

Deepak Chopra

By Jason Barker

Date of Birth: 1947.

Publications: Nineteen books, including *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (1993), *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* (1995), *The Return of Merlin* (1995), *The Way of the Wizard* (1996), and *The Path to Love* (1997). Has also published a CD-ROM, *Deepak Chopra's The Wisdom Within* (1997). Publishes a monthly newsletter, *Deepak Chopra's Infinite Possibilities for Body, Mind and Soul*.

Organizations: Chopra Center for Well Being, Global Network for Spiritual Success, Quantum Publications, OSI Systems, Inc. (semiconductors).

Unique Terms: Quantum soup, ayurveda / mind body medicine, Opti (a line of healthcare products, including OptiMind, OptiCalm, and OptiWoman), infinite possibilities.

HISTORY

Deepak Chopra is the oldest son of Krishan Chopra, an Indian cardiologist whose training was personally authorized by Lord Mountbatten.¹ Chopra was raised in a family infused with both Western medicine and traditional Hindu beliefs and practices. For example, he describes a conflict over medical practices between his British-trained father and ayurveda-practicing grandfather.² Following his father's career in medicine, he graduated from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 1968.³ While in medical school, he claims to have seen a Hindu holy man who was voluntarily buried alive; after six days, the man was freed and went on his way.⁴

Chopra first came to the United States in 1970 to serve an internship at a hospital in New Jersey.⁵ He followed this internship with a residency and further training at the Lahey Clinic and the University of Virginia Hospital.⁶ In the early 1980s, he became the chief of staff at New England Memorial Hospital.⁷

A major turning point in Chopra's medical practice and philosophy occurred in 1981, when he returned to New Delhi and met Dr. Brihaspati Dev Triguna, "The preeminent living Ayurvedic physician."⁸ Triguna needed only, according to Chopra, to "put three fingers on your wrist...and he knows your whole medical history — past, present, and future."⁹ After hearing from Chopra's friend that Chopra was "a beacon of wisdom" and "one of the most famous doctors" in America, Triguna touched Chopra's wrist and diagnosed Chopra as "think[ing] too many unnecessary thoughts."¹⁰ Chopra was advised to meditate, spend more time with his family, and chew his food more slowly.¹¹

Chopra did not immediately follow Triguna's advice. He was continually drinking coffee, smoking a pack of cigarettes each day, and drinking whiskey in the evening to relax.¹² Eventually overcoming his previous biases against the Hindu-based mysticism of his native India which might hold the key to alleviating his stress, Chopra became receptive to the message of Transcendental Meditation (TM) that "meditation was an effortless process that led to deeper relaxation."¹³ He notes that he was particularly impressed by the sizable amount of research that proves that TM reduces stress.¹⁴ Within two weeks he stopped smoking and drinking.¹⁵

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Chopra met the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder and leader of TM, in 1985.¹⁶ The Maharishi invited Chopra to study Ayurveda,¹⁷ and that year Chopra became the founding president of the American Association for Ayurvedic Medicine. He was later named medical director of the Maharishi Ayurveda Health Center for Stress Management and Behavioral Medicine.¹⁸

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Chopra became a dedicated champion of TM thought and practice. His 1989 book, *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind Body Medicine*, combined Hinduism and Western medicine to explain that the body is a “network of intelligence” that can be programmed through meditation and clean living to be immune to disease and aging.

A significant episode in Chopra’s career occurred in 1991, when the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published an article by Chopra, Triguna and Hari Sharma, “Letter From New Delhi: Maharishi Ayur-Veda: Modern Insights Into Ancient Medicine.” Criticism from the Journal’s readers over the validity of the article’s argument led the associate editor to write a rebuttal in which he criticized the financial stake the authors had in validating and selling their products, the Hindu belief in yogic flying, and the basis of Chopra’s ayurveda in TM.¹⁹ Chopra responded by filing a \$30 million suit in which he accused the Journal of defamation and bigotry.²⁰ Chopra’s lawyer claims that the suit was settled for an undisclosed amount;²¹ some critics, however, state that the suit was dismissed.²²

Chopra split with TM in 1993, allegedly because the Maharishi attempted to control his speaking and writing.²³ In that same year, Chopra published his breakthrough work, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old*. After an appearance on Oprah, Chopra sold 130,000 copies of the book in one day.²⁴

