

# Book Review

## As a Man Thinketh

By James Allen, Paperback 90 pages, ISBN-13 : 979-8706171780

Reviewed by Paul Issifu \*

The book, "as a man thinketh", a set of philosophical musings on the power of our thoughts, was originally published in the year 1903. The author, James Allen, though late, still inspires many today with his book. Most contemporary personal development authors and teachers credit this little book for providing a foundation for their principles.

The statement, as a man thinketh, was first promulgated by some of the earliest wise men, and it appears again and again throughout the Bible. The author draws his title from a very popular bible quote from King Solomon. Which reads "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee" (Proverbs 23:7). It only gets interesting when we look back into history to see great philosophers and teachers make similar assertions. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman church in about A.D. 57, admonished them in the second verse of the twelve chapter of his epistle to transform themselves by working on renewing their minds. In his 'Meditations on First Philosophy', René Descartes made a philosophical statement in Latin: "Cogito, ergo sum". Which is usually translated into English as "I think, therefore I am". All these go to buttress the author's standpoint on how a man's thoughts affect his entire life and being. Thus, we become what we think.

Earl Nightingale, widely regarded as the father of modern-day personal development, in his best-selling recording, called the ideas in this book, "The Strangest Secret". The secret, he said, is "we become what we think about". This short write-up reviews the lessons the reader has gleaned from this timeless piece by James Allen.

The book is made up of 7 chapters; thoughts and character, effect of thoughts on circumstances, effect of thoughts on health and body, thought and purpose, the thought-factor in achievement, visions, and ideals, and serenity.

In the first chapter, "thoughts and character", the author asserted, "A man is literally what he thinks, his character being a complete sum of his thoughts." Thus, the character of a man is not worked outside a man into his being, however, his character is just the fruits of the seeds of the thoughts a man has sown. Therefore, it will be a futile mission trying to change the character of a man from the outside. Implying that, to change the character of a man you need to change his thought pattern, his paradigms, and ideologies. Because man is made or unmade by himself, man is the master of thought, the molder of character, and the maker and shaper of conditions, environment, and destiny.

In the words of Earl Nightingale, the strangest secret is "we become what we think about. In 1950 he said that, throughout history, the great wise men and teachers, philosophers, and prophets have disagreed with one another on many different things. It is only on this one point that they are in complete and unanimous agreement that the key to success and the key to failure is this: WE BECOME WHAT WE THINK ABOUT.

It also goes on to suggest that, a man can decide or choose to change for good, bad, or become better. In his classical book, Attitude is everything, Keith Harrell, dedicated the second chapter to exploring the theme; "Attitude is a choice". He argues that "your attitude affects everything you do; your attitude affects the people around you and your attitude reflects YOU". According to him, "Choices are essential in one's life. They can be made consciously or unconsciously. Whichever way, they always define behavior. Behaviours are responses to every situation that one encounters."

Keith profoundly explained that one cannot change his parents, where he was born, or how he was born – he cannot make himself tall if he was born short. However, one thing everyone can decide to change is their attitudes. It goes on to suggest that no one is born with a better character or attitude



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than another however, we all develop good characters and become better in our behaviors through the conscious renewal of our minds. In the words of the author, James Allen, “A noble and God-like character is not a thing of favor or chance but is the natural result of continued effort in right thinking, the effect of long-cherished association with God-like thoughts. An ignoble and bestial character, by the same process, is the result of the continued harboring of groveling thoughts.” This quote leaves the reader wondering if the LGBTQ+ community are people who fall into the second category of people who associate with groveling thoughts. Can one conclude that if they associate with God-like and noble thoughts enough, their preferences will change? The author opened the second chapter by likening the mind of a man to a garden that can be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild and like a gardener, the man is responsible for tending the garden of his mind, weeding out all the wrong, useless, and impure thoughts, and cultivating toward perfection the flowers and fruits of right, useful, and pure thoughts. He added that the soul attracts that which it secretly harbors, that which it loves, and that which it fears. It reaches the height of its cherished aspirations; it falls to the level of its unchastened desires, and circumstances are how the soul receives its own. Therefore, the circumstances of a man are just an extension of his thoughts.

