The Little Book of Big Change: The No-Willpower Approach to Breaking Any Habit

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“If the only thing people learned was to not be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world.” –Sydney Banks
Introduction

I wouldn’t recommend asking people what they are least satisfied with in life. It’s a downer question that won’t do anyone any favors.

But if you were to ask, I bet you’d hear a lot about unwanted habits. As a life coach—even though I don’t explicitly ask—I hear about peoples’ areas of least satisfaction all the time and I can attest to how often bad habits and old patterns enter the picture. Unwanted thoughts and behaviors are counterproductive obstacles to what we want for ourselves. The most exciting dreams and the best of intentions can be quickly derailed when habits and repetitive patterns take over.

As if having your dreams and intentions interfered with wasn’t enough, many of us feel like powerless victims of our habitual patterns. We know better, yet we don’t do better and we can’t figure out why. Habits not only take us away from the life we think we want, they become ammunition we use against ourselves—proof that we should be better than we are.

Humans are designed to thrive; we have a natural bend toward it. Feeling good is our nature, and so we instinctively look to return there when we’re not there. As a testament to our desire to feel good and thrive in life, we try everything we can think of, going to extreme lengths at times, to end our unwanted habits. That quest often ends in frustration and hopelessness.
It doesn’t have to, though. When you view yourself and your habits in a new way, change happens much easier than you have experienced in the past. The 19 secrets in this book will help you see your habits in a way that renders them powerless and leaves you free to fully enjoy your life the way you are meant to.

A No-Willpower Approach
The book you’re holding is quite different than other books you may have read about ending bad habits.

You aren’t going to read about setting goals to be habit-free, using willpower to overpower your habit, or being more disciplined as a way to outsmart yourself.

This is not a book that urges you to examine your past, the overall state of your life, or the specific emotional voids that led you into your habit. You won’t be asked to consider the external factors that trigger your habit and you won’t have to come up with a list of alternate behaviors to turn to when the urge to do your habit strikes.

This approach is different.

This book is based on the premise that your habit is an impersonal, *thought-based experience* that can be addressed without rehashing your past or analyzing the state of your life. It is not about a lack of willpower or discipline, and it has nothing to do with being ignorant of triggers or
not using the right coping mechanisms. Instead, ending your habit is about deeply connecting with the truth of who you are and deeply seeing the true nature of your habit and yourself. We will look at the intersection of spiritual principles and neuroscience principles to encourage those insights.

Your habit is rooted in an attempt to feel better, but that doesn’t mean you have to radically change your life for your habit to go away. In very simplistic terms, nearly all habits start as a way to not feel what you’re feeling; a way to leave the present moment, often by numbing out in some way, and returning to our more peaceful, calm home base. Your habits are misguided attempts to feel more comfortable in your own skin, and they are incredibly effective. They do take you out of your suffering for a short time. They quiet your painful thinking, transport you away from the moment you’re in, and help you stay partially blind to your experience. When you’re feeling restless and you stumble upon some behavior, substance, or obsession that instantly soothes that restlessness, the habit has taken hold. From then on, the habitual thought or behavior looks like the best, fastest, feel-better option available to you.

Your habit is also giving you valuable information about your state of mind. When you feel the tension and dis-ease that leads you to want to act out your habit, that dis-ease is your signal that you are lost in your personal thoughts, creating an uncomfortable experience for yourself with your own thinking. In that way, your habit is a helpful invitation to step back and let your mind clear so that you can reconnect with the truth of who you are.
So initially, your habit may be something you do to help you feel more like yourself in the face of some inner conflict or dissatisfaction. As you get deeper into your habit, however, the habit itself becomes the problem. Before you know it, the habit itself is a bigger problem than any pain it originally helped you avoid.

