

# Joe Dispenza's *Becoming Supernatural*: How Common People Are Being Misled

Promises of attaining instant enlightenment and supernatural abilities made by many New Age gurus are misleading, insidious, and unscientific. Here's an examination of the claims made by Joe Dispenza in his book *Becoming Supernatural*.

CLARKE VAN STEENDEREN

*Skeptical scrutiny is the means, in both science and religion, by which deep thoughts can be winnowed from deep nonsense.*—  
Carl Sagan.

I began reading *Becoming Supernatural* by Joe Dispenza<sup>1</sup> with an open mind. But I'm afraid that the more I read, the more critical I became of his references, interpretations of published work, experimental methods and findings at his workshops, choices of metaphor, blatant misuse of scientific terminology, statements of false "facts" that he writes about with such authority, and confusion of pseudoscience and hoaxes with legitimate scientific knowledge.

I initially wondered why anyone would publish this book and why people with medical degrees would praise it. Christiane Northrup, MD, writes, "This information is thrilling, life changing, and incredibly practical." Mona Lisa Schulz, MD, writes, "It is cutting edge and an amazing breakthrough in mind-body medicine." I wonder whether Mona Lisa wrote this with an enigmatic smile. In the book's foreword, Gregg Braden wrote that Dispenza drew information from "diverse fields of rock-solid science," and referred to the "scientific documentation from Joe's classroom discoveries" that "has the potential to change your life."

Hay House published this book in 2017. A paperback version was published in 2019. Hay House was founded by Louise Hay, author of several New Age books, including *You Can Heal*

*Your Life*. If this individual (who had no medical degree—or any degree at all for that matter) could attribute ailments such as coughing, diabetes, ringworm, and kidney stones to "a desire to bark at the world," "longing for what might have been," "allowing others to get under your skin," and "lumps of undissolved anger," respectively, then my first question is answered without further ado.

Christiane Northrup is a well-known obstetrician-gynecologist in the United States who has a firm belief in astrology, tarot cards, past life regression therapy, and other mystical ideas that have not an iota of science behind them. Of course, one's personal ideas are of no consequence to anyone else, and one has every right to believe what one wants to, but it becomes a huge problem when these beliefs overstep a boundary from the personal to the professional and societal level. According to Northrup, "Research shows that past traumas—including traumas from past lives—... can be an underlying cause of chronic illness," "Many women have thyroid and other problems (like canker sores in their mouth) when they have something to say but don't dare say it," "Getting your child or yourself immunized is a culturally agreed-upon ritual, designed to shore up both aspects of first chakra-health" (these last two quotes come from her book *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, first published in 2005), and "Remember—vaccines and immunity are first chakra issues." Bear

in mind of course that the concept of chakras has no scientific basis at all. My favorite one is her recommendation to women to direct *qi gong* energy to their vaginas to cure “all kinds of ailments.” Well, if you ever happen to encounter a female suffering from vaginal atrophy or a yeast infection, you know what to recommend—although beware the consequences!

Mona Lisa Schulz is a psychiatrist and claims that she is a “medical intuitive that can detect health problems by intuition alone, which appears through clairvoyance.” She makes these conclusions based on phone calls with clients, and, according to her, “I only know their name and age, and that helps me isolate intuition data. If they try to tell me about their health, I cut them off because it confuses me.” This appeared on the Discovery Channel program *One Step Beyond*.

My last critique before finally plunging into the book regards Gregg Braden. Without going into too much detail, Braden has made claims of cancer being cured within three minutes (has he won a Nobel Prize yet?), that there would be a “magnetic reversal” of the earth’s polarity in 2012 and that this can affect our DNA, and that collective prayer and thought would help clear the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

There is a common thread running through this commercialized New Age movement, where several opportunists publish with the same company, recommend each other, and conveniently dodge the bullets that mainstream science and peer-reviewed journals will fire at them. So, let’s load the magazine of logic and reason, and fire away.

