

LAW OF ATTRACTION OR LAW OF DISTRACTION by Bob Waldrep

Though it is a teaching first popularized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the “Law of Attraction” has continued to have its promoters and adherents throughout the decades. Of course, not all are successful, but occasionally a teacher will come along and breathe fresh life into it and raise its popularity to a new level. Rhonda Byrne proved to be just such a teacher with the publication of her bestseller *The Secret*, in 2007.

The popularity of the book and companion DVD led to several other books by Byrne and a number of copycats. How popular was the book? Within three months of its release, publisher, Simon & Schuster announced a second run of two million copies of *The Secret* making it the largest reprinting of a book in the company’s history.¹

Due to Byrne’s influence the law of attraction, which she smartly marketed under a new name – “the secret” – still has quite the following today and has created flourishing careers for many other “secret-teachers.” Byrne’s original offering provides an understanding of what the Law of Attraction is, what it offers and why it remains popular.

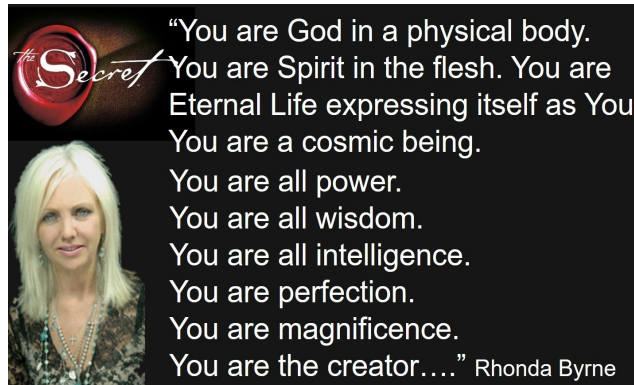
SECRET OR LAW OF ATTRACTION?

When asked by Oprah why she called it *The Secret*, Byrne replied, “We really needed to contain the knowledge in a couple of words. And ‘The Secret’ is the law of attraction.”²

Apparently, calling the book what she claims it to be, “Law of Attraction” was too long of a title. We are led to believe that “Secret” conveys the idea of “law of attraction” better than the words themselves. Of course they don’t, it’s all about marketing. As Donavin Bennes, a buyer who specializes in metaphysics for Borders Book, points out, “It was an incredibly savvy

move to call it ‘The Secret’. We all want to be in on a secret. But to present it as *the secret*, that was brilliant.”³

By definition a secret is supposed to be kept to oneself, to not be revealed. However, there are two facts about secrets that most people can probably agree are true: as Bennes noted, everyone loves to hear, or be in on, a secret, but, once heard, a secret is also difficult not to share with someone else. The marketing machine behind Byrne’s DVD and book clearly understand this.



There is a game in which a group of people sit in a circle and someone whispers a secret in the ear of the person seated next to him or her. That person then shares it with the next person, who shares it with the next, and so on until all have heard it. The last person then shares what he or she was told. Very rarely is the final result even close to the original secret that was given.

If playing that game, Byrne would not claim to be the originator of *The Secret*, but a secret-sharer. How close is the message she delivers to the message that was first given? To answer this we must determine who the players are and which, if any, of them is the secret-starter. Only then can we compare her message with the original one.

INFLUENCE OF WALLACE WATTLES

Byrne has consistently credited *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles with initiating the search that would

lead to her understanding of *The Secret*. Thus, any examination of *The Secret* must include consideration of Wattles.