Your habituated brain is now focused on keeping your habit alive and it uses urges—thoughts and feelings that encourage acting on your habit—to do that. Urges are simply thoughts that encourage acting on your habit. Urges can be anything from a fleeting thought that says, “It’s okay, just check your email one last time”, to full-out warfare: an urge that you feel throughout your body, that hijacks your emotions, drives action, and feels near impossible to ignore, like a smoker’s craving for a cigarette or an alcoholic’s craving for a drink.

Soon, your habit is still about avoiding your experience, but now the painful experience you are trying to avoid is the urge itself. Acting out your habit is still a means of distraction from your own inner experience, but the source of suffering changes.

That extremely uncomfortable drive to act on your habit is neurologically strengthened each time you obey the urge and act out your habit. The stronger and more frequent urges become the harder it is to do anything other than give into them, which sets a painful, habit-reinforcing cycle into motion. As you will see throughout this book however, transcending your habit is always possible regardless of the neurological state of your brain.
**Habit** is broadly defined in this book as *a repetitive thought or behavior that one wishes they did not experience*. I will focus on two types of habits: behavioral habits such as gambling, being on the internet too much, overeating, overworking, overspending, or lashing out at your partner; and mental or thought-based habits, such as a fear of public speaking or other situations, or persistent thoughts (e.g., thoughts about being judged by others, thoughts about something bad happening). Common fears and phobias (e.g., the fear of public speaking, flying on an airplane, or heights) are considered thought-based habits because the basis of the habit is *fear*, created by very subjective, habitual *thoughts* that appear real and compelling.

When you think of a habit, you probably think of something similar to the behavioral habits mentioned above. In this book however, persistent thoughts and mental habits are treated the same as behavioral habits because *the basis for all habits is thought*. On a moment to moment basis we feel only what’s on our mind—it is how we feel, which is the direct result of thought, that drives *100% of our behaviors*.

The only difference between behavioral habits and mental habits is where the focus is. In behavioral habits, we tend to focus on the action itself. If you bite your fingernails, work to extremes, or compulsively clean your house, the outward behavior is what you call the problem. Despite the focus on behavior, thought *underlies* the problem behavior. The reason you do everything thing you do is because of how you relate to the thoughts that run through your head.

In mental habits, the focus tends to be more on your internal state than on overt behaviors. If you have habitual, insecure thoughts about your relationship, for example, the inner turmoil you
experience as those thoughts arise feels like the primary source of your pain. Of course you sometimes act on those thoughts and your actions no doubt create even more pain, but the source of the problem appears to be your inner (mental) rather than outer (behavioral) life. Again, in reality, your inner, thinking life is always the direct source of everything you feel and everything you do.

The way I’m referring to thought here may be quite different than how you’re accustomed to thinking about it. I’m not talking about the content of specific thoughts or about only conscious thought that you are aware of. I’m talking about thought much more broadly, as the creative force that allows us to experience and create life (Banks 1998; 2008). All human experience comes to us via the creative gift of thought; without conscious and unconscious thought we wouldn’t have human experience as we know it.

**Spiritual Insights that Can Change your Habit**

A spiritual understanding of life can lead to a fundamental, vertical leap in how you see the world.

The spiritual understanding I share in this book is derived from a field of spiritual psychology called The Three Principles. The Three Principles reveal how our entire experience of life is created—the interplay of three universal, always true principles describes the origin of all human experience.
The Principle of *Universal Mind* describes the creative energy that is the source of all life. Universal Mind is the power source of all living things—it is the universal, infinite intelligence that creates and powers our entire universe and everything within it. Universal Mind is running through all of us, always. The Principle of *Thought* is how we come to know or experience life. Everything we know comes to us via Thought. The principle of Thought is the vehicle that transforms the creative energy of Universal Mind into real life, manifest experience. And the Principle of *Consciousness* is what allows us to experience what Thought creates. Consciousness is like the projector in our minds—it brings thinking to life, delivering a vivid, sensory, often outside-in-appearing experience of what’s actually taking place internally, generated from within us.

