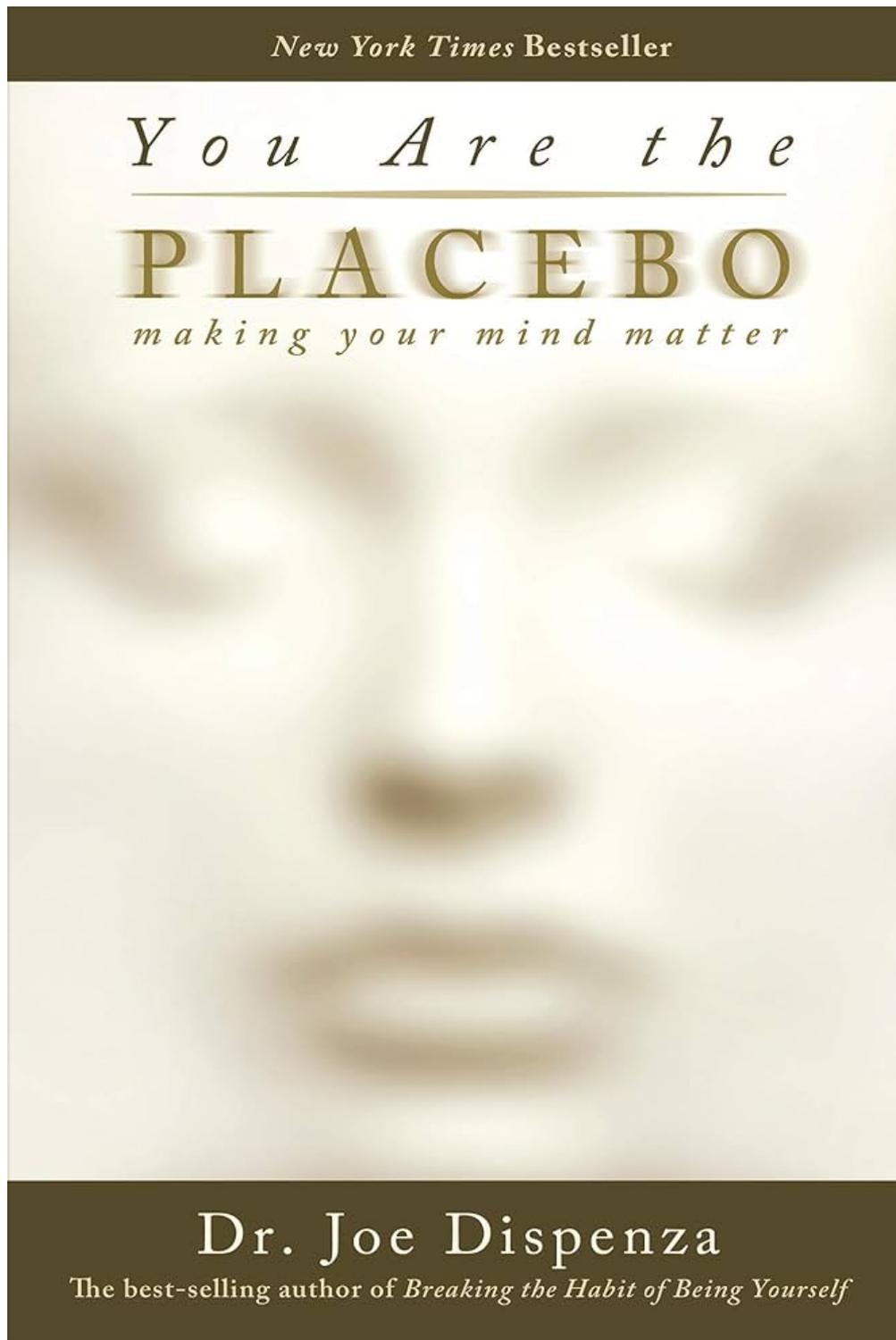


***You Are the Placebo: Making Your Mind Matter (2014)***  
by Joe Dispenza



**About**

Chiropractor with advanced studies in neuroscience and brain function, is known for teaching how the mind-body connection, meditation, and shifts in thought/emotion can trigger personal transformation, healing from chronic conditions, and unlocking potential, blending science (neuroscience, epigenetics) with quantum physics to empower people to change their lives and heal.

What follows are quotes from the book above. These quotes stood out in my first reading of the book back in 2024. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace medical and/or other professional advice.

**Note:** Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not necessarily reflect what may be found in the book.

**Note too:** Beneath various quotations from the book, I have added my own comments and thoughts (these I added when I reviewed the book in January 2026). Where I have made bold the text within a particular quotation, it's to emphasise a point. My emphasis does not necessarily appear in the original text.

## **Blurb**

*Is it possible to heal by thought alone—without drugs or surgery? The truth is that it happens more often than you might expect. In *You Are the Placebo*, Dr. Joe Dispenza shares numerous documented cases of those who reversed cancer, heart disease, depression, crippling arthritis, and even the tremors of Parkinson's disease by believing in a placebo. Similarly, Dr. Joe tells of how others have gotten sick and even died the victims of a hex or voodoo curse—or after being misdiagnosed with a fatal illness. Belief can be so strong that pharmaceutical companies use double- and triple-blind randomized studies to try to exclude the power of the mind over the body when evaluating new drugs. Dr. Joe does more than simply explore the history and the physiology of the placebo effect. He asks the question: "Is it possible to teach the principles of the placebo, and without relying on any external substance, produce the same internal changes in a person's health and ultimately in his or her life?" Then he shares scientific evidence (including color brain scans) of amazing healings from his workshops, in which participants learn his model of personal transformation, based on practical applications of the so-called placebo effect. The book ends with a "how-to" meditation for changing beliefs and perceptions that hold us back—the first step in healing. *You Are the Placebo* combines the latest research in neuroscience, biology, psychology, hypnosis, behavioral conditioning, and quantum physics to demystify the workings of the placebo effect... and show how the seemingly impossible can become possible.*

## **Foreword (by Dawson Church, PhD)**

"The discovery that the number of connections in a neural bundle can double with repeat stimulation revolutionized biology in the 1990s. It earned its discoverer, the neuropsychiatrist Eric Kandel, a Nobel Prize. Kandel later found that **if we don't use neural connections, they begin to shrink in just three**

weeks."

"The majority of genes (estimates range from 75 to 85 percent) are turned off and on by signals from our environment, including the environment of thoughts, beliefs, and emotions that we cultivate in our brains."

**"Negative emotion may literally be an addiction to high levels of our own stress hormones, like cortisol and adrenaline.** Both these stress hormones and relaxation hormones like **DHEA** and **oxytocin** have set points, which explains why we feel uncomfortable in our skin when we think thoughts or countenance beliefs that drive our hormonal balance outside of that comfort zone.

Cf. what Feldman-Barrett says about cortisol in her book *How Emotions Are Made*: ""People call cortisol a "stress hormone " but this is a mistake. **Cortisol is released whenever you need a surge of energy, which happens to include the times when you are stressed.** Its main purpose is to flood the bloodstream with glucose to provide immediate energy to cells, allowing, for example, muscle cells to stretch and contract so you can run. **Your body-budgeting regions also make you breathe more deeply to get more oxygen into your bloodstream and dilate your arteries to get that oxygen to your muscles more quickly so your body can move.** All of this internal motion is accompanied by interoceptive sensations". An interesting observation since cortisol has been spoken of as "the stress hormone" for as long as I can remember. Instead, its function is to help you release energy by signaling your breathing centres to breathe more and pump oxygen to when it's needed most.

