

THE WISHING YEAR by Noelle Oxenhandler  
Discussion Questions

- 1) The Wishing Year's point of departure is "an (almost) equal balance of hope and skepticism" about wishing. Where would you place yourself on this spectrum: do you start off with a strong belief in the power of wishing, with strong doubts...or somewhere in between?
  
- 2) The author describes herself as being "a wish-snob." She writes, "It's not that I mean to be. It's that somehow I grew up with a powerful wish hierarchy in place...." What about you? Would you describe yourself as "a wish-snob"? For example, would it be easy for you to announce to a throng of people that you were wishing for things as disparate as "world peace" and "new kitchen cabinets"? Why or why not?
  
- 3) In regard to her own attitudes about wishing, the author traces their origins to: her basic temperament, her Jewish-Catholic childhood, and her long-time interest in the study and practice of Buddhism. What about you? In regard to *your* attitudes about wishing, what do you feel have been the major formative influences?
  
- 4) From classic fairy-tales to contemporary films, the theme of wishing abounds in stories for children. When you were a child, what stories about wishing were most vivid for you? Why do you think that these particular stories made such an impression on you?
  
- 5) From time immemorial, a great many superstitions have swirled around the act of wishing. What about you—do you have any superstitions about daring to wish for what you want? If so, what are they, and why do you think that you adhere to them?
  
- 6) An underlying theme of The Wishing Year is the relationship between wishing and suffering. The author describes herself as being, in spite of herself, "attached to suffering." (In the "April" chapter, she describes her revelation, upon re-reading Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, that she had remembered *only one* of Viktor Frankl's two stories about coming upon a field of flowers after being released from the concentration camp—the one in which he was numbed to their beauty, rather than the one in which he fell to his knees in awe.) What about you? Do you feel that you are in any way "attached to suffering"? And if so, how does this attachment affect your attitude toward wishing? Does it make you afraid to wish for what you want? Do you have the deep belief that you have to suffer for what you want?
  
- 7) Whether they refer to it as "God," "the Universe," "the Source"...or whatever...many people believe that there is some sort of transcendent power out there that is ready, willing, and eager to exert itself in our behalf—if only we would let it. What do you think

about this? Is this a place where you feel deeply skeptical, full of hope...or somewhere in between?

8) When it comes to seeking romantic love, what do you believe is the right combination of wishing, waiting, and working to make something happen? Are you a classic romantic, who thinks that love just descends upon us out of the blue? Or do you believe in a more active approach? Whatever your stance, how did you come by it? How has it played itself out in your life?

9) Over thousands of years of human existence, there is probably nothing that has been most urgently, intensely wished for than the desire to be cured of illness and restored to health. What do you think about this very complex—and, in our era, very controversial—issue? Do you think that wishing has a place in healing? When you read (in the “October” chapter) about the author’s friend George, who refuses medical treatment and entrusts himself entirely to “mind over matter,” what comes up for you? Do you see any value at all in his approach, or do you believe that he was simply deluded?

10) The Secret has been an immensely powerful DVD and book, inspiring millions of people around the world to believe in and practice “the law of attraction.” In the “September” chapter of The Wishing Year, the author herself becomes an initiate...and finds that she’s both encouraged and repelled by the “focus and ye shall have it” attitude. What are your feelings about The Secret? Are you a 100% believer, or do you have some reservations about it? And in either case, tell *why*....

11) If it hasn’t already come up in the course of discussion, then: is there anything that you have ever intensely wished for in your life? If so, what was it, and was there any method to your wishing? What was the outcome for you? Have you ever tried to make a wish come true for someone else? If so, what was the outcome? And what are you wishing for now: for yourself, for someone close to you, and for the wider world?

12) Carole Watanabe, whom the author describes as “The Queen of Putting It Out There” is a great believer in making a tangible thing—in the form of a three-dimensional shrine—as a first step toward actualizing one’s desires. Have you ever made a shrine? Would you like to make one? If so, what would it look like...and why?