There are numerous Internet sites devoted to Wattles, primarily for the purpose of selling his books (which are in the public domain, and some of which have been updated with modern co-authors). Some of these websites also contain what little is known about his life. Concerning his interest in “things” now being attributed to *The Secret*, many of them point out that, “Later in his life he took to studying the various religious beliefs and philosophies of the world including those of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Swedenborg, Emerson, and others. It was through his tireless study and experimentation that he discovered the truth of New Thought principles and put them into practice in his own life.”⁴ Shortly after Wattles died, his daughter, Florence, wrote a letter

that mentions two factors that obviously influenced the message in his books – his acceptance of a social gospel and his fear of poverty. She reveals that in 1896 her father met, and came under the influence of George D. Herron, an important leader and voice of the socialist movement in America. She also reveals the tremendous impact this meeting had on how her father would live his life. She wrote, “From that day until his death he worked unceasingly to realize the glorious vision of human brotherhood. For years his life was cursed by poverty and the fear of poverty. He was always scheming and planning to get for his family those things which make the abundant life possible.”⁵ Apparently, this “scheming and planning” involved writing and, more importantly, selling numerous publications; such as, *The Science of getting Rich*, published in 1910.

Byrne admittedly did draw from this

work, yet she clearly states it is not the source for *The Secret* but the starting point for the journey. And while critics might argue that Wattle's book doesn't even use the term "law of attraction", that is so important to *The Secret*, the concept is certainly contained in such lines as, "The universe desires you to have everything you want to have."⁶

How are these "desires" brought forth? Wattles explains, "Man can form things in his thought, and, by impressing his thought upon formless substance, can cause the thing he thinks about to be created."⁷

*"If you want a sewing machine, for instance, I do not mean to tell you that you are to impress the thought of a sewing machine on Thinking Substance until the machine is formed without hands, in the room where you sit, or elsewhere. But if you want a sewing machine, hold the mental image of it with the most positive certainty that it is being made, or is on its way to you. After once forming the thought, have the most absolute and unquestioning faith that the sewing machine is coming; never think of it, or speak, of it, in any other way than as being sure to arrive. Claim it as already yours. It will be brought to you by the power of the Supreme Intelligence, acting upon the minds of men."*⁸

WALLACE WATTLES – GETTING RICH

This is certainly what *The Secret* describes as the Law of Attraction when it states, "If you can think about what you want in your mind, and make that your dominant thought, you will bring it into your life. Through this most powerful law, your thoughts become the things in your life. Your thoughts become things!"⁹ Say this over to yourself and let it seep into your consciousness and your awareness. Your thoughts become things!" Perhaps, even a sewing machine?

However, it is more than just sewing machines on which Wattles and Byrne want you to focus your thoughts. As its title suggests, *The Science of Getting Rich* is about just that – getting rich. Wattles states, "You can make the most of yourself only by getting rich; so it is right and praiseworthy that you should give your

first and best thought to the work of acquiring wealth."¹⁰ In fact, Wattles believes this is the "Divine" plan, writing, "It is the desire of God that you should get rich. He wants you to get rich because he can express himself better through you if you have plenty of things to use in giving him expression. He can live more in you if you have unlimited command of the means of life."¹¹

But what of *The Secret*? Does Byrne agree with this view that wealth is part of the "Divine" plan? Consider the following: "Now that you know *The Secret*, when you see someone who is wealthy you will know that that person's predominant thoughts are on Wealth and not on scarcity, and that they have drawn wealth to them—whether they did it consciously or unconsciously. They focused on thoughts of wealth and the Universe moved people, circumstances, and events to deliver wealth to them."¹²

If you want a sewing machine...Claim it as already yours. It will be brought to you by the power of the Supreme Intelligence, acting upon the minds of men"

Wallace Wattles

So the Divine/God wants you to be rich so it/he can do even more for you. This message doesn't sound so very different from that of the modern so-called "Christian prosperity", or Word of Faith¹³ teachers – such as Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Charles Capps, Crefflo Dollar, et al. – who traverse the country proclaiming that humans are little-gods who create their own existence through the power of their words. As Capps once summarized, "God released His faith in words. Man is created in the image of God, therefore man releases his faith in words. Words are the most powerful things in the universe today. Let me say it again, 'The Word of God conceived in the human spirit, formed by the tongue, and spoken out of the mouth becomes creative power that will work for you.'"¹⁴

Yet that raises a difficult question, "If the 'Universe', the 'Supreme Intelligence', or 'God' truly wants people to be wealthy, then why are so many impoverished?" Why are there so few wealthy people if all that is necessary is for one to think or speak positively about and focus upon wealth? If, as Wattles and *The Secret* teach, the wealthy are rich because they have manipulated the universe through their thinking (or, as Word of Faith proponents would say, because of their words), then doesn't it also stand to reason that the poor must be blamed for their own poverty?

