

The Secret

By James K. Walker¹

Author: Rhonda Byrne

Associated Publications: *The Secret* is both a DVD and book (2006) by Rhonda Byrne. Byrne says she got her first glimpse of “the secret” after reading the 1910 book, *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles. She also cites from several other obscure, one hundred-year-old books including Charles Haanel’s *The Master Key System* (1912), Robert Collier’s *The Secret of the Ages* (1925), and Prentice Mulford’s *The God in You* (1918).² Although not attributed, Byrne seems to also draw heavily from William W. Atkinson’s 1906 work, *Thought Vibration: The Law of Attraction in the Thought World*. The 2008 DVD, *Source of The Secret*, is an unauthorized sequel that attempts to blend Byrne’s message with a Christian prosperity “health and wealth” gospel message.³

Organizational Structure: While there are numerous blog sites and independent “Law of Attraction” study groups, there is no formal organizational structure based around *The Secret* or Rhonda Byrne. Attempting to capitalize its success, several teachers featured in *The Secret*, including Jack Canfield (coauthor of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series) and Bob Proctor, have developed, The Science of Getting Rich (SGR) affiliate program, a multi-level marketing organization based on the Law of Attraction.⁴

HISTORY

In 2005, Rhonda Byrne was a virtually unknown television producer in Australia who had reached a crisis of deep, personal despair. She explains, “...my life had collapsed around me. I’d worked myself into exhaustion, my father died suddenly, and my relationships with my work colleagues and loved ones were in turmoil.”⁵ At her darkest point of hopelessness, Byrne’s daughter, Hailey, gave her an obscure one-hundred-year-old book⁶ along with a note, “Mama, this will help OXOX.” As she read the book, Byrne describes being filled with unbelievable hope explaining that she had been given her first glimpse of the secret of life.

She instinctively knew that this book held an essential clue to the answer of all of life’s deepest yearnings. The path to fabulous wealth, mental and emotional health, harmonious personal relationships, all this and much more, she believed, was buried in this long-forgotten book. She wondered how she could have lived to age 50 without ever hearing this vital, life-changing message. As she began feverishly researching the subject, she quickly discovered why. The reason almost no one knew this marvelous, transformational message was simple. It was a secret! Byrne says she discovered many of history’s most brilliant, famous, and successful people knew “the secret” including “Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Emerson, Edison, [and] Einstein.”⁷ Byrne implies that number of powerful corporations, mammoth institutions, and wealthy tycoons hatched an elaborate conspiracy to keep “the secret” to themselves. Bent on using its power for selfish purposes, these unnamed conspirators largely succeeded in keeping “the secret” to themselves – until now.

To unleash “the secret” for the good of all, Byrne embarked on a new mission in life – to present it to the entire world. She decided to produce a documentary titled *The Secret*. She located a couple of dozen teachers who knew “the secret” and were willing to go public with it. Her video was released in 2006 through pay-per-view on internet download and by DVD. It features a variety of presenters who share the principles of “the secret” with a heavy dose of story-telling and antidotal evidence. With virtually no advertising budget relying largely on word-of-mouth, the video had significant success. In 2006, the publishing giant Simon & Schuster became interested in the project and produced the book version of *The Secret*. It is mainly a transcript of the video. Although Byrne is named as author, she functions more as an editor of the teachings and testimonies of the secret experts appearing in the DVD.

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The Secret set record sales. Byrne reported that within a few months of the release of the DVD, enthusiastic followers began to hold “Secret Parties” in homes around the world. Universities and schools began sharing the secret with their students and churches of all denominations began sharing it with their members.⁸ By February of 2007, both the book and the DVD jumped to the top of the bestsellers lists supplanting *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The book quickly sold out and Simon & Schuster announced the largest reprinting history of their corporation.⁹

Oprah Winfrey has been a major evangelist for Byrne. Oprah’s first program on *The Secret* received such a huge response that eight days later she aired an unprecedented follow-up show called “One Week Later: The Huge Reaction to The Secret.”¹⁰ The book and DVD have also been featured on a variety of network talk shows including CNN’s *Larry King Live* and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*.

