

Book Summary: *Spontaneous Healing* by Dr. Andrew Weil

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Dr. Andrew Weil, a graduate of Harvard Medical School and a prominent and respected doctor, wrote *Spontaneous Healing* in an effort to change the public's attitudes toward health, healing, and the practice of medicine itself. Subtitled "*How to Discover and Enhance Your Body's Natural Ability to Maintain and Heal Itself*," this book presents Dr. Weil's thoughts and suggestions combined with true stories of "spontaneous healing" experiences. According to Dr. Weil, modern medicine teaches "that health requires outside intervention of one sort or another, while proponents of natural hygiene maintain that health results from living in harmony with natural law" (pg. 3). He states that "spontaneous healing" is a natural result of putting the body's systems in harmony. In this book, Dr. Weil explores the body's healing system, suggesting that it is both intrinsic and invaluable. He also delves into what it takes to optimize the healing system, giving advice on diet, toxins, tonics, and other helpful aspects. The book closes with a discussion on what to do when one is beset with illness, from making the right decisions to strategies of "successful" patients.

Dr. Weil asserts that the body wants to be healthy. "Health is the condition of perfect balance, when all systems run smoothly and energy circulates freely" (p. 36). This is a natural condition that requires less effort than being out of balance and ill, which drains a body of energy and vital nutrients. Not only is healthiness a natural condition, it is also a natural "power." Though modern medicine concerns itself with the business of healing, Dr. Weil states that it does not regard the body's ability to heal itself as important as it does medical treatments and tools. Additionally, Dr. Weil states that all parts of the body are connected. This understanding requires a person to nurture the whole body, not just an affected or ailing part of it. Combined with the knowledge that "there is no separation of mind and body" (p. 38), it becomes apparent that the body and the mind (or the body/mind, as some call it) work in tandem for good or ill, especially where health is concerned. Learning how to care for both the body and mind can help a person live in a state in which spontaneous healing can occur.

There is some technique to producing health and a bodily environment that supports spontaneous healing. While it may be true that "the body wants to be healthy, because health represents efficient operation of all of its systems" (p. 129), in our world we are surrounded by toxins of every kind: in our food, water and air, in the medicines we consume, in energy and electricity around us, etc. Other factors that contribute to poor health include mental and emotional issues, as well as spiritual problems. In order to help the body maintain good health, some things are necessary. Dr. Weil suggests that a healing diet, self-defense against toxins, tonics, exercise and rest, and practices that strengthen the mind and spirit will all positively affect the body's ability

to heal spontaneously. For Dr. Weil, spontaneous healing is not only possible, but probable, if a person does what is necessary to keep the body's systems strong.

Being healthy does not mean being free from sickness or disease. Actually, Dr. Weil suggests that being healthy means that the body is able to respond quickly and effectively against agents that cause illness or harm to the body. Healthy people get sick, because of outside influences, but they heal, because of a strong, well-balanced healing system. Nonetheless, when we do face disease and illness, there are things that we can do to boost the immune system, strengthen the body, mind, and spirit, and increase the likelihood of spontaneous healing. Dr. Weil proposes that it is very helpful to know when to turn to allopathic (e.g. conventional) medicine, and when alternative therapies may be most appropriate. He suggests a person become familiar with alternative therapies and practitioners, so that finding one when necessary is not difficult. Additionally, Dr. Weil states that to be a "successful" patient (that is, one who experiences spontaneous healing, even in dire and remarkable circumstances), one should: actively search for help, seek out others who have been healed, form constructive partnerships with health professionals, regard illness as a gift, and cultivate self-acceptance. In the last analysis, after a person has done all that he or she can do to strengthen the healing system and promote spontaneous healing, "the trick is to get your ego out of the way, get your concepts out of the way, and just let the body heal itself. It knows how to do it" (p. 252).

As a Nutritional Consultant, I found this book very insightful and encouraging. Though I am well aware that I will not be diagnosing and treating people's ailments, I do believe that it is helpful to know about the body's healing ability. I feel, as does Dr. Weil, that health professionals' attitudes toward their clients make a large difference in how healing takes place. It's more than appropriate to be optimistic in every individual's ability to experience spontaneous healing, especially as I help them assess their nutritional needs, and as I make dietary and nutrition suggestions to help them become as healthy as they can be.