



# Unraveling The Secret

DAVID RIPPE

**C**LOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE your perfect life. What would you wish for? Money, fame, your ideal mate? Maybe a loving family, rewarding work, or an unshakable state of enlightenment? Any of your desires can be fulfilled according to the law of attraction that is being popularized in *The Secret*, the cleverly marketed sales sensation by Rhonda Byrne.

Not surprisingly in a culture where happiness and acquisition are the hallmarks of a successful life, *The Secret*—or the law of attraction—has attracted a huge following, with 3.75 million books in print and 1.5 million DVDs sold. *The Secret* has been featured by Larry King, Ellen DeGeneres, and Oprah, in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *People* magazines, and is burning up the Internet with hundreds of thousands of emails flying through cyberspace as people discover what has been known for thousands of years.

The law of attraction states simply that “like attracts like.” Each of us vibrates at a specific frequency, giving off thought waves that act like a cosmic magnet drawing back to us what we mentally broadcast. So, the “thinking” goes, think like a rich person, and you become rich. Visualize a beautiful home, and it will manifest. In essence, you get what you think.

But the law of attraction poses many complexities and

contradictions. If like attracts like, then what is the message of unwanted outcomes, such as cancer or a child born with Down syndrome? Who or what is to blame, if blame is even an appropriate part of the analysis? While one side sings the law’s praises and the other pronounces it snake oil (see sidebar on page 14), the truth, like many things in life, lies somewhere in the middle.

## ANCIENT ROOTS

The fast-cut montage that begins *The Secret* video features scenes surrounding a mysterious green tablet—the Emerald Tablet. *The Secret* book begins with an eight-word excerpt attributed to the Emerald Tablet, circa 3000 BCE: “As above, so below. As within, so without.” But after that brief acknowledgment, Byrne and her team of best-selling authors and coaches never again mention the Emerald Tablet nor the Hermetic philosophy and teachings associated with it.

Hermetic philosophy centers on Hermes Trismegistus, whose legend traces back thousands of years to ancient Egypt. Like many historical and religious figures from antiquity, man and myth have been hopelessly entangled, leaving us with accounts that are subject to interpretation,



SHANE GUFFOGG

exaggeration, errors in translation, and outright repudiation. Hermes Trismegistus appears to be a syncretism of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes. The title “Trismegistus” means “Thrice Great” and refers to the three ancient branches of the wisdom of the universe—alchemy, astrology, and theurgy—that Hermes Trismegistus possessed and transmitted.

The Emerald Tablet was said to have originally been a mysterious stone or crystal-like green tablet on which a coded spiritual formula was succinctly written in bas-relief. According to documentation from eleventh-century German theologian Albertus Magnus, Alexander the Great found the Emerald Tablet in Egypt in 331 BCE when he discovered what he believed was Hermes Trismegistus’s tomb. Alexander immediately ordered that the Tablet be transcribed and translated. By 400 CE, however, the Tablet itself was reportedly buried along with other texts

and artifacts—some say on the Giza Plateau—to protect it from destruction by religious zealots who were burning libraries and from patriarchs who condemned the Tablet’s mysterious and universal formula for personal transformation and collective evolution. But the wisdom was nonetheless protected and became the cornerstone for Hermetic sciences and philosophy.

In his well-researched book *The Emerald Tablet: Alchemy for Personal Transformation* (Penguin, 1999), Dennis William Hauck writes extensively on the history of the Tablet and Hermeticism: “The Hermetic tradition emphasized the existence of a supreme force called the One Thing, which has no perceptible form until it is ‘grounded’ or expressed in material reality . . . The Hermeticists saw the One Thing as a primordial, plastic energy that takes the form of the idea or thought projected by the One Mind.” Hermeticists believed that calming the mind and focusing our intention through meditation, prayer, and invocation allows us to consciously communicate with and influence this force. The Hermeticists’ ultimate goal was to achieve divine consciousness.

The Emerald Tablet was the precursor to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which was based on a number of ancient

manuscripts assigned to Hermes Trismegistus and translated by the Greeks from the Egyptian during the second and third centuries. Copies of the *Corpus* were widely circulated by scholars and influenced the civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, Persia, and eventually Europe. Hermetic principles and passages were also quietly integrated into many major religions and belief systems, including Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Paganism, and Christianity. Portions of the Gospel of John, for example, resemble some of the Hermetic writings, as with, “In the beginning was Thoth, and Thoth was in Atum, and Thoth was Atum in the unfathomable reaches of primordial space.” The Hindu and Buddhist principles of karma and reincarnation are also found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: “O son, how many bodies we have to pass through, how many bands of demons, through how many series of repetitions and cycles of the

stars, before we hasten to the One alone?” Similarly, there are close ties in language and imagery between the *Corpus* and the Kabbalah. Indeed,

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hundreds of mystery schools and schools of philosophy taught the Hermetic philosophy, though it gets scant recognition for its influence.

