

# CHAPTER 1

## Mememes and Manipulation: The Battle for Control of Your Mind



### The Forces Aligned to Keep You Dumb, Sick, and Broke



It was that thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning. I had just returned from an evening at a club. As I parked on the street and got out of my car, a tall stranger bounded up to me. I figured he probably wanted to bum a cigarette or ask directions.

I didn't notice the gun until it was too late.

Turns out the guy was a crackhead desperate for his next fix. This was the eighties, the "wild west" days of Miami and the advent of the crack epidemic, when we were overrun by petty criminals from the Mariel boatlift and the infamous Cocaine Cowboys. South Beach, where I lived, sat at the epicenter of drug activity.

And I was about to become the next statistic....

The guy held the gun to my temple, and his eyes glassed over as though looking right through me. A white Pontiac Fiero pulled up behind us, apparently waiting for my assailant.

Although I practiced martial arts, this situation didn't call for physical

defense. The gun remained pointed at my brain, and I knew that if you get shot there, you're done. Even if you're not dead, you're dead. I had no idea whether the accomplice in the car had another gun. (I found out later he did.) And, of course, he could just run me over if he wanted to.

So I elected to try and calm down my attacker, give him my money, and steer the incident to a peaceful resolution. Which works a lot better if you have more than \$7 in your pocket! Since a rock of crack cocaine cost five bucks in those days, I kept telling him to take the money, get himself a rock, and we'd just forget about the whole thing. But he wasn't buying that, insisting I had more money and I'd better hand it over.

I kept trying to rationally explain that the seven bucks was all the money I had on me, and he should just take it and get to the crack house. I pointed out why he didn't want the situation to escalate, with probable repercussions being arrest, felony charges, and prison. Of course, crackheads are not known for their rational thinking . . .

Finally, he told me to get back in my car. I don't know how or why, but I knew that if I did get in the car, I wouldn't come out alive. So I refused.

"You have my money, and here are the car keys. You can have the car, but I'm not getting in it. Just take the money, get a rock, I'll walk away, and we'll forget this ever happened."

We were standing under the periphery of a streetlight's glow. I kept slowly edging back toward the bright light in the event someone might drive by or look out from an apartment window. I could see him getting jumpier by the second. The driver of the Fiero revved his engine.

Suddenly he moved the gun away from my head and pressed it against my abdomen. Then he said something very ominous. I remember wondering whether what he said was directed at me, at the world in general, or to himself. It was one of those mysterious statements that could mean many things. I remember discussing it with people soon afterwards, debating who he was talking to and what he meant.

The fascinating thing is, when I try and recall those words now, I can't. I believe my mind has shut out that entire experience, to protect me from reliving too vividly what happened next....

He pulled the trigger.

It wasn't like TV. The noise was deafening, especially at that time, reverberating off my apartment building and echoing out across the neighborhood. I clutched my stomach as I fell backwards onto the street. Then time slowed down to Matrix speed . . .

I calmly watched the shooter get into the car, which drove off towards Miami. I remember thinking for a second that I'd been had, that the gun must have been a starter pistol or shooting blanks, because I didn't feel anything. But when I looked down to where I was holding my abdomen, I saw blood streaming through my fingers.

Then I felt the pain. A lot.

As a writer and professional speaker, I pride myself on my ability to communicate ideas, concepts, and stories. But I simply don't have the words to adequately describe to you what a bullet tearing through vital organs feels like. We're talking white-hot, searing, thermonuclear hurt.

Because the shot was so loud, I expected lights would flash on, people would lean out windows, open doors, and then someone would come out and take care of me.

None of the above. Complete stillness.

I sat in the street, my legs splayed out under the streetlight. I remained there for who knows how long, suffering from shock, locked in a surreal, detached state, as I watched the pool of blood surrounding me grow larger. Suddenly I realized that if I didn't get up, go to my apartment, and call for help, I would die in the street.

I ripped off my shirt and tied it around me to stop the bleeding as best I could. I struggled up, crossed the street, climbed a flight of stairs, and entered my apartment. I managed to dial 911, then collapsed into a chair. I felt my life slowly ebbing away from me, as more and more of my blood flowed down onto the carpet.

By the time the paramedics arrived, I was so weak they picked up the chair with me in it and carried me down to the ambulance. When they lifted me onto the gurney, I writhed in pain as blood gushed from my gut. On the way

to the hospital my blood pressure dropped so low they had to put me in a pressurized space suit to keep my heart pumping.

Once we arrived, emergency nurses greeted me with four IVs and a catheter. The doctors rushed me into surgery and sewed up my large intestine. My life had been saved, but I had yet to go through the worst agony I would ever experience . . .

For the next few days I could neither eat nor drink. They gave me a cotton swab to moisten my lips. A tube running through my nose, down my throat and into my stomach kept gagging me. Even through the fog of drugs, the pain was excruciating. When I choked on my own mucus and vomit, I ripped the tube out, only to have them reinstall it and threaten to strap my arms to the bedrails if I tried to remove it again.

The operations and recovery that followed made the next several months the most excruciatingly painful period of my life. The sutures ripped out of my stomach and infection set in. I couldn't find any comfortable way to sit, stand, or lie down. Two years passed before I felt normal again. What I endured I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

Yet imagine my shock when I realized later that I had subconsciously wished it all on myself.

