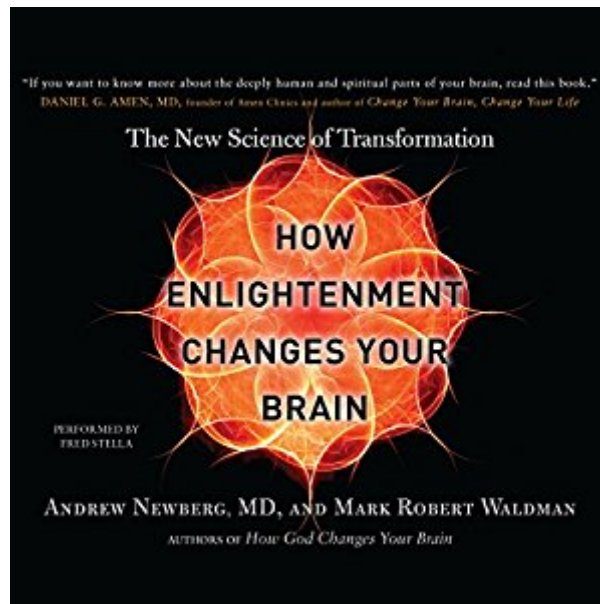


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How Enlightenment Changes Your Brain: The New Science Of Transformation



Synopsis

The bestselling authors of *How God Changes Your Brain* reveal the neurological underpinnings of enlightenment, offering unique strategies to help listeners experience its many benefits. In this original and groundbreaking book, Andrew Newberg, M.D., and Mark Robert Waldman turn their attention to the pinnacle of the human experience: enlightenment. Through his brain-scan studies on Brazilian psychic mediums, Sufi mystics, Buddhist meditators, Franciscan nuns, Pentecostals, and participants in secular spirituality rituals, Newberg has discovered the specific neurological mechanisms associated with the enlightenment experience - and how we might activate those circuits in our own brains. In his survey of more than one thousand people who have experienced enlightenment, Newberg has also discovered that in the aftermath they have had profound, positive life changes. Enlightenment offers us the possibility to become permanently less stress-prone, to break bad habits, to improve our collaboration and creativity skills, and to lead happier, more satisfying lives. Relaying the story of his own transformational experience as well as including the stories of others who try to describe an event that is truly indescribable, Newberg brings us a new paradigm for deep and lasting change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a fascinating and scientific look at how enlightenment experiences change the brain.

Newberg takes a non-religious and even non-spiritual approach to the concept. He conducted online surveys of people who have reported enlightenment experiences, and a lot of the book is

based on these stories combined with MRI brain scans. I found his style to be accurate without being boring or overly technical. This book should be accessible to most people. Basically the book can be divided into three main sections, The Roots of Enlightenment, The Paths Toward Enlightenment, and Moving Toward Enlightenment. In the first section, Newberg analyzes the brain science behind enlightenment, frequently speaking of "little-e" and "big-E" enlightenment experiences. Little-e experiences are small, insightful moments that may gradually change a person's outlook, while big-E experiences are often intense, life-changing experiences that are a result of being in a state of altered consciousness (usually the person feels a connection to something larger, as well as the feeling that all things are connected). A good friend of mine had such an experience, and it fits Newberg's description exactly. Newberg explains what is generally happening in the brain during different enlightenment experiences. Interestingly, not all enlightenment experiences are the same, neurologically speaking at least. Usually they involve decreased frontal lobe (rational thinking) and parietal lobe (where the brain separates self from outside objects) activity, but not always. In this section, he also covers the "levels of human awareness," a helpful spectrum of how we perceive reality, starting with instinctual awareness all the way up to transformational awareness.

Overall I didn't think much of this work. It had several problems which ruined the book for me, centering on semantic issues (the use of the term enlightenment), spiritual materialism (one does not buy spiritual awareness), and even basic scholarly practices (inventing a prayer and calling it the "apostle's creed"). Two men worked on the book, providing two different perspectives. Dr. Newberg's neurological (fMRI) scans of the brain were interesting, however Mr. Waldman's proselytizing his atheism as enlightenment (with a capital "E") was a bit much to take. As far as the fMRI scans of brains in "enlightened" states, where was the psychopharmacology work? Where were the postmortem studies of the brains of advanced masters, looking for areas of increased neural density? So, I examine each issue in depth, and how I formed my opinions. Let's start with the basic problem that faces anyone who defines enlightenment. On page 245, enlightenment is defined as "that momentary glimpse of the thread that connects us to everyone and everything." Pretty. So, let's say I feel connected to humanity every time I see a baby's smile. Or when I view the Mona Lisa. Does that really mean enlightenment? Also, to help differentiate, enlightenment gets split into two types in the book, enlightenment with a small "e" and Enlightenment with a capital "E". However, many different experiences, which also have terms like "flow experiences", "runner's high", "drug induced altered consciousness", "meditative trance", and so on, are classified in the

book as enlightenment experiences. Semantically speaking, that sucks.

This book utterly fails to explain the core reasons why self-realization is elusive for the vast majority of humanity. I think it is a waste of money, and am returning it. It's a shameless exploitation of people who are looking for guidance. If you are a serious seeker, Steve Taylor's book 'Waking From Sleep', is a much better treatment of topic of enlightenment. How Enlightenment Changes Your Brain is a sales pitch for the sense of well-being that comes along with enlightenment and the authors program Neurowisdom 101. Readers are encouraged to spend time fantasizing and 'choosing the kind of enlightenment they would like to have'. Here is a verbatim quote from Adyashanti: 'It is impossible to know what words like liberation or enlightenment mean until you realize them for yourself. This being so, it is of no use to speculate about what enlightenment is; in fact, doing so is a major hindrance to it's unfolding.' Much time is spent on with advice on getting into altered states. An altered state is not enlightenment. It might be a fun, transient experience, but that's all I can say about it. Serious people figured this out thousands of years ago, and moved on. Instead of citing the work of serious scientists around the world, they mention people like JZ Knight (Ramtha), Tony Robbins, Esther Hicks. Not a word about the emergence of the highly successful direct path teachers such as Rupert Spira and Adyashanti. No mention of Eckhart Tolle who paved the way for countless people. No mention of Dr. Jeffrey Martin or Steve Taylor, or any of the other academics who have dedicated their careers to this topic. No mention of the hundreds of neuroscientists worldwide who take this topic very seriously.

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