

## **Oriah, Mountain Dreamer**

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.  
I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare  
to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know  
if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dreams,  
for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.  
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own  
sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have  
become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,  
without moving to hide or fade it or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine your own:  
if you can dance with the wildness and let the ecstasy  
fill you to the finger and toes without cautioning us  
to be careful, be realistic, or to remember the limitations  
of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.  
I want to know if you can disappoint others to be true to  
yourself: if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and  
not betray your own soul.

I want to know if you can be faithless  
and therefore be trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see the beauty even when it  
is not pretty every day, and if you can source your life  
from its presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure,  
yours and mine, and still stand on the edge  
of the lake and shout to the silver  
of the full moon, "Yes!"

It doesn't interest me to know where you live,  
or how much money you have. I want to know  
if you can get up after the night of grief and  
despair, weary and bruised to the bone,  
and do what needs to be done for the children.

It doesn't interest me who you are,  
or how you came to be here.  
I want to know if you will stand in  
the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or  
with whom you have studied. I want to know  
what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away.

I want to know if you can be alone with yourself,  
and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

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### **About the Poem: Message from Oriah Mountain Dreamer**

*Sent to SKDesigns from the publisher, Harper Collins, June 23, 1999*

In the spring of 1994 I went to a party-an ordinary party- and I made an effort, a real effort, to be sociable. I asked and answered the usual questions: What do you do for a living? How do you know the host? Where did you study? Where do you live? And I came home with the familiar hollow feeling of having gone through the motions. So, I sat down and did what I often do to sort out what is going on--I wrote.

Using the format of a writing exercise that had been given to me by poet David Whyte I wrote about the party conversations--what really did not interest me and what I really did want to know about others, about myself.

I went to the centre of the ache for something more between myself and the world and the prose-poem, "The Invitation", poured onto the page.

A week later I included the piece in a newsletter I was sending to eight hundred students who had, over the previous ten years, come to workshops I had facilitated on spirituality, sexuality and creativity. I sent it exactly as it had been written that night. I didn't think much about it. I'd shared many pieces of writing with folks on my mailing list over the years, often hearing back from those who felt a particular piece spoke to them.

But this time, something different happened. People started copying and sharing "The Invitation" and I began hearing from hundreds of people I didn't know. A woman wrote from New Zealand where the piece had been read at a large spiritual gathering. A man in the States wrote of reading the piece at the funeral of a dear friend who had died of AIDS. Individuals as far away as Romania, Iceland, Greenland and South Africa wrote that someone had sent them "The Invitation" on e-mail, handed it out at a wedding or read it aloud at workshop or conference. The piece seemed to have a life of its own.

It was Joe Durepos, a literary agent in Chicago who had contacted me to ask permission for the piece to be used in Jean Houston's book, "A Passion for the Possible", who suggested that I consider writing a book based on "The Invitation." I started writing and Joe sold the first few chapters to Harper San Francisco.

The prose-poem had touched others with a voice that cut through to what really matters. I didn't want the book to be a watered-down version of the original piece or a

heady analysis of its heart-felt sense of urgency. I wanted the book to be as raw and as real as the prose-poem, to offer the receptive reader a chance to actually go to the places mapped out by “The Invitation” To fulfill this promise I had to go to those places myself.

I went to a cabin owned by some friends and started writing, using each segment of the original piece as a doorway into deeper places-the longing, the joy, the sorrow, the fear- reflecting with ruthless honesty on the meaning and struggles of a human life. I wrote what I need to remember, what I need to hear again and again: that life is full of beauty and pain; that the world will break your heart and heal it, over and over, if you let it, and that letting it do both is the only way to live fully; that we are not alone but deeply connected to that which create, and sustains all life.

Aided by Harper San Francisco editor Karen Levine I distilled the stories down to their essence and offered meditations at the conclusion of each chapter, meditations that had helped me walk through the doorways “The Invitation” had opened.

Life is hard. And life is wonderful. “The Invitation” is about finding what we need-the inspiration, the intimacy, the courage and the commitment to live fully, every day.

**— Oriah Mountain Dreamer**

*Detailed on website: [Spirituality & Alternative Healing](#)*

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**About the Author:**

*"I am a teacher and writer living in Toronto with my two teenage sons. While my family history includes stories of Scottish, German and Native American descent I am a Canadian woman, and not an 'Indian elder' as has sometimes been reported, being neither old enough nor wise enough to claim the status of 'elder' for any people."*

*If you have any questions concerning this essay, please contact the following:*

Note of clarification by the above author regarding this prose:

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