Ageless Body, Timeless Mind led Chopra into a fierce lawsuit over plagiarism. The book contains unaccredited material developed by Robert Sapolsky, a professor of biology at Stanford University; Sapolsky filed suit on January 23, 1997.²⁵ The suit was settled out-of-court, with Chopra agreeing to provide proper attributions to Sapolsky in future printings of the book.²⁶

In 1993 Chopra and family moved to La Jolla, CA. He soon became the executive director of the Sharp Institute for Human Potential and Mind–Body Medicine with a \$30,000 grant from the Office of Alternative Medicine in the National Institutes to study ayurvedic medicine.²⁷ The Sharp Institute was affiliated with Sharp HealthCare, a system of seven hospitals, twenty-three clinics, and three medical groups.²⁸

In 1995, however, a change in ownership resulted in a break between Sharp and Chopra; Chopra then opened the Chopra Center for Well Being.²⁹ It is noteworthy that Chopra declined to apply for a California medical license, and he no longer engages in clinical practice.³⁰ While his recent books do not list Chopra as a doctor in the by-line on their covers, his web site contains a question-and-answer section titled “Ask Dr. Chopra.”³¹

In addition to the aforementioned lawsuits, Chopra has sued several other critics in recent years. A 1996 article in *The Weekly Standard* published the claim of a prostitute that Chopra had patronized her in 1991. Chopra filed suit against *The Weekly Standard* after the prostitute retracted her assertion, leading the magazine to publish an apology and pay Chopra’s estimated \$1 million in legal fees.³² The law firm representing a former Chopra employee who accused Chopra of sexual harassment was also sued; this suit was recently dismissed with prejudice by a judge who called the suit “frivolous.”³³

In 1998, Chopra was sued for \$100 million by a former psychotherapist who claims that Chopra used portions of a copyrighted manuscript, *Pattern Change Programming, Creating Your Own Destiny*, in his 1994 book, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*.³⁴

TEACHINGS

Ayurveda / Mind Body Medicine: Ayurveda is a form of Indian folk medicine that has been practiced for at least two thousand years. It was first promoted in the United States by disciples of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.³⁵

Ayurvedic medicine is essentially, to use Chopra's term, "mind body medicine." This form of medicine "offers new possibilities for promoting and improving health through natural approaches that stimulate our body's intrinsic healing system."³⁶ Ayurvedic practitioners engage in meditation techniques, balanced nutrition, yoga, and exercise to enhance their health and reduce stress.³⁷

A statement made by Triguna at the end of his first meeting with Chopra had a profound impact on Chopra's later ideology: "Ayurveda is very clear about the goal of life. It is to be happy and to receive wise and happy thoughts from every part of the universe."³⁸ Chopra restated the principle: "You are what you think."³⁹ The purpose of ayurveda is to attain balance between mind, body, and environment; Chopra writes, "Ayurveda takes the vista of man to be infinite. The universe is the macrocosm, man is the microcosm."⁴⁰

Simply stated, the universe consists of a single energy or consciousness; this energy is the "field of all possibilities."⁴¹ Chopra also refers to this field as the "quantum soup." This energy field, which is endlessly creative and positive, is the source for all existing beings (including humans). When humans are completely open to the "flow" of this energy field, they will be happy and healthy. They become unhappy and unhealthy, and age more poorly, when they block this flow.⁴² The practices of ayurveda are intended to lower a person's resistance to the flow of the universal energy field.

Chopra correctly points out that the medical community does not widely accept ayurvedic medicine. Because his medical practices are "experimental," the Chopra Center for Well Being is not a licensed medical care facility, and ayurvedic treatment is not covered by most insurance programs.⁴³ Instead of healing his clients from their diseases, Chopra focuses on "self-empowering knowledge and experience of the achievement of balance."⁴⁴

The Seven Spiritual Laws: Chopra is well known for his seven spiritual laws, "the principles that nature uses to create everything in material existence," and which people can use to "fulfill [our] desires with effortless ease."⁴⁵ His two books on the subject provide guidelines for adults and children to create unlimited wealth. Chopra's seven spiritual laws are:

1. The Law of Pure Potentiality
2. The Law of Giving
3. The Law of "Karma" or Cause and Effect
4. The Law of Least Effort
5. The Law of Intention and Desire
6. The Law of Detachment
7. The Law of Dharma

Dharma and karma are the two cornerstones of Chopra's seven laws. In Hinduism, dharma is our purpose in life, and karma is the law of cause-and-effect (Chopra explains the Law of Karma by paraphrasing the Bible: "What you sow is what you reap").⁴⁶ By fulfilling our purpose to serve others (dharma), as stated in the Law of Giving, we will reap benefits for ourselves (karma).⁴⁷

A modified version of Brahma — which in Hinduism is understood as the impersonal energy of which all existing things are a part — is also central to Chopra's seven laws. Hinduism encourages the renunciation of material desires in order to achieve perfect alignment with Brahma. Chopra, however, teaches that unity with Brahma (which he calls the "field of pure potentiality" or "quantum soup") can be used to fulfill one's desires.⁴⁸ Also different from Hinduism is Chopra's teaching that not only can people channel the

energy of the universe into fulfilling their desires, they should also be able to do this with minimal effort.⁴⁹

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

In contrast to Chopra's Hindu-based teaching that we create reality from universal energy, the Bible teaches that only God can create *ex nihilo* (something from nothing) (Isaiah 45:18; John 1:3).

Brahma, an impersonal energy, does not govern the universe. Instead, the universe is governed and preserved by God (Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 103:19). God is infinite (1 Timothy 6:16), personal (Isaiah 44:6–7), and immutable (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

The Bible condemns the materialism inherent in Chopra's teachings. Jesus encouraged us to lay up treasure in heaven, instead of pursuing possessions on earth (Matthew 6:19–21). In addition, one of the results of sin is that work without the empowering of the Holy Spirit requires great effort, rather than being effortless (Genesis 3:17–19).

RECOMMENDED READING

Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Harvest House Publishers. The most comprehensive examination of New Age beliefs and practices in print. Extensively examines New Age medicine and physics as taught by such people as Chopra. 670 pages.

The Kingdom of the Cults, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition, by Walter Martin and edited by Hank Hanegraff, Bethany House Publishers. Contains a chapter on the New Age Movement. Comes with a CD-ROM for cross-referencing. 703 pages.

Notes

- 1 *Return of the Rishi*, 18–19.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 3 "A Few Thoughts on Ayurvedic Mumbo–Jumbo," <http://www.quackwatch.com/04ConsumerEducation/chopra.html>.
- 4 *Return of the Rishi*, 57–58.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 6 "A Few Thoughts on Ayurvedic Mumbo–Jumbo."
- 7 Tony Perry, "So Rich, So Restless." *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997, <http://www.latimes.com>.
- 8 *Return of the Rishi*, 103–105.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 108–109.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 12 *Return of the Rishi*, 125.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 124–125.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Return of the Rishi*, 139.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 143.
- 18 *Ibid.*, back cover.
- 19 *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Newsweek*, October 20, 1997, 57.
- 22 "Deepak Chopra Bombshell," <http://www.trancenet.org/chopra/news/plagoverview.shtml>.
- 23 *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.
- 24 *Newsweek*, October 20, 1997, 54.
- 25 "Deepak Chopra Bombshell."
- 26 "Text of Chopra/Sapolsky Statement," <http://www.trancenet.org/chopra/news/plagstate.shtml>.
- 27 *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Time*, June 24, 1996, 68.
- 31 <http://www.chopra.com>.
- 32 *Newsweek*, October 20, 1997, p. 56; *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1997.
- 33 "Deepak Chopra Bombshell."
- 34 *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1998.
- 35 "Deepak Chopra and Maharishi Ayurvedic Medicine," <http://www.trancenet.org/chopra/news/ncahf.shtml>.
- 36 "Mind Body Medicine," <http://www.chopra.com/aboutmindbody.htm>.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Return of the Rishi*, 110.
- 39 *Creating Health*, 92.
- 40 *Return of the Rishi*, 113.
- 41 *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, 9.
- 42 *Creating Health*, 102.
- 43 "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.chopra.com/ccwfaq.htm>.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, 1, 2.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 48 *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, 10, 13.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 51.



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