In the first chapter, the author describes a mystical experience he had during one of his meditation sessions, which sounds very much like the effects of hallucinogenic drugs: “All my senses were heightened 100 percent. Everything I saw, touched, felt, smelled, tasted, and heard was amplified.” Dispenza describes being a “stout man in a very hot region of the world ... I was a philosopher and a longtime student of some charismatic movement ...

on a pilgrimage and mission of sorts.” In my understanding of this narrative, he believes himself to be a prophet and bearer of some valuable new information to humanity. Almost comparing himself to Jesus Christ, he notes, “I had just finished addressing a crowd in a relatively populated village. The gathering was just breaking up when suddenly, several men quickly moved through the masses to arrest me.” My point is this: How can we take someone seriously whose motivation to help people through meditation was sparked by a narcissistic hallucination? For one thing, I don’t recall Jesus charging entrance fees to his speaking events.

In the second chapter, Dispenza cites a study by Pascual-Leone et al. (1995). His interpretation of the subjects in this study was that “if you were to put them in front of a piano after five days of mental rehearsal, many of them would be able to play the exercise they imagined pretty well, even though they had never before tickled the ivories.” This leads the reader to believe that mental rehearsals can replace physical actions and practice. The original study concluded that “mental rehearsal alone ... was significantly less than that produced by physical practices alone” and that “mental practice alone seems to be sufficient during the early stages of motor skill learning,” and “the combination of mental and physical practice leads to greater performance.”

Page 58 mentions the use of a “gas discharge visualization” (GDV) machine with a “Sputnik antenna” and that Dispenza and his team measured the changes in “ambient” electromagnetic energy in the venue rooms emitted by his students over the duration of his workshops. Taking measurements with a GDV machine is just a fancy way of performing Kirlian photography. Although the corona plasma discharge is an interesting interaction between high voltage and moisture, its use in showing “auras” or other measures of mystical energies is pure pseudoscience. It also has no practical applications, apart from producing pretty images. Dispenza and his team were measuring nothing more than changes in moisture

in their workshop rooms. Perhaps they need more ventilation in their venues. Or maybe his participants were just a little on the sweaty side.

Apart from the airy-fairy talk about brain changes in the quantum field and coherent and incoherent brain waves, what caught my attention in chapter three on page 73 was Dispenza's reference to a study by René Peoc'h (1995) involving chicks and the behavior of a robot. This was the first time I had heard of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. Its impact factor for 2018 was 0.09, and it is known for its association with "fringe science," including phenomena such as ESP, dowsing, cryptozoology, reincarnation, and UFOlogy. Henry Bauer, the previous editor-in-chief of the magazine, is an AIDS denialist and believes that the Loch Ness monster exists (he even wrote a book on the matter, *The Enigma of Loch Ness: Making Sense of a Mystery*, published in 1986). If someone such as Dispenza wishes to make a solid argument backed by science, why resort to citing articles in this low-ranking journal with a questionable reputation?

On page 80, Dispenza writes, "Some of our students have lowered their cholesterol levels just by tuning in to a potential. They've lowered their cancer markers. They've made tumors disappear." Yes, and "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." And where is the evidence for these grand claims? Can we see before-and-after scans? X-rays? Blood test results? Who are "our students"? Who were the doctors involved, and can they give testimony? Can we transcend the first-name basis and get more information other than "Anna's Turning Point," "Ginny Heals Her Chronic Back and Leg Pain," "Donna Helps Souls Cross Over," and "Jerry Returns from the Brink of Death"?

Dispenza mentions on page 89 in chapter four the work of Fritz-Albert Popp, the discoverer of biophotons (see Popp et al. 1988). It has indeed been shown that biophotons are emitted by biological tissues, but whether these photons play a role in intercellular communication is not certain. Knowing that this theory is not at present accepted

in mainstream science, Dispenza still writes: "the more intense and coherent the light field, the greater communication between cells and the healthier the organism" and "it's not molecules and positive or negative charges that are instructing the cell to do what it does ... it's the biophotons ... and their patterns of light and frequency that the cell emits and receives that give the instructions." He seems to have mixed up biophotons with the nucleus! His mention of organ transplants and cellular memory also does not belong in a book praised for its "rock-solid science."