On this point, *Salon* reporter, Peter Birkenhead, has rightly observed: ...with survivors of Auschwitz still alive, Oprah writes this about "The Secret" on her Web site, "the energy you put into the world—both good and bad—is exactly what comes back to you. This means you create the circumstances of your life with the choices you make every day...The only reason any person does not have enough money is because they are blocking money from coming to them with their thoughts."¹⁵

The knowledge *The Secret* claims to impart is much more than just how to obtain wealth. In fact, there appears nothing it cannot provide when one considers this testimonial from the book's forward:

*"As the film swept the world, stories of miracles began to flood in people wrote about healing from chronic pain, depression, and disease, walking for the first time after an accident; even recovering from a deathbed. We have received thousands of accounts of The Secret getting used to bring about large sums of money and unexpected checks in the mail. People have used The Secret to manifest their perfect homes, life partners, cars, jobs, and promotions, with many accounts of businesses being transformed within days of applying The Secret. There have been heart-warming stories of stressed relationships involving children being restored to harmony."*¹⁶

While *The Science of Getting Rich* was Byrne's introduction to the secret, she relied upon many other related books in

developing *The Secret*. In the acknowledgements section of *The Secret*, Byrnes expresses gratitude to, “every person who has come into my life and inspired, touched, and illuminated me through their presence.”¹⁷ Those whom she specifically mentions include, “the great avatars and master teachers from the past, whose writings lit a burning fire of desire within me.” She follows this with, “I have walked in the shadows of their greatness, and I honor every one of them. Special thanks to Robert Collier and Robert Collier Publications, Wallace Wattles, Charles Haanel, Joseph Campbell and the Joseph Campbell Foundation, Prentice Mulford, Genevieve Behrend, and Charles Fillmore.”¹⁸

All of the above-named individuals except Joseph Campbell (who was born in 1904) were born in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Byrnes identifies more than eighty people, by name, for whom she is grateful. Was it an ancient secret that linked these teachers born in the nineteenth century? Or were all these people associated, to some degree, as students, teachers, and/or writers of a view being popularized in the mid to late 1800s known as New Thought?¹⁹ Who were these individuals and what role did they and their beliefs in “New Thought” play in the production of *The Secret*? Did they really share Byrnes’ “Secret”, or were they simply the architects whose plans she found and built upon?

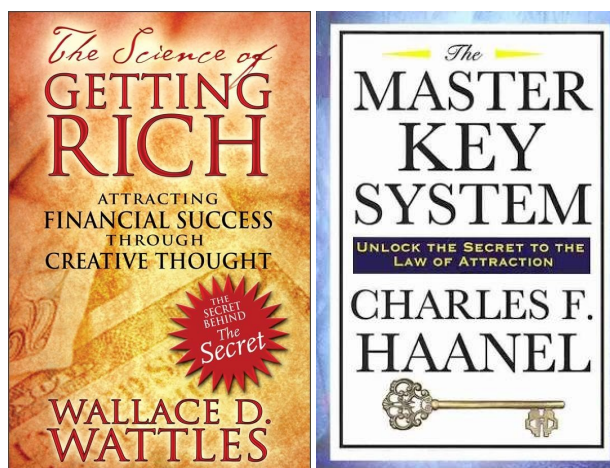
Keep in mind that while Byrnes did draw from Wallace Wattles’ book *The Science of Getting Rich*, Wattles book only started her journey. His was not the main course but was simply the New Thought “appetizer”.