*By changing your internal state, you can change your external reality.*

"A new generation of researchers has coined a term for the practice Joe outlines; **self-directed neuroplasticity** (or *SDN*). The idea behind the term is that **we direct the formation of new neural pathways and the destruction of old ones through the quality of the experiences we cultivate.**"

## ***Part I: Information***

### **Chapter One: Is It Possible?**

The following tells the story of a man mistakenly diagnosed with liver cancer..

"A funny thing happened when the hospital performed Londe's autopsy. **The**

**man's liver was, in fact, not filled with cancer; he had only a very tiny nodule of cancer in its left lobe and another very small spot on his lung. The truth is, neither cancer was big enough to kill him.** And in fact, the area around his esophagus was totally free of disease as well. The abnormal liver scan taken at the St. Louis hospital had apparently yielded a **false positive result**. Sam Londe didn't die of esophageal cancer, nor did he die of liver cancer. He also didn't die of the mild case of pneumonia he had when he was readmitted to the hospital. He died, quite simply, because everybody in his immediate environment thought he was dying. His doctor in St. Louis thought Londe was dying, and then Dr. Meador, in Nashville, thought Londe was dying. Londe's wife and family thought he was dying, too. And, most important, Londe himself thought he was dying."

The following is an account of a person who overdosed on antidepressants...

"Writhing, he told his neighbor he'd made a terrible mistake, that he had taken all his pills but didn't really want to die. When he asked the neighbor to take him to the hospital, she agreed. When Mason got to the emergency room, he was pale and sweating, and his blood pressure was 80/40 with a pulse rate of 140. Breathing rapidly, he kept repeating, "I don't want to die." When the doctors examined him, they found nothing wrong other than his low blood pressure, rapid pulse, and rapid breathing. [...] Four hours later, after the results of the lab tests came back totally normal, a physician who had been part of the clinical drug trial arrived. Checking the code on the label of Mason's empty pill bottle, the researcher looked into the records for the trial. He announced that **Mason had actually been taking a placebo** and that the pills he'd swallowed contained no drugs at all. Miraculously, Mason's blood pressure and pulse returned to normal within a few minutes. And as if by magic, he was no longer excessively drowsy either. **Mason had fallen victim to the *nocebo***: a harmless substance that, thanks to strong expectations, causes harmful effects."

Now an account of depressive symptoms lifting with placebo...

**"Not long after she started taking her pills, Schonfeld began feeling dramatically better for the first time in her life.** Ironically, she also felt nauseated, but that was good news because she knew that nausea was one of the common side effects of the drug being tested. [...] at the end of the eight-week study, one of the researchers revealed the shocking truth: Schonfeld, who was no longer suicidal and felt like a new person after taking the pills, had actually been in the placebo group. [...] And she wasn't the only one: The study results would soon show that **38 percent of the placebo group felt better, compared to 52 percent of the group who received Effexor.** [...] The patients like Schonfeld, who had improved on the placebos, hadn't just imagined feeling better; they had actually *changed their brain-wave patterns*. The EEG recordings taken so faithfully over the course of the study showed a **significant increase in activity in the prefrontal cortex**, which in depressed patients

typically has very low activity. [...] She wasn't just *feeling* well—she *was* well. **Schonfeld literally had a different brain by the end of the study, without taking any drug or doing anything differently."**

The following account, without corroboration, would appear unbelievable...

"Mr. Wright," had huge tumors, some as big as an orange, in his neck, groin, and armpits, and his cancer was not responding at all to conventional treatments. He lay in his bed for weeks, "febrile, gasping for air, completely bedridden." [...] Wright received his injection of Krebiozen on a Friday, and by Monday, he was walking around, laughing, and joking with his nurses, acting pretty much like a new man. **Dr. West reported that the tumors "had melted like snowballs on a hot stove."** Within three days, the tumors were half their original size. **In ten more days, Wright was sent home—he'd been cured.** It seemed like a miracle. **But two months later, the media reported that the ten trials showed that Krebiozen turned out to be a dud.** Once Wright read the news, became fully conscious of the results, and embraced the thought that the drug was useless, **he relapsed immediately, with his tumors soon returning.** [...] **the doctor told Wright not to believe the newspaper reports** and that he'd suffered a relapse because the Krebiozen they'd given Wright was found to be part of a bad batch. What Dr. West called "a new, super-refined, double-strength" version of the drug was on its way to the hospital, and Wright could have it as soon as it arrived. **In anticipation of being cured, Wright was elated, and a few days later, he received the injection. But this time, the syringe Dr. West used contained no drug,** experimental or not. The syringe was filled only with distilled water. Again, **Wright's tumors magically vanished.** [...] But then the American Medical Association made the announcement that Krebiozen was indeed worthless. [...] **Wright relapsed a final time—no longer believing in the possibility of health. He returned to the hospital hopeless and two days later was dead."**

Flabbergasted at the following...

"After the surgery, all ten of the patients in the study reported greater mobility and less pain. In fact, **the men who received "pretend" surgery did just as well as those who'd received debridement or lavage surgery.** There was no difference in the results—even six months later. And **six years later, when two of the men who'd received the placebo surgery were interviewed, they reported that they were still walking normally, without pain, and had greater range of motion."**

The following regards heart surgeries...

"67 percent of the patients who had received the actual surgery felt less pain and needed less medication, while 83 percent of those who had received the sham surgery enjoyed the same level of improvement. **The placebo surgery**

## had actually worked better than the real surgery!"

The following, I can get behind—attitude really is (almost) everything if we regard outcomes.

"the Mayo Clinic published a study in 2002 that followed 447 people for more than 30 years, showing that optimists were healthier physically and mentally. [In other studies] optimists had fewer problems with daily activities as a result of their physical health or their emotional state; experienced less pain; felt more energetic; had an easier time with social activities; and felt happier, calmer, and more peaceful most of the time. [...] **optimists live longer than pessimists.** [...] those with a positive attitude about aging lived more than seven years longer than those who had a more negative outlook about growing older. **Attitude had more of an influence on longevity than blood pressure, cholesterol levels, smoking, body weight, or level of exercise.** [...] those who routinely felt more positive emotions had a 20 percent greater chance of being alive 11 years later [with regards to heart patients ...] **Those who were the most hostile had five times greater incidence of coronary heart disease."**

The following regards digestive issues...

"The day I found out I was really normal and there was nothing wrong with me, I thought, I'm fine, and all my symptoms went away. I immediately felt great and could eat whatever I wanted,"

And on Parkinson's...

"Parkinson's disease is a neurological disorder marked by the **gradual degeneration of nerve cells in the portion of the midbrain called the basal ganglia**, which controls body movements. The brains of those who have this heartbreaking disease don't produce enough of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which the basal ganglia needs for proper functioning. Early symptoms of **Parkinson's**, which is **currently considered incurable**, include motor issues such as muscle rigidity, tremors, and changes in gait and speech patterns that override voluntary control. [...] people who responded positively to the placebo were actually manufacturing dopamine in their brains—as much as 200 percent more than before. To get an equivalent effect with a drug, you'd have to administer roughly a full dose of amphetamine"

On preachers and faith...

"They are overcome with the spirit, what they call "being anointed." Then it's time for the preacher to flip open one of the locked boxes, reach a hand in, and pull out a deadly snake—usually a rattlesnake, cottonmouth, or copperhead. [...] In some services, the preacher might even ingest a poison, like strychnine, from a simple drinking glass, without suffering any ill effects. [...] Why are these

people not bitten more often? And why aren't there more deaths when they do get bitten?"

And on superhuman strength...

"16-year-old Hannah Smith and her 14-year-old sister, Haylee, of Lebanon, Oregon, lifted a 3,000-pound tractor to free their father, Jeff Smith, who was trapped underneath."

Voodoo...

