



CAUTION!  
***MAGICAL THINKING AHEAD***

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Like most of you my life has contained powerful successes, embarrassing failures, traumatic crises and ecstatic highs. Throughout these times I have learned that positive events can occur without dreaming of them, and that crises can blindside us without warning. There are often no explanations as to why these highs and lows occur.

A retrospective look at my life was triggered when I read, *The Secret*, written by Rhonda Byrne, an Australian television and film producer. Although I appreciate some of the ideas presented in *The Secret* I feel some caution is necessary. Many of my concerns relate to concepts presented in two of my former articles – “The Control Fantasy” written in 2001, and “Living as a Creative Visionary Parts I and II” written in 2004.

In case you are not familiar with the book or movie *The Secret*, the theory is simple. In the book author Bob Proctor defines “the secret” as the “law of attraction”. He says that “Everything that’s coming into your life you are attracting into your life.”

“Whatever is going on in your mind you are attracting to you.” Although I believe in the power of thought, I believe there are some serious pitfalls to be aware of. This article will consider some of my concerns, hoping that all of us think more about what “the secret” really is, and what it is not.

I believe that positive thinking has a powerful effect on the outcome. I also believe that each of us is inherently creative and able to manifest meaningful visions – particularly visions about our goals, and desires. As I said in “Living as a Creative Visionary”, “These personal visions are not only expressions of who we are as unique individuals, but they also help us define the meaning and purpose of our lives. In order to live as creative visionaries, we must begin each new day in the same way we would face a blank canvas or a piece of paper – each being full of potential.” It is up to us to creatively envision each new day in ways reflecting our beliefs, values, priorities and goals. In order to live a mature and fulfilling life, we must use our creative visions as sign posts to guide us. As we make choices reflecting our creative visions we pull energy toward us, aiding us in manifesting these visions.

For example, I recently experienced this when I needed to find a new home. My first major requirement was the need for a large, bright studio space. I also envisioned a neighborhood that was friendly, lively, and with easily accessible shops. After seeing twenty-some houses, nothing fit this description and yet I knew there had to be such a place. I could sense it at the core of my being and felt pulled to search until I found it. I was not willing to settle for less than my vision. I felt sorry for my real estate agent who showed me house after house only to be told it was not the right one.

One day a friend mentioned a neighborhood she thought was great. I was unfamiliar with it, but after visiting I was convinced that it was where I wanted to live. At that point my vision became more specific – I wanted to live on a street where I would feel connected, with supportive and caring neighbors, and in an area close to shops. Eventually my search ended when I walked into a house and immediately knew that I had found my new home.

I had envisioned what I desired, and even though there were times when I became discouraged and frustrated, I knew at the core of my being, there would be a positive outcome. If I had not first created an image of what I desired, and pursued this vision with diligence and determination, I would not have found it. So yes, I believe in the power of our creative visions, and that as we project our visions into the universe they energetically pull us in the right direction.

Having said that, ***I have a serious concern that the concepts embodied in “the secret” will be confused with fantasy, magical thinking and ultimately with control.*** In *The Secret* author and spiritual leader Dr. Michael Beckwith is quoted as saying, “Creation is always happening.” “Every time an individual has a thought...they’re in the

creation process.” Although I do believe these things can be true, we must be cautious and self-aware.

My first caution is to not confuse “the secret” with fantasy and magical thinking. While fantasy and envisioning both require creativity, as I stated in my “Creative Visionary” articles, there is a big difference between the two. Fantasy is more closely linked to the behavior of a child. I wrote, “...there is a big difference between the endless free-floating fantasies of a child, and the purposeful process of accessing our creative visions as adults. ***Fantasy is an activity often generated by the emotions, carried out by the mind, and done for self-soothing or pleasure-seeking purposes***”. As a child we could fantasize about flying, about becoming a prince or princess, or about having an imaginary friend, like my granddaughter who took her invisible friend “Andy Alice” with her wherever she went. (Or, just look at the success of the wonderful Harry Potter books!) As fun and magnificent as these fantasies are, engaging in them will not make them real – even though they are generated by the mind and emotions, which is described in *The Secret* as the necessary components in the law of attraction.