Amazingly, Simon & Schuster’s record two million-copy reprint order came just three months after the book had been released and brought the total number of copies in print to a staggering 3.75 million.¹¹ This does not include the 1.5 million copies sold of the DVD version. This is truly remarkable for a first book written by an unknown Australian television producer. Why the popularity? Readers who could suspend their skepticism found *The Secret* to be at the very least entertaining if not intriguing. *The Secret* boldly claims to be the hidden answer to almost every human desire and it does so in a way that continues to attract attention even if it cannot deliver.

The Secret promises to be the source of everything your heart desires – and more. Do you yearn for tranquility, financial security, strengthened relationships, or perfect health? Would you like to lose weight? Do you need a convenient parking spot at a busy mall or would you like world peace? The keys to everything you have every wanted – personal well-being, prosperity, and harmony – are all promised in *The Secret*. It is your Aladdin’s Lamp, whose genie does not limit you to just three wishes because “there’s absolutely no limit whatsoever to the wishes.”¹²

DOCTRINE: THE “SECRET” LAW OF ATTRACTION

What is “the secret” and how does it work? The secret can be summarized in this simple phrase, “THOUGHTS BECOME THINGS.”¹³ Whether positive or negative, good or bad, whatever a person thinks about, concentrates on, or visualizes will eventually become reality. Byrne claims to have rediscovered an innate power hidden within the mind – not just to plan for the future or set goals – but to tap into the infinite power.

Do you find yourself always worried about bills? Your mind in harmony with that ancient unchangeable secret law begins to attract more debt. But if you focus on positive thoughts and prosperity, the universe will begin to align itself in such a way to channel income your way. Byrne insists this is not just wishful thinking. In fact, *The Secret* argues that through “new science” particularly quantum physics, researchers have already proven the principle – at least on a subatomic level. Its power comes from an eternal, inexorable law – a secret principle – called “The Law of Attraction.”

Through lecture, drama, and testimony, Byrne and her roster of experts set forth the principles of the Law of Attraction, which simply stated means “like attracts like.” Thoughts, we learn, function like strong TV transmission towers or powerful magnets. Positive thoughts attract positive results and negative thoughts draw negative results. At its heart, the Law of Attraction is a very simple yet bold and provocative claim. The human mind has an intrinsic, virtually unlimited ability to literally change the physical world using only the power of thoughts. Thus, thoughts become things. Your thoughts are the secret source of an unimaginable, infinite power when properly fueled by positive emotion and released in three simple steps: ask, believe, and receive.¹⁴

According to the secret, your thoughts actually vibrate at predetermined frequencies emanating from your mind. That mental signal reaches out into your immediate surroundings, around the world and even into the farthest reaches of the universe.¹⁵ That transmission does not produce a mere television picture or sound – it produces every element of that tangible, physical environment that we call reality.

You don't believe it? Well, that's why it will not work. That is the Law of Attraction. You are broadcasting your doubts and lack of faith right back to yourself and those thoughts are being manifested right now before your eyes. Properly change your thinking and you have forever mastered the secret key to everything you ever dreamed or desired. The bad news is that everything going wrong in your life today actually is your fault. The source of your problems is you – or at least your own wrong thinking.¹⁶ Thoughts, whether good or bad, actually create reality. *The Secret* gives countless success stories about attracting expensive jewelry, exotic vacations, and even a 4.5 million-dollar home.¹⁷ The secret also is touted as the cure for sickness, disease and even unwanted weight gain. According to Byrne, obesity is not caused by calories or lack of exercise but by wrong thinking.

One of the more troubling testimonials in *The Secret* is the story of Cathy Goodman, a cancer survivor who shunned chemotherapy and radiation treatments and substituted the Law of Attraction to heal herself. Part of her self-treatment included reducing stress by watching funny movies to “just laugh, laugh, and laugh.”¹⁸ Bob Proctor, one of the main teachers featured in *The Secret*, is admittedly somewhat uncomfortable with the Byrne's inclusion of Goodman's story. When interviewed on ABC's *Nightline*, he said that he personally was not recommending that cancer patients replace doctor prescribed treatment for *The Secret*. He explained, “If I was diagnosed with cancer I'd be the first to go and take whatever treatment they gave me.”¹⁹ He did acknowledge, however, that *The Secret* might imply otherwise. He admitted that if he had written *The Secret* he “probably would not” have included Goodman's story.²⁰

