachings of a very particular shamanic tradition. Although I continue to value, utilize and share much of what I learned in this tradition, I do not see myself as a teacher of a fixed and particular set of teachings. This is because I am always learning, always changing how I understand and use what I was taught and what life and on-going studies continue to teach me. I am uncomfortable when someone uses the term "Oriah's teachings," and wonder exactly what they mean.

Recalling those high school discussion groups I realize that I value and still want what I sought then: meaningful conversation that deepens my own reflection about the questions that matter most to our human lives. Oh, some of the questions and the language I use have changed, but basically the inquiry remains the same: Who am I? Why am I here? How can I live in joy without denying the darkness and suffering that is part of a human life? How can I contribute to the world? What is my deepest longing? Who is my authentic Self and what does that Self and the greater Mystery desire from this small human life? How do I develop the discernment and courage necessary to live all of who I am? What does it mean, to what do we point, when we talk about faith?

Happily, since high school I have developed some skills at facilitating these conversations and that's what I offer at workshops: ways to enter deep conversations about what really matters. In workshops these conversations are primarily internal, hopefully with many aspects of self, and with that which is larger however you imagine and name it. To some degree (where you choose) the conversation is shared with other participants, and of course, it is necessarily weighted at my end as I share things I hope will help take your inner conversation to a deeper level. My hope for these conversations is that we all find bits and pieces that inspire, clarify and enlarge our relationship to the world and ourselves. And as in all conversations, the primary tool is story- as told through symbols, images, dreams, ceremonies and the body. We will use the supportive structures of meditation, movement, music, myth, ceremony, and creative expression to hear the stories we are telling ourselves, and to find the questions these stories raise.

So, if you feel called to enter one of these conversations, I hope to see you at one of these workshops. Many blessings, Oriah