In 1912, the Three Initiates, an anonymous group with ties to the Masonic Temple in Chicago, published *The Kybalion*. This book put into writing the “Secret Doctrine,” a version of the Hermetic philosophy that had been carefully shared and passed down for the previous two thousand years through various secret societies. *The Kybalion* explains the seven fundamental principles of Hermetic philosophy:

**I. Mentalism.** Everything that exists in the reality that underlies all manifestation, known as the universe of matter and energy, is spirit in the form of an infinite living mind. The All is Mind; in other words, the totality of the universe is consciousness.

A growing number of books, such as Ervin Laszlo’s *Science and the Akashic Field* (Inner Traditions, 2007), are documenting a wide range of scientific studies that suggest and reinforce the notion that the universe is underpinned by a subtle fundamental field that connects all things

with all other things: “At the roots of reality there is an interconnecting, information-conserving, and information-conveying cosmic field.”

**2. Correspondence.** There are always correspondence, harmony, and agreement between the laws and phenomena that affect the seven planes of existence. The widely known maxim “That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below” reflects this principle.

The principle of correspondence is aptly illustrated today by the concept of holons (first coined by Arthur Koestler in 1967): a system that is whole in itself but that is also part of a larger whole; for example, from the system of a subatomic particle to the system of a molecule and on through ever-larger systems to the whole of the universe.

**3. Vibration.** Everything is in constant vibration, and the rate of vibration manifests matter, energy, mind, and spirit. From lead to gold to table salt, human beings, and the distant stars, everything is energy that emanates from the place of All is Mind, the universal consciousness.

The pop spiritualism of *The Secret* fuses a shard of this principle to the principle of mentalism to create a simplistic version of the law of attraction.

**4. Polarity.** While everything emanates from the One Mind, everything that is manifested has a dualistic nature, containing pairs of opposites with untold degrees between the extremes of the poles. For example, joy and sadness are poles of emotion separated by a plethora of feelings.

**5. Rhythm.** There is a measured motion to everything that exists: in and out, rise and fall, back and forth, swinging like a pendulum between the two poles, a perpetual action and reaction.

If this sounds reminiscent of Newton’s Third Law of Motion, it should—Newton was an alchemist and Hermeticist who translated his own version of the Emerald Tablet.

**6. Causation.** Every cause has its effect, and every effect has its cause. The precision of the universe is such

that nothing happens by chance. There is continuity among all events precedent, current, and subsequent. Every thought we think and action we take have their direct and indirect results, which link together in a continuous chain of cause and effect.

**7. Gender.** Everything that exists contains masculine and feminine properties. Gender manifests on all planes, including the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Creation requires both the masculine and the feminine properties.

*The Kybalion* further states: “Mind (as well as metals and elements) may be transmuted from state to state, degree to degree, condition to condition, pole to pole, vibration to vibration. True Hermetic Transmutation is a Mental Art.” Intention plays a vital role in mastering mental transmutation, and each of the seven principles is affected to varying degrees by the conscious

and unconscious intentions of the practitioner.

Upon his extensive study of alchemy and its symbols, Carl Jung, the founder of

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analytical psychology, wrote an exhaustive work entitled *Psychology and Alchemy*. In his preface to the second edition, Jung writes, “I was led to postulate a ‘collective unconscious,’ a source of energy and insight in the depth of the human psyche which has operated in and through man from the earliest periods of which we have records.” Wallace D. Wattles tapped into the concept of the universe as thought when he wrote his classic, *The Science of Getting Rich*, in 1910: “Thought is the only power which can produce tangible riches from the formless substance.” Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, numerous works similar to *The Secret* convey their own version of the law of attraction—among them, Shakti Gawain’s popular *Creative Visualization* (Bantam, 1983), Deepak Chopra’s *Creating Affluence* (New World Library, 1998), and Wayne Dyer’s *The Power of Intention* (Hay House, 2004). The idea that our thoughts influence the manifestation of our reality is neither new nor radical. ➔

## DEEP-SEATED INTENTIONS

The law of attraction is not as easy as it first appears, however. “We may intend to shape our thoughts toward a certain outcome,” says Gay Luce, psychologist and founder of the Nine Gates Mystery School, “but because our minds are so out of control and mostly so out of sight, we may be doing a lot of unconscious thinking that would oppose our supposed intent.” Which means we must be vigilant in knowing ourselves and understanding our deeper motivations. As Luce explains: “Intention can be extremely focusing because its impact depends upon our ability to maintain the focus among the shoals of circumstance, the unforeseen tendencies of our nature, or our physiological unfolding. Intention implies that we are conscious.”