CHARLES HAANEL – THE ORIGINAL

Based on the number of times Charles Haanel is quoted and because he is the first, among these writers, to use the term Law of Attraction (in sources Byrnes mentions as having studied), he must be given special attention. Every quote by Haanel that is cited in Byrnes’ book, comes from a single source, *The Master Key System*, written in 1912. This book is

regarded as the most well-known of his writings and in it one finds Haanel’s development of what he refers to as the Law of Attraction.

Based upon this book’s teachings Byrnes concludes, “Almost one hundred years ago, without the benefit of all the scientific discoveries of the last hundred years, Charles Haanel knew how the Universe operated.”²⁰ She then quotes from page 86 of the Master Key System:



“The Universal Mind is not only intelligence, but it is substance, and this substance is the attractive force which brings electrons together by the law of attraction so they form atoms; the atoms in turn are brought together by the same law and form molecules; molecules take Objective forms and so we find that the law is the creative force behind every manifestation, not only of atoms, but of worlds, of the Universe, of everything of which the imagination can form any conception.”²¹

Were these dynamics that would later be proved by “scientific discoveries” or just the wishful thinking of the new secret-sharers? Whether scientific, or not, Byrnes is correct in associating Haanel and Wattles. One cannot help but be reminded of Wattles when reading passages like this from Haanel:

“This, then, is the way we are consistently creating and recreating ourselves; we are today the result of our past thinking, and we shall be what we are thinking today, the Law of Attraction is bringing to us, not the things we should like, or the things we wish for, or the things someone else has, but it

brings us ‘our own,’ the things which we have created by our thought processes, whether consciously or unconsciously.”²²

If this is true, then, as is the case with Wattles’ teaching, the logical conclusion is that those who are sick, suffering, and impoverished are in that condition because of their own mental failures. Haanel explains it this way:

“If you require Wealth a realization of the fact that the ‘I’ in you is one with the Universal mind which is all substance, and is Omnipotent, will assist you in bringing into operation the law of attraction which will bring you into vibration with those forces which make for success and bring about conditions of power and affluence in direct proportion with the character and purpose of your affirmation.”²³

“Vibration” here is critical. As Haanel elaborates, “The Law of Attraction rests on vibration, which in turn rests upon the law of love.”²⁴ In fact, he would write that nothing is more powerful. “The vibrations of Mental forces are the finest and consequently the most powerful in existence.”

Byrnes surely picked up on this for *The Secret* as is evident in these words:

“Here is the “wow” factor. When you think about what you want, and you emit that frequency, you cause the energy of what you want to vibrate at that frequency and you bring it to You! As you focus on what you want, you are changing the vibration of the atoms of that thing, and you are causing it to vibrate to You. The reason you are the most powerful transmission tower in the Universe is because you have been given the power to focus your energy through your thoughts and alter the vibrations of what you are focused on, which then magnetically draws it to you.”²⁶

The use of the terms *atoms*, *molecules*, *electrons*, *vibrations*, *frequency*, and *transmission towers*, among other similar words, certainly seems to lend a scientific ring to what Haanel is teaching. But, is he truly

referring to science when he uses terms like *Universal Mind* and *law of attraction*, or is he simply putting forth ideas that come from New Thought proponents such as Wattles?

Though the architects of the secret try to lay claim for a basis in science, the evidence just isn't there. As we have seen, the more one investigates these claims the more any credible scientific basis disappears. Even Wattles acknowledged this when he wrote, "Do not ask why these things are true, nor speculate as to how they can be true; simply take them on trust. The science of getting rich begins with the absolute acceptance of **this** faith."²⁷ (emphasis added)

As the layers are pulled back, the Law of Attraction seems more and more to be rooted not in science, but in the supernatural, or the spiritual. Those who look to the Bible as the source of wisdom recognize an eerie parallel. This sacred secret sounds familiar – too familiar. It sounds very much like the secret promise shared with Eve in the Garden of Eden.²⁸

Satan, appearing as a serpent in the Garden of Eden, tempted Eve to sin against God by eating of the forbidden fruit. This was the original sin.