Now, if you had told me this at the time, I no doubt would have slapped you into next week. But as you'll soon discover, I had indeed subconsciously attracted the whole painful experience. I was unknowingly following a pattern of victimhood that had been programmed into my subconscious mind since childhood. I was a helpless pawn, blindly manipulated by forces greater than I—just as you, too, probably have unknowingly manifested challenges for yourself, subconsciously attracted adversity, and even sabotaged your own success.

Now why would I do this? And why would you?

Later I'll explain the bizarre and robotic series of actions that caused me to bring such misfortune, suffering, and pain on myself. But first, let's explore whether you are being manipulated by these same forces—and might be sabotaging your own success and settling for less than you deserve in life.

And by *forces* I don't mean the usual suspects: the devil, terrorists, or communist insurgents. I'm not suggesting a *Da Vinci Code* conspiracy, nor am I reserving a seat on the next comet out. I'm talking about common, ever-present, and well-regarded people and institutions all around you right now, such as your family, your social circle, the place you worship, your government, and the media.

Because herein lies the real danger. If you are like most people, you think these institutions are part of your support network and working for your highest good. What you probably don't realize is that instead, *they are actually keeping you dumb, sick, and broke.*

It's not that your family doesn't love you or your friends don't like you. They probably do. And I doubt that your rabbi, minister, or priest consciously wants to cause you great harm. Your congressperson doesn't really have a vendetta against you, and the columnist in your daily newspaper isn't on a mission to harm you. At least not consciously.

But that won't stop all of these people, and thousands more, from causing you to subconsciously wreck your marriage, get passed over for promotions, manifest an illness or injury, sabotage your business, ingest substances that destroy your body, or do any one of a million other behaviors and actions that can prevent you from reaching the health, happiness, and prosperity that are your birthright.

I understand this may all sound crazy to you. Allow me to suggest the possibility that you have been so totally brainwashed with feelings of unworthiness, prejudice about wealth, and false beliefs about success, that you have unknowingly become your own worst enemy.

To find the cause, we have to go back to the formative years of your childhood—to look at the subconscious programming you were exposed to and the core beliefs that programming created. We must explore the world of *memes*, which are actually viruses of the mind.

Memes are like computer viruses in that they parasitize the host and cause it to replicate the memes. A hit song that you can't get out of your head is a meme, as is a catchy expression like "Just Do It!" Those are innocent enough memes. But there are many more memes that aren't so innocent.

Some of the memes you'll be exposed during the course of a week are likely to include "Buy furniture with no money down and no payments for two years," "If you drink our beer, you will be sexy and popular," and "When you buy our SUV, you'll be able to traverse fjords, climb mountains, and splash through rivers on your way to the dry cleaners."

Those endless chain e-mails that state, "Send this to everyone you know, and the people who care about you will send it back," "Help find this lost girl," and "Watch this amazing slide show of *Conversations with God*" are perfect examples of memes in action. When people receive these e-mails, they experience an emotional reaction and instantly feel compelled to forward them to everyone they know. (The term *meme* and the science of memetics were pioneered by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. And you'll learn much more about them in the book *Virus of the Mind* by Richard Brodie.)

The more emotion involved, the more likely a meme is to replicate. Of particular strength are memes involving children. (You'll see that demonstrated later in this chapter.) Case in point is all those new mothers who feel compelled to place "Baby on Board" decals in their car windows. What practical purpose could these signs actually achieve? Do they really think drivers in other cars are more cautious or slow down because they see one of these signs in the minivan window? But imagine the argument you would get from the mother of a newborn if you questioned this practice.

There is a whole group of memes that are interrelated (known as a *memplex*) in the area of money and success. But these memes are about keeping you from achieving money and success, instead of helping you get it. They are very prevalent today, and a vast majority of the population is infected with them. These memes are readily accepted and replicated because they allow people to validate their lack of progress in their life goals. They include:

- Money is bad.
- Rich people are evil.
- It is spiritual or noble to be poor.
- If you struggle and grind it out, you'll be accepted by the rest of the nice people doing the same.

- Underdogs and the little guys are good; big entities are bad.
- You have to sell your soul to get rich.
- Rich people lie, cheat, and steal.
- CEOs, movie stars, and pro athletes are overpaid.
- Rich people have lots of money, but they also have many additional problems. Being rich isn't worth it.
- Money causes good people to go bad.
- If you deny yourself now, God will provide true prosperity in the afterlife.

It may be hard to believe that something a teacher or parent said when you were six years old is preventing you from getting a promotion today, but it could very well be so. You may doubt that a TV show you watched when you were 15 could be causing your marriage to suffer 20 years later, but that might be the case. You may find it far-fetched to think the books you read or the movies you enjoy could be causing you to stay sick or manifest disease.

But in fact, this is exactly what is happening to millions of people. And most likely you are one of them. As you are exposed to these people, institutions, and environments, you are likely to be infected by thousands of potential memes. Just as exposure to raw sewage can cause you to be infected with germs, microbes, and other nasty things, prolonged exposure to the *data-sphere* (meaning TV, radio, movies, books, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and e-mail) will infect you with many nasty viruses of your mind.

Memes are as real—and deadly—as biological viruses. Just like computer viruses, memes parasitize the host (your mind), replicate, and spread to others. And just like other viruses, an epidemic of memes is sweeping through our society today.

Society spends billions to protect us from biological and computer viruses. Yet most people have never even heard of a mind virus. And they may be the most dangerous of all, because you don't realize you've been exposed to and then infected with them.

Obviously one of the big culprits is the data-sphere. All of these information and entertainment sources come with a slant—a bias, an opinion, or a point of view.