While Byrne chose to include Goodman's story, she decided to edit out an even more controversial participant. Most fans of *The Secret* may be surprised to learn that there was a first edition DVD that relatively few have seen. The star of the original edition was Esther Hicks, a “channeler” who claims to have made psychic contact with a group of disembodied spirit beings that collectively call themselves “Abraham.” Channeling is a form of occult divination in which the medium allegedly allows the spirit of a deceased person, alien, or some ascended master to temporarily take possession of their bodies to teach some esoteric message.²¹

Byrne actually signed a contract offering Hicks 10% royalties of the secret project if she would make contact with her spirit guides and channel the Law of Attraction on camera for her documentary. Hicks and her husband Jerry had been crisscrossing the country for over a decade conducting expensive channeling seminars in hotel ballrooms in which “Abraham” would teach the law of attraction. Later, however, Byrnes and Hicks had a major falling out and Byrne informed Hicks that she would be required to relinquish her royalty rights. After consulting “Abraham,” Esther and Jerry decided not to sign away their rights and Byrne responded by completely editing Esther out of the video. The new edition, minus the weirdness of spirit channeling, sounds much more credible, even scientific, and became a huge hit. In its original form, however, *The Secret* is clearly a religious work involving occult practices and psychic manifestations.

Even without the channeling, the message behind *The Secret* remains a spiritual and mystical one. The real message of *The Secret* is not really so much about conjuring unlimited wealth or healing disease using the law of attraction. Byrne saves the most important, ultimate message of *The Secret* to the final chapters of her book. Surprisingly, many of the published reviews of the seemed to gloss over or miss entirely this aspect of *The Secret* focusing on its excessive materialism or questionable medical advice. The ultimate message is not about getting things but about discovering your true identity. The big secret is about who you really are: “You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator...”²²

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

The Secret is based in part on a revamped version of New Thought teachings promoted for over 100 years by the “Mind Science” religions such as Unity School of Christianity, Christian Science, and Religious Science. While there may have some parallels to aspects of Kenneth Hagan's controversial Word-Faith²³ theology, the spirituality promoted in *The Secret* is not based on modern science and most certainly is not compatible with biblical Christianity.

A major emphasis of *The Secret* is its grandiose claims to have been proven scientifically – mostly on a subatomic level – through quantum physics. For the most part, *The Secret* teachers making these claims are not physicists or scientists. They include bestselling authors (such as Jack Canfield and Neil Donald Walsh²⁴), entrepreneurs, motivational speakers, and one, Marie Diamond is a *feng shui* consultant.²⁵

There are, however, two credentialed quantum physicists featured in *The Secret* – Fred Alan Wolf and John Hagelin. Both both have earned PhDs from major universities and have taught quantum physics on a graduate level. Both scientist, however, have been largely discredited in by their peers. Claims made in Wolf's book, *The Yoga of Time Travel*, are well outside of mainstream science. Dr. Hagelin's reputation as a scientist has also been called into question after he became a devotee of the late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of Transcendental Meditation (TM). Dr Hagelin teaches at Maharishi University, founded by the Yogi, in Fairfield, Iowa. Courses at Maharishi U include "Yogic Flying" where cross-legged TM meditators hop vigorously a foot or so up and down off of padded mats. This is supposed to be a precursor to advanced courses in Yogic flying including levitation and soaring around the room. Dr. Hagelin's beliefs concerning the Law of Attraction and Yogic flying are not shared by the academic community. In fact, most all of the major scientific medical and claims in *The Secret* have now been reviewed and discredited by an independent panel of respected researchers and scientists.²⁶

The practice of contacting the dead or communicating with spirits other than the Holy Spirit is forbidden in the Scriptures (Deut. 18:9-12). Christians are warned not to believe "every spirit" but to test the spirits (1 John 4:1). The message of the spirits "Abraham" and Rhonda Byrne are tested by comparing it with the message of the Bible. Byrne's ultimate secret, that we are actually God, is remarkably similar to the Serpent's deceptive message to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when he promised "...Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