Man does not attract what they want, but that which they are. It is amazing how the human mind is powerful that the circumstances of a man do not necessarily affect him. However, properly engaging the human mind, can change the circumstances of man. Army officers are trained to withstand adverse and harsh weather. The Shaolin Monks are trained to the extent that, many believe they have supernatural powers. However, both groups show how powerful the human mind is.

Over the decades, the human mind has changed the course of humanity in a most significant way. We may call it technology and innovation, but they are the products of man's thinking. Technologies and inventions like Google, YouTube, Microsoft, Facebook, and many others have changed the circumstances of humanity. They have changed how we communicate, how we trade, how we study, how we work, how we market, and sell and the list goes on and on. But all these inventions have one thing in common – they all began as a thought in the minds of their inventors.

Some years ago, the late Nobel prize-winning Dr. Albert Schweitzer was asked by a reporter, “Doctor, what’s wrong with men today?” The great doctor was silent a moment, and then he said, “Men simply don’t think!” Though its been many decades after that statement, unfortunately, Dr. Albert’s statement is still valid today: men simply don’t think! The reader believes if Africans will think rather than worry and gripe about their problems, Africa would be a better continent – their circumstances will change for the better. In chapter 3, the writer espouses the effect of thoughts on human health and the body. That is, strong pure and happy thoughts build up the body in vigor and grace. Men will continue to have impure and poisoned blood, so long as they propagate unclean thoughts. He made a profound statement that the reader finds quite intriguing: a change of diet will not help a sick man who will not change his thoughts. When a man makes his thoughts pure, he no longer desires impure food. Indeed, the body is the servant of the mind. It obeys the operations of the mind, whether they be deliberately chosen or automatically expressed. At the bidding of unlawful thoughts, the body sinks rapidly into disease and decay; at the command of glad and beautiful thoughts, it becomes clothed with youthfulness and beauty. Sickly thoughts will express themselves through a sickly body. Thoughts of fear have been known to kill a man as speedily as a bullet, and they are continually killing thousands of people just as surely though less rapidly.

The statement, ‘the thought of a man has a great effect on his health’ is not just the truth but a scientific fact. Thus, the author was not just making a baseless argument but reflections that can be buttressed with scientific research and findings. According to an article on the University of Minnesota website, negative attitudes and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can create chronic stress, which upsets the body’s hormone balance, depletes the brain chemicals required for happiness, and damages the immune system. Chronic stress can actually decrease our lifespan. (Science has now identified that stress shortens our telomeres, the “end caps” of our DNA strands, which causes us to age more quickly). Poorly managed or repressed anger (hostility) is also related to a slew of health conditions, such as hypertension (high blood pressure), cardiovascular disease, digestive disorders, and infection.

Of course, they cannot think themselves better to remove a tumor or cure a virus, but researchers have found that the power of the mind can have a physical impact when it comes to pain, depression, anxiety, fatigue, and even some symptoms of Parkinson's. In the concluding words of James Allen, There is no physician like cheerful thought for dissipating the ills of the body; there is no comforter to compare with goodwill for dispersing the shadows of grief and sorrow.

Thoughts and purpose is the theme of the fourth chapter. Some of the salient points to take note of are; A man should conceive of a legitimate purpose in his heart, and set out to accomplish it. He should make this purpose the centralizing point of his thoughts. It may take the form of a spiritual ideal, or it may be a worldly object, according to his nature for the time being. Whichever it is, he should steadily focus his thought forces upon the object he had set before him. Until thought is linked with purpose there is no intelligent accomplishment. However, thought allied fearlessly to purpose becomes a creative force. The principle underpinning this chapter is that a man after conceiving his purpose should mentally mark out a straight pathway to its achievement, looking neither to the right nor left. The reader finds the words of the author very erudite and sagacious. Research has proven that those who consciously think about their purpose tend to be more successful than those who allow their thoughts to wander in mere fancies. It is worth noting that it is not sufficient for one to discover his purpose, but he must constantly engage and focus his mind on his purpose in order to fulfill his purpose. That is, the purpose of man should be translated into visions (purpose in pictures), where the human mind constantly envisages how the purpose can be attained. That is why many organizations write out their statement of purpose or philosophy and hang them at vantage points where their staff can always read them and constantly remind themselves of the reason why they exist as an organization. It is in doing this that companies will be able to fulfill their ultimate purpose and calling. Though they might not attain 100% success or fail on many occasions, however, the strength of character gained will be the measure of their true success, and this will form a new starting point for future power and triumph.