The comparison of the human body to a magnet with a north and south pole sounds ridiculous, but to me, one of the two worst blunders in this book (the second will come later in chapter 12), is the statement on page 125 in chapter five that "at the same time you inhale, the sutures of your skull open up just slightly, and as you exhale, they close back up." Read that statement again if it makes sense to you. This apparently "propagates the cerebrospinal fluid up your spine all the way to your brain." He cites M.B. DeJarnette in an article titled "Cornerstone" in *The American Chiropractor* written in 1982. I could not find or access this anywhere online. If anyone else can, please let me know, because I would love to know where this nonsense came from. Dispenza writes on page 137 that he measured gene expression in thirty participants before and after his workshop. He cites his own presentation for this finding and says that it has been "submitted for publication." I could not find this anywhere either. Where was it submitted? Can we see the data and the methods used? How did he account for biological variability in these subjects? Is thirty people a large enough sample size to be making these claims? Or is this being reviewed by the same guy who is still out searching for the Loch Ness monster and Bigfoot in the hills yonder?

On page 155 in chapter seven, Dispenza writes that the Mesopotamians "performed human sacrifices whereby they extracted a still-beating human heart to offer it to the Sun God" (funny, I thought that it was the Aztecs

and Mayans who didn't have a heart). Dispenza also states that "at the turn of the 20th century, hardly anyone died of heart disease." It has been found that heart diseases such as atherosclerosis were much more common in pre-modern humans than previously realized (see Thompson et al. 2013, for example).

Page 156 introduces the HeartMath Institute (HMI), which produces "pioneering, groundbreaking work" regarding "heart-brain coherence." Although their mission statement is positive and they are aimed at helping people, I am very skeptical about the terminology they use. The term *heart-brain* is extrapolated to imply that the heart has a "mind of its own" because it possesses some 40,000 neurons. The gut has over 100 million neurons, so this is a weak, misleading argument; neurons alone do not equate to mind or consciousness. The HeartMath Institute was founded by "Doc" Childre, who does not hold a degree and whose research is directed by Rollin McCraty—who, not surprisingly, is a member of the Society for Scientific Exploration. Apart from the absence of peer-reviewed publications by Dispenza himself, HMI appears to have most of their publications published in journals with low impact factors and directly through university departments. These are red flags and should not be taken lightly for an organization approaching the health sector and charging money for their services.

Page 161 states that "Today, with about 75% accuracy, science can predict what someone is feeling just by looking at the beat-to-beat activity of the heart using heart rate variability analysis." By "science today," he is referring to his own "advanced workshop with Joe Dispenza." Page 166 makes reference to Gary Schwartz and his experiments regarding heart-brain coherence, where he "found inexplicable communications between the heart and the brain that made no sense via neurological or other established communication pathways." This is the same guy who reported that Reiki had an effect on lab-cultured bacteria, that the human mind can change the pH of water over long distances, and that "pollution is not simply chemical,

it is ultimately energy based and therefore conscious as well" (see his book *The Energy Healing Experiments: Science Reveals Our Natural Power to Heal*, published in 2007). The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has published several devastating critiques of Schwartz's work over the years by Ray Hyman (2003a; 2003b) and Richard Wiseman (O'Keefe and Wiseman 2001) among others.

Page 200 in chapter eight refers to brain scans taken while a participant was reviewing their "Mind Movie." Can we see comparative scans while the participant is performing another task? What is this one image supposed to prove? Dispenza loves mentioning his "advanced workshops," his "students," and his URL address where you can purchase his goods. Why the need for all this commercialization when you're dealing with people who are broken, depressed, sick, and searching for self-betterment?

