

# The Evolution of the New Thought Philosophy as a Psycho-Spiritual Movement in the Global Culture

In the mid-1800s two men in the New England region of North America laid the groundwork for a new psychological and philosophical approach that another New Englander called “a religion of healthy-mindedness”. Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord, Massachusetts, laid out the principles in his essays and lectures, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby of Belfast, Maine, developed the methodology through hundreds of experiments, and in 1902 William James, a Harvard professor speaking at the Gifford Lectures in Scotland, captured its essence, as published in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Since then, thousands of study groups, centers, and churches have been formed to apply this approach, and, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many of its fundamental concepts have been integrated into the global corporate and pop culture through media and emerging developments in neurophysiological research. This paper lays out the principles of what has become called the New Thought movement and describes their historical progression into the mainstream American, and now global, culture.

Keywords: New Thought; psycho-social movements; spiritual movements; cultural evolution; applied metaphysics

## Introduction

This study provides a description of the evolution of the New Thought movement with an assessment of the prevalence of the ideas developed within the New Thought philosophical framework across the planet today. It places those principles in their historical context and describes their expansion through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>.

## *Historical Context for the Movement*

Over the millennia, each stage in the development of Western Culture has offered voices who have encouraged their listeners to rely on an Inner wisdom, in harmony with the processes of Nature, rather than the strident, often discordant directives of the cultural norms. Modern students of shamanism (a westernized version of the Siberian term for a person who “steps outside” and “lifts awareness to higher levels”) have seen how this understanding is present in the most ancient, pre-urbanized cultures [Harner, Michael, *The Way of the Shaman*, 19XX, and others]. Students of the most ancient codified spiritual tradition, dating from 6000 b.c.e. and called today Zoroastrianism, experience the call to lift one’s awareness beyond the material to a great Light of being [Smith, 1955]. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia b.c.e. formed the basis for the Hindu tradition and offered the path of *yoga* to experience a life of higher consciousness, making it possible to develop skills and abilities beyond those found in the normal culture. Various modern interpretations of the 7<sup>th</sup> century b.c.e. works of Lao Tsu and Chuang Tsu, called today, Taoism, invite the reader to step outside of a world of competition and acquisition and align with the

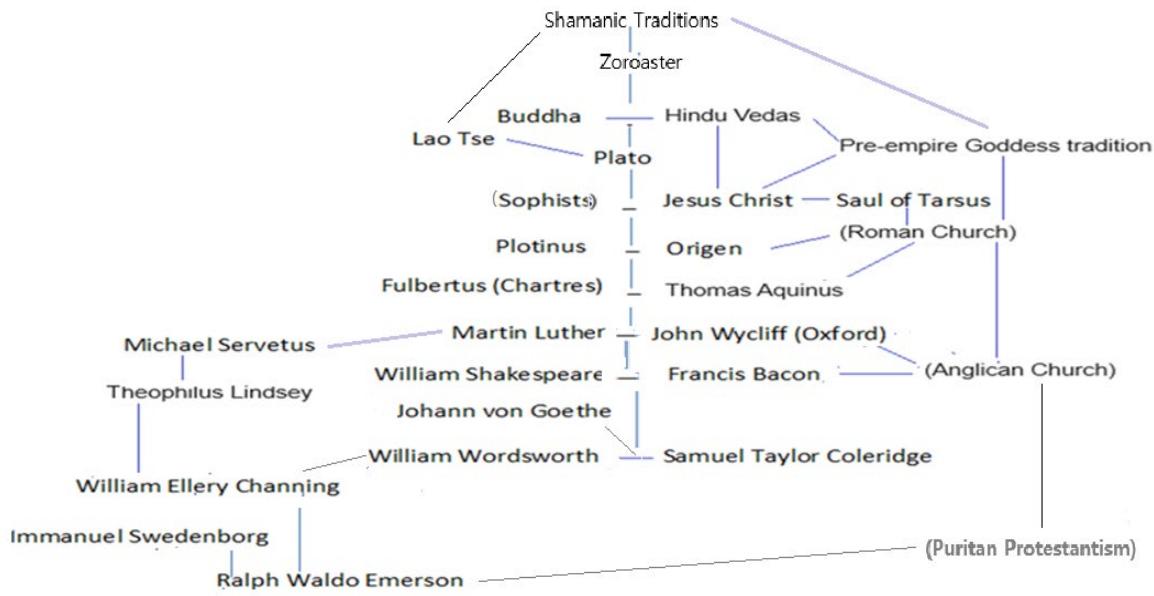
1 flow of natural processes [Mitchell, 1991]. During the same century the prince  
 2 Gautama synthesized the Hindu traditions into a simple practice, based on eight  
 3 principles that invite the practitioner to leave behind attachment to the material world  
 4 and discover the peace and wisdom within, in what became known as Buddhism  
 5 [Smith, 1955]. We see some of the same teachings in the works of the ancient Greeks,  
 6 notably Heraclitus and the Stoics, culminating in the “idealism” of Plato as described  
 7 in his *Republic*, and expanded on several hundred years later in Plotinus’ *Enneads*  
 8 during the early years of the Roman empire,

9 Following the fall of the empire, the call to turn within for wisdom was made  
 10 available only to a very few, educated men and women, flowering for a time at  
 11 Fulbertus’ (980-1030 c.e.), cathedral school in Chartres, where the Greek liberal arts  
 12 were integrated into Christian theology and a Neo-Platonic philosophy. With the  
 13 emergence of the Inquisition, 1184 c.e., however, such ideas were repressed across  
 14 the territories controlled by the Roman church, while they bloomed in the Arabic  
 15 world, as illustrated by the popularity of the writings and teachings of the Turkish Sufi,  
 16 Rumi during the 1200s c.e.