On the other hand, ***“(Creative) envisioning, as opposed to fantasy, is a focused, peaceful, centered endeavor, helping us explore and expand our creative inspirations, and aspirations.***” Creative envisioning contains an emotional maturity. When we engage in creative envisioning we open a space within us, inviting ideas, inspirations and possibilities. This could be used toward a change in lifestyle, a business venture, an invention that will make our lives easier, or a creative idea like writing the Harry Potter books. These are not escapes, nor reactions to *extreme* emotions. Creative envisioning helps us become more self-aware and more focused. In turn we can manifesting specific goals, desires, solve problems, and even determine our life’s mission.

Another caution is to not confuse the “laws of attraction” as described in *The Secret* with magical thinking. In *The Secret*, Bob Proctor is quoted as saying, “...the law of attraction is your magnificent tool to create whatever you want in your life. Welcome to the magic of life...” According to James Alcock, as quoted in *Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia*, “Magical thinking is the interpreting of two closely occurring events as though one caused the other, without any concern for the causal link.”

Magical thinking starts in childhood. Chris Connelly of ABC News, in her article of May 10, 2007, “Magical Thinking: Are You a Believer?”, quoted University of Texas Professor Jacqui Woolley as saying that his studies have shown that “at about age 4, children believe that wishing can cause a penny to appear in what has just been show to be an empty box.” As adults, we can carry this magical thinking further, i.e. when we believe that rituals like crossing our fingers can make a wish come true, or holding our breath while passing a cemetery will keep us from dying, or carrying a rabbit’s foot will be protective. Magical thinking gives a person the sense of extra power and/or protection. It is often used to boost the ego and what I call “the enemies of the spirit” – shame, doubt, fear and longing. Both fantasies and magical thinking can occupy our minds and emotions – both key ingredients in the theory of “the law of attraction”.

Magical thinking can also involve the misinterpretation of a dream or synchronistic experiences. Synchronistic experiences, as described by Carl Jung, are those events that happen simultaneously and appear to hold personal meaning. For example, a synchronistic experience occurs when we need the answer to a question and then during a casual conversation a friend gives us the answer. On the other hand it is magical thinking to believe we have found a parking place because we employed the principles in “the secret”. Perhaps that parking place would have been there even if we didn’t think it. Or, what if ten people had employed the principles in “the secret” at the same time? Whose “power of attraction” would win? The interpretation of any simultaneous occurrence needs to be looked at. Perhaps it was just a coincidence. Although I firmly believe in the power of dreams and synchronistic occurrences, we must be very careful how we interpret these signs and events, and then cautious about using the information.

One example is James, an intelligent, educated and successful business man. James was sure he would win the next lottery, because in a dream his “spirit guides” told him the “secret number”. Because this dream was particularly vivid he decided it was a real message. In his emotional excitement, he spent a lot of time and energy planning – by fantasizing about how he would spend his winnings. Of course he did not win. I wonder how many people believe they have found the secret winning number, as opposed to how many really win? How many people make fantasy-oriented choices, to find out that the outcome was disastrous to themselves and/or other?

My next area of caution is the fantasy of control. Both fantasies and magical thinking can be forms of control. At times we all want to feel like we are in control. Control is a defense mechanism used to emotionally cope with the seemingly negative aspects of life. Generally we need/want to control something, or someone, because we are afraid. Believing that our thoughts can *always* control the future is nothing more than a seductive fantasy. It gives us a false, usually short-lived, feeling of power and safety.