"Vanders, who lived in a community where voodoo was a common practice, had had an argument with a local voodoo priest. **The priest had summoned Vanders to the cemetery late one night, where he put a hex on the man by waving a bottle of malodorous liquid in front of Vanders's face.** The priest told Vanders that he would soon die and that no one could save him. That was it. **Vanders was convinced that his days were numbered** and thus believed in a new, dismal future reality. The defeated man returned home and refused to eat. Eventually, his wife brought him to the hospital. [...] Dr. Doherty said that the priest had told him that he'd rubbed some lizard eggs onto Vanders's skin and that the eggs had found their way to Vanders's stomach, where they'd hatched. Most of the lizards had died, but a large one had survived and was now eating Vanders's body from the inside out. **The doctor announced that all he had to do was remove the lizard from Vanders's body and the man would be cured.** He then called for the nurse, who dutifully brought a large syringe filled with what Dr. Doherty claimed was a powerful medicine. In truth, **the syringe was filled with a drug that induced vomiting.** [...] Nearing the bedside, he reached into his black doctor's bag and scooped up a green lizard, hiding it in his palm beyond anyone's notice. Then just as Vanders vomited again, **Dr. Doherty slipped the reptile into the basin.** [...] Within a few minutes, he'd fallen into a deep sleep that lasted more than 12 hours. **When Vanders finally awoke, he was very hungry and eagerly consumed so much food that the doctor feared his stomach would burst. Within a week, the patient had regained all his weight and strength."**

## Chapter Two: A Brief History of the Placebo

"**When Harvard-educated American surgeon Henry Beecher was serving in World War II, he ran out of morphine.** [...] Without skipping a beat, one of the nurses filled a syringe with saline and gave the soldier a shot, just as if she were injecting him with morphine. The soldier calmed down right away. He reacted as though he'd actually received the drug, even though all he'd received was a squirt of saltwater. Beecher went ahead with the operation, cutting into the soldier's flesh, making what repairs were necessary, and sewing him back up, all without anesthesia. **The soldier felt little pain and did not go into shock."**

"In what became his most famous case, Mesmer partially cured teenage concert pianist Maria-Theresia von Paradis of "hysterical blindness," a psychosomatic condition she'd had since about the age of three. She stayed in Mesmer's home for weeks as he worked with her and finally helped her to be able to perceive motion and even distinguish color."

"During the first two world wars, military doctors, most notably Army psychiatrist **Benjamin Simon**, used the concept of **hypnotic suggestibility** [...] to help returning soldiers who suffered from the trauma that was first labeled "shell shock" but is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (**PTSD**). These veterans had suffered through such horrible war experiences that many of them numbed themselves to their emotions as a form of self-preservation, developed amnesia surrounding the horrific events, or, worse, kept reliving their experiences in flashbacks—all of which can cause stress-induced physical illness. **Simon and his colleagues found hypnosis extremely useful for helping the veterans face their traumas and cope**"

"In the 1940s, Harvard physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon (who had in 1932 coined the term *fight or flight*) studied the ultimate nocebo response—a phenomenon that he called "voodoo death." [...] His research laid the groundwork for much of what we know today about how physiological response systems enable emotions (fear in particular) to create illness. [...] Scientists in the 1960s coined the term *nocebo* (Latin for "I shall harm," as opposed to "I shall please," the Latin translation of *placebo*), referring to an inert substance that causes a harmful effect—simply because someone believes or expects it will harm her."

The following account shows the power of the nocebo effect.

"For obvious ethical reasons, few studies are designed specifically to look at this phenomenon, although some do exist. A famous example is a 1962 study done in Japan with a group of children who were all extremely allergic to poison ivy. Researchers rubbed one forearm of each child with a poison-ivy leaf but told them the leaf was harmless. As a control, they rubbed the child's other forearm with a harmless leaf that they claimed was poison ivy. All the children developed a rash on the arm rubbed with the harmless leaf that was thought to be poison ivy. And 11 of the 13 children developed no rash at all where the poison had actually touched them. This was an astounding finding; how could children who were highly allergic to poison ivy not get a rash when exposed to it? And how could they develop a rash from a totally benign leaf? The new thought that the leaf wouldn't hurt them overrode their memory and belief that they were allergic to it, rendering real poison ivy harmless. And the reverse was true in the second part of the experiment: **A harmless leaf was made toxic by thought alone**. In both cases, it seemed as if the children's bodies instantaneously responded to a new mind."

"Harvard cardiologist Herbert Benson, who became interested in how it might help reduce stress and lessen the risk factors for heart disease [...] developed a [meditation] technique, which he called the "relaxation response," [and] found that just by changing their thought patterns, people could switch off the stress response, thereby lowering blood pressure, normalizing heart rate, and attaining deep states of relaxation."

A powerful documentary that features Benson (and other luminaries of mindfulness over the years) is called *The Connection* (produced by Shannon Harvey).

The following account is that of Norman Cousins as appears in *New England Journal of Medicine*...

"Cousins's doctor had diagnosed him with a degenerative disorder called *ankylosing spondylitis*—form of arthritis that causes the breakdown of collagen, the fibrous proteins that hold our bodies' cells together—and had given him only a 1-in-500 chance of recovery. Cousins suffered from tremendous pain and had such difficulty moving his limbs that he could barely turn over in bed. Grainy nodules appeared under his skin, and at his lowest point, his jaw nearly locked shut. **Convinced that a persistent negative emotional state had contributed to his illness, he decided it was equally possible that a more positive emotional state could reverse the damage.** While continuing to consult with his doctor, Cousins started a regimen of massive doses of vitamin C and Marx Brothers movies (as well as other humorous films and comedy shows). **He found that ten minutes of hearty laughter gave him two hours of pain-free sleep. Eventually, he made a complete recovery.**"

**"diabetic patients watching an hour-long comedy program upregulated a total of 39 genes, 14 of which were related to natural killer cell activity.** While none of these genes were directly involved in blood-glucose regulation, the patients' blood-glucose levels were better controlled than after they listened to a diabetes health lecture on a different day. Researchers surmised that laughter influences many genes involved with immune response, which in turn contributed to the improved glucose control."

**"placebos worked just as well as the popular antidepressant drugs Prozac, Effexor, Serzone, and Paxil a whopping 81 percent of the time. In most of the remaining cases where the drug did perform better, the benefit was so small that it wasn't statistically significant. Only with severely depressed patients were the prescription drugs clearly better than placebo."**

What follows is the neurobiology of placebo...

"our bodies are indeed capable of creating a host of biological chemicals that can heal, protect us from pain, help us sleep deeply, enhance our immune

systems, make us feel pleasure, and even encourage us to fall in love. Reason this for a moment: **If a particular gene was already expressed so that we made those specific chemicals at one point in our lives, but then we stopped making them because of some type of stress or illness that turned off that gene, maybe it's possible for us to turn the gene back on again, because our bodies already know how to do that from previous experience.** [...] If a person keeps taking the same substance, his or her brain keeps firing the same circuits in the same way—in effect, memorizing what the substance does. [...] An associative memory elicits a subconscious program that makes a connection between the pill or injection and the hormonal change in the body, and then the program automatically signals the body to make the related chemicals found in the drug”

This thesis is not dissimilar to neuroscientist Feldman Barrett's in *7 1/2 Lessons About The Brain*: “Your brain's most important job is to control your body – to manage allostasis – by predicting energy needs before they arise so you can efficiently make worthwhile movements and survive. Your brain continually invests your energy in the hopes of earning a good return” and *How Emotions Are Made*: “A single interoceptive cue, such as a dull ache in your abdomen, could mean a stomachache, hunger, tension, an overly tight belt, or a hundred other causes. **Your brain must explain bodily sensations to make them meaningful, and its major tool for doing so is prediction.** So, your brain models the world from the perspective of someone with your body. Just as your brain predicts the sights, smells, sounds, touches, and tastes from the world in relation to the movements of your head and limbs, it also predicts the sensory consequences of movements inside your body.”

