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The Secret about "The Secret"

by Robert Fritz

A new book entitled *The Secret* made a splash in America recently, much because talk show host Oprah Winfrey gave it her unabashed endorsement. Since its release, many people have asked me to comment on it, so I will.

If you haven't read the book, the major themes are these:

Thought is creative: whatever you think tends to manifest
Through the "law of attraction" you are able to manifest your desires
The higher or more refined your consciousness, the better this will work for you

To quote from the book:

"You must believe you have received. You must know that what you want is yours the moment you ask. You must have complete and utter faith... In the moment you ask, and believe and know you already have it in the unseen, the entire Universe shifts to bring it into the seen. You must act, speak, and think as though you are receiving it *now*."

Most commentators on the book have either adopted it wildly, or rejected it out of hand. I don't fall into either of these camps in that I think there is something to the "law of attraction," and I'm not skeptical about paranormal phenomena. On the other hand, many of the claims made in the book create unintended consequences of which the authors seem not aware, some of which I will cover in this article.

For the record, I shared these very same ideas thirty years ago. Ironically, a few of the contributing authors studied with me during the time I was fostering these types of notions and before I discovered how structural dynamics is even more causally powerful than various forms of positive thinking or mental programming.

Rather than reject these ideas out of hand, I would like to explore some of the deeper issues and implications that are difficult to address from the position of true believer or total cynic.

The first idea to address is "the law of attraction." Here's what we can observe: within the creative process, often the universe seems to cooperate, especially when you establish structural tension by knowing the outcome you want and the reality you have. How and why does this phenomenon happen? We don't know. That's a big "*we don't know*," because given we don't actually know, how can we form a concept or belief system around it?

In fact, the authors of *The Secret* have many concepts that the reader is encouraged to adopt, believe, have utter faith in, and so on.

Okay, here's a good test: does this type of experience happen to those who don't believe? Yes, all the time. How come that happens given they don't believe in it? *Because it doesn't call for belief*. The fact that things can come about in mysterious ways isn't a consequence of how or what you think, but that it sometimes happens that way, and that time it did.

The phenomenon of synchronicity and unusual manifestation of results is only one aspect of the creative process, and one that is often minor rather than major. Our aspirations are usually not fulfilled by the law of attraction, but by hard work, strategic decisions, and an ongoing life-building process in which we learn, improve, evaluate, and develop competence. And there are times when "lucky" coincidences happen, much to our delight: the phone rings and it's just the person you wanted to talk to; or you see a book that gives

you the information you needed just at that moment; or you hear about an opportunity that is just right for the project in which you are engaged.

Here's what we actually know: Sometimes great synchronistic things happen while we're working toward a desired outcome. These occurrences are not a direct outcome of rational thought or normal physics. We like it. We don't actually know much about it.

Here's where I think those in the belief business go terribly wrong. They glorify the phenomenon and make it symbolic. Rather than one of many ways in which something can come about, now there is a story about how strange it was, which leads to a myth which leads to a conviction which leads to a dogma. But remember, this phenomenon happens to people who do not have any beliefs about it.

The Long Range Effects

How did I move from believing in notions of mental manifestation as a foundation for a life-building process to questioning it, and then, later, seeing its limitations? From the experience of tracking over time those to whom we taught this process. At first everyone had great success. They were reaching their goals. There were many great stories about the weird ways things would come about. There was a lot of hysteria around much of this, which led lots of people to want to learn about it. But, over time, too often, we saw a pattern of oscillation. Early success was followed by reversals. Often people landed in the very same place they were in before they began.

People who believe in various forms of positive thinking have a built in excuse for these reversals. There was a negative thought that interfered with the programming. Others say that faith was weak, or negative beliefs got in the way. These explanations come from within the original belief system, and therefore are circular.

Given I was trying to understand the reasons for oscillation, I needed to look beyond the claim that they "didn't do it right." In fact, they had done it right, as evidenced by the early success. The fact is, the success wasn't sustainable. But why not?

To illustrate an oscillating structure, I often describe a person in a room who has two large rubber bands tied to him or her, one from the wall in front and one from the wall behind. These represent two competing tension-resolutions systems. In an oscillating structure, when you begin to walk toward one wall, the one that represents your goals, the rubber band in front of you is relaxing. But the one behind you is becoming more stretched. Since energy moves along the path of least resistance, even though you may want to stay at the wall that represents the accomplishment of your goals, the underlying dynamic has a different goal. That goal is equilibrium: equal tension between both rubber bands. You can't fool Mother Structure. Soon you will be moving away from what you want, because the underlying structure is the dominant force.