17 They re-emerged in Europe with Kant and the various writers of German  
 18 idealism, culminating in the works of Johann von Goethe, whose transcendentalist  
 19 logic strongly influenced the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. (see  
 20 Figure 1)

21

22 **Figure 1. A Simplified Overview of the Philosophies Influencing Ralph Waldo  
 23 Emerson**



24

25

1 *Philosophical Foundation of the Movement*

2

3 Emerson, abandoning his career as a Unitarian minister, traveled to Europe in  
 4 1832. While there, visiting all the great cities, he met John Stuart Mill in Rome, and  
 5 was introduced to the British writers Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle while in  
 6 England. This trip provided the missing pieces for Emerson's emerging philosophy,  
 7 which he laid out first in the essay "Nature," in 1836. Specifically, according to Marc  
 8 Josef Wortman,

9

10 Goethe and Emerson found that the study of nature was a way to unify the individual  
 11 with the wider processes of nature, thus gaining insight into the ideal whole. Both  
 12 rejected a static understanding of nature, instead believing in the primacy of the mind's  
 13 intuition of the dynamic quality of nature. [Wortman, 1987]

14

15 Emerson went on to write many more essays defining his ideas and to lecture on  
 16 these subjects across North America (see, e.g. *Emmerson's Essays*, 1981). In those  
 17 essays he introduced the possibility of living life in harmony with Nature and one's  
 18 Inner Wisdom.

19

20 Nature is so elegant that just one substance becomes all the variety of the universe.  
 21 However complex a form may be—star, sand, fire, water, tree, humanity—it's still that  
 22 one substance... ["Nature"]

23 ...none of us can comprehend what we're not prepared to experience, no matter how  
 24 close we are to it. We much have a mental framework to make sense of what our  
 25 perceptions tell us... So, since we can neither see nor have anything more than what  
 26 we are, let's stop looking outside ourselves to justify our fears or find our good. Let's  
 27 seek inside ourselves instead, for what is already in our being must emerge and shine  
 28 in our world as long as we exist. ["Spiritual Laws"]

29 The true doctrine of omnipresence is that God, as the Soul of life, exists with all His  
 30 qualities in everything everywhere, always...all wisdom, all beauty, and all good.  
 31 When I act in accord with Nature's law, I add to the world. I roll back the illusions of  
 32 darkness and chaos. ["Compensation"]

33

34 He also expanded on the idea, present in only the most esoteric societies at the  
 35 time (see, e.g. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*) of improving oneself to live a  
 36 more prosperous life. Thus, the philosophical underpinnings of a uniquely American  
 37 form of religious practice, having been established across the millennia, were  
 38 formulated for the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of a New Englander who thought of  
 39 himself as a poet, rather than a Christian minister.

40

41 **Methodological Approach Within the Movement**

42

43 Paralleling Emerson's career, a clockmaker in Maine was discovering that there  
 44 is a causal relationship between a person's belief systems and thought patterns and the  
 45 state of their physical health, and so was developing a method to eliminate the physical  
 46 symptoms by transforming the beliefs [Braden, 1963; Anderson, 1995; Miller, 2024].

47 Having been healed of consumption, and later, the secondary effects of  
 48 medications he had been prescribed, by non-medical means, he was fascinated by the

1 role of mind in bodily conditions. Accordingly, he was one of the first North  
2 Americans to study mesmerism, and spent several winters traveling around New  
3 England offering demonstrations. He stopped that practice, however, when one of his  
4 subjects was clearly responding to his thoughts and to those of people in the audience,  
5 rather than his verbal suggestions. According to Quimby's son, George,

6  
7 After a time Mr. Quimby became convinced that, whenever the subject examined a  
8 patient, his diagnosis of the case would be identical with what either the patient or  
9 someone else present believed, instead of Lucius really looking into the patient and  
10 giving the true condition of the organs; in fact, that he was reading the opinion in the  
11 mind of someone rather than stating a truth acquired by himself.

12 Becoming firmly satisfied that this was the case, and having seen how one mind could  
13 influence another, and how much there was that had always been considered as true,  
14 but was merely some one's opinion, Mr. Quimby gave up his subject, Lucius, and  
15 began the developing of what is now known as mental healing, or curing disease  
16 through the mind." [in Dresser, A., 1895]

17  
18 At that point, Quimby began to analyze the thoughts and beliefs he had  
19 experienced prior to his own illnesses, as well as the similarities between the state of  
20 consciousness of the hypnotized subject and that of the patient in the doctor's office  
21 or congregant in the church. Over time, and through hundreds of experiments, he  
22 found a direct correlation between a person's belief in what Christian ministers called  
23 their "sinful nature" or their doctor's diagnosis and the symptoms they were  
24 experiencing.

25 He began using quotes from the Old and New Testaments in the Christian Bible  
26 that contradicted the religion-based issues and to point out the lack of support for the  
27 diagnoses as ways to shift the belief systems of people who came to him.

28  
29 MY THEORY: the trouble is in the mind, for the body is only the house for the mind  
30 to dwell in . . . If your mind has been deceived by some invisible enemy into a belief,  
31 you have put it into the form of a disease, with or without your knowledge. By my  
32 theory or truth I come in contact with your enemy and restore you to health and  
33 happiness. . .as Science sees through man's belief it destroys the belief and sets the  
34 soul or wisdom free. . . So awake from your lethargy and come to the light of Wisdom,  
35 that will teach you that man's happiness is in himself, that his life is eternal. . . [Quimby,  
36 in Dresser, 1921]

37  
38 Several people among Quimby's successful cases learned his methods and  
39 applied them to others, forming healing centers and schools over the years 1860-1880,  
40 notably Julius and Annette Dresser, Warren Felt Evans, and Mary Baker Glover  
41 Patterson (later Eddy) [Braden, 1963]. In those centers, they trained more students in  
42 Quimby's method, as they understood it. As described by the Dressers' son, Horatio,  
43 some 50 years later, the essence of their teachings was as follows:

44  
45 • The state of our body is not the cause, but the effect, of our thoughts and  
46 feelings;  
47 • Our beliefs shape our thoughts and feelings;

