

## Can You Change Your Brain by Thinking Differently?

By Dr Joe Dispenza

Current neuro-scientific theory tells us that the brain is organized to reflect everything we know in our environment. The different relationships with people we have met, the variety of things we own and are familiar with, the cumulative places we have visited and have lived in, and the myriad of experiences we have embraced throughout our years are all configured in the soft plastic tissues of the brain. Even the vast array of actions and behaviors that we've repeatedly performed throughout our lifetime is also tattooed in the intricate folds of our gray matter. For the most part, our brain is equal to our environment.

In a normal day, as we respond to familiar people, as we encounter common things in known places at predictable times, and as we experience recurring conditions in our personal world, we will more than likely think and behave in automatic memorized ways. To change, then, is to think and act greater than our present circumstances. It is to think greater than our environment.

We have been told that our brains are essentially hardwired with unchangeable circuitry—that we possess or, better put, are possessed by a kind of neuro-rigidity that is reflected in the type of inflexible and habitual behavior we often see exhibited. The truth is that we are marvels of flexibility, adaptability, and a neuroplasticity that allows us to reformulate and re-pattern our neural connections to produce the kind of behaviors that we want. We have far more power to alter our own brains, our behaviors, our personalities, and ultimately our reality than previously thought possible. Consider those individuals in history who have risen above their present circumstances, stood up to the onslaught of reality as it presented itself to them, and made significant changes.

For example, the Civil Rights Movement would not have had its far-reaching effects if someone like Martin Luther King, Jr., had not, despite all the evidence around him (Jim Crow laws, separate but equal accommodations, snarling attack dogs, and powerful fire hoses), believed in the possibility of another reality. Though Dr. King phrased it in his famous speech as a “dream,” what he was really promoting and living was a better world where everyone was equal. How was he able to do that? Simply put, he saw, felt, heard, lived and breathed a different reality in his mind than most other people at that time. It was the power of his vision that convinced millions of the justness of his cause. The world has changed because of his ability to think and act greater than conventional beliefs.

Not only did King consistently keep his dream alive in his mind, he lived his life as if his dream was already unfolding. The idea was so alive in his mind that there was a good possibility that his brain “looked as if the experience had already happened.”

Neuroscience has proven that we can change our brains just by thinking differently. Through the concept of mental rehearsal (to repeatedly imagine performing an action), the circuits in our brains can reorganize themselves to reflect our very intentions. In one study, people who mentally rehearsed one-handed finger exercises two hours a day for five days demonstrated the same brain changes as people who physically performed the same movements.<sup>1</sup> To put this into perspective, when we are truly focused and single minded, the brain does not distinguish between the internal world of the mind and the external environment.

This type of internal processing allows us to become so involved in our dreams and internal representations that the brain will modify its wiring without having had experienced the actual event. When we change our minds independent of environmental cues and then steadfastly insist on

an ideal with sustained concentration, the brain will be ahead of the actual external experience. In other words, the brain will function as if the experience has already happened. As we embrace the very circumstances that challenge our mind, we will have put the appropriate circuits in place to allow us to behave consistently with our intentions. Simply said, the hardware will have been installed so that we can handle the challenge. When we change our mind, our brain changes, and when we change our brain, our mind changes.

What made Dr. King—or any great leader, for that matter—unique was that his mind and body were united to the same cause. In other words, he did not think one thing and then behave contrary to his intentions. His thoughts and actions were completely aligned to the same outcome. This is not a bad working definition for true leadership. When we can focus our mind on a desired goal and then discipline the body to consistently act in alignment with that end, we are demonstrating greatness. We are literally living in the future, and our body will begin to change in order to prepare us for the new experience. In one study, men who mentally rehearsed doing bicep curls with dumbbells for a short period of time every day showed (on the average) a 13 percent increase in muscle size without ever touching the weights. Their bodies changed to match their intentions.<sup>2</sup>

So when the time comes to demonstrate a vision contrary to the environmental conditions at hand, it is quite possible for us to be already prepared to think and act, with a conviction that is steadfast and unwavering. In fact, the more we think about or formulate an image of our behavior in a future event, the easier it will be for us to execute a new way of being because the mind and body are unified to that end.

So what is it then that talks us out of true change? The answer is: our feelings and our emotions. Feelings and emotions are the end-products of an experience. When we are in the midst of any experience, all of our five senses are gathering sensory data and a rush of information is sent back to the brain through those five different pathways. As this occurs, gangs of neurons will string into place and organize themselves to reflect that event. The moment that these jungles of nerve cells become patterned into networks, they will fire into place and release chemicals. Those chemicals that are released are called emotions.

Emotions and feelings, then, are neuro-chemical memories of past events. We can remember experiences better when we can recall how they felt. For example, do you remember where you were on 9/11? You probably can clearly recall where you were that day, at that exact time, because you can remember the novel feeling that woke you up enough to pay full attention. More than likely, it was a different feeling than you'd had in a long time.

Back to the concept of change. If emotions brand experiences into long-term memory, then when we are faced with current obstacles in our life that require thinking and acting in new ways, and we use familiar feelings as a barometer for change, we will most certainly talk ourselves out of our ideal. Think about this. Our feelings reflect the past. But to change is to abandon past ways of thinking, acting and feeling so that we can move into the future with a new outcome. To change is to think (and act) greater than how we feel. Emotions like fear, worry, frustration, greed, and self-importance are familiar feelings that, even in the midst of transformation, if we decide to succumb to, will surely point us in the wrong direction.

Can we then begin to contemplate change for ourselves? To learn to think independently of the barrage of environmental stimuli is a skill that, when properly executed, will change the brain, the mind, and the body to prepare us for the future. The art of self-reflection may seem as if it is dying in a technological culture that saturates us with so much information that we become

addicted to the external world to stimulate our own thinking. How free are we? Most are lost without the thrill of entertainment, text messaging, phone calls, and the Internet. To make the time to meditate, to plan our future, to mentally rehearse the behaviors we want to change and to think about new ways of being will surely advance us beyond our predictable genetic destiny.

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#### REFERENCES

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