Taken together, the three principles of universal mind, thought, and consciousness account for every experience we ever have in life. Powered by universal mind, thought creates experience and consciousness brings that experience to life for us. Every moment of our lives occurs within us by the interplay of these three principles. We are not those experiences—we are universal mind (spiritual energy) taken physical form. We have been blessed with the wonderful gifts of thought and consciousness that allow us an always-changing experience of life.

You are full of peace of mind, clarity, and connection by nature. By nature, you are confident, calm, and habit-free. You weren’t born with your habit and it is not an essential part of who you are. It may dominate your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, but your habit says nothing at all about your basic nature—that part of you which is always there and always true, underneath your surface thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
Because the core of you is thriving and habit-free and it can’t be any other way, you are never too far away from that truth. I know it may feel like you are light years away from health and clarity. It did for me. But that’s only how it looks when you are lost in thought. In truth, there is enormous momentum in favor of leading you back to your innately healthy nature. Your resilience, and your ability to reconnect with the truth of who you are, cannot be stressed enough.

Your habit, as well as any personal thoughts, judgments, and insecurities you might identify with in life, are *thought*. We live in a sea of personal thought, so much so that we rarely recognize it as such. We take what floats through our minds as truth, assuming it reflects reality outside of ourselves. Actually, the reverse is true. Spiritual traditions throughout the ages, as well as modern physics, point to the fact that what we experience of the world around us is a reflection of our own personal thinking, not the other way around.

Think of it like this: You are a wise, spiritual being with infinite clarity and peace of mind. You are part of the greater intelligence that is responsible for all of life.

And, you are having a human experience. As a human being, you have a brilliant mind full of personal thought. Personal thought is yours and yours alone. It is the expression of the very human side of you, full of ideas about yourself and about life, opinions, judgments, fears, concerns, and preferences. The human part of you experiences thought, emotion, behavior, and the whole gamut of human experience. But because we so often lose sight of our healthy, spiritual nature, it is easy to get lost in that human experience and believe that’s all there is.
We take our thinking very seriously, owning it as if it is ours and fearing it as if it can hurt us. In an attempt to feel more “like ourselves” and less uncomfortable, we try to fix, or manipulate our experience. Ironically, when we resist or try to change it, we often reinforce it. The energy of resistance showers it with attention and so it dominates our experience even more. In contrast, when we accept our experience as it is because we deeply see that it is not us, it comes and goes naturally and swiftly. We find ourselves with richer and more meaningful glimpses of the spiritual truth that is alive and well beneath our human experience.

It’s as if we are the sky—always blue, always clear, with the sun always shining. That is our never-wavering spiritual essence. And our human experience is weather. Weather (thought, emotion, behavior) rolls in and covers up the blue sky at times. The storms can be so violent that they are all we can see; the clouds can be so thick that we forget the sun is there. But the weather doesn’t disturb the sky. The sky contains the weather but is not affected by it, just like our spiritual nature contains our human experiences but is not affected by them. And the weather, like thought and emotion, is always temporary. Sometimes it comes and goes quickly. Other times it lingers. Sometimes the weather is pleasant and other times we curse it. But it is all surface-level and temporary.

What this means is this: there is a part of you that is totally and completely habit-free. When you are in the deeper emotions of peace, love, and gratitude you are connected with your true self and your habit is a non-issue. It is nonexistent.
When you are caught up in the human weather of your life—thinking about life rather than simply being in it—your habit crops up. It is associated with that part of you. Your habit is of the mind, not of the soul or spirit. It is not even of “you”…it is a creation of temporary, fleeting thought that comes and goes when left alone. Given that thought is self-correcting, your habit is also self-correcting, in a sense. There is a way in which you can let that experience float by like clouds in the sky without getting caught up in the storm.

