lexoshpejt

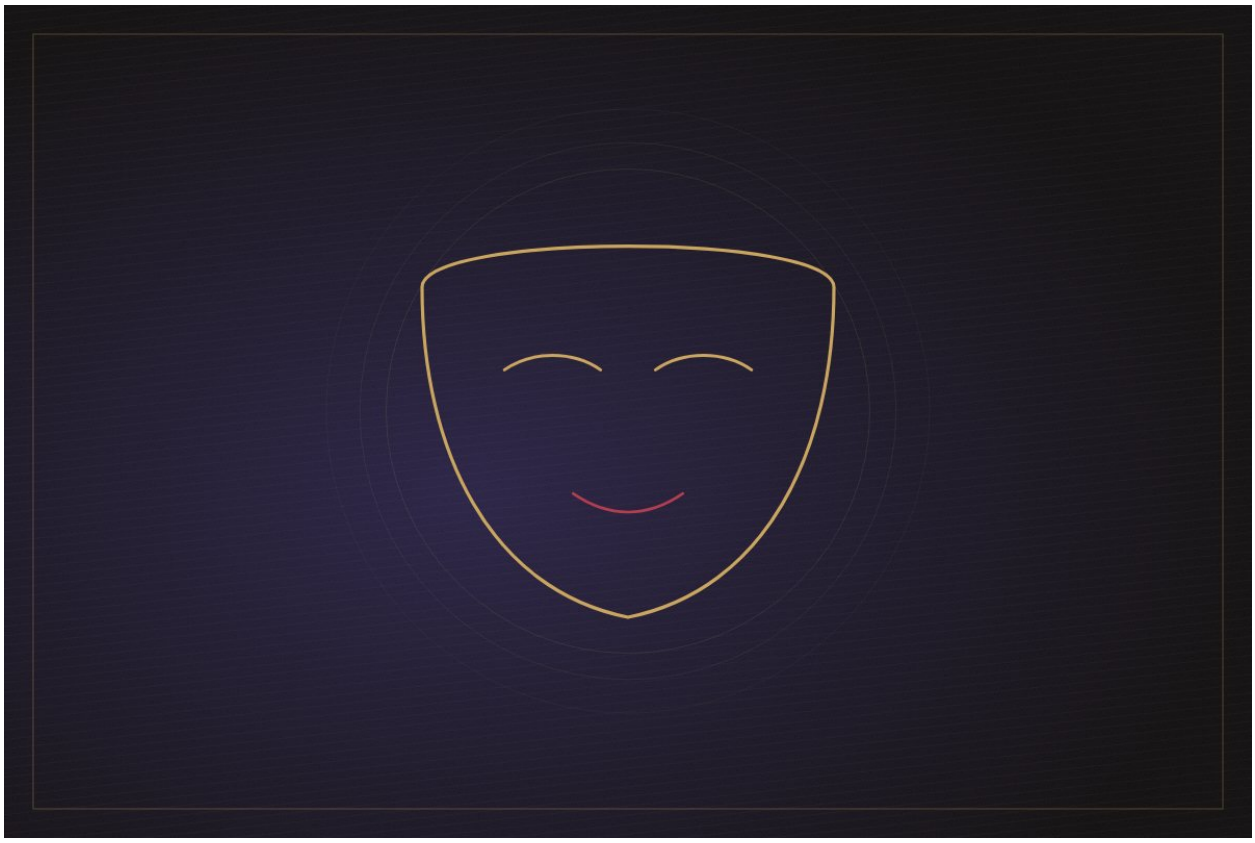
Mind

The law of attraction: what is true and what is not

From The Secret to the experiments on expectations: why thoughts do not "attract" events, but can change what we do

26 October 2026 / 5 min read

Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



Original illustration by the lexoshpejt editors. Not a historical photograph or object.

In 2006 Rhonda Byrne's book and film *The Secret* made an old idea known all over the world: that thoughts have a kind of magnetic force. According to this idea, if you think with conviction about wealth, health or love, they come to you; if you think about problems, you attract them. The book sold millions of copies and the idea spread on social media as the "law of attraction" or "manifesting".

What the evidence does not support

There is no scientific evidence that thoughts directly affect external events without passing through our own actions or those of other people. The words often used, such as "frequency", "vibration" or "energy", are borrowed from physics but do not have the same meaning here and cannot be measured. When an idea can be neither proven nor disproven, it is not science but belief.