Notes

- This Profile is based in part on the book *The Truth Behind The Secret*, by James K. Walker and Bob Waldrep (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2007).
- ² Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*, (New York: Atria Books/Beyond Words), xiv. *The God in You* can be read online at <http://prenticemulford.com/wwwhubs.com/tgy.htm> (accessed 9/16/08).
 - ³ Shad Wehrl, executive producer of *Source of The Secret*, is a graduate of Oral Roberts University and Victory Bible Institute. See: <http://thesecretpath.org/Contact.htm> (accessed 9/16/08).
 - ⁴ The Science of Getting Rich (SGR) website: <http://thesgrprogram.com> (accessed 9/16/08).
 - ⁵ *The Secret*, ix.
 - ⁶ Byrne latter identifies the book as *The Science of Getting Rich* (1910), by Wallace Wattles.
 - ⁷ *The Secret*, ix.
 - ⁸ *Ibid*, xi.
 - ⁹ Rahel Deahl, "Atria's 'Secret' Is Way Out of the Bag," *Publisher's Weekly*, March 1, 2007.
 - ¹⁰ The first *Oprah Winfrey Show* on *The Secret* aired on February 8, 2007 and the second aired February 16, 2007. Oprah hosted a third program on the Law of Attraction featuring Louise Hay which aired on June 27, 2008.
 - ¹¹ Press Release "THE SECRET IS OUT...PUBLISHER ORDERS 2,000,000 ADDITIONAL COPIES," http://www.simonsays.com/content/feature.cfm?sid=33&feature_id=5796.
 - ¹² *The Secret*, 45-46. The genie granting requests with the phrase "Your wish is my command" is a theme throughout *The Secret*. Rhonda Byrne suggests that legends such as Aladdin's magic lamp and genie contain in their essence "the very truth of life." In *The Secret*, James Ray claims that the in earliest versions of the legend, the genie does not limit the wishes to three but grants an "unlimited" numbers of desires.
 - ¹³ *Ibid*, 9.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid*, 68. Byrne states that this "Creative Process used in The Secret, [ask, believe, and receive] was taken from the New Testament in the Bible..." (47). This is most likely a misunderstanding or
 - misinterpretation of Jesus' instructions in Matthew 21:22. When taken in context with the rest of Scripture, it is evident that Jesus was not suggesting that his followers ask some impersonal universe to grant all their materialistic wishes. Instead, His followers were to ask Jesus in prayer according to God's will and for His glory (John 14:13). The Scriptures clearly warns that God makes no promises to fulfill the requests of those asking for earthly desires and pleasures (James 4:3).
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid*, 11.
 - ¹⁶ *Ibid*, 27-28.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 40.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 128.
 - ¹⁹ "Interview Transcript with 'Secret' Contributor Bob Proctor," 31. ABC News *Nightline*, March 23, 2007, p. 31. (<http://www.abcnews.go.com/images/Nightline/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Proctor%20Transcript.pdf>)
 - ²⁰ *Ibid*, 32.
 - ²¹ For more on channeling, see: Rick Branch, "Channeling" *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2008).
 - ²² *The Secret*, 164.
 - ²³ Some of the more controversial television evangelists such as Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, and the late Kenneth Hagan teach a prosperity "health and wealth" gospel that finds much in common with Byrne's *Secret*. For a critique of their "Word Faith" theology see Robert Bowman, Jr. "Word-Faith Movement" *Profile Notebook* (Watchman Fellowship, Inc., Arlington, Texas, 1994-2008).
 - ²⁴ Neil Donald Walsh's bestselling book, *Conversations with God* was also a product of alleged spirit communication received in a channeling-like process similar to spirit dictation. Sirona Knight and Michael Starwyn, "An Interview with author Neale Donald Walsch," (<http://www.dcsi.net/~bluesky/nwalsch1.htm>).
 - ²⁵ *The Secret*, 189. *Feng shui* is the ancient Chinese practice of directing spiritual energy called *chi* by placing and arranging objects according to religious beliefs including astrology, and yin and yang.
 - ²⁶ *The Truth Behind The Secret*, 53-85.



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