Jonathan Haidt, associate professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and author of *The Happiness Hypothesis*

(Basic Books, 2006), further explains the difficulties that can surround our best intentions: “The mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict. It’s as though we are each a little person, riding on the back of an elephant. The rider is conscious verbal reasoning—what we think we believe and want. The elephant is the 99 percent of the mind that is automatic, fast, and very hard to control consciously. Much of the drama and comedy of human life is that the elephant is so much more powerful than the rider—the best we can do is to get the two to work together reasonably well.”

So much of our behavior is made up of automatic processes that we are often unaware of our underlying intentions and how they affect our thoughts and actions. It is a constant internal battle to exert control over the automatic part of ourselves, and permanently changing our habits or our temperament is difficult. As Haidt explains: “The rider can’t just decide to change and then order the elephant to go along

## Bashing The Secret

Imitation is flattering, but you’re nobody in spiritual publishing until other authors start lining up to debunk you. So, not surprisingly, there are a number of books in the pipeline that dissect and attempt to discredit Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*.

First up in May is Thomas Nelson’s *There is More to “The Secret”* by Ed Gungor. According to Nelson, Gungor’s new book “is not written to attack recent publications but rather to correct their misguided advice while still speaking to the felt need that is causing millions to explore their pages.”

Next will come *The Secret Revealed: Exposing the Truth About the “Law of Attraction”* (August) by Jim Garlow and Rick Marschall, from Hachette’s FaithWords division. Garlow is the author (with Peter Jones) of *Cracking Da Vinci’s Code*, one of the most successful Da Vinci response books. FaithWords

promises that *The Secret Revealed* will discuss the law of attraction as typical of many false religions and movements throughout the centuries. Though not as blatantly out to bash *The Secret* as the first two titles, a third book promises to investigate whether the principles in it really work. St. Martin’s Thomas Dunne imprint will publish Karen Kelly’s *The Secret of the Secret* in August, billed as a wide-ranging analysis based on interviews with experts from a variety of disciplines.

There will undoubtedly be more to come, as *The Secret* continues burning up the best-seller list. Said Joel Fotinos, director of religious publishing for the Penguin Group and publisher for its Tarcher imprint, “We’ve been flooded with proposals all saying they are the next *Secret*, and most of those haven’t been that good.”

—Lynn Garrett  
*Publishers Weekly* (March 28, 2007)

with the program. Lasting change can only come by retraining the elephant, and that's hard to do."

How our minds actually work, then, makes uniform application of *The Secret's* version of the law of attraction virtually impossible to master. Different people at different levels of self-awareness will attract different circumstances—consciously *and* unconsciously. To retrain our minds and become more conscious require effort. One of the most effective ways to do this, Haidt says, is through meditation—echoing the Hermeticists' ancient credo of meditation, prayer, and invocation, as well as the contemplative and meditative practices of other spiritual traditions.

The ease of simply thinking about abundance and believing that you will attract whatever you desire may be *the* primary reason so many have embraced the notion. Bertram Malle, associate professor of psychology and director of the Institute of Cognitive and Decision Sciences at the University of Oregon, observes that, "A function of the simplistic law of attraction is that you don't have to know much—about physiology, physics, biology, psychology, society. You don't have to try to achieve outcomes by weaving yourself through the massive causal networks of the world. You can just cut through it and will the outcome. In its extreme form, that belief is unintelligent and dangerous. For example, if we all believed in 'the law,' we would just sit down and will a solution to the global warming crisis—of course, nobody would then take the hard path of actually *doing* something."

Perhaps the best gift *The Secret* gives us is the impetus to fully consider who we are and what we want. Is it a list of material possessions? If we strip away what we think we want and ask ourselves what we really desire, isn't it love and happiness? "Happiness comes from getting the right relationships between yourself and others, yourself and your work, and yourself and something beyond yourself," suggests Haidt. "As we become more conscious and clear, we can set intentions we might be glad to fulfill," says Luce. The real secret to navigating this complicated world may be to know ourselves more deeply, and then from that place, intentions will flow that embrace both an inner wisdom and a world of possibility. 

**DAVID RIPPE** is coauthor of *The Flip: Turn Your World Around* (Hampton Roads, 2006) and author of *The Journals* trilogy, written under the pseudonym R.T. Stone. He is also founder and CEO of Celestia International, a strategic marketing communication and creative services firm. Rippe can be reached at [david@theflip.net](mailto:david@theflip.net).



# The 15th Temple Awards for Creative Altruism

The 15th Temple Awards  
for Creative Altruism  
will be presented at the  
IONS International Conference  
"Consciousness in Action"  
August 8–12, 2007  
in Palm Springs, California



The Temple Awards  
for Creative Altruism  
are presented to one or more  
outstanding altruists  
whose lives and work  
embody the inspirational light  
of unselfish service motivated by love.

An award fund of \$25,000  
is divided among recipients  
each award year.

The deadline for nominations  
for the 2007 Award  
is May 31, 2007.

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