What is true: expectations matter

Still, there is something true in the link between what we expect and what happens. In 1968 the psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson published a famous study known as the Pygmalion experiment. In a primary school in California, teachers were told that some pupils, in fact chosen at random, would make great progress that year. By the end of the year some of these pupils, especially in the first grades, had gained more on intelligence tests.

The study was criticised for its methods, and replications gave mixed results. In 2005 Lee Jussim and Kent Harber reviewed 35 years of research and concluded that self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom exist but are usually small, do not accumulate much over time and may be stronger for pupils from stigmatised groups.

> *Thoughts do not move the world. They move our hands, and our hands move the world.*

The real mechanism

Expectations have an effect because they change behaviour: a teacher who expects more of a pupil gives that pupil more attention and time. Likewise, when we believe something is possible, we are more likely to try, to keep going after failure, to notice opportunities. This is not magic. It is ordinary psychology, and it works only through action.

There is also an important limit, which we covered in the article on visualisation: when we imagine the goal as already achieved, without thinking about the obstacles, the energy to act can even decrease.

The hidden risk

The idea that we attract everything that happens to us has a dark side. If someone falls ill, loses their job or suffers a misfortune, does it mean they "attracted" it with their thoughts? That adds guilt to pain, and it is unfair. Many events in life depend on circumstances we do not control.

Where the idea came from

"The Secret" invented nothing new. The idea that thoughts attract events was born in the nineteenth-century American movement called **New Thought**. In 1906 the author William Walker Atkinson published the book *Thought Vibration, or the Law of Attraction in the Thought World*, using almost the same words heard today. In 1910 Wallace Wattles published *The Science of Getting Rich*, a book that according to Rhonda Byrne herself inspired her to create "The Secret". This history shows that the idea has circulated for more than a century without ever being proven in controlled experiments.

Where expectations have real power: placebo

There is one field where expectations really do affect the body: the placebo effect. When a patient takes a pill with no active substance but believes it is medicine, pain or anxiety may decrease. In 2001 Asbjørn Hróbjartsson and Peter Gøtzsche compared, in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, groups receiving placebo with groups receiving no treatment at all. The placebo effect was visible mainly in symptoms that patients report themselves, such as pain, but very small or negligible in objective measurements, such as blood pressure or test results. In other words, expectation can change how we experience a condition, but not cure the disease itself.

Belief in your own ability

The psychologist Albert Bandura called **self-efficacy** the belief that you are able to carry out a particular task. In 1977 he argued that this belief influences what people choose to try, how hard they try and how long they persist in the face of difficulties. Later research has supported this idea in many fields, from sport to quitting smoking. Self-efficacy grows mainly from experiences of success, even small ones, not from repeating positive sentences. This is the realistic form of what the "law of attraction" promises magically.

Why it convinces us so easily

The idea of attraction seems convincing because it feeds on several well-known tendencies of the mind. We remember better the times we thought about something and it happened, and forget the hundreds of times nothing happened. The psychologist Ellen Langer showed in 1975 another tendency, the **illusion of control**: people who had chosen their own lottery ticket demanded a much higher price to sell it than those who had been handed one, as if their choice gave them better odds, even though the chances were the same. We need to feel in control, and "The Secret" meets this need with a pleasant promise.

What is worth keeping

- **Clarity of purpose**: knowing what you want helps you notice the opportunities connected with it.
- **The belief that it is worth trying**: it pushes you to act and to keep going.
- **Daily action**: without it, even the strongest thought changes nothing.
- **Kindness to yourself** when things go wrong, instead of the question "what did I think wrongly?".

Sources

Jussim, L. & Harber, K. D. (2005). Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: Knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9(2), 131–155. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0902_3

Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. WorldCat

Byrne, R. (2006). *The Secret*. New York: Atria Books. WorldCat

Atkinson, W. W. (1906). *Thought Vibration, or the Law of Attraction in the Thought World*. Chicago: New Thought Publishing. WorldCat

Hróbjartsson, A. & Gøtzsche, P. C. (2001). Is the placebo powerless? An analysis of clinical trials comparing placebo with no treatment. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 344(21), 1594–1602. PubMed

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. PubMed

Langer, E. J. (1975). The illusion of control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(2), 311–328. WorldCat

Read online: https://www.lexoshpejt.com/en/article/the-law-of-attraction-what-is-true