1       • What we hear when we're half asleep or upset or not really paying attention,  
2            along with what is repeated over and over in our minds or around us, forms our  
3            beliefs;  
4       • To change conditions in our body or life, we must change the beliefs that shape  
5            our thoughts and feelings. [Dresser, 1921]

6

7

8       **Expansion of the Movement**

9

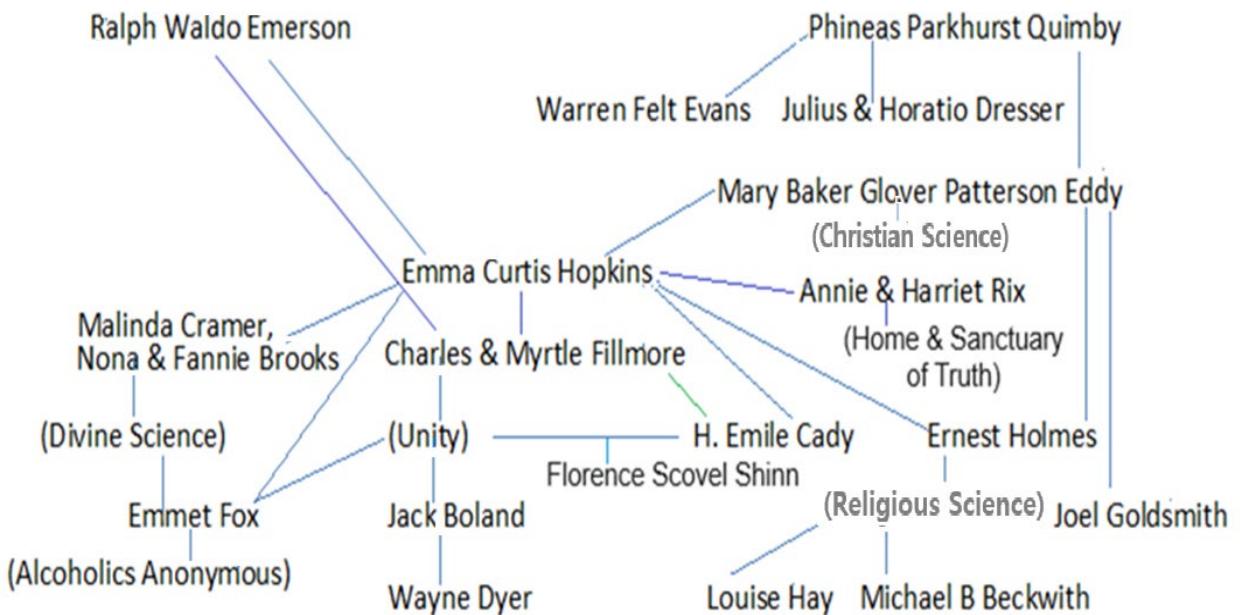
10      The ideas presented by Emerson and Quimby were picked up and developed by  
11       men and women throughout the New England region and printed in magazine articles  
12       – notably Margaret Fuller's *The Dial*, and Mary Baker Eddy's *Christian Science*  
13       *Journal* – and offered in classes and lectures in the New England region through the  
14       1870s and into the 1880s.

15      Through these journals, the principles and practices of the New Thought  
16       movement spread across North America and into England and Australia, where other  
17       writers and teachers began to expand upon them, and to develop healing practices  
18       based on them. Among these was Charles Swartz, a student of Eddy's, took the ideas  
19       to Chicago, publishing a journal he called *Mind-Cure*. [Braden, 1963; Miller, 2024]

20      Mrs. Eddy formed a school to teach her version of Quimby's methods in Lynn,  
21       Massachusetts in 1876, which became the Massachusetts Metaphysical College in  
22       1881, then, in 1903, was established as the Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston,  
23       Massachusetts. There she taught a basic and advanced class to groups of a dozen or  
24       so students a couple times a year. [Braden, 1963; Miller, 2024]

25      One of those students was a high school teacher named Emma Curtis Hopkins,  
26       whose family experienced a sudden and complete elimination of a respiratory illness  
27       following a verbal treatment by one of Mary Baker Eddy's students. Although  
28       originally skeptical of the method, this demonstration was sufficient to cause Hopkins  
29       to seek to learn how it worked, which she did, at the Massachusetts Metaphysical  
30       College, completing the six-week program in December of 1883, and being listed as  
31       a practitioner in the *Christian Science Journal* in February, 1884 [Braden, 1963]. By  
32       spring of 1886, she was practicing and teaching Eddy's method in Chicago, Illinois,  
33       and her first textbook was published in 1887. Over the years she developed her own  
34       variation of the method and is documented as having demonstrated its efficacy in  
35       close to 11,000 cases, many of whom were also taught the method and were  
36       encouraged to go out and teach it to others [Braden, 1963; Hopkins, 1888; Miller,  
37       2024]. Her school was restructured as a seminary from which one hundred ten people  
38       were ordained and over five hundred Hopkins Associations were formed between  
39       1888 and 1916 [Braden, 1963], establishing the New Thought movement both  
40       formally and informally across the North American continent. (See Figure 2).

41

1 **Figure 2. The formation of the major New Thought organizations**2  
3

4 Hopkins' students formed the schools that defined the main branches of the  
 5 movement; Unity, Religious Science, Divine Science, and Sanctuaries/Homes of Truth.  
 6 Their students formed churches to ritualize and teach the methods to people who were  
 7 not seeking to be healed but were seeking a better life and open to the fundamental ideas,  
 8 and then formed associations to share their experiences and understandings, including  
 9 the International Divine Science Federation, the Association of Unity Churches, the  
 10 United Churches of Religious Science (now International Centers for Spiritual Living),  
 11 and the International New Thought Alliance. [Braden, 1963; Miller, 2024] Other,  
 12 smaller associations have been formed from these, including the Universal Foundation  
 13 for Better Living and the Affiliated New Thought Network. Paralleling these is the  
 14 Seichi-No-Ie movement out of Japan, informed by the work of Fenwicke Holmes,  
 15 brother of Religious Science founder Ernest Holmes, with around a million adherents,  
 16 worldwide.[Seicho-No-Ie website, 2024]

17 Through these schools, churches, and associations, the number of practitioners of  
 18 New Thought principles and practices were maintained at sufficient levels to be an  
 19 established presence in most of the cities of the U.S. through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today,  
 20 according to the website NewThoughtWisdom, the publishing and educational  
 21 activities of these associations reach approximately 2.5 million people worldwide  
 22 annually, of which Unity's *Daily Word* is the largest of these publications, with over a  
 23 million subscribers in 2024 [personal communication, Jim Braden, Unity Worldwide  
 24 Headquarters, 2024].