On page 222, Dispenza states that "And as you know, the majority of people's personality is based on past experience." Modern science is pointing toward our genes shaping our personalities to a much larger degree than previously thought. See, for example, Flint and Willis-Owen (2010). I also find the jump from Newtonian physics to the complexities of human behavior and psychology a long shot. This chapter, in my opinion, is a prime example of the misuse of the field of quantum physics to support pseudoscientific claims made by people with a poor understanding of its concepts.

Chapter twelve is probably the most embarrassing one in the book. Dispenza promotes the idea that microscopic crystals in the pineal gland create a "pulsating electromagnetic field" via the piezoelectric effect upon inhalation and exhalation. This then becomes a "pulsating antenna" that is further stimulated by cerebrospinal fluid "tickling" the cilia in the pineal gland. This overstimulation results in the "phallus-shaped gland ... ejaculating upgraded metabolites of melatonin ... leading to a transcendental experience." That certainly escalated quickly! According to Kenneth Saladin, a professor of parasitology, "there are



crystals that develop within the pineal gland with age, and develop in some other parts of the brain too, called 'corpora arenacea' or 'brain sand' ... They are entirely harmless ... There is a lot of pseudoscience and medical quackery going around about these pineal granules" (Saladin 2017).

The *coup de grâce* of this chapter begins on page 282. Dispenza shows an image of a crop circle in the shape of the melatonin molecule and writes "Is this crop circle [appearing in 2011 in Wiltshire, England] an elaborate hoax? Or is somebody somewhere in another dimension trying to tell us something?" Crop circles were debunked decades ago, in *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* and other publications. The only thing that the pranksters Doug Bower and Dave Chorley showed the world with their crop circle art was the extent of the gullibility and superstition displayed by human beings.

Never mind Dispenza's comparison of a cross-section of the brain to the Egyptian eye of Horus, his use of the Fibonacci constant to highlight the importance of the pineal gland, or his allusion to the staff of Hermes from Greek mythology to the movement of energy up the spine. He refers to a YouTube video by David Wilcock (a name he misspells as Wilcox), titled "Understanding the Sacred Geometry & the Pineal Gland Consciousness." Wilcock believes that he is the reincarnation of the psychic Edgar Cayce, has spoken about the "2012 enigma" at the "Truth Convention," and argues that "the fantastic powers of deities and heroes in the world's ancient mythologies should be interpreted literally as evidence of lost alien technology."

## Conclusion

Dispenza's previous affiliation with the Ramtha's School of Enlightenment (RSE) is deplorable to say the least. RSE was founded in 1988 by Judy Zebra Knight, who claimed to channel the spirit of "Ramtha," a 35,000-year-old being who first appeared to her in her kitchen while she balanced a toy pyramid on her head to signal to him. This being has taught her everything

from "theology to quantum physics." Anyone involved with a group such as this should not be revered as a role model—let alone make money from authoring self-help books.

If Dispenza did not attempt to use science to back his claims, it would be more challenging to criticize his writing. One cannot claim that someone else's personal experiences are false. But turning the mystical and the world of pseudoscience into a lucrative business is nothing more than preying on the vulnerable and lonely people in the world. Highfalutin claims about self-healing can quickly become insidious, and *Becoming Supernatural* is nothing more than the regurgitation of age-old ideas mixed with cliché pseudoscience packaged as an expensive book and series of workshops marketed to the gullible public.

## Note

1. *Becoming Supernatural: How Common People Are Doing the Uncommon*. By Dr. Joe Dispenza. Hay House, 2017/2019. Paperback, \$20.

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Pull quotes

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**2. Several opportunists in the New Age movement publish with the same company, recommend each other, and conveniently dodge the bullets that peer-reviewed journals will fire at them.**

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**3. Dispenza and his team were measuring nothing more than changes in moisture in their workshop rooms. Perhaps they need more ventilation in their venues.**

**5. He cites his own presentation for this finding and says that it has been “submitted for publication.” Is this being reviewed by the same guy who is still out searching for the Loch Ness monster and Bigfoot in the hills yonder?**

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