You will read much more about this spiritual understanding in the pages that follow because a deeper sense of these truths will make it far easier to dismiss the thoughts that encourage your habit. It is easy to become almost completely focused on the weather—your habits and circumstances—and lose sight of what you know to be true of yourself and your resilience. I will remind you throughout this book as a way of reconnecting you with what you already deeply know to be true.

**Scientific Insights that Can Change your Habit**

Modern neuroscience has a great deal to contribute when it comes to seeing your habit in a more accurate and hopeful way. The brain science I will discuss in this book is the physical manifestation of the spiritual principles I will discuss. In other words, the spiritual understanding points toward the nonphysical, or the formless. In spiritual terms, thought is the vehicle that brings formless, spiritual energy into something we can directly experience. In scientific terms, a specific thought—or the action we often refer to as thinking—is the manifestation of spiritual energy that shows up in our physical body (in the brain).
In a neurological sense, you have your habit because of how you react to your own thoughts, or urges. When you act on an urge, you strengthen the wiring of your habit in your brain. You may have heard the expression “neurons that fire together, wire together”, which points to the fact that two things occurring together repeatedly—as is the case when an urge arises and you then obey that urge—lead to those events being even more strongly, neurologically linked (Shatz, via Doidge, 2007). That means that each time you give into an urge, you essentially strengthen the neural associations that represent the habit in your brain and tell your brain to keep producing urges. Giving into your urges can make your habit stronger and stickier over time.

I can hear you wondering, because I used to wonder the same thing: “How do I not give into my urges, especially the horribly uncomfortable, hijacking ones?” Most likely, you obey your urges because giving into them is the only way you know to make them go away. Given how terrible they can feel, it’s no wonder your priority is for them to go away so that you can feel better. Urges often come with enormous pressure--it feels as if the only way an urge will fade is if you obey it, thereby releasing the pressure. Even if you don’t consciously make the decision to act out your habit, giving in and acting on your urge can begin to happen somewhat mindlessly, almost like a reflex.

The really great news that you’ll see throughout this book is that you actually don’t have to give into your urges to make them go away. You don’t have to do anything to make those urges go away. They begin to go away on their own when you see the truth about them.
Brain research (Schwartz and Begley 2002) shows how the brain can change as a function of our own thinking, focus, and insightful understanding. Self-directed neuroplasticity describes the finding that the brain can *physically rewire itself* as a function of how we think about our own thinking. When patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), for example, began to practice mindfulness—when they were taught to view their compulsive thoughts and urges from a detached, observer standpoint that acknowledged that those thoughts *arise within* them, but *are not* them—their compulsive thoughts and urges carried far less weight and were much easier to dismiss. Dismissing their urges meant they acted on them far less, which dramatically weakened the presence of those urges in the brain. This type of insightful self-directed focus actually showed improvements in OCD symptoms that matched patients who were taking powerful psychotropic drugs.

Jeffrey Schwartz’s work with OCD patients is some of the pioneering work in this field, but the results have now been replicated in psychology labs around the world on a wide variety of habits. At this point in time, neuroplasticity is a well-documented finding, confirming that the brain can literally change as a result of how we come to view and relate to our own thinking.

When you see your urges and drives for what they are—fleeting messages that do not represent “you” or signify your real needs or desires—they are stripped of their perceived power and they become *much* easier to dismiss.
And when you dismiss those urges without acting on them repeatedly, the urges eventually go away. Without urges, and from a state of mind that allows you to rest in the truth about your essential nature, your habit is a thing of the past.

**The Intersection of Spirit and Science**

When you combine the *spiritual truth* that you are perfectly and completely mentally healthy and habit-free *but for* your temporary, habitual thinking—with the *scientific finding* that your habit is made up of thoughts that fade on their own—your habit begins to look far less powerful and stable than it has.

When you consider the *spiritual truth* that thought (like all human experience) is forever ebbing and flowing, always being replaced with new experience—with the *scientific finding* that the thoughts that support your habit (urges) fade on their own when viewed in a deeper way—it becomes apparent how the only power this habit of yours only has is in your innocent misunderstanding of it. Although it feels fixed, unwavering, and unavoidable, it is actually fluctuating and changeable.

