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As a Man Thinketh: Overview

"Of all the beautiful truths pertaining to the soul that have been restored and brought to light in this age, none is more gladdening or fruitful of divine promise and confidence than this — that you are the master of your thought, the molder of your character, and the maker and shaper of your condition, environment and destiny."

This week, Life Training Online is reviewing [As a Man Thinketh](#), by James Allen, the sixth of fifty-two books in the [52 Personal Development Books in 52 Weeks](#) series.

This 1902 classic succinctly summarizes the theme of the self-help movement — the idea that the "mind is the master weaver."

It's interesting for me to think about some of the conversations that I've had with my peers. A common belief that many of them share is that their thoughts are somewhat separate from who they are. They may think that they can hide their thoughts from the world, thinking one way but acting another.

Allen's contribution in **As a Man Thinketh** was to reveal the fallacy of this sentiment. As you'll come to see this week, Allen discovered that "we do not attract what we want, but what we are." And what we are is what we dominantly think about. ([someone else knew the secret I guess...](#))

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As a Man Thinketh: Thought & Character

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Thought and Character

"As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," summarizes the first section of Allen's book. He goes on to further explain that a person is literally what they think of, their character being the complete sum of all their thoughts.

If you think about this, Allen is spot on. Some might argue and say that it's the environment that determines one's character and not one's thoughts. However, if you look at those who have risen above their environment, you would have noticed that their environment did not create their character but instead, revealed their character.

The logic here is very clear. Noble thoughts are what make and noble person, and negative ones create a miserable one. How many times have we seen people who constantly focus on the negative when someone in their exact situation are able to rise above it. [Victor Frankl is a perfect example of this.](#)

The Effect of Thought on Circumstance

According to James Allen, we not only attract what we want, but also what we don't want. People knowledgeable with [the law attraction](#) know this concept all too well. He explains, that our minds can be likened to a garden which can be actively cultivated or allowed to run wild. Whether we cultivated or not, it will and must, bring forth. If we do not actively plant useful seeds of thought then by default,

noxious ones will take its place.

Everyone is where they are as a result of the thoughts which they have built into their character. As long as you believe yourself to be the creature of outside conditions, you'll never realize your true potential. And not until you realize that your external circumstances are a direct match with your dominant thoughts, you will never obtain the power necessary to change your life.

Our souls attract that which we secretly harbor, that which we secretly love as well as fear. Because every thought that we allow to fall in our mind — if we allow it to take root — will sooner or later blossom into an action and bear its own harvest of consequence, whether bad or good.

We cannot escape the fact that our outer world of circumstance is molded by our inner world of thought. We may labor all we want to improve our circumstances, but until we are willing to improve ourselves we will forever remain bound to those circumstances. Again this is worth repeating: "We do not attract what we want, but what we are". And what we are is the result of what we most often think about...

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As a Man Thinketh: Thoughts, Health, and Purpose

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Effect of Thought on [Health](#) and the Body

Can our thoughts affect the physical condition of our health? Nowadays we have seen science already prove this fact. Our ability to heal and fight disease has as much (if not more) to do with our state of mind and thoughts as our lifestyle does. In Allen's time however, this wasn't common knowledge.

According to Allen, disease and health are like circumstances — they're rooted in thought. Have you ever noticed that those who think and worry most about [sickness](#) are the ones who get sick the most? "Sickly thoughts express themselves through a sickly body."

On the other hand, strong, pure, and happy thoughts strengthen the body. You may be familiar with Norman Cousins who, after being sent home with a debilitating disease, went out and got a bunch of comedy movies and watched them all day long — lifting his spirits, laughing and healing himself in the process.

When you think positive thoughts - this goes beyond a Pollyanna theory - there is scientific proof that you will be healthier. "There is no [physician](#) like cheerful thought for dissipating the ills of the body."

Thought and Purpose

Allen explains that the majority of people allow their thoughts to simply "drift upon the ocean of life." This aimlessness of thought invites petty worries, fears, troubles,

and self-pitying into our lives which, if continued, lead to eventual unhappiness, loss, and failure.

What is the remedy? According to Allen, it is purpose. Until our thoughts are aligned with a purpose, we will never be able to make any real and lasting accomplishments in life. I tend to agree with this. I really believe that each of us has a definite purpose in life and we should all seek to discover it.

