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Dread Reflections

Edited and Published by Plants and Healers International 2015

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February 17, 2007
in the bush of New Zealand

Today marks the 20th year since I began dreading my hair. Amazing how time passes. I know that none of the hair on my head is from that time—like a river flowing—it is the way of being that defines. I am a dread. My head is dreaded. The vibration flows through me.

Morgaine shared with me a story about dreads the other day that is worth repeating here. As a woman assisted her in getting her hair dread going, she said, “You know dreads do not grow just on the outside. They also grow inward. They grow into your brain so you think differently. Then they grow into your eyes so you see differently. And then they grow into your heart so you feel differently.”

That has certainly been true for me. I am forever changed. When I meet people who once wore dreads, I try to remind them of that—how once a dread, always a dread, even if the world can no longer see them.

For me, in the winter of 1987, I was quite naïve in many, many ways. And around the subject of dreadlocks I was particularly ignorant. I knew the song, “I Shot the Sheriff” and the like by Bob Marley and perhaps knew he was a Rastafarian in some base way.

I did know that my shoulder length curly hair was becoming an increasingly big hassle to comb every day. I was losing patience with it. My girlfriend was not into combing it. What to do? Somehow I came up with the idea of just letting it go. As I said, I had no aspirations to be a Rasta as I was ignorant of all that. Very quickly my hair started matting especially in the back. I braided my long strands of hair in the front and just never took the braids out. And over the years my hair dreaded fully. I would occasionally pull them apart to keep them from becoming one big dread.

When I went on the road in 1992 I realized that thousands of people had dreaded or were dreading their hair. In those years I began to become aware of Rastafarianism. On the road, since I had been dreading my head for five years, people assumed things about me and in this way I learned lots about the cultures that embrace dreadlocks—notably, the Rastas and the Hindus. There was an alternative culture booming around the US and many youth were dreading or wanting to. Most of these people only kept their locks for a little while.

This journey was for me all new territory. My dreads taught me many things about being simple, about vanity, about stereotypes. I remember in Louisville, Kentucky in 1993 walking

through a neighborhood and this burley black man came up to me and placed his hands on my dreads and asked me at each weak link, “Ahh, what sin did you do here?” saying that those spots were where Jah reminded me of my human frailties. Over the years the dreads certainly have budded (as I like to call it). I usually bury them near where they come off.

I have had to treat lice perhaps half a dozen times. I have had to learn how to wash them and how to avoid mildew; learning when to keep them up, when to let them down. I have faced oppression and admiration.

In 1997 I went to India for what turned out to be nine months (I went there with a one way ticket and a couple hundred dollars). I had a lot of questions for that continent. Some of them had to do with the roots of dreads and chillums and ganja. I learned so much from that journey and died several times along the way. A friend said to me back in the states that in India people follow you around if you are a white dread and want to start an ashram around you. In the states if you are a dread people follow you around to make sure you are not shoplifting.

In 2003 I traveled to Jamaica with a companion, Claudia, to understand its culture a bit more deeply. I was very impressed by the Rasta culture I met there. Those whom I met were good, simple, kind people. Some of them sat along roads with their pumpkin soup and other ital food making enough of a living to take care of their families.

In the late 1990’s I traveled with a good friend, Mark, around the US in a 1971 VW Superbeetle named Lucy S. Dobson. We met so many people who asked about dreadlocks that we considered putting together a little pamphlet of the twenty most asked questions about dreadlocks. We wrote up the questions but did not take it further than that.

I have now traveled all over the world and everywhere there are people aware of dreadlock culture either through Bob Marley and Rastafarianism or Shiva and Hinduism. In Southern Africa I would interact with many people each day around being a white dreadlock. In India people would inquire everyday as to who I was.

Now twenty years into it, I want to take a moment to honor all these dreads have taught me along the way. When I walk into a space people expect something different from me. I am not easily stereotyped. They have been good companions in all their forms. As a green being, they feel to me in many ways my roots. I think of this each day when I do my headstand. I am blessed by them. I feel honored to wear them as long as they wish to stay with me. If they go away externally, I know they will always stay with me inside my being.

Praise Be to the Most High.