When I realized this principle, I saw that what we were doing with all of our mental practices was getting people to the wall faster, only to experience a reversal if they happened to be in an oscillating structure. In those days, after teaching thousands of people how to get to the wall that says "what I want," I was shocked to come to understand that the actual outcome was often success followed by reversals followed by ultimate failure.

Ironically, the other "rubber band" in an oscillating structure is conceptual; in other words, all about beliefs, ideals, concepts, often attempting to compensate for how reality actually is. To have a change of underlying structure, you can "cut" the other rubber band by better understanding reality and ridding yourself of the conceptual content you hold on to. In a world that markets belief systems of all kinds, this was pretty radical stuff. But, in fact, people were able to have profound changes of underlying structure in which they could create those things that mattered deeply to them, and, instead of an inevitable reversal, use that success for the platform of future success.

Yes, you can use the notions of *The Secret* to manifest success for yourself, and it will work for a while. But, if you have not had a real change of underlying structure, and you are in an oscillating structure, your success will be temporary and followed by a reversal.

Okay, so around 1980 I was horrified to discover that we had helped people get to the wall a little faster, but many of them weren't able to build from there. That's when I began to understand the relationship between vision *and* reality. The more I talked about reality, the less people liked it. Many of them liked the idea of manipulating their minds, and didn't want to know anything about reality because reality often contains things that disappoint us, or

show we are not as capable as we wanted to imagine ourselves. Reality shows us our failures as well as our successes.

Over the years, the idea of reality being an acquired taste has gained more and more popularity, especially by those who have, through the law of attraction and other mental means, gotten to the wall marked success. It takes a few years to begin to see your own patterns, especially if you are busily holding on to the faith with utter and complete conviction. But reality has a way of always winning. That's because it is real.

But the creative process is about reality. It is about bringing creations into being, giving them birth, helping them exist.

So, here's the interesting thing: what it takes to have an underlying structure that advances rather than oscillates is: knowing the outcomes you want and reality as it is in relationship to that. There is no place for belief in this. People can master their own creative process, no matter what they believe. That happens to be a fact of history.

Here's another profound conflict: it has to do with truth and the subconscious mind. In the tradition of *The Secret*, the subconscious mind cannot tell the difference between what is real and what is not. Part of the technique is to hold an idea as if it were real so the subconscious thinks it's true. That's why they have you imagine what you want as if it was a done deal, already existing. So, if you program the subconscious, (or connect with the Universe) it will attract the result. I thought that to be the case thirty years ago.

But, now I think the opposite. I think the subconscious is more aware of reality than our usual conscious state. Many people have had this experience: they set the alarm clock for a certain time, say 7 am. At 6:59 they wake up and shut the alarm off just before it goes off. Many people have this experience even in new time zones, so it is not the same 7 am they usually experience. How does the subconscious know what time it is, even when you are sleeping? The reason is it does understand reality exceptionally well.

So when we tell it things that are not true, there is a dissonance between what it actually knows and what you are telling it. At first, through the law of attraction or what-have-you, you are getting parking spaces in the hardest places in the city, and the phone is ringing off the hook with the people you just thought about, but soon, there is a breakdown of the relationship between what you say and what is true. You lose credibility with your mind, and your desires and values are taken less seriously. You never want to be in a position of lying to yourself.

And there is a value conflict of truth, on the one hand, and concepts, on the other. If you value truth, you do not want to try to trick the mind or the universe. You want to be honest. And perhaps this is the difference between metaphysics and the creative process: the creative process demands a high level of honesty about what you want and what you have in reality. Without that, you can't grow, learn, rethink your assumptions, discover new insights, or open new worlds.

And finally about the subject, there is something very magical, very mysterious, very miraculous about the creative process in which an invisible hand often seems to be at work. That, alone, will not take you where you want to go. But it is nice to know that somehow, you are not alone, that the universe does work in mysterious ways sometimes, and that it is part of your creative process. As Robert Frost said, "Anything more than the truth would be too weak." To glorify never does justice to that which is glorified. To seem to make more of it, less is made of it. The real secret is that the human spirit longs to create a life of aspiration and values, and, for that, there are no tricks.

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