“placebos worked *even when people knew they were taking a placebo.* [In one study,] “placebo pills made of an inert substance, like sugar pills [...] have been shown in clinical studies to produce significant improvement in IBS symptoms through mind-body, self-healing processes.” [...] After three weeks, the group taking the placebos reported *twice as much symptom relief* as the no-treatment group [Another study by Alia Crum that measured how mindsets about fitness in hotel maids found] the first group lost an average of two pounds, lowered their percentage of body fat, and lowered their systolic blood pressure by an average of 10 points—even though they hadn't performed any additional exercise outside of work or changed their eating habits in any way. The other group, doing the same job as the first, remained virtually unchanged.”

Here's what Crum says about mindset in an interview on Huberman Lab: “[Regarding research on] women working in hotels who were on their feet all day long[—i]t was clear that they were getting above and beyond [...] the Surgeon

General's requirements at that time, which were to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day. But [...] when we [...] surveyed them and asked them, "Hey, how much exercise do you think you're getting?" A third of them said "Zero." [...] We oriented them to the Surgeon General's guidelines [and] to the benefits that they should be receiving [and] measured them [...] on their physiological metrics (like weight and body fat and blood pressure) and we came back four weeks later and we tested them again. [T]hese women, even though they hadn't changed *anything* in their behavior, they had benefits to their health. So they lost weight, they decreased their systolic blood pressure by about 10 points on average." And elsewhere in the same episode: "[Mindsets] matter in shaping our motivation [...] whether or not they're true or false, right or wrong, they have an impact. And they have an impact not just through the motivational mechanisms that [Carol] Dweck and others have studied, but as our lab has started to reveal, they also shape physiological mechanisms by changing what our bodies prioritize and prepare to do."

"We also assign meaning to subtler factors, such as the color of the medicine we take and the quantity of pills we ingest, as shown in an older but classic study from the University of Cincinnati. In this study, researchers gave 57 medical students either one or two pink or blue capsules—all of them inert, although the students were told that the pink capsules were stimulants and the blue ones were sedatives. The researchers reported, "Two capsules produced more noticeable changes than one, and blue capsules were associated with more sedative effects than pink capsules." Indeed, the students rated the blue pills as being two and a half times more effective as sedatives than the pink pills—even though *all* the pills were placebos."

"More recent research shows that beliefs and perceptions can also affect scores in mental performance on standardized tests. In a 2006 study from Canada, 220 female students read fake research reports claiming that men had a 5 percent advantage over women in math performance. The group was divided into two, with one group reading that the advantage was due to recently discovered genetic factors, while the other group read that the advantage resulted from the way teachers stereotype girls and boys in elementary school. Then the subjects were given a math test. The women who'd read that men had a genetic advantage scored lower than those who'd read that men had an advantage due to stereotyping. In other words, **when they were primed to think that their disadvantage was inevitable, the women performed as if they truly had a disadvantage.**"

**"Priming is, basically, when someone, someplace, or something in our environment (for example, taking a test) triggers all sorts of associations**

**that are hardwired into our brains** (that people grading this test think black students score lower than whites), **causing us to act in certain ways** (not scoring as highly) **without being conscious of what we're doing.**"

"What we're conditioned to believe about ourselves, and what we're programmed to think other people think about us, affects our performance, including how successful we are."

"optimists were more likely to respond positively to a suggestion that something would make them feel better, because they were primed to hope for the best future scenario. And the pessimists were more likely to respond negatively to a suggestion that something would make them feel worse, because they consciously or unconsciously expected the worst potential outcome."

A client of mine once described himself as a pessimist. I paused for a moment and he blurted out laughing because he found it funny that I couldn't find a way to reframe that in a positive way. I often find new ways to interpret or ask questions about what clients say about themselves, to help them rethink what they believe. This particular client had a lifetime of doubting himself having a diagnosis of autism and very little support in school. He also had significant difficulty regulating his emotions and more and more often found himself retreating into himself and thinking badly about the world. He would often state how much he'd hate people even though he spent little time getting to know them. When I spoke to him about the power of *framing*, he would briefly listen and then change the subject or zone out. He found it difficult to accept that he could make any changes in his life ... therefore this reinforced his negative worldview. He retreated more and more into watching negative News items and saw the impacts on his mood. However, when he'd take my advice and briefly take time away from the News he noticed a slight improvement in his mood. I've seen the same thing with people who take time off social media and how their mental health dramatically improves. The point: perspective matters, as does what we choose to pay attention to, because what we pay attention to forms the beliefs we have about ourselves, others and the world at large.

"the latest scientific research in psychology estimates that about 70 percent of our thoughts are negative and redundant, the number of unconsciously created nocebo—like illnesses might be impressive indeed—certainly much higher than we realize."

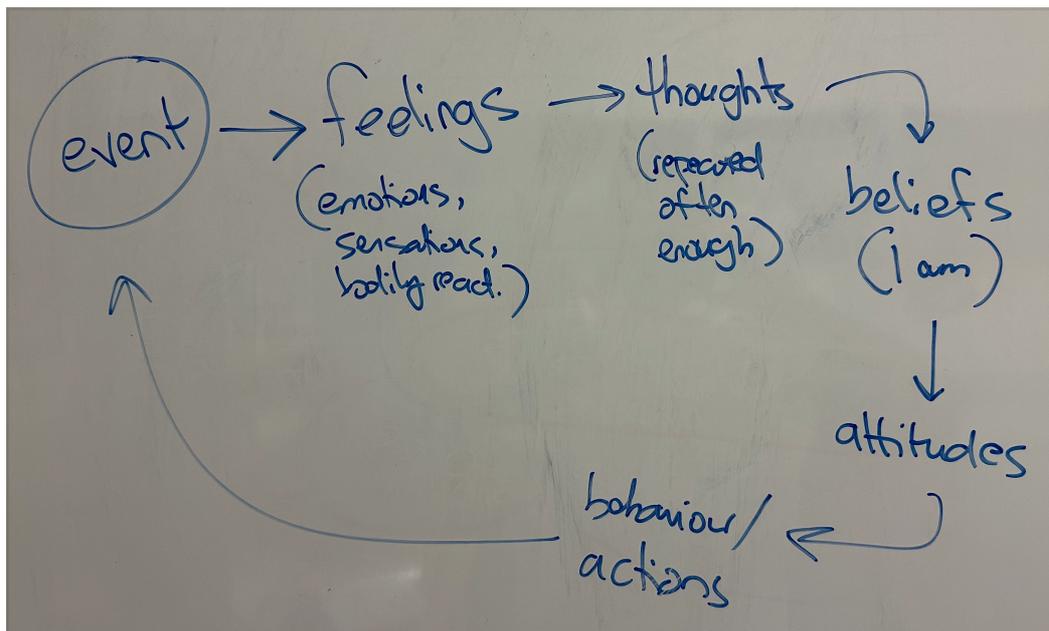
Unsure how that was measured, but, sure, let's assume that's

right ... the point remains.

### Chapter Three: The Placebo Effect in the Brain

"The moment you notice a change in your inner environment, you pay attention to what it was in your outer environment that caused the change. That event—where something outside of you changes something inside of you—is called an **associative memory**."

I have the following on the board in my consulting room. Speaks to the importance of framing experiences...



"new thoughts should lead to new choices. New choices should lead to new behaviors. New behaviors should lead to new experiences. New experiences should create new emotions, and new emotions and feelings should inspire you to think in new ways."