After [you've discovered your purpose in life](#), Allen urges you to set out accomplishing it by making it the central point of your thoughts. This may be a spiritual idea or even a worldly object — dependent upon the “nature of our being” ([level of consciousness](#)). Whatever it is, if you can focus all your thoughts and mental faculties upon it — not allowing your thoughts to wander away — you will be able to accomplish it. Developing this kind of self control will enhance every aspect of your life.

“Thought allied fearlessly to purpose becomes creative force: he who knows this is ready to become something higher and stronger than a mere bundle of wavering thoughts and fluctuating sensations; he who does this has become the conscious and intelligent wielder of his [mental powers](#).”

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As a Man Thinketh: Achievements, Visions, and Serenity

This week, Life Training Online is reviewing [As a Man Thinketh](#), by James Allen, the sixth of fifty-two books in the [52 Personal Development Books in 52 Weeks](#) series.

The Thought Factor in Achievement

According to Allen, when it comes to success in any endeavor in life, the key to its achievement or failure is found in one's own thoughts. So many get caught up pointing the finger at everyone and everything else that, according to them, is the reason for their lack of success. This is a cop-out. Allen says that not until we realize that the responsibility for our success lies in our own thoughts and hands, will we ever have the ability to achieve it. This is reminiscent of the first habit Covey speaks about in his Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Be Proactive.

"Achievement, of whatever kind, is the crown of effort, the diadem of thought. By the aid of self-control, resolution, purity, righteousness, and well directed thought a man ascends; by the aid of animality, indolence, impurity, corruption, and confusion of thought a man descends."

Visions and Ideals

"The dreamers are the saviors of the world. As the visible world is sustained by the invisible, so man, through all their trials and sins and sordid vocations, are nourished by the beautiful visions of their solitary dreamers. Humanity cannot forget it's dreamers."

I really liked this part of the book. Probably because, as a dreamer myself, I seem to resonate with this the most.

All the achievements that we see in our world today were at first for a time, a dream. What started as a dream or thought, eventually progressed to a desire. From that desire sprang an aspiration which spurred action. And finally the continual application of those actions manifested what we see today as our reality.

Allen's main point in this section of the book, is for you to dream big. Because you can only rise as high as your vision or your ideal, it's important that your visions and ideals are lofty. This does not exclude the importance of effort in the achievement of your dreams, for "in all human affairs there are efforts, and there are results, and the strength of the effort is a measure of the result."

Serenity

In his final chapter, Allen speaks of serenity. I find it interesting that he concludes his book with this section. Because for a book that is so focused on being proactive with your thoughts, calmness of mind, at first glance, may seem contradictory. However, according to Allen, serenity is the advanced application of controlling one's thoughts.

You can only become calm in mind in the measure that you understand yourself and your relationship with your external environment. When you learn to function within the gap of stimulus and reaction and learn to choose your own response, you will cease to fuss and worry and grieve, and instead remain poised, calm, and serene.

We all have this ability. It just takes some practice. The next time that you get in an argument with someone, look back and try to find the moment where you reacted. Visualize yourself instead responding to stimulus that caused you to at first react, and this time choose a different, more serene response. (I will be speaking about this in a future article.)

Allen sums this up perfectly:

"Yes, humanity surges with uncontrolled passion, is tumultuous with ungoverned grief, is blown about by anxiety in doubt. Only the wise man, only he whose thoughts are controlled and purified, makes the winds and the storms of the soul obey him."

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As a Man Thinketh: Final Thoughts

This week, Life Training Online is reviewing [As a Man Thinketh](#), by James Allen, the sixth of fifty-two books in the [52 Personal Development Books in 52 Weeks](#) series.

Despite being written over a hundred years ago, **As a Man Thinketh** continues to be an inspiring and practical source of self-help literature. The easy-to-read prose and absence of hype are a breath of life-giving air for those who are drowning in a sea of sensational claims and over-the-top personalities.

I highly recommend this work to anyone looking for a good introduction into self-help literature. However, don't let its size fool you — there is plenty of meat in this book for you to chew on. In a nutshell, this will book will help you to be more aware of your thoughts and help you understand their importance in achieving the kind of life that you desire. To summarize James Allen's words, "We do not attract what we want, but what we are." Only by changing your thoughts will you be able to change your life.

I hope you enjoyed this week's review. Next week we'll be taking a look at a book that is currently rocking the business world called, the **Power of Nice**. Although not a self-help book by definition, my cursory glance into its pages revealed that it contains plenty of principles that can be applied to our own personal lives. So stay tuned...

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