Habits are both spiritual and brain-based. The spiritual part is deep. It provides the basic foundational understanding—it is the part we can’t see but we can sense; we have a feel for it; an intuitive understanding of it. It feels like common sense, something we may not be able to easily explain, but that we somehow *just know*. The science is the real world manifestation of the spiritual. It is the data we can see; the understanding we take from the physical, observable evidence.
I don’t want to give the impression that there is a dualism here. There is not. The spiritual truths are the truth of who we are and how the human experience operates at a most basic, fundamental level, *beyond and before the senses*. They point toward what we can’t physically see, hear, or touch. They are the felt truth that comes *before* the scientific facts we can sense directly. What we then observe in brain scans and in overt thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is the *physical manifestation of that spiritual realm*. It is after-the-fact, in that way.

The brain is a physical machine; the state of your physical brain is not fixed and it cannot ultimately prevent well-being, happiness, or being free of habits (which are all your default nature). In other words, the spiritual energy is who you are—the energy that created and powers your physical brain and body—ensures that you can rise above the dictates of your brain.

The spiritual understanding is the often missing piece of the puzzle that I hope this book will help you wake up to. Looking at what comes *before* the already-manifest allows us to see the malleable, in-flux nature of life. You are not a fixed entity with a fixed habit—you are fresh in each moment with infinite possibilities available to you. As you continue to examine the spiritual and brain science perspectives together in this way—not as a dualism but as the non-physical and physical sides of the same coin—you will begin to see your habit and your own innate well-being in a very different way.

**How my Habit Ended**
I know the power in this approach firsthand.
I struggled with binge eating and bulimia off and on for 8 years. Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is an eating disorder that involves binge eating large quantities of food in a way that feels very out of control. Bulimia is when those binges are followed by some behavior designed to compensate for the binge such as vomiting or using laxatives. I never vomited or used laxatives, but I did restrict my food intake and exercised in extreme amounts in the days following a binge as an attempt to mitigate the damage done by my habit. My compensatory behavior never fully cancelled out the sometimes thousands of calories I consumed in a binge though, and my weight, moods, and overall peace of mind fluctuated wildly during that time.

It may sound strange to hear an eating disorder described as a habit, and I acknowledge that it is a somewhat controversial stance. However, given the way habits are discussed in this book—as routine thoughts or behaviors that are impersonal issues that exist only because we innocently act on the urges our brain sends out—the binging and purging behaviors that characterize BED and bulimia fit well within our treatment of habits. This book points toward thought as the underlying source of all habits (and the underlying source of everything we experience in life, actually). It’s not so much what we think (as in the specific content of our thoughts), but that we think, that is important. The whole of our behaviors, emotions, and experiences in life are thought-created.

Viewing addictions and disorders as a thought-created habit is not only fair and accurate in my view, it is incredibly hopeful. Our thoughts can change in a moment and when they do, the behaviors that are based on them often change as well. When we are caught up in a habit, we are caught up in thought that appears real. Our fundamental nature hasn’t changed—it can’t. We are
fundamentally well, peaceful, mentally healthy individuals. But habitual surface thought can mask that wellness. When we mistake that surface thought for who we truly are, we suffer and our habits look far more stable and serious than they are.

As far as habits go, I felt completely out of control when it came to this one. I tried everything to end it. I am an unbelievably disciplined person, but discipline and willpower were never enough. In fact, the more I tried to get my binge eating habit under control myself by discipline or sheer force, the worse it became.

So, I tried not controlling it, but diverting attention away from it by distracting myself when an urge arose. I tried preventing urges by avoiding the things I thought preceded a binge. I tried everything from traditional therapy to self-help to energy-based healing modalities. None of the things that were supposed to work, worked.