"the brain shows physical evidence that something was not only learned, but also remembered. This process of **selective strengthening is called synaptic potentiation**. When jungles of neurons fire in unison to support a new thought, an additional chemical (a protein) is created within the nerve cell and makes its way to the cell's center, or *nucleus*, where it lands in the DNA. The protein then switches on several genes. Since the job of the genes is to make proteins that maintain both the structure and function of the body, the nerve cell then quickly makes a new protein to create new branches between nerve cells. So **when we repeat a thought or an experience enough times, our brain cells make not only stronger connections between each other (which affects our physiological functions), but also a greater number of total connections (which affects the physical structure of the body).**"

"Nobel laureate Eric Kandel, M.D., showed that when new memories are formed, the number of synaptic connections in the sensory neurons that are stimulated doubles, to 2,600. However, unless the original learning experience is repeated over and over again, the number of new connections falls back to the original 1,300 in a matter of only three weeks."

The implications here are important: repeat what you want to believe in order to write it deeper into the brain...

"If we embrace the fact that change is the denaturing of the hardwired circuitry from years of unconsciously thinking the same way, we can cope. **If we understand that the discomfort we feel is the dismantling of old attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that have been repeatedly etched into our cerebral architecture, we can endure.** If we can reason that the cravings we battle in the midst of change are real withdrawals from the chemical-emotional addictions of the body, we can ride it out. If we can comprehend that real biological variations are occurring from subconscious habits and behaviors in which our bodies are changing on a cellular level, we can forge on. And if we can remember that we are modifying our very genes from this life and from untold previous generations, we can stay focused and inspired to an end."

"Every time you have a thought, in addition to making **neurotransmitters**, your brain also makes another chemical—a small protein called a **neuropeptide** that sends a message to your body. Your body then reacts by having a feeling. **The brain notices that the body is having a feeling, so the brain generates another thought matched exactly to that feeling that will produce more of the same chemical messages that allow you to think the way you were just feeling.**"

"Whenever you say, "I am ..." (insert your own words here, what you are declaring is that your mind and body are aligned to a future or that your thoughts and feelings are one with your destiny. You're reinforcing a memorized state of being."

As an example: *I am patient, I am kind.* This, for somebody who loses his temper can be difficult. However, if they can admit that *in that moment* they are being patient, they can be kind—this can create buy-in and lead to more practice of the self-state.

## **Chapter Four: The Placebo Effect in the Body**

The following findings describe outcomes of a 1980s study where elderly men in their 70s and 80s attended a five-day retreat and were asked to reminisce about being 22 years younger. The retreat was set up to resemble the 1950s to

help them do this.

"The researchers discovered improvements in height, weight and gait. The men grew taller as their posture straightened, and their joints became more flexible and their fingers lengthened as their arthritis diminished. Their eyesight and hearing got better Their grip strength improved. Their memory sharpened, and they scored better on tests of mental cognition (with the first group improving their score by 63 percent compared to 44 percent for the control group). The men literally became younger in those five days, right in front of the researchers' eyes. Langer reported, "At the end of the study, I was playing football-touch, but still football-with these men, some of whom gave up their canes." How did that happen? Clearly, the men were able to turn on the circuits in their brains that reminded them of who they had been 22 years ago, and then their body chemistry somehow magically responded. They didn't just *feel* younger; they physically *became* younger"

"Stress is one of the biggest causes of epigenetic change, because it knocks your body out of balance. It comes in three forms: physical stress (trauma), chemical stress (toxins), and emotional stress (fear, worry, being overwhelmed, and so on. Each type can set off more than 1,400 chemical reactions and produce more than 30 hormones and neurotransmitters."

Cf. Alia Crum's research on the topic: "The true nature of stress is manifold and complex, and lots of things can happen [...] when you view stressors more as a challenge, less as a threat, that your brain and body response more adaptively[. In one study, participants were put into] three different conditions: some watched no videos, some watched the *stress will crush you* videos, and some watched the *stress could enhance you* videos. And what we found was that [...] a total of nine minutes of videos over the course of the week, led to changes in their mindsets about stress [it] led to changes in their physiological symptoms associated with stress. So people who watched the enhancing films had fewer backaches, muscle tension, insomnia, racing heart and so forth. And they also reported performing better at work compared to those who watched the debilitating videos. Now, interestingly, we didn't make anyone worse with the debilitating videos, which was good." (Huberman Lab)

"eliciting the relaxation response produces changes in gene expression after just *one session* of meditation among both novices and experienced practitioners alike"

## **Chapter Five: How Thoughts Change the Brain and the Body**

"mental rehearsal is extremely effective for learning a physical skill with minimal

physical practice."

"when you concentrate on a particular region of the body, your thoughts stimulate the region in the brain that governs that part—and if you keep doing it, physical changes in the brain's sensory area will then follow."

"In [a] study of 30 people over a 12-week period, some regularly exercised their little fingers, while others just imagined doing the same thing. While the group that actually did the physical exercises increased the strength of their little fingers by 53 percent, **the group that only imagined doing the same thing also increased the strength of their little fingers—by 35 percent.** Their bodies had changed to look as if they were having the physical experience in external reality over and over again—but they only experienced it in their minds. **Their minds changed their bodies.** In a similar experiment, ten volunteers each imagined flexing one of their biceps as hard as they could five times a week. Researchers recorded the subjects' electrical brain activity during the sessions and measured their muscle strength every two weeks. **Those who only imagined flexing increased their bicep muscle strength by 13.5 percent in just a few weeks, and they maintained the gain for three months after the training stopped.** Their bodies responded to a new mind. A final example is a French study that compared subjects who either lifted or imagined lifting dumbbells of different weights. **Those who imagined lifting heavier weights activated their muscles more than did those who imagined lifting lighter weights.** In all three of these studies on mental rehearsal, the subjects were able to measurably increase their body strength using *only their thoughts.*"

"If we have a heightened emotional response to the new thoughts we're concentrating on in mental rehearsal, it's like turbocharging our efforts, because the emotions help us make epigenetic changes much faster. [...] Japanese researchers found that watching an hour-long comedy show up-regulated 39 genes, 14 of which were related to natural killer cell activity in the immune system. [...] **increased positive emotions produced increases in vagal tone, a measure of the health of the vagus nerve, which plays a major part in regulating the autonomic nervous system and homeostasis.**"

## Chapter Six: Suggestibility

"suggestibility is: making a thought into a virtual experience and having our bodies consequentially respond in a new manner. Suggestibility combines three elements: *acceptance, belief, and surrender.* The more we accept, believe, and surrender to whatever we're doing to change our internal state, the better the results we can create. [...] **a person who experiences intense emotions tends to be more receptive to ideas and is therefore more suggestible.**"