If Eve would only disobey God and follow the serpent, he would grant her a promise – actually three promises. The Serpent promised Eve that:

- *She would not die. This is the promise of immortality and eternal life.*
- *Her eyes would be opened. This is the promise of enlightenment. She would learn a secret.*
- *She would be as God knowing good and evil. This is the promise of deification. This is the sacred secret.*

From this biblical account, it seems Byrne did get at least one thing right, The Secret is ancient. In fact, it is so old that it

was the first secret ever hissed (shh!) into human ears – the promise that we are God. And this secret continues to live on – being whispered from one person to another throughout the ages – the promise that you can control your own destiny, for you are God

Is *The Secret* a source of empowerment and spiritual fulfillment or is it actually a lure, an enticement from the truth? Those who hold to a biblical understanding of God will answer yes to the latter. Yes, it is true that *The Secret* is very attractive and extremely appealing but we must remember, such is the nature of all temptation.

[Ed. Note: This article is an excerpt from *The Truth Behind the Secret* by Bob Waldrep and James Walker. To get a copy of the book go to crosswindstore.org]

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- 12 *The Secret*, p 103-104
- 13 Much, though not all, of the distinctive theology of the Word-Faith movement is derived from the writings of E. W. Kenyon (1867-1948)...[who was]...exposed to New Thought and Christian Science in Boston, the extent of the influence of these mind sciences (which are clearly heretical) is disputed even among Kenyon's critics. Kenyon's lasting legacy has been felt largely through his influence on popular teachers of the "Latter-Rain" movement, a "healing" revival of the late 1940s and 1950s spearheaded by the heretical and highly controversial William Branham. One of the evangelists on the fringe of that movement was Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003). By 1950 Hagin had started reading Kenyon's books and adopting some of Kenyon's teachings as his own. The Word-Faith movement quickly grew in

size and visibility, especially through the exposure provided by the Trinity Broadcasting Network, a TV network started by Paul Crouch in 1973. That same year Kenneth Copeland Ministries was founded; Copeland is widely regarded as the second most important teacher in the movement after Hagin. The movement's most visible and influential teachers today emphasize prosperity and general well-being and deemphasize, though not deny, the movement's controversial theology. The new generation of Word-Faith teachers includes Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen, both of whom (unlike Hagin or Copeland) are authors of bestselling books aggressively marketed to the general public. Adapted from, *Word-Faith Movement Profile* by Robert M. Bowman Jr. 14 Charles Capps, *The Tongue a Creative Force*, (Harrison House, Tulsa, 1976) p. 160 15 "Oprah's Dirty Secret," *Salon*, March 5, 2007, (www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2007/03/05/the_secret/index2.html).

- 16 *The Secret*, p x-xi
- 17 *The Secret*, p xii
- 18 Ibid p xiv
- 19 New Thought describes a set of religious ideas that developed in the United States during the late 19th century, originating with Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Followers of New Thought also find inspiration in the Transcendentalist philosophy, as it was developed by Ralph Waldo Emerson and other 19th-century American thinkers. From this movement emerged several independent organizations that are actively spreading today, including Divine Science, Religious Science, Unity, and the Universal Foundation for Better Living. The largest of the new thought organizations is the Unity Church, comprised of over two million members worldwide. New Thought religions generally share a core belief in monism, the universal presence of a creative energy, or God, within the world and within all people. Some take literally the Christian teaching that 'the kingdom of heaven is within.' The central teaching of New Thought is that thought evolves and unfolds, and thinking creates one's experience of the world. The movement places great emphasis in positive thinking, affirmations, meditation, and prayer. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Thought
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