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THE SECRET

Audiobook by Rhonda Byrne

2006, Audioworks, 4 hours

When a good friend of mine with a company known as Wealth Masters International handed me this CD we both were under the impression it was a video DVD. I learned it was an audio CD just prior to my recent journey to the Free State (New Hampshire). The audio book was actually more appropriate for my understanding, and I listened to it during my drive.

One would classify *The Secret* as motivational outreach. It is authored by Rhonda Byrne, an Australian television and film producer who was inspired to develop her ideas and publish them by a nearly 100-year-old book *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace D. Wattles. *The Secret* has become somewhat of an icon in the network marketing business.

Recall I reviewed Napoleon Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich* toward the end of last year, and I have to say the fabled all-American movement toward the power of positive thinking—Hill's essential message is what you imagine and affirm comes to fruition (with planning and effort)—is well worth taking to heart... with a grain of salt to be sure.

Marketing of *The Secret* obviously relies on the evoking a verbal mystery. I.e. who wouldn't want to know a secret if it reveals something worthwhile: a secret treasure, secret source of wealth, secret key to health, and so on? Rhonda is mercifully quick to reveal her priceless discovery, namely, "as ye imagine so shall ye be."

This is the core concept, though the terms vary a little, and there's more to it than that. She would argue that one's thoughts dictate almost entirely what happens to one through a principle she identifies as the Law of Attraction... or as she says with her Aussie accent, "the lore of attraction."

Whatever the content of one thinking, these folks hold, the universe responds in kind. A certain causality applies by virtue of our own mental state, analogous to receiving a message from a radio transmitter at a certain frequency. You can look at the analogy from either end, but basically if you set your receiver to a positive frequency, the universe qua transmitter delivers data consistent with that "request."

A central slogan (and if you listen to enough motivational stuff, you'll be up to your knickers in slogans) is "Ask, believe, receive (ABR)." Much of the CD focuses on how to specify what you want from the universe (ask), form a calm conviction and imagination (believe) you are living day-to-day while having what you want (receive).

A corollary to ABR is "What you resist persists." If you form a thought that has a negative entrained in it and send out a corresponding mental-energy wave, the universe responds as if the negative is unattached. For example, if I have to hit a golf ball over a body of water and I think "I do not want to wind up in the water," guess what? Nine times out of ten, my ball will be swimming with the fishies.

So far so good, and my feeling as a rational man is Rhonda's insights are simply good "success-oriented" psychology, which I know works and am committed to applying to my life. I'm sensitive to both the need to envision/achieve success and, particularly, to eliminate negatives. Here's an example of the latter:

For some reason, perhaps because my father was obese when he died at the age of 54 from congestive heart failure (possibly a genetic condition), seeing someone grossly overweight elicits a negative mental state. My visceral reaction is, "What's the matter with that person? Don't they have any self-respect? You'd better be buying two airplane seats, mister." A la the Randy Newman song, "fat people ain't got no reason to live, baby."

(I know this is horrible to have that kind of reaction, but I'm sure it isn't uncommon for people to react automatically negatively without thinking to racial or physiological stereotypes. That isn't a problem in itself, so long as we are careful to individualize and recognize our response, as well as to preclude any response that involves aggression.)

Now I realize—and Rhonda makes it crystal clear—that such negative or even hostile perceptual responses generate a negative transmission from reality. The transmission may not be body-weight

related, but in some other way a negating image is applied to my own life... e.g. I lose some confidence in my own physical health, people don't like me, and so on.

It just so happens that I had the chance to apply my new anti-negativity responses this weekend at the Free State Porcupine Festival, where a few of the attendees were "a bit roomy." I consciously shifted my automatic reaction to one in which a) I imagine each of these people as on the threshold of svelteness recovery and b) I imagine myself as acquiring a perfectly proportioned body and outstanding health.

Oh, and Rhonda shares a tip on eating that's helpful in keeping one's weight appropriate, namely being aware of the process. Feel when you're chewing each mouthful that the food is being converted to the exact amount of energy you'll be needing during the day.

Interestingly, the weekend (which I'll be diarizing in a week or so) was an exercise in the power of positive thinking in general for me. I have some criticisms of the facilities and some concerns about the direction of the organization. But because I worked to neutralize any negative formulations, I found my mind opening to quite a number of insights, ideas, and spiritually uplifting images. I don't believe these positive energies would have come unto me otherwise.

I do have some criticisms of The Secret.

The first pertains mainly to a problem of degree: Rhonda and a couple of her guest commentators make some statements that would seem to propose wishing makes it so (known as the primacy of consciousness problem in philosophy). For example, she claims without any education in science she read a book on quantum physics and didn't have any trouble understanding it. Right, and with the right attitude I could have aced my differential equations class in engineering school without study.

So we need to add a shred of context from objective reality.

The second is what I call the Problem of Justice. A lot of people via government (I refer to them often in my columns) make their money the old-fashioned way: they steal it. It seems a good share of the motivational and self-improvement community, while advocating abundance through healthy thinking and creative work, ignore the advance of the State power over the social power in society. I don't think we can minimize the importance of our common human need toward elevating the Sacred Nonaggression Principle.

Finally, we have to accept that for all the positive thinking in the universe, sometimes bad things happen to good people. Some of the comments in the book suggest negative thinking is even what causes natural disasters! If a meteor is headed for collision with Earth, love beams emanating from our consciousnesses are in all likelihood not going to deflect it.

Still, the message of self-worth and abundance is something everyone wants to hear. As libertarians we need to better recognize what motivates people and apply it, not just to create a free world for others but to create our own bountiful existence. Wealth and health are much better draws than abstractions of freedom.