25 One of Hopkins' students, William Walker Atkinson, picked up the mantle when  
 26 Hopkins closed her seminary in Chicago, offering classes on his own. He published  
 27 several books outlining his understanding of the principles, calling them the "Law of  
 28 Attraction."

29 We are sending out thoughts of greater or less intensity all the time, and we are reaping  
 30 the results of such thoughts. Not only do our thought-waves influence ourselves and

1 others, but they have a drawing power--they attract to us the thoughts of others, things,  
 2 circumstances, people, "luck"--in accord with the character of the thought uppermost  
 3 in our minds...

4 A strong thought or a thought long continued will make us the center of attraction for  
 5 the corresponding thought-waves of others. "Like attracts like" in the Thought World--  
 6 as ye sow, so shall ye reap. [Atkinson, 1906]

7  
 8 During the same years that Atkinson was working in Chicago, James Allen, a  
 9 devoted student of Emerson's works, was integrating basic Buddhist principles with  
 10 Neo-Platonic Christianity in England. Starting in 1902 he self-published *As A Man*  
 11 *Thinketh*, and led an ongoing series of evening dialogues for visitors in his Cornwall  
 12 home. Over the next 10 years he published *All These Things Added*, *The Way of Peace*,  
 13 *Above Life's Turmoil*, and *The Eight Pillars of Prosperity*, all of which were  
 14 international successes. [Allen, 2012]

15 The Higher Thought Center was formed in London during that same period, and  
 16 sponsored the work of a retired magistrate, Thomas Troward, who had grown up in  
 17 Ceylon and worked for decades in the Punjab. Though grounded in the Anglican  
 18 Christian tradition, his familiarity with the Sanskrit/Urdu/Hindi, Hebrew, and Arabic  
 19 languages and their respective religions and cultures, as well as frequent and powerful  
 20 paranormal experiences, led him to create a whole body of theory to support the ideas  
 21 of the New Thought movement, outlined in his Edinburgh and Doré lecture series  
 22 [1918], as well as *The Law and the Word* [1920], and several other volumes.

23 Troward's work provided the theoretical foundation that Ernest Holmes, in Los  
 24 Angeles in 1917, needed in order to understand how it was that practitioners like Nona  
 25 Brooks and Mary Baker Eddy could accomplish the results they did. Holmes  
 26 continued to study and teach with his brother, Fenwicke, until 1925, when he  
 27 completed a series of lessons with Emma Curtis Hopkins and immediately published  
 28 his seminal work, *The Science of Mind* [1926]. The next year, in 1927, he established  
 29 the Institute of Religious Science and, like the other founder-teachers, was persuaded  
 30 to launch a church a few years later, which he did, after being ordained by the head of  
 31 the Divine Science church, Nona Brooks. [Braden, 1963; Miller, 2024]

32 Between all of these early students, researchers, and teachers, in the years 1890 -  
 33 1930 over 900 study centers, schools, and churches were founded across the English-  
 34 speaking countries. [Braden, 1963] They provided access to the essential principles  
 35 and practices that would empower people to heal themselves, heal others, and live  
 36 abundant lives of well-being. They also trained practitioners, teachers, and ministers  
 37 to continue the work, focusing primarily on physical and emotional healing and well-  
 38 being.

39

40 *Emergence of The New Thought Prosperity Movement*

41

42 Outside of these organizations, however, another branch of the New Thought  
 43 movement was developing, focused on prosperity and abundance through creative  
 44 thought and action. The movement's initial focus began to shift to general well-being,  
 45 including financial, very early on. In 1890 Mrs. Hopkins insisted that students who  
 46 were practicing her teachings should be able to pay a relatively high tuition (\$50 in  
 47 1890 would be around \$1850 in 2025, [U.S. Consumer Price Index]) for her

1 advanced, 6-week course without any effort. [Braden, 1963]. The Fillmores gave up  
2 seeking income through any other source besides their teaching and practice in 1892,  
3 shortly after they were ordained as ministers. [Braden, 1963] About the same time,  
4 Nona Brooks found that she could “treat” for financial well-being for her school just  
5 as easily as for health for her patients. [Deane, 1945]

6 Thus was born what could be called the “masculine arm” of the New Thought  
7 movement, which would take on a life of its own. While leaders in the healing,  
8 spiritual, or “feminine arm” continued to focus on physical and emotional healing,  
9 this group began to apply the same principles and practices in the world of business.  
10 Building on Emerson’s principles and Allen’s applications, they developed theories  
11 and practices to help men create thriving businesses and comfortably support their  
12 families. William Walker Atkinson’s *Thought Vibration* [1911] took Thomas  
13 Troward’s explanations of then-current scientific principles [Troward, 1918] and  
14 explained the “Law of Attraction”. Wallace Wattles encouraged people to think and  
15 act “in a certain way” that would lead to “certain results” in the world around them  
16 [Wattles, 1910].

17 In 1925, a magazine illustrator in Greenwich Village, New York, wrote up some  
18 of her successes as a practitioner and teacher of these principles, and published a book  
19 called *The Game of Life and How to Play It*. Florence Scovel Shinn was well known  
20 in the publishing industry and a popular figure in New York. In her book she described  
21 how people could have the home of their dreams, the money to pay whatever needed  
22 to be paid, the helpers that would get things done, and more. Her explanations of the  
23 principles were clear, her anecdotes understandable, and her book has never been out  
24 of print since.