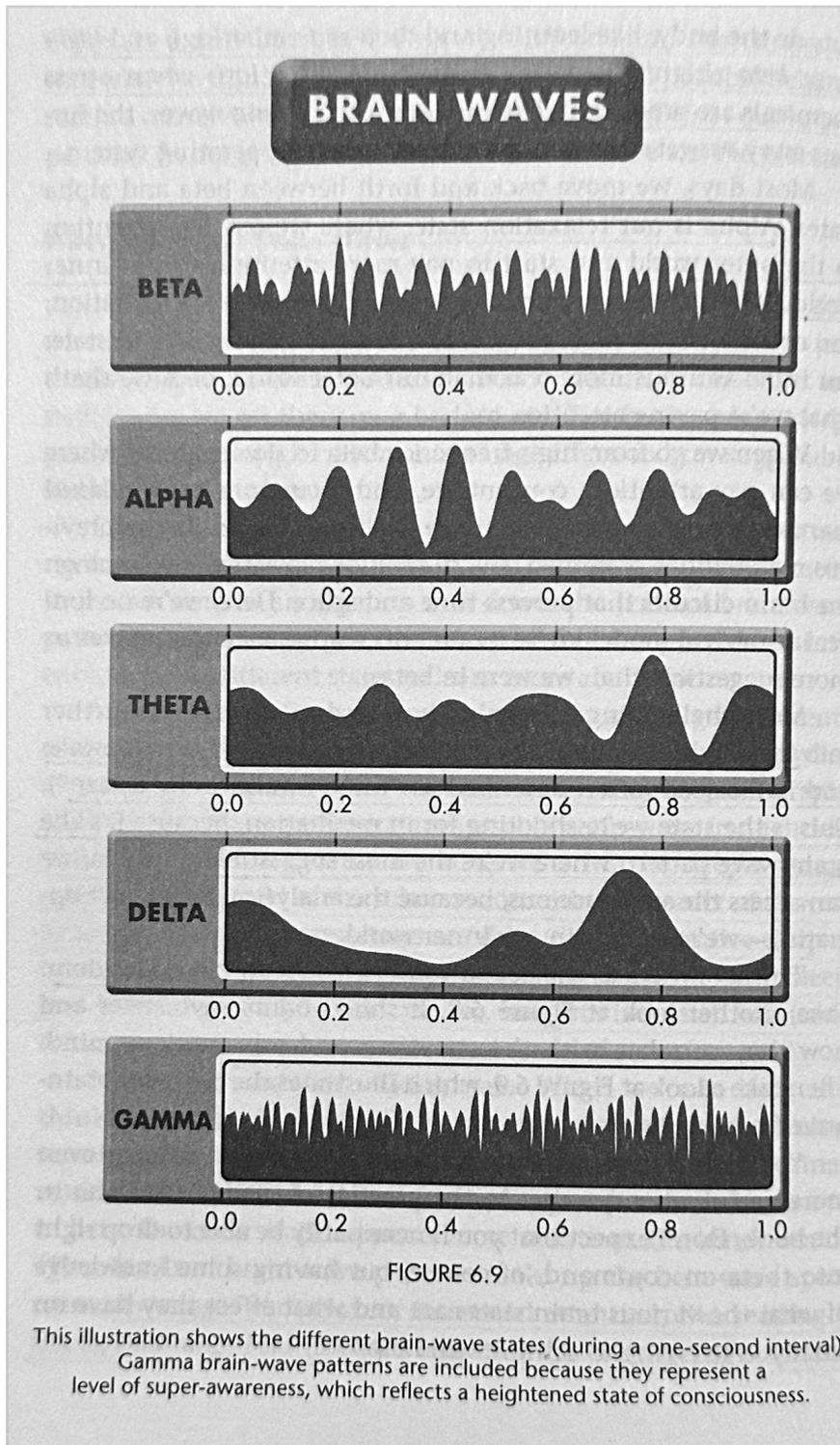
"Humans have several measurable brain-wave frequencies, and the slower the brain-wave state we're in, the deeper we go into the inner world of the

subconscious mind. In order of slowest to fastest, the brain-wave states are **delta** (deep, restorative sleep-totally unconscious), **theta** (a twilight state between deep sleep and wakefulness), **alpha** (the creative, imaginative state), **beta** (conscious thought), and **gamma** (elevated states of consciousness."

"Three levels of brain-wave patterns make up the beta-wave spectrum: **low-range beta** (relaxed, interested attention, like reading a book), **mid-range beta** (focused attention on an ongoing stimulus outside the body, like learning and then remembering), and **high-range beta** (highly focused, crisis-mode attention, when stress chemicals are produced). The higher the beta brain waves, the further away we get from being able to access the operating system. Most days, we move back and forth between beta and alpha states. **Alpha is our relaxation state, where we pay less attention to the outer world and start to pay more attention to our inner world.** When we're in alpha, we're in a light state of meditation; you could also call that imagination or daydreaming. In this state, our inner world is more real than our outer world, because that's what we're paying attention to."

"More challenging is learning how to drop down even further into **theta**, which is a kind of twilight state where **we're half-awake and half-asleep** (often described as "mind awake, body asleep"). **This is the state we're shooting for in meditation, because it's the brain-wave pattern where we're the most suggestible.**"

**Note to self:** look into the relationship between brain wave patterns and IFS therapy. Clients look like they're in a deep state of relaxation, accessing memories and feelings and sensations, observing, rapid eye movements, low prosody, and reminiscent of a sleep state. Are they in theta?

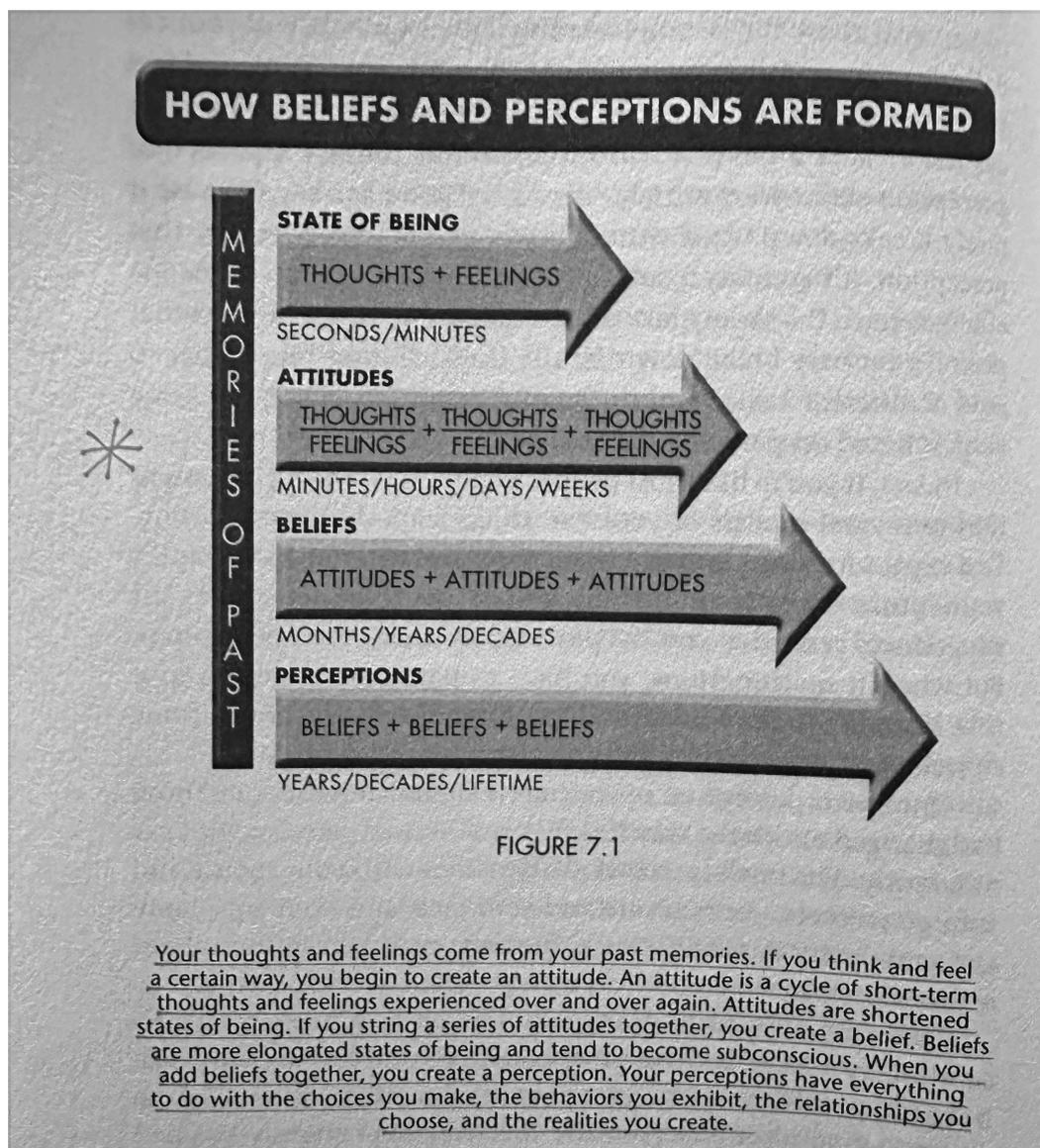


## Chapter Seven: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions

"when people [...] healed themselves using the placebo effect, what did they do differently? First, **they didn't accept the finality of their diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment. Nor did they believe in the most probable outcome or future destiny that their doctors had authoritatively outlined.** Finally, they didn't surrender to the diagnosis, prognosis, or suggested treatment. Because they had a different attitude from those who did accept, believe, and surrender, they were in a different state of being."