I was “failing” at recovery and I took it very personally. There must be something I was missing, something I was overlooking, or something I was doing wrong. I felt like a supreme fraud working with my own clients as a life coach. Who was I to help others when my life was so out of control when it came to this habit?

During this time, I leaned on many of the spiritual principles that were already a part of my life. I viewed my mental dialogue as ‘passing thought’ rather than as ‘truth’, and I knew that a vast majority of what ran through my mind each day was habitual, biased, and extremely quick to change based on my own state of mind. I especially watched my emotions in that regard,
knowing that if I was feeling anything other than peace of mind, that meant I was caught up in some personal thinking that did not reflect the wiser reality of life. These spiritual practices made a notably positive difference when it came to my habit, but I had a hard time fully embracing them because in many ways, they clashed with what traditional psychology was telling me.

My therapists were wonderful people who were well-respected in their field, but their approach of looking into the past, looking at my emotions, and examining triggers and other coping mechanisms wasn’t helpful to me. They viewed my habit as a disorder or a mental illness which naturally led them to view me as sick or lacking, and led them to try to solve or fix my problem. My spiritual beliefs, on the other hand, assumed that I was innately mentally well and always would be, but that I had simply fallen into a habit of faulty thinking that appeared meaningful and real (Banks 1998; 2008). My heart told me that my spiritual beliefs were the truth, but it was hard to argue with distinguished and well-meaning doctors who had been working with this issue for decades. I was torn and so I dabbled in both sides, always feeling somewhat conflicted.

Each of my therapists questioned whether I was secretly unhappy in my relationships, in my career, or with myself in some other way. They assumed my unhappiness was what was driving me to act out in this way. Honestly, nothing could have been further from the truth. Sure, I was adjusting to the changes that came from setting up a life in a new city (I had recently finished graduate school and moved to Chicago), but so were many of my peers and they didn’t find themselves locked in a horrible binge-starve cycle. And sure, I was adjusting to life with my boyfriend, turned fiancé, turned husband, but our relationship was great. He was a source of
strength far more than a source of stress. It simply didn’t make sense that my life circumstances were to blame.

My therapists suggested I track the external factors that seemed to immediately precede, or “trigger”, a binge. Although there were some noticeable patterns to my binge behavior, there were also countless exceptions to every pattern. Yes, I tended to binge more on weekends than on weekdays, but I had binged on every day of the week at some point. I tended to binge more in the evening, but I could certainly recall morning binges as well. I tended to binge eat more around social events, but sometimes it was before the event, sometimes after the event, sometimes during the event, and sometimes not at all. Chasing triggers felt like a game of whack-a-mole—as soon as I identified one trigger, an example of the opposite would pop up. I now understand that external events do not trigger or cause binges—internal events (i.e., thoughts) are the sole cause of acting out a habit.

My therapists also suggested I make a list of activities I could do instead of binge eating, as if I decided to partake in this dreadful, obsessive habit because I was bored or didn’t have other plans. I was told that I’d most likely have food issues my entire life; that they would probably peak when I was under stress and that it would be something I’d always have to monitor. I can tell you that nothing could be further from the truth today.

Traditional therapy has helped many people and in no way do I mean to criticize it across the board. I only share the details of my therapy because you may have also tried many of the things I was encouraged to try in hopes of ending your own habit. Tracking triggers, delving into the
past, looking toward outside circumstances…these are the things many professionals believe are the solution to our problem and in fact, some of these things are helpful at times. But the real solution is much simpler and much closer to home. The solution is not complex or hidden, and it is certainly not found in the past or outside of you. The solution to your problem is incredibly simple and it lies within you, right now. As it turns out, I was much more on track with my spiritual practices than I could have known at the time. Therapy was helpful in many ways, but it did not help me end my habit because it did not provide the insight I needed.

Then, one day, I found myself one step closer to that insight.