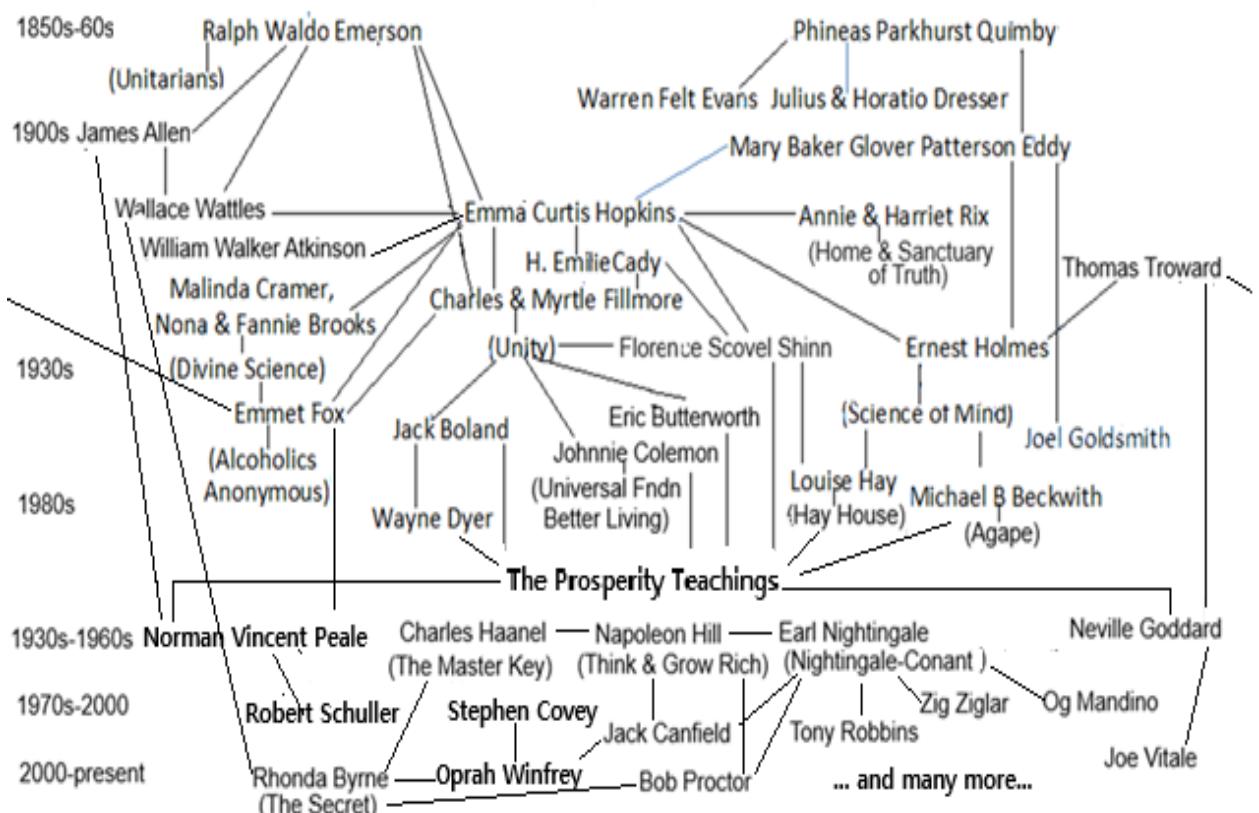
25 In the 1930s a young Irish engineer, Emmet Fox, who had studied with Thomas  
26 Troward to understand his paranormal experiences, began to teach New Thought  
27 principles and practices across England. In 1937, during the Depression, he moved to  
28 New York City, where his Sunday and Wednesday services filled Carnegie Hall  
29 [Braden, 1963; Miller, 2024]. Fox also assisted in the formation of Alcoholics  
30 Anonymous, for whom Fox’s writings are considered a supplemental text to their “Big  
31 Book” [Miller, 2024].

32 Also in the 1930s, Napoleon Hill interviewed dozens of successful businessmen  
33 and told his readers how to “Think and Grow Rich” [1937]. Earl Nightingale started  
34 reading Hill’s material on the radio in the 1940s, then joined with Lloyd Conant to  
35 record and distribute those readings as a company in Chicago [from the Nightingale-  
36 Conant website: <https://www.nightingale.com>]. They focused on men in business,  
37 providing inspiration and motivation to transform their work and their lives by  
38 transforming their patterns of thought. Motivational speaking, drawing on all these  
39 materials and some personal experiences, became a profession.

40 During the 1960s and 1970s, new teachers from India and Tibet began to explain  
41 the principles of *yoga* to Americans and Europeans, including ways to still the mind  
42 and begin to allow new patterns of thought to emerge. At the same time, the women’s  
43 “consciousness raising” movement led to a wave of divorces and a reduction in teen  
44 marriages, which shifted the focus of nearly half the North American population away  
45 from home and family into the work world.

1 As a result, the 1980s saw a huge expansion of women in the business-building  
 2 market, nearly doubling sales of what was by then considered “traditional”  
 3 motivational materials, and by the 1990s, many of the producers of these materials  
 4 were the women who had studied them in the past. Louise Hay launched Hay House  
 5 to promote the practitioner methods she'd learned from one of Ernest Holmes'  
 6 students in a Religious Science church [Hay, 1984]. Oprah Winfrey introduced Hay  
 7 and many more teachers of these ideas to thousands of women in her late-afternoon  
 8 television shows, interviewing the current speakers and writers who were promoting,  
 9 or finding new ways to apply or explain them. Catherine Ponder published her  
 10 “Dynamic Laws” series [1963-1987], explaining how the characters described in the  
 11 Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament were using these principles to live  
 12 healthy, abundant lives. Both Hay and Ponder encouraged the repetition of  
 13 affirmations to help change one's thought patterns, as the masculine and feminine  
 14 arms of the New Thought movement were merged.