It’s great to imagine controlling the behavior of others, the realities of nature, or our health. As an artist/writer I would love to control what others think of my artwork or my writing. I can’t. If a hurricane is coming, it would be marvelous to think we could control its path or power. If we had multiple sclerosis or Lou Gehrig’s disease, it would be great to think we could cure our illness with our thoughts. Yes, we can think positively and take steps to ensure the best outcome, but no matter how positive our thoughts, there are always times when they have no impact. I know several very positive, spiritual people who developed cancer. Despite thinking positively, meditating daily, and following all the medical advice, they ended up dying of their illness. Although our attitude and intentions play a huge part in what occurs in life, it is a fantasy to think we have control over everything.

Should we blame ill people for not being cured because they did not “know” the secret? Should we blame the victims of 9/11, or Hurricane Katrina because as a group they weren’t thinking positively? This would be blaming people for circumstances out of their control. Tara Burghart, in her Yahoo June 23, 2007 news article, “Critics of ‘The Secret’ Bemoan Claims” says that, “...the book dismisses conditions such as a genetic

predisposition to being overweight or a slow thyroid as “disguises for thinking ‘fat thoughts.’” She also says that the book states that during times in which massive number of lives were lost, the “frequency of their thoughts matched the frequency of the event.” This is blaming the victim and **blaming the victim is never okay.**

There is only one thing we can consistently control – aspects of ourselves. For example, we can control our judgmental thinking and change our negative and paranoid attitudes. We can control our choice of actions, i.e. how we treat others and our environment. We can control our health by eating well, exercising and getting enough rest. With practice, we can even lessen many physical problems such as pain, high blood pressure, etc.

If the law of attraction holds true for positive outcomes, then the implication is that it will also be true for the negative outcomes. The creator of the “Wealth Beyond Reason” program, Bob Doyle, says in *The Secret*, no one deliberately attracts anything unwanted, it simply comes “from a lack of awareness of the great creative power of our thoughts.” The message imbedded in the “law of attraction” implies that negative happenings are generated by conscious and subconscious thoughts, or come to us because we do not know “the secret”. On several occasions I have been deeply betrayed by people I truly loved. On one occasion a man I was to marry died suddenly two months before the wedding. I am very sure I did not hope for, nor envision his death.

The other implication is that if we can achieve positive results via “the law of attraction”, then we can purposefully attain destructive outcomes. For example, I had a client who couldn’t leave her cheating husband because she was so financially dependent. She wished he would die. Because he traveled a lot, she constantly thought about him being involved in some sort of accident, so she could get his life insurance. Thanks goodness her negative, obsessive thoughts held no power. Her real task was to work on herself to become emotionally and financially independent. She did this when she went back to school, got an advanced degree and then left her betraying husband.

There are a couple of other dangers in occupying ourselves with the power of “the secret”. One is that it is always about the future, and the other is that it seems to be narcissistically focused on materialistic values. In the first instance it takes us out of the here and now, (what happened to being present and aware of each moment of our lives?) and then it suggests that we use the “law of attraction” to obtain things such as success and wealth. It is interesting to note that *The Secret* was first inspired by *The Science of Getting Rich*, a 100 year old book by Wallace D. Wattles.

This leads me to one more cautionary note. That is, when we engage in creative envisioning – not fantasy or magical thinking – we must use our energy toward mature, spiritual, and ego-syntonic results. There are individuals who hold certain beliefs, or narcissistic thoughts that they deserve things in life, despite the fact that the outcome may hurt others. Long ago, a client told me her mother shoplifted from the local stores, because her mother believed she deserved more possessions, but did not have the money. The mother had created very clever ways of stealing and concealing what she stole. The daughter, a witness to all of her mother’s controlling, greedy behavior, copied these behaviors and as an adult

became involved in creating her own very selfish fantasies. The daughter's behavior came to a screeching halt when she was caught shoplifting.