A study conducted on Yahoo! revealed that the once internet giant declined, due to a couple of reasons including, poor decisions, indecisiveness, and lack of a corporate purpose or direction. Yes, lack of a corporate purpose. Aside, the company's poor investment choices like failing to buy Google on two occasions and refusing to sell to Microsoft in 2008 at \$44.6 billion and later sold to Verizon in 2017 at \$4.48 billion, the company was involved in so many services like Yahoo Mail, Messenger, News, Finance, and many others. This made it hard for Yahoo! to have a real focus and became a blend of different internet companies that provided many internet services. Eventually, companies like Facebook, WhatsApp Messenger, and Google Mail who had a defined purpose focused on their purpose and subsequently took over a lot of the niche markets Yahoo! was operating in. This is the story of a great company that lost its purpose and got knocked out because they were moving in too many directions.

The writer links achievements to thoughts in chapter 5. The unmissable lesson in this chapter is that a man can only rise, conquer, and achieve by lifting his thoughts. He can only remain weak, abject, and miserable by refusing to lift his thoughts. A key principle that keeps resonating within the reader is, there can be no progress nor achievement without sacrifice, and a man's worldly success will be by the measure that he sacrifices his confused animal thoughts and fixes his mind on the development of his plans, and the strengthening of his resolution and self-reliance. Another golden nugget the reader seeks to personalize is the fact that the higher man lifts his thoughts, the greater will be his success, the more blessed and enduring will be his achievements. For achievement of any kind is the crown of effort, the diadem of thought.

It is an important principle. Whatever, the human mind cannot perceive the human effort cannot achieve. Over the years, the reader has realized that every creation or invention goes through creation. The first creation takes place in the mind of the inventor/creator and the second phase of creation is the material aspect that everyone sees, feels, and can touch. This is an ancient principle, and it is indispensable. When one reads the creation story of the earth, the question that arises is how did God know that this was a man after creating man? How did He know that this was what He commanded? The answer is this principle. God compared what was in His mind or imagination with the physical or

material substance and the two were the same. Toyota was first created in the mind of the founder before everyone saw its physical manifestation. This goes to demonstrate how powerful the human mind is. With this understanding, it can be implied that you cannot achieve that which the human mind has not conceived. Because the mind is like a womb which with time births that which has been conceived over some time – being success or failure. Think great things to achieve great results. Little thoughts will only bring little impact.

On that note, it is imperative to understand this erudite truth that; “He who would accomplish little need sacrifice little; he who would achieve much must sacrifice much. He who would attain highly must sacrifice greatly.”

In chapter 6, the author encourages all to cherish their visions and ideals for out of them will grow all delightful conditions, all heavenly environment, of these, if we but remain true to them, our world will, at last, be built. Dream lofty dreams, and as we dream, so shall we become. He explained that vision is the promise of what one shall one day be and ideal is the prophecy of what one shall at last unveil. The reader finds this to be an extension of the fourth and fifth chapters because according to Dr. Myles Munroe, vision is purpose in pictures. That is, the dreams and vision of a man can help define his purpose and consequently lead to great achievement. Until he sees himself becoming a solution provider, the probability of becoming it will be close to nothing. A songwriter in his song said, “when you dream, dream big!” because dreams come to pass.