15  
 16 **Figure 3. Expansion of the New Thought Prosperity Movement**



17  
 18  
 19 All of these separate activities came to a head in 2006, when an Australian  
 20 woman named Rhonda Byrne produced a pilot for what, at first, was going to be a TV  
 21 series, but became, instead, a standalone DVD, called *The Secret*. Integrating her  
 22 personal story with the mystery of a little-known “emerald tablet” and inviting half a  
 23 dozen motivational speakers to explain how it worked, she created a vehicle to  
 24 promote the ideas that “thought become things” and “what you’re thinking becomes

1 your reality.” It was an immediate hit, selling over 2 million copies in its first year,  
2 and reawakening interest in the authors who inspired it, which, in turn, led to the  
3 publication of books and supplemental videos, and the creation of “The Library of  
4 Hidden Knowledge,” a book series offering the 19<sup>th</sup> century teachers’ complex prose  
5 in modern language with summaries and exercises [Atria, 2006-2013]. Books from  
6 this series have been published in Indonesian, Estonian, Chinese, Hindi, and more,  
7 and *The Secret* is published in a dozen languages [personal communication, Richard  
8 Cohn, publisher, 2024].

9 With these works, the global New Thought Prosperity movement was fully  
10 established, even though most people had no idea it existed. A recent introduction to  
11 the movement put it this way:

12

13 Ever hear of the positive thinking of Norman Vincent Peale, the seven habits of Stephen  
14 R. Covey, or the Be-Happy Attitudes of Robert Schuller? Familiar with the concepts  
15 of self-fulfilling prophecy, psychosomatic illness, the placebo effect, and what goes  
16 around, comes around? Acquainted with the concept of God being within each of us  
17 and in all of nature? Aware that your thoughts play a crucial role in the kind of life you  
18 experience? If so, then you know about New Thought. [Evans, 2005]

19

20

## 21 Literature Review

22

23 Since the 1960s, the primary reference for the history of New Thought has been  
24 Charles Braden’s *Spirits in Rebellion*, published by Southern Methodist University  
25 Press [1963; 1984]. Braden’s encyclopedic text provides excellent historical  
26 documentation of the lives and teachings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century discoverers and teachers  
27 of the fundamentals of the New Thought philosophy and practice. He documents the  
28 relationship between the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the work of Phineas  
29 Parkhurst Quimby in the 1840s-1860s, and that of Quimby’s students with each other  
30 through the 1880s, then goes on to describe the lives of their students who were the  
31 founders of the various branches of the movement in the 1890s-1920s.

32 Braden’s history was drawn largely from the archives of the International New  
33 Thought Alliance (INTA), then located in Mesa, Arizona. Those archives have been  
34 considerably expanded over the past sixty years, as students of those early founders  
35 have passed away and left their notes and documents to the archives. This past year,  
36 2025, they were moved to Lee’s Summit, Missouri, and are now housed in climate-  
37 controlled facilities at Unity Village, adjacent the archives for Unity Worldwide  
38 Ministries, and the Science of Mind archives, providing unprecedented access to  
39 primary source material regarding these people and their teachings.

40 In those archives, the INTA magazine offers a continuous series of articles and  
41 datapoints that inform the development of the movement since 1914.

42 Other resources on the history of the movement include Alan Anderson and  
43 Deborah Whitehouse’s *New Thought: A Practical American Spirituality* [1995] and  
44 the early text by Horatio Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* [1919]. In  
45 addition, a number of independent websites have been developed over the past 20  
46 years that provide useful insights and access, among them:

- 1     • the New Thought Wisdom Site: <https://www.newthoughtwisdom.com/index.html>;
- 2     • the encyclopedia.com site: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/new-thought-movement#:~:text=NEW%20THOUGHT%20MOVEMENT%20.,Science%2C%20Theosophy%2C%20and%20Spiritualism>;
- 3     • an Emma Curtis Hopkins site: <https://www.emmacurtishopkins.org/>;
- 4     • the Fillmore Fellowship site: <https://www.truthunity.net/>.
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

## 11     **Methodology/Materials and Methods**

12     This study provides an assessment of the prevalence of the ideas developed by  
 13     the teachers within the New Thought philosophical framework across the planet  
 14     today, in the context of its development in the New England region of North America  
 15     since the 1850s.

16     A qualitative review of historical documents provides a summary of the defining  
 17     principles and practices that have become known as New Thought, as well as a history  
 18     of the movement up until the 1980s.

19     Quantitative data about those publications and the activity of organizations within  
 20     the movement is taken from conversations with or the websites of the associations and  
 21     publishers.

22     Personal observation through the editing of the seminal works of the major  
 23     teachers is a major source of the thesis developed here, as well (see, e.g., *As We Think  
 24     So We Are*, *The NEW Science of Getting Rich*, *Natural Abundance*, *Unveiling Your  
 25     Hidden Power*, etc.)

26     Finally, scanning social media sites provides insight to the ubiquity of New  
 27     Thought principles being applied for personal development in individual and  
 28     corporate settings around the world.

## 31     **Results**

32     The purpose of this paper is to establish the process by which the New Thought  
 33     philosophy has become a global psycho-spiritual movement. Thus far it's been  
 34     established that there have evolved two main branches of the movement: one that  
 35     focuses on physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and one that focuses on  
 36     abundance and prosperity.

### 40     *Current State of the New Thought Well-Being Movement*

41     The organizations and associations established by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century founders  
 42     of the movement continue to shift and change, and were strongly affected by the  
 43     Pandemic shutdown of 2020-21. They continue, however, to teach practitioners  
 44     methods for healing and restoring well-being in the lives of those who attend their  
 45     centers and churches. The training has evolved, and is now offered mostly in the

1      churches and centers, but also through schools like the Unity Urban School, the  
 2      Johnny Coleman Theological Seminary, and the Emerson Theological Institute, all of  
 3      which, together, graduate 30-50 practitioners and ministers each year. These then  
 4      either help to form new centers and churches or go back to their home organization to  
 5      offer healing services.