On an encouraging note, yes positive thinking and creative visualization are empowering tools. In *The Secret* it says, "The reason visualization is so powerful is because as you create pictures in your mind of seeing yourself with what it is you want, you are generating thoughts and feelings of having it now." Absolutely. It does create *feelings* of having it now – and I stress the word "feelings". This has been shown to be true for athletes. When they use guided imagery to envision each step in their event, they are more apt to do better. However, just visualizing does not necessarily create a positive outcome. Visualizing must be followed by intention, determination, and self-discipline. They must do the necessary footwork to get their bodies ready through rigorous practice. Yet, they still cannot control the final outcome. What if they have the flu the day of the race, or their opponent is just plain better than they are? They can only do their best.

Lance Armstrong is truly a man of creative vision. His behavior embodies much of what I am talking about. Against all odds he was cured (with an extremely small chance of survival), of multiple cancers found in his lungs, testicles, and brain, and then went on to win the Tour de France, the prestigious bicycle race, a record-breaking seven times. Without his ability to creatively envision becoming healthy and then becoming a top notch athlete this success never would have happened. Yet, he had to do an amazing amount of footwork. He had to actively participate in his positive, creative visions, first of getting well, then of becoming a champion.

I believe the Serenity Prayer, used in twelve step programs like AA, conveys a very powerful message. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." As Virginia, a graphic artist and good friend of mine said recently, "We must respond to what life requires of us, rather than trying to fit life into any pre-conceptions, needs or desires". Plus, it does no good to merely think and talk about our desires. As AA also says we must "walk the walk, not just talk the talk". We must walk toward our goals with ruthless determination and discipline.

Clearly positive thinking gives us an advantage, while negative thinking gets us nowhere. Negative thinking robs us of both our energy and focus. We must take responsibility for the way we think and the choices we make. The bottom line is, if you break a mirror and think you will have "seven years of bad luck", you will. On the other hand, if your astrologer or psychic tell you that your next few years will be filled with good fortune, they probably will. This phenomenon is primarily because we watch for, and then focus on, signs proving our perspective to be correct.

No matter what we envision for ourselves, or what path we wish to pursue, it also helps to have a loving support system. A positive outcome of our creative visualizations is always helped by the process of co-creation. If we have loved ones, friends, or colleagues, who have the same creative ideas and goals, it truly helps to reinforce and assure a more positive result, by supporting us in our creative visions.

In general, we must be tenacious in our self awareness – to watch for negativity when it creeps in and to move toward the positive. We must pursue our dreams, our visions with determination and courage. We must put our whole selves into that which we desire, and whenever possible, not settle for less. However, there are times when we must alter our goals in mid-stream. The woman, whose husband suddenly died before they had children, must *temporarily* give up her vision of becoming a mother. Her creative visions will be altered by her current circumstances, but not forever. She will need to be “light on her feet” (see my article “Being Light on Your Feet”, in the September 2006 issue of “Pathways”), and create new visions to get her through this moment in time.

Yes, caution is necessary. Not caution about being positive, but caution that we do not use “the law of attraction” to lead us to fantasies, magical thinking and ultimately the fantasy of control. We must be cautious that our beliefs do not hinder us from taking the necessary actions to ensure our ability to fulfill our mission and purpose in life.

So to summarize my cautionary note – use the concepts of positive thinking imbedded in *The Secret*, but be careful not to confuse them with fantasy, magical thinking or control. With the “power of attraction” we are basically creating a vision for our future, which in and of itself will give us an energetic boost. Yet, we must always do the footwork required to reap positive results. That means in order to manifest our vision we must use intentionality, self-determination and discipline to achieve what we desire. Even then, there are times, when no matter how well we do the above, we will need to be “light on our feet” and momentarily shift our focus.

So perhaps the *real* secret is that there is so much more to be considered as a part of “the secret” than what appears on the surface. Then, given that, imagine what the world would be like if we all use “the law of attraction” to gain more empathy, compassion, love, or inner wisdom? So, if this law works – even fifty percent of the time because nothing is perfect – and everyone used it toward a positive loving world, this earth would be an emotionally and physically better place to live.