Martin Luther King Jr had a dream that his four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by their character. And his dream came true. Martin had a dream; little did he know that one day America will have a black president – what a dream. It is imperative to understand that the greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream and dreams are the seedlings of realities. Walt Disney had a dream, and that dream became Disney World. It is worth noting that this is not talking about mere fancies but constantly engaging the human imagination to explore and dream is a healthy and powerful habit.

The author closes his book with the last chapter on Serenity. The Cambridge Dictionary defines serenity as “the quality of being peaceful and calm”. It is the state of being calm, peaceful, and untroubled and it is synonymous with the words tranquillity and calmness. The salient points to keep note of in this chapter are that serenity is the result of long and patient effort in self-control; a man becomes calm in the measure that he understands himself as a thought-evolved being and the more tranquil a man becomes, the greater is his success, his influence, his power for good.

In this chapter, the author makes a powerful assertion, that “the strong, calm man is always loved and revered. He is like a shade-giving tree in a thirsty land or a sheltering rock in a storm.” This is not just an assertion, but a statement of truth backed by the numerous facts embedded in history. For instance, the disciples of Jesus revered and loved Him because of the quality of His calmness. The followers of Buddha loved and revered him because he possessed a tranquil mind and taught about the serenity of the mind. Of course, who does not love a tranquil heart, a sweet-tempered, balanced life? Thus, it is worth noting that all the teachers taught this lesson in the major religions. Christians are taught that the kingdom of God is within, not without. They have quiet time and contemplations like the Buddhists will have meditation and mindfulness. In our world today, this can be referred to as emotional intelligence (EQ). Now EQ is as important as IQ and some organizations won't hire you without a high EQ.

To the reader, the last chapter is the key to using the mind correctly. A mind which is not at peace cannot think and meditate on positive and healthy thoughts. A mind which is void of peace and calm is a mind that can not focus on dreams, purpose, ideals, and visions. The question to be answered now is if all problems arise from the mind and thoughts, could going inside to understand the mind and the thought process be a way out of the concrete jungle of traffic congestion, maladministration, environmental chaos, and spiritual blindness? This is something everyone should deeply reflect on and meditate upon.

In conclusion, there is a positive correlation between our thoughts and our character, health, bodies, circumstances, achievements, visions, purposes, and serenity. The key principle that runs through this timeless capsule is that man is responsible for where he is today and where he wants

to be in the future. Also, the mind of a man is so powerful that, whatever it conceives becomes a manifestation over time. The book “As a man thinketh” is indeed a timeless piece filled with so much wisdom. However, the reviewer thinks the author did not support his reflections with enough evidence. For instance, there are medical proofs and scientific research that buttress his point that the thoughts of a man can affect his health. Also, research has shown that students who had a clear vision and purpose for their lives turned out to be more successful than those who had no clear vision for their lives. More also, the author could have shared some personal testimonials to support his philosophies.

Finally, the book is more of a compilation of the author's reflections concentrating on the relationship between the mind and how it impacts human life. On the other hand, one would have expected some guidelines on how to harness the power of the mind like reading and engaging in intellectual discourses. The author could have shared some personal experiences of how he has engaged his mind to get positive results or how he utilized his mind to develop a healthy life.

Despite all these, one cannot underestimate the power of the mind. The reader has always said that, when you lose an eye, you could always get a replacement. You can always get a blood transfusion, a heart transplant, a kidney transplant, and a replacement for an amputated hand or leg. However, medical science hasn't broken through with a successful brain transplant: that shows how important and delicate the human brain is.

### **Reviewer Bio**

**Paul Issifu** is an aspiring business consultant and tech entrepreneur with a specific focus on agriculture. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Professional Studies, Accra, and a Mini EMBA in Leadership and Management from the Accra Business School. He's currently a student member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, UK. Paul over the years has gathered experience in the areas of entrepreneurship, international development, technology, and finance. He currently works with MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) as a Finance Officer, where he oversees and reports on the financial activities of 23 Cashew SMEs and 2 Rubber SMEs. He hopes to challenge the status quo by adopting the use of disruptive technology to solve Africa's age-old agricultural problems using newly improved agritech means as a catalyst.