"Is it possible that, whenever people don't respond to treatment or when their health stays the same, they're living by the same emotional state every day, accepting, believing, and surrendering to the medical model without too much analysis[? ...] **Does a doctor's diagnosis become the modern-day equivalent of a voodoo curse?**"

"If you repeat or maintain certain attitudes long enough and you string those attitudes together, that's how you create a *belief*. A belief is just an extended state of being—essentially, beliefs are thoughts and feelings (attitudes) that you keep thinking and feeling over and over again until you hardwire them in your brain and emotionally condition them into your body."



"Just changing your beliefs and perceptions once isn't enough. You have to reinforce that change over and over. [...] **for some, the placebo effect only lasts for a certain amount of time, because they go back to who they were before:** their old states of being. In [one study] when the Parkinson's patients went back home and saw their caregivers, saw their spouses, slept in the same

beds, ate the same food, sat in the same rooms, and maybe played chess with the same friends who complained about their pains, their same old environments reminded them of their same old personalities and their same old states of being [and their symptoms returned. ...] The same thing happens with drug addicts who've been clean for many years. If you put them back in their same environments where they used to do drugs, even without their ingesting any drug, being there turns on the same receptor sites in their cells that the drugs did when they were using—and that in turn creates physiological changes in their bodies as if they've taken the drugs, increasing their cravings."

"the conditioning process creates strong associative memories. [...] associative memories stimulate subconscious automatic physiological functions by activating the autonomic nervous system. [... In one study where students were given a drink and told it had alcohol in it when it did not] beliefs alone were sufficient to fire up a biochemical change in their bodies that was equal to being drunk. That's because the students conditioned themselves enough times to associate alcohol with a change in their internal chemical states. As the subjects expected or anticipated the future change in their inner states based on their past associative memories of drinking, they were cued by the environment to physiologically change"

"The environment can also signal healing. **Hospital patients in Pennsylvania who recovered from surgery in a room with a view of a stand of trees in a natural suburban setting needed less-potent pain medications and were released seven to nine days earlier than patients in rooms facing a brown brick wall.**"

"**change your internal state every day**—before you get up and face your same old environment so that it won't pull you, as it did the Parkinson's patients, back to your old state of being."

## **Chapter 9: Three Stories of Personal Transformation**

"Newborns spend the vast majority of their days in the delta brain-wave state. During the first 12 years, children gradually progress to a theta state and then to an alpha state, before they get to the beta state they'll spend most of their adulthood in. [...] **theta and alpha are highly suggestible brain-wave states.** [...] the moment they feel emotionally altered from some experience, they pay attention to whoever or whatever caused it and so are conditioned to form associative memories connecting that cause to the emotion of the experience itself."

A brief set of practices for a woman (Laurie) who wanted to change her thought processes associated with a medical diagnosis of fibrous dysplasia, affecting her bones and ability to move...

"Laurie [...] concentrated on changing a few simple behaviors. She watched her thoughts and words, and reminded herself repeatedly to stop her old, repetitive, destructive patterns. [...] She'd say "Change" to herself 20 times a day, whenever she noticed her mind drifting. to her past. Although negative thoughts sneaked through a hundred times a day, little by little, Laurie created a few new thoughts, wrote them down, and attempted to believe them deeply. Laurie worked hard at it, but it took almost two years before she could really *feel* those new thoughts. [...] She also reminded herself that she'd have to go through a biological, neurological, chemical, and genetic death of the old self before the new self emerged."

**Laurie:** "I knew that over the years, all of those fractures had manifested structurally from the unhealthy protein expression in my bone cells, because I had been living by the survival emotions of fear, victimization, and pain—and I felt weak. I was powerful enough to manifest weakness perfectly in my body. I had programmed the genes to stay on, because I'd memorized those emotions subconsciously in my body. And my body, as my mind, was always living in the past. So I figured, if bones are made of collagen— which is a protein—and I wanted my bone cells to make some healthy collagen, I'd have to enter my autonomic nervous system, get beyond my analytical mind, enter into the subconscious mind, repeatedly reprogram my body with new information, and allow it to receive new orders every day. When I received the good news, I felt like I was halfway across the river of change."

Another story...

"Joann constantly pushed herself to take on as much as possible, all the while maintaining exceptionally high standards. She was a leader, admired by many and regularly sought out for advice. [...] doctors diagnosed her with **secondary progressive multiple sclerosis (SPMS), an advanced stage of multiple sclerosis (MS)**, a chronic disease in which the immune system attacks the central nervous system. Symptoms vary widely depending on the individual, but can start with conditions such as numbness in a leg or an arm, progressing as far as paralysis and even blindness. These symptoms can include not only physical but also cognitive and psychiatric problems. [...] MS is an inflammatory disease in which the insulating coverings of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord are damaged, along with the nerve fibers themselves. The condition disrupts the nervous system from communicating and sending signals to various parts of the body. The type of MS Joann developed is a progressive type that builds up over time, often causing permanent neurological problems, especially as the disease advances. Her doctors told her it was incurable."

"Joann's body finally did her the favor she wouldn't do herself—that is, to stop and say, "No more!" She'd pushed herself too hard. Even though she'd achieved success in her early years, deep down inside, she felt like a failure most of the time because she constantly judged herself and thought that she

could always do a better job. She was never satisfied. Whatever she did or achieved was *never good enough.*"

"She started mentally rehearsing doing yoga, and after just a few weeks of daily practice, she was able to do some actual physical poses—even some standing ones. [...] Joann was installing the circuits in her brain to look as if she were already physically walking and moving. [...] Soon she was able to stand briefly, and then she could walk with support. [...] When Joann began to meditate regularly to simply quiet her mind chatter, she became aware of how sad and angry she really was. The floodgates opened. Joann realized she felt weak, isolated, rejected, and unworthy most of the time. Out of balance, ungrounded, and disconnected, she felt as though she'd lost a vital part of herself. She observed how she denied herself by pleasing others and how she couldn't acknowledge herself without feeling guilty. [...] She decided to become conscious of all of those subconscious thoughts, actions, and emotions that were defining her as the same personality who'd created this particular personal reality. [...] Over time,] Joann felt that the progression of the MS had indeed slowed. [...] But] she stopped trying to slow, stop, or reverse her MS. She no longer tried to prove anything to herself, her family, her doctors, or anyone else. She understood and experienced for the first time that her true journey was always about wholeness [...] MS was simply a label, like "mother," "wife," or "boss." She had changed that label by simply giving up her past. [...] Joann taught herself how to walk again. Two years later, she is still walking unassisted and is more playful and full of life. [...] Joann feels whole, and because she can now *receive*, she continues to receive healing. [...] Very rarely does a thought get past her conscious mind that she doesn't want to experience."

