BOOK REVIEW

The Genie in Your Genes: Epigenetic Medicine and the New Biology of Intention

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Dawson Church’s *The Genie in Your Genes: Epigenetic Medicine and the New Biology of Intention* follows on in the inspired tradition of such books as *Molecules of Emotion* by Candace Pert and *The Biology of Belief* by Bruce Lipton. Essentially, Church’s message is that our thoughts and feelings can influence our genetic makeup, which potentially fluctuates by the hour or even faster. The author explores the furthest reaches of the relatively new field of epigenetics and describes the implications for individual and societal health.

The more conventional voice of epigenetics postulates that gene expression is not solely determined by DNA, but by factors outside the cell, such as proteins and possibly RNAs, collectively thought of as epigenetic (control above the level of the gene) phenomena. In this model, conveyors of environmental signals include hormones and growth factors. Our DNA is more like a blueprint than a deterministic mandate, and the potential of this blueprint to manifest or not is largely determined by factors outside the cell and outside the genome. Given the amount of research suggesting that what we think and feel might influence our health and well-being (for example, the positive effect of optimism and the negative effect of stress on immune function), it is only a small conceptual step to posit that modulations of environmental (external) and cognitive/emotional (internal) stimuli can affect genetic expression. The author declares that the ultimate power over health and well-being, therefore, is located in consciousness and not in molecular structure.

The author believes that energy medicine works by some- how harnessing epigenetic potential, and a good portion of the book is interwoven with anecdotes and studies relating to a particular form of energy psychology known as Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). Church’s contention is that since we know we can influence our genome from outside the cell and even outside the body, it makes sense to practice generating input (such as self-acceptance) that promotes health and well-being and thus discourages the development of disease. I wholeheartedly agree with this, but unfortunately the consistent refrain about the power of EFT left me with the slightly nagging sense that I’d been subjected to a sales pitch rather than given a how-to manual of valuable tools.

The main drawback of *The Genie in Your Genes* is not the amount of information so much as the enormous variety of information provided to support the book’s main thesis. Unfortunately, it often feels like a haphazard array of different parts rather than a unified, coherent whole. For example, the author sometimes touches upon, sometimes dwells at great length on such topics as quantum physics, placebo response, distant healing, the inherent bias of drug clinical trials, nonlocality, string theory, molecular biology, and entanglement, but in what struck me as a somewhat random and unorganized way. If one were simply to look at the book’s headings, they would not outline a clear and compelling path. This gives the book the air of a dumping ground of information, which detracts from its powerful message.

This book is replete with references, although assertions in the text about the effect in humans of epigenetic signals do not always make it clear initially that these assumptions are extrapolated from nonhuman studies. For example, the idea that behaviors may not only be transmitted across generations genetically but may also be developed *de novo* by individuals in a single generation is illustrated with the concept of maternal nurturing, but was based on a study of mice. The statement “measurable molecular changes in the DNA molecule can result from human desires, intentions, and emotions,” is only backed up by a HeartMath *in vitro* experiment where individuals projected a specific intention to either wind or unwind human placental DNA.

The author predicts that the potential of what he calls epigenetic medicine as expressed through the practice of en-
ergy medicine will dramatically affect the fields of medicine and psychology over the next decade. Given that the pathways of epigenetic signaling are mediated by intention, it strikes me that any treatment (including pharmaceutical drugs or surgery) can become epigenetic medicine if it is administered in the context of a nurturing and conscious relationship. The material in *The Genie in Your Genes* has far-reaching consequences for clinical practice. The medicine that Dawson Church presents in this book is one of hope and self-actualization through the conscious development of positive intent. As such, it is inspirational and provides both motivational tools and a comprehensive theoretical framework for practitioners and patients alike.

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