I came across a book by Kathryn Hansen called *Brain over Binge: Why I was Bulimic, Why Conventional therapy Didn’t Work, and How I Recovered For Good*. *Brain over Binge* is Kathryn’s story of her own recovery from her binge eating habit. She quit almost instantly—and permanently—after struggling with the habit for six years and trying everything imaginable to quit. The similarities between Kathryn’s story and what I had been going through were astounding.

Kathryn was able to leave her habit behind so swiftly and dramatically because she came upon some information that gave her an insightful understanding of her habit. When she saw her habit in a new way, continuing it was simply no longer a viable option.

The new information she stumbled upon came from a form of addiction recovery called Rational Recovery™ (Trimpey 1996). Rational Recovery differs from Alcoholics Anonymous in many
ways, but primarily because it does not view addictions as diseases. Rather, it considers a basic understanding of neuroscience and how habits and addictions are formed and sustained in our brain.

The approach *Brain over Binge* applies to binge eating, and which can be applied to a huge range of habits, starts with the understanding that habits come from an evolutionarily old part of the brain called the lower brain. The lower brain is responsible for the mostly automatic functions that keep us alive—our drives for food, water, sex, and anything else that ensures our survival. The lower brain is not rational, thoughtful, or intelligent. It is essentially a machine that regulates routine, which makes a lot of sense in light of habits. The lower brain is the machine-like part of your brain that quickly grabs onto thought or behavioral patterns and fights to preserve them. The fact that the lower brain is focused both on survival and on developing and maintaining routine means that routine and survival are often intertwined and confused. The lower brain mistakenly treats habits as if they are survival-related, which helps explain why many habits and addictions feel like matters of life or death, as if our survival is based on getting our “fix”. Even when it is clear that your habit has nothing to do with survival, following through on the urge can feel absolutely essential.

When we don’t realize how innocent and often meaningless the lower brain’s messages are, we innocently and understandably hear those messages as truth. The inner dialogue that tries to convince you to act on your urges reflects that misunderstanding.
All behavior begins with a thought. Our inner dialogue sounds like “Who are you kidding? You’ll never change”, or “Just one more time; you can quit tomorrow”. These messages are nothing more than, habitual, temporary thought consistent with the machine-like and unintelligent lower brain. The lower brain broadcasts these messages in a routine, unthinking way simply because your brain is conditioned to keep your habit alive—it is no more personal or meaningful than that.

In contrast with the lower brain, the higher brain is the conscious decision-making part of your brain, it is the part of your brain that makes the decision to listen to thoughts that tell you to act on your urges. The lower brain alone cannot control action, which means that the wiser part of you is actually in charge. It certainly doesn’t feel that way. But when you see the truth about this, everything changes.

The simple neuroscience that I initially read about in *Brain Over Binge* perfectly converged with the spiritual principles I had already been studying and applying to my own habit. The facts that “you” are not your thinking, that thinking is habitual and subjective and not necessarily reflective of the world around us, and that thoughts are always changing on their own with no effort required by us, are the essential spiritual truths—now backed by modern brain science—that spelled the end of my habit.

I can’t tell you exactly how I knew that my habit was over for good. All I can say is that I had a profound insight—or a series of them, more likely—that led me to clearly see that my habit had absolutely no power over me. I saw that any power my binge eating habit appeared to have (and
it appeared to have *a lot* of power for most of those 8 years) was power I was giving it by the way I was thinking about it. I had been viewing my urges as a force that was larger than me, that had the ability to hijack me completely. When I saw that my urges were actually a temporary experience made of nothing but conditioned thought—and that I couldn’t possibly act on that thought unless I chose to on some level—everything changed. My habit was soon over.

(Although my habit was over quite quickly and effortlessly, I don’t want it to sound as if I never had another persuasive thought about binge eating. I did. But as you’ll see through the stories shared in this book, those later thoughts were night and day different from the strong, hijacking type of thoughts that appeared to run my life in the heyday of my habit. They had a very different quality and were relatively easy to dismiss. They were not thoughts that felt like *urges* because they lacked the emotion, physical symptoms and urgency that characterized strong urges. My later thoughts about binge eating were less compelling and did not drive me into action.)

