



STATEMENT DN069

**The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success:
A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams
by Deepak Chopra (Amber-Allen Publishing/New World Library, 1995)**

This short book, currently riding near the top of the bestseller lists, skillfully presents nondualistic Hinduism (pantheistic monism) in the perennially popular genre of American self-help literature. Whereas 20 or 30 years ago the self-help genre was dominated by the liberal Protestantism of the Norman Vincent Peale variety, books on personal success today typically frame their psychological boosterism in New Age metaphysics. Although the New Age movement is no longer splashed in the headlines, the popularity of this book and its author prove that New Age themes have entered the mainstream and are now well integrated into American culture - even into the church. One of Chopra's videos was recently advertised in a Christian magazine.

Chopra has attained prominence as a best-selling author and popular speaker on holistic health, particularly the application of Hindu-based medical treatments (called ayurveda) to modern maladies. *The Seven Laws of Spiritual Success* is distilled from material in his earlier work, *Creating Affluence* (1993). His guiding premise is the essence of New Age thought: human beings are unlimited in their potential. Any limitation or lack of success is attributable to a lack of awareness of one's true identity as a god or goddess. He unequivocally states that "we remain unfulfilled unless we nurture the seeds of divinity inside us. In reality we are divinity in disguise, and the gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized" (p. 3).

Chopra doesn't shrink from promising the moon (or the entire universe) to the aspiring reader. He claims that the mastery of his principles "will give you the ability to create unlimited wealth with effortless ease, and to experience success in every endeavor" (pp. 1-2). This cosmic carrot will entice many who seek spiritual liberation from the fetters of a fallen world. Yet Chopra's promises are built on the sands of an unbiblical, illogical, and existentially unsatisfying world view.

The "seven laws" are, nevertheless, attractive for several reasons. Chopra rightly emphasizes the need to focus on the spiritual life through times of reflection and silence. A harried, busy, noisy America should take that to heart, while recognizing that all silences are not spiritually equal. Although Chopra adheres to the nondualistic Hinduism of his mentor, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi the founder of Transcendental Meditation), he usually avoids Hindu terminology (with the exception of *karma* and *dharma*), using more easily recognizable words instead. (He does, however, quote from Hindu texts and teachers.) And although his world view is antithetical to Christianity, Chopra presents his ideas as a generic spirituality suitable for anyone seeking spiritual growth. In the undiscerning spiritual climate of America today, this strategy sells books and makes careers.

Chopra's first principle is "the law of pure potentiality": we can connect with "the *unity* of one all-pervasive spirit" (p. 10) or "true self" (p. 11) when we transcend the illusion of a separate ego. Without using the terms, Chopra affirms the Advaita Vedanta Hindu idea that "Atman is Brahman": the individual self (Atman) is really one with the Divine Self (Brahman). To realize this we should practice silent meditation on the unity of all things. We should also practice nonjudgment — the refraining from moral evaluations — in order not to hinder the flow of divine energy.

The biblical revelation claims that God is a personal and holy Creator who is separate from His creation (Gen. 1:1; Rom. 1:25), and that human beings are finite and fallen creatures, not extensions of a pantheistic power (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 3:9-20). While Chopra says that "only intimacy with the Self will bring about true healing" (p. 19), biblical spirituality concerns the reality of the God who both transcends creation and is intimately involved with it (Isa. 57:15). Christians pray to a God other than themselves (Matt 6:9); they do not meditate on the divine within.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

Although Chopra speaks of divine “grace” (p. 13), his concept of an impersonal deity destroys any meaning for that term. Energy shows no grace; only persons do. Unlike Chopra’s amorality (nonjudgment), Christian spirituality demands a moral discernment that judges ourselves and others according to biblical wisdom (Matt. 7:1-5). Moreover, no sane person would want a judge, law officer, or politician to practice the amorality that Chopra preaches (Isa. 5:20).

Chopra’s second principle seems difficult to criticize, given that he calls it “the law of giving.” Who could be against giving? Yet this is not the biblical model of loving our neighbor as ourselves because he or she is made in the image of God (Matt. 19:19). Rather, Chopra teaches that giving releases divine power, because “your mind is dynamically interacting with the mind of the cosmos” (p. 27). He says that giving and receiving are really the same thing, because they are equally aspects of “the flow of energy in the universe” (p. 29).

But the concept of giving assumes that there is an individual giver and an individual receiver who are not merely aspects of a universal flow. Chopra’s monism (the idea that all is one) really undermines the idea of giving. If all is one flow, there are no givers or receivers at all. Nevertheless, Chopra claims that if we fail to give, we “interfere with nature’s intelligence” (p. 29) and this is wrong. However, if all is one divine flow, nothing could interfere with it, since it is everything. Neither could anything really be wrong if everything is equally part of the divine intelligence. The basis for morality dissolves.

Chopra’s third principle is “the law of ‘Karma’ or Cause and Effect.” Although he previously stated that we have unlimited potential as gods and goddesses, he now claims that our actions generate effects that shape our destinies, both positively and negatively. Karmic debts must be paid. The notion that “there is a perfect accounting system in this universe” (p. 45) speaks of some kind of moral order. However, Chopra never gives any reliable criteria for determining the difference between good and bad karma. If God is an impersonal/amoral energy, it is impossible to appeal to God (the All) to distinguish good from bad.

Later in the book, Chopra claims that “*this moment is as it should be*, because the whole universe is as it should be” (p. 57; emphasis in original). Where, then, is there room for karmic debt based on bad karma?

The rest of Chopra’s principles – least effort, intention and desire, detachment, and purpose in life (dharma) — concern the application of his pantheistic and monistic ideas. They essentially amount to going with the flow of the universal energy without anxiety. We must realize that “we are not human beings that have occasional spiritual experiences — it’s the other way around: were spiritual beings that have occasional human experiences (p. 97).

For Chopra, the fundamental problem with humans is ignorance of their spiritual identity as one with the universal energy (Brahman). Although his discussion of karma intimates some idea of morality (which his world view cannot logically support), Chopra denies the definition of human evil as sin against a holy God. Therefore, he has nothing to say about the work of Jesus Christ as the sinless but sin-bearing Savior of sinners (2 Cor. 5:21).

In addition to the problems mentioned above, Chopra’s world view is existentially unsatisfying because it gives no meaning to human suffering in the face of unrelenting adversity. Chopra blithely promises success to all who tap into the Force through his techniques. But what of those who remain ill, who can’t find happiness, who are trapped in dead-end jobs, who are helpless before bloody injustice, who are watching a loved one slowly die? Or what of those who have achieved success and still feel an inner emptiness or sense of guilt over a life filled with regrets? As with all New Age thinking, Chopra has no answers for the realities of sin and suffering: they are but minor impediments and ultimately illusory.

Yet God Himself came into the midst of our tragedies in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-11). Jesus was no Hindu sage, lecturing on the illusions of ego and the bliss of Brahman. He suffered the wounds of the cross. He forsook the bliss of heaven to redeem those who trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins and for life eternal. The Christian, unlike Chopra, can both recognize the fallenness of the world and find hope for redemption and resurrection. New Age illusions to the contrary, spiritual success cannot be rightly understood apart from these biblical realities.

— Douglas Groothuis