6      While most medical practitioners have discounted the methods established by  
 7      Quimby and taught, in various forms, within the New Thought movement, there are  
 8      now close to 200 years of records demonstrating the effectiveness of changing one's  
 9      life by changing one's beliefs. These start with Dresser's [1921] documentation of  
 10     Quimby's 12,000 documented cessations of symptoms (or "cures"), continuing  
 11     through Hopkins' 11,000 cases [Braden, 1963], Brooks' 18,000 cases [Deane, 1945],  
 12     and include the hundreds of thousands of "answered prayers" documented by Silent  
 13     Unity at Unity Worldwide Headquarters.

14     As a result, some scientists have explored the possibility that there is some  
 15     validity to the method. Two authors, in particular, helped to launch that field of  
 16     research: Deepak Chopra, with his *Quantum Healing*, and Norman Cousins with his  
 17     *Anatomy of an Illness*. Their careful documentation of the relationship between the  
 18     mental state of a patient and that person's medical condition reached enough people  
 19     in enough places to open the door to rigorous research.

20     Since then, the work of biologists like Bruce Lipton, with his *Biology of Belief*,  
 21     and neurophysiologists like Joe Dispenza, with *You Are the Placebo*, have detailed the  
 22     mechanism by which what is happening in the brain affects what is happening in the  
 23     body. Their work is supplemented by an increasing understanding of the nature of  
 24     consciousness as a universal field, rather than electro-chemical activity in the brain. A  
 25     brief summary of these theoretical and experimental understandings follows (a  
 26     detailed explanation may be found in Miller, 2024):  
 27

- 28     • In physics, it's become clear that matter is not solid, but is, in fact, energy  
 29       held in tension in patterns, which can be interpreted as information, which  
 30       can be understood as a form of awareness, or consciousness (see, e.g. *The  
 31       Self-Aware Universe* by Amit Goswami, or *Quantum Self* by Danah Zohar)
- 32     • These patterns act as fields, and they interact in such a way that our  
 33       experience is a function of the behaviors of "fields within fields" in a nested  
 34       hierarchy, of which the largest is the "quantum field" out of which all matter,  
 35       energy, and information emerge. (see, e.g., *Space, Time, and Beyond* by Fred  
 36       Alan Wolf and Bob Tobi)
- 37     • This quantum field is a holon, indivisible; it's ordered, and increasing in  
 38       complexity across the universe, based on the patterns of energy flows within  
 39       it. (see, e.g., *Order Out of Chaos* by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stenger)
- 40     • The orderly progression of increasing complexity is a creative process that  
 41       applies to all levels of fields within the whole, and so is ongoing within the  
 42       individuals within it. (see, e.g., *The Noetic Universe* by Dean Radin)
- 43     • The human experience is one part of the whole, and each human being is  
 44       the result of and a contributor to the creative process of the whole –  
 45       physically and energetically creating and expanding the possibilities of, not

1 only their individual experience but that of the whole. (see, e.g., *A New  
2 Science of Life* by Rupert Sheldrake)

3

- 4 The nature of fields is such that the pattern of matter and energy being  
5 created in one place is mirrored and reflected back by the surrounding,  
6 interacting fields, so the individual's thoughts and feelings are reflected back  
7 in various forms of matter and energy. (see, e.g., *The Reflexive Universe* by  
8 Arthur M. Young)
- 9 The body's chemistry and physiology are determined only partly by innate  
10 genetics, which can be changed, and largely by the feelings and emotions of  
11 the individual (see, e.g., *The Biology of Belief* by Bruce Lipton, *You Are the  
Placebo*, Joe Dispenza)

12

13 Following this set of understandings, each individual being is currently  
14 experiencing the consequences of past thoughts, actions, feelings, and the beliefs that  
15 sustain them, in the body and the larger material world they are creating, according to  
16 the patterns of information they have habitually been within the interacting fields-  
17 within-fields of energy that is our universe. Together, these understandings establish  
18 the essence of New Thought. They provide a sound theoretical basis for practitioners  
19 seeking to help people improve their experience of well-being.

20

21 *Current State of the New Thought Prosperity Movement*

22

23 While there are well established centers and associations devoted to the well-  
24 being arm of the New Thought movement, no official organization for the Prosperity  
25 branch exists. Therefore, documenting its development requires monitoring the  
26 distribution of materials produced by its adherents.

27 To that end, a cursory count of the sales of books, audiobooks, and ebooks in this  
28 arena amount to over 40 million copies a year, globally, for the past 20 years [drawn  
29 from goodreads.com, googlebooks.com, amazon.com]. This count is based on  
30 recorded sales of individual titles, including *The Secret* (2 million copies of the DVD  
31 sold in its first year and over 100,000 in most years since, per the publisher), *Think  
32 and Grow Rich* (over 100 million copies sold between two publishers since the  
33 original publication in 1937), and *The Science of Getting Rich* (now in the public  
34 domain, published by 50 different publishers in the US, with average sales of 3000+  
35 copies/year, according to listings on Amazon).

36 They are also published in several languages, as illustrated in Figure 4.

37

38

1 **Figure 4. Some Translations of the New Thought Prosperity Title Think and Grow  
2 Rich by Napoleon Hill**



10  
11 According to John LaRosa, on the website MarketResearch.com,  
12 Self-improvement is big business, as Americans constantly seek out services to  
13 improve their lives — spiritually, financially, and for health reasons. The market is  
14 primarily female, but men are getting more involved. [LaRosa, 2025]