Since my own fast and easy recovery, I’ve devoted half of my coaching practice to helping people end habits. Because I stopped binge eating by insightfully seeing some truths that go far beyond intellectual understanding, I can’t promise to verbally explain *exactly* what helped me. If a set of behavioral practices or techniques was responsible for my radical change, it would be easier to share exactly what was helpful. But the truth is, I insightfully saw something that goes beyond intellectual understanding and explanation, and it changed everything.

So the ideas you’ll read about in the 19 secrets that follow are my best attempt to point you toward what I believe I saw, and what I see now, about how human beings operate. Stumbling
upon brain science related to habits in my reading of *Brain over Binge*, combined with my deep belief in the Three Principles that underlie all human experience, led to what felt like a serendipitous, magical merging of science and spirit that makes me unbelievably excited to share it with my clients, and now, with you.

**About the 19 Secrets**
The 19 Secrets you’ll read about in the pages that follow are new perspectives on the nature of your habit. Each can make a huge difference on its own, but studying all 19 together will have the greatest impact. For that reason, I recommend you first read the secrets in the order they are presented. Later, when you’re looking for additional insights or a refresher, feel free to flip through the book and read any secret you feel drawn to.

This book is divided into three main sections: Understanding your Habit, Ending your Habit, and Lifelong Change. The Understanding your Habit section is twice as long as the Ending your Habit section, with good reason. As I’ve touched upon already, ending your habit for good is far more about *understanding*—having a profound insight or new view of the nature of your habit—than it is about action. With insight, action naturally and effortlessly occurs. All of the secrets in this book, but especially those in the Understanding your Habit section, are designed to produce an insightful understanding of your habit.

An insightful understanding is very different from an intellectual understanding. When we have an intellectual understanding of something, we *conceptually* see how it works. It makes logical
sense and we can explain it to others. But an intellectual understanding does not necessarily translate into behavioral change.

With an insightful understanding, you hear something that deeply touches you in a way that effortlessly produces change. It is possible to have insight with or without intellectual understanding. When something you hear reaches you on a deep level and you don’t decide to act differently as much as you simply notice yourself feeling and acting differently, that’s insight.

The Secrets in this book work by insight. If you’re tempted to skip ahead to the Ending your Habit chapters, please don’t. The substance is actually in the deeper understanding and insight that begins to build from the earlier Secrets.

This book goes beyond ending habits. At first, it may appear to be all about what you do or what you think (your behavioral or thought habit), and that is fine. It may be preferable, actually. After all, you’re here to end your habit, so first things first. But what I hope you begin to see is that the truths you’ll learn about your habit—that it is based on nothing more than a single thought; that all thought is fleeting, temporary, and not inherently meaningful; and that your habit is represented in your brain but it is not reflective of “you”—are actually true of all of life. By the time you finish this book you will not only be far closer to habit-free, but I hope you will have a greater sense of freedom and a deeper sense of purpose across the board.

**You Really Want to Quit, Right?**
To get the most out of the principles discussed in this book, it’s important that you truly want to end your habit.

Some people aren’t quite ready for change. The extreme workaholic who, although her habit is threatening her health, is ambivalent about giving it up; or the woman whose weekly shopping habit is something her husband wants her to give up but not something she views as a problem, probably won’t necessarily find the 19 Secrets as life-changing as someone who is clearly ready for change.

But if you do genuinely desire lasting, relatively easy, lifelong change, you are in the right place. It’s okay if you are scared or ambivalent about the process. It’s even okay if you are skeptical or you doubt your ability to change. As long as you truly want change and you take in the Secrets with an open mind, you’re in an excellent position for these ideas to help you put an end to your habit forever.

With that…let’s dive in.