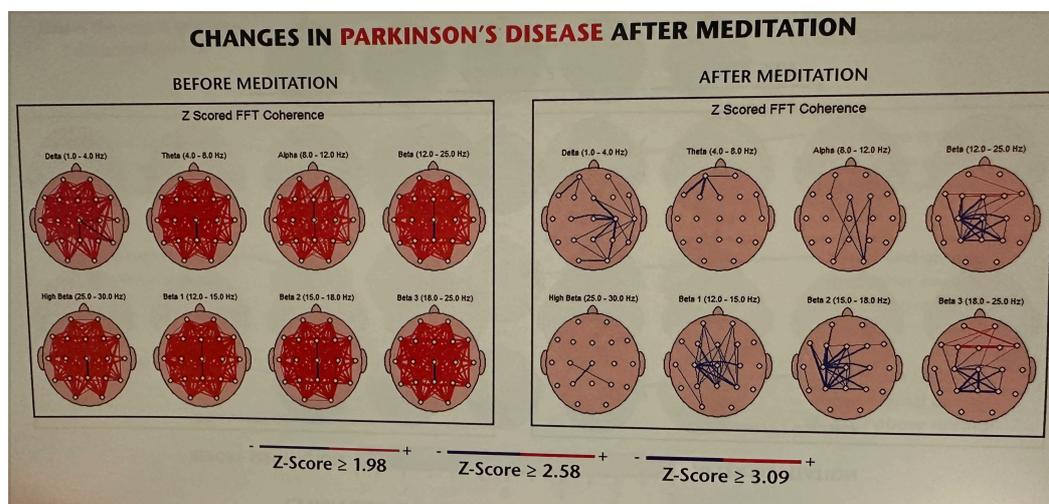
## **Chapter Ten: Information to Transformation: Proof That You Are the Placebo**

"the placebo works because a person accepts and believes in a *known* remedy—a fake pill, injection, or procedure substituted for its real counterpart—and then surrenders to the outcome without overanalyzing how it's going to happen."

"Michelle is in her 60s and was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2011, after she noticed progressive involuntary shaking of her left arm, left hand, and left foot. In November 2012, she became a patient at Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix. Her attending physician told her that she probably had Parkinson's for 10 to 15 years already and that she had to live with the symptoms. Her plan was to cope with the progression of the bodily limitations as she aged. She began taking Azilect (rasagiline mesylate), a medication used for Parkinson's disease that stops the uptake of dopamine at the receptor-site level, slowing its breakdown in the body. The drug produced very few noticeable changes. Michelle became a student in November 2012. The month of December was outstanding. Her daily meditation routine brought a feeling of

peace and joy, which began to reduce her symptoms"

"The lack of the proper neurotransmitters (specifically dopamine) causes the neurons to display an erratic communication system between each region of the brain, with neural networks firing out of control. The result is a type of spastic or hyperactive neuronal firing, which affects the brain and the body. As a result, involuntary motor functions interfere with normal movement. Now review the "after meditation" part of the same figure. This is Michelle's brain after four days of changing her state of being during meditation. This is very close to a normal brain, with very little hyperactivity, incoherence, or overregulation. At the end of our event, she was experiencing no involuntary tremors, twitches, or motor problems—and her brain scan confirms this change."



"her anxiety is still getting better, and as a result, so is her condition. Less anxiety means fewer tremors. She's sustaining and thus memorizing that state of being for a longer period of time—and her brain is showing the changes. [...] Today, Michelle hardly ever has any of the involuntary motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease. Very minor twitches do present themselves when she gets stressed or overtired at times, but for the most part, she's high functioning and normal."

## Part II: Transformation

### Chapter Eleven: Meditation Preparation

"when you fall asleep, you naturally shift through the entire spectrum of brain-wave states, going from your waking, beta state to the slower alpha state, when you close your eyes, to the slower-still theta state, when you're half-asleep and half-awake, all the way down to the deep-sleep delta brain-wave state. And when you wake up in the morning, you do the same thing in reverse: rising from delta to theta to alpha to beta, where you're fully awake and conscious."

"As you begin the meditation, close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths. Soon you should drop from a beta brain-wave state into an alpha state. This more restful, but still focused, state activates your frontal lobe, which as you read, lowers the volume on the circuits in your brain that process time and space. Although at first you might not be able to slip easily into the next slower brain-wave state, theta, with practice you'll be able to slow your brain waves down even further. Theta is the brain-wave state where the body is asleep but the mind is awake, and it's where you can more readily change your body's automatic programs."

"We have a ranch with 18 horses, and mastering the will to stay focused in meditation reminds me of what it's like to ride a favorite stallion after I haven't been on him in a while. When I first climb up into the saddle, that stallion couldn't care less about me. He smells the mares on the other side of the property, and that's where his attention goes. It's as though he's saying to me, "Where have you been for the last eight months? I got into some bad habits while you were away, the girls are over there, and I'm not concerned about what you want to do, so I'm going to throw you off. I'm in charge here." He gets mad, temperamental, and controlling, and he tries to run me into the side of the arena. But I pay attention to him, and when his head starts to turn toward those mares, I take control of him. So the moment I see him start to move away from my lead, I slowly but firmly grab the reins and pull them in, and I just wait. And before long, he stops and lets out this big snort, and I stroke him on the side and tell him, "That's right." And we take two steps and then I see his head starting to turn just slightly again, and I stop him—and wait. And he lets out another big snort, and once he knows I'm in charge, we start to move forward again. I just keep following the same procedure until he ultimately surrenders to me."

## **Chapter Twelve: Changing Beliefs and Perceptions Meditation**

"beliefs and perceptions are subconscious states of being. They start with thoughts and feelings that you think and feel over and over, until they ultimately become habituated or automatic—at which point they form an attitude. Attitudes strung together become beliefs, and related beliefs strung together become perceptions. Over time, this redundancy creates a view of the world and of yourself that's largely subconscious. It affects your relationships, your behaviors, and really everything in your life."

**Final reflections:** Part I of this book has got to be the best resource I've yet come across that describes the power of the placebo. Part II—and here you'll see my bias—feels a little too woo-woo for me. I know, I know, it's probably one of those things that you've got to experience to understand ... just ... the scripts feel a liiiiiiiiittle cultish.

That's not to say they don't work (and I might read this in a few years and think completely differently), just ... my gut doesn't really connect with it. And if you hear any recordings of these scripts (and I think this is where I'm most put off) you'll know what I'm talking about.

In saying this, the book is very readable with a great focus on research. Dispenza does a good job at showcasing a whole body of research that looks at expectations and outcomes. He also talks about the nocebo effect and how negative expectations impact the brain and body. Lots of stories, anecdotes, and research to draw from and make up your own mind. Unlike his other books, the first part reads less 'new agey' and carries concepts most of us can apply to our lives. Take it as it comes, I say. Apply a critical lens and see what you think.

The book helped me with language to communicate to my clients the hope for change through intention. Plus, it helped distinguish between brain waves in a way that makes sense! (Gamma, Beta, Alpha, Theta, Delta.) But mostly, it helped conceptualise how experiences lead to thoughts and feelings and attitudes and beliefs and perceptions. And these perception's lead to actions. Any actions have consequences.

*Choose them well, then.*

*These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. But remember, they are but a glimpse of what the book is actually about—for more context, buy the book and make up your own mind. You can find out more about Emil by visiting [www.barnacc.com](http://www.barnacc.com)*

***"A text without a context is a pretext to a proof text."***

**—Dr. Don Carson**