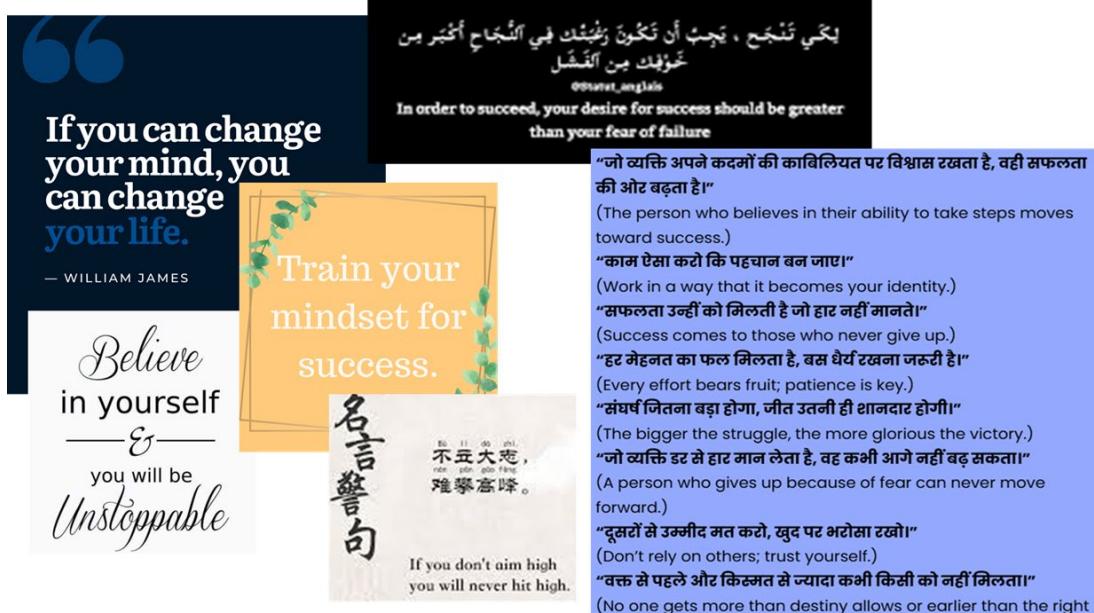
15  
16 He quotes a report from the research firm Market Data, saying “Marketdata  
17 estimates that the self-improvement market in the U.S. was worth \$13.4 billion in  
18 2022... fueled by growth in personal coaching services, self-help books and  
19 audiobooks, and self-help apps.” [LaRosa, 2025] Another firm, Grandview Research,  
20 set the global market for such products at \$48.4 billion in 2024, of which the North  
21 American market is 35% [grandviewresearch.com, 2025].

22 Another measure of the extent to which such ideas have penetrated the world  
23 marketplace is their prevalence on social media sites like YouTube. A basic search for  
24 “change your thoughts change your life” on YouTube currently yields thousands of  
25 direct results, with many individual videos amassing millions of views. Top dedicated  
26 channels include:

27  
28 • Tony Robbins: Over 833 videos focused on mindset shift and personal  
29 transformation.  
30 • The Mindset Mentor Podcast: Regularly uploads content on subconscious  
31 rewiring, with some videos reaching over 500,000 views.

1     • Psych2Go: Features over 1,000 videos (reaching 9.42 million subscribers)  
 2       about understanding and managing emotions for a better life.  
 3  
 4       Other social media sites, like Facebook and Instagram provide what are called  
 5       “memes,” or short, clearly stated affirmations or guidelines for personal development.  
 6       While neither Facebook nor Instagram report the number of specific memes, a search  
 7       on Google Images reveals hundreds of such items, across multiple languages, as  
 8       illustrated in Figure 5.

9  
 10 **Figure 5. Some New Thought Prosperity Memes in Multiple Languages**



11  
 12       Another measure is the degree to which the principles and practices are being  
 13       applied within traditional Judeo-Christian organizations. Online journalist John Haller  
 14       traces how New Thought doctrines transform into a Prosperity Gospel whose  
 15       preachers are “promoting techniques for success in business and in life through  
 16       positive attitude” [Haller, 261]. And Jewish rabbis have begun to offer teachings from  
 17       the *Kabbalah* that are in alignment with New Thought (see, e.g., “rabbi David” and  
 18       “rabbi soul coach” YouTube channels).

20  
 21 **Discussion**  
 22

23  
 24       The research shared in this paper addresses both the historical evolution of the  
 25       New Thought movement and its current contributions to the global Prosperity  
 26       movement, with a brief consideration of the modern scientific research that supports  
 27       the principles and methods that define the movement. It is by no means definitive, and  
 28       one could readily find reason to explore the current status in greater detail. The paper  
 29       does, however, establish the essential bases for further research.

1      **Conclusions**

2

3      As stated at the outset, the teachings of the New Thought movement are by no  
 4      means new, but through the work of the authors, ministers, and practitioners trained  
 5      within the movement, the principles and practices have extended far beyond the limits  
 6      imposed by ancient spiritual texts based in unfamiliar cultural contexts. They are, in  
 7      fact, the basis for a global movement calling people to turn inward, away from  
 8      mechanistic science and toward an inner field of unfolding possibilities—based on an  
 9      awareness of one's own nature as a human being.

10     New Thought products—print, e-, and audio-books, affirmation cards, dvds,  
 11     classes, coaching, and webinars, are offered in a global marketplace, promoted by  
 12     television celebrities, motivational speakers, therapists, organizational development  
 13     specialists, and sales managers. The use of positive statements to shift one's mental  
 14     attitude and so achieve greater levels of productivity and advancement has become a  
 15     normally accepted practice across the professions.

16     In addition, books by the original teachers, and by the authors explaining the  
 17     science that supports their principles and practices, are now being used as textbooks  
 18     to teach New Thought practitioners through several schools around the U.S.,  
 19     including the Emerson Theological Institute, in classes offered online and through 35  
 20     New Thought centers around the world [2025].

21     The ideas are being spread through many different media across the continents  
 22     and language barriers, encouraging people to live a life of, as William James put it in  
 23     1902, “healthy mindedness.” Thus it can be said,

24

25     New Thought, as Dr. Holmes wrote, has valued and timeless concepts or principles  
 26     which, when developed in generation after generation, can serve all of humanity in  
 27     working toward a future world that works for everyone. [Lockhard, 2023]

28

29     To which students of Ernest Holmes' Religious Science ending their declarations  
 30     of intention, or “treatments,” would say “and so it is.”

31

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