

Book Review on *Who Switched Off My Brain? Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions*

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Outline

1) Introduction

- a) **Full title, author's name, and publication date.**
- b) **Information about the author of the book. The other works of the author that support the idea of the current book. The experience of the author and possible information about the author.**
- c) **The subject of the book. The thesis which the author makes for his work.**
- d) **The aim of the author writing this book. Why did the author write this book?**

2) The summary of the book.

- a) What were the main parts of the book?
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- a) Reviews of the author's work in academic journals.
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- a) What is the contribution of the book to the subject?
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Book Review on *Who Switched Off My Brain? Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions*

Introduction

Doctor Caroline Leaf finished working and published the new edition of her work, *Who Switched Off My Brain? Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions* in 2009. The first edition, according to Dr. Leaf, was published in South Africa. The second edition was published in the United States of America with the support of the Improv, Ltd publishing company.

According to the professional website of Dr. Caroline Leaf, she is a communicational pathologist and cognitive neuroscientist. She has a Master's degree and a Ph.D. in these fields and a BSc Logopaedics with a specialization in cognitive and metacognitive neuropsychology. The main research topics of Dr. Leaf are nature and mental health, mind and brain connections, and memory. She has many years of clinical practice, and she used this experience to develop her theories on the mind detox. Other ideas of Dr. Leaf are the improvement of health and life quality through the mind detox. These ideas were reflected in her successful books; some of them are *Think Learn Succeed*, *Eat Yourself Smart*, and *Switch on Your Brain* ("About Dr. Leaf," n.d.).

The current book, *Who Switched Off My Brain?* is the scientific explanation of the relationship between human emotions and bodies, and the possible consequences of toxic thinking. Throughout the book, Dr. Caroline Leaf combines the results of her research and analysis of the other researchers' work with Scripture. The author claims at the beginning of the work that "...thoughts affect our emotions and bodies...", but "your mind can be renewed, ... toxic emotions can be swept away and that your brain really can be "switched on." (2009, p.11). She summarizes the thesis with the idea that thoughts influence life more than a person may suspect, and that "a thought may seem harmless, but if it becomes toxic, even just a thought can

become physically, emotionally or spiritually dangerous.” (Leaf, 2009, p.11)

The author states that she wrote the book to help readers cope with toxic thinking and sweep away toxic thoughts and emotions. In the introductory part, the author explains that she received a significant quantity of feedback from the readers, searching for breaking unhealthy thinking patterns that resulted from their past experiences (Leaf, 2009, p. 8). The author attempts to help her audience understand the scientific theory behind the detoxification of the brain and thinking. Using the simple language and underpinning the explanation with Scripture quotations, Dr. Leaf explains twelve areas of life and the importance of their detoxification. The book aims not to substitute professional medical help but rather give practical advice to those who want to better understand the scientific background of the topic. The practical part is also an attempt to design the tool for self-reflection and a more in-depth understanding of the person's current situation with the toxic thinking.

Summary of the book

The book *Who Switched Off My Brain?* consists of four parts. Before starting the explanation of the effect of toxic thinking, the author included an explanation of her aims and dedications to write this book. After four main parts of the book, Dr. Leaf included recommended reading and the list of the research works which she used to investigate for her current book. Each of the four main parts had a theoretical background of the mind detoxification. A part contains its introductory part, theoretical background, and academic research on a topic, explained simply. Some parts contain chapters that require self-study work from a reader to better explain his or her situation, using the topic information.

The first part is called *Switch On Your Brain!*, is the simple explanation of the poisoning of the brain by toxic emotions and reactions to the experience. Life is affected by various sub-

kids of toxic thinking, introduced by Dr. Leaf as "The Dirty Dozen." They are "Toxic Thoughts, Toxic Emotions, Toxic Words, Toxic Choices, Toxic Dreams, Toxic Seeds, Toxic Faith, Toxic Love, Toxic Tough, Toxic Seriousness, Toxic Health, and Toxic Schedules." (Leaf, 2009, p. 13). Each of these aspects provokes toxic thoughts and poisons a human's brain. The further parts give detailed further review and practical guidance for a reader.

The Part One attempts to explain the appearance of the stress in a body and the further reaction of the body and brain on stress. Dr. Leaf explains that stress that resulted from toxic thinking may provoke the majority of the mental, digestive, and immune and heart health problems (Leaf, 2009, p. 13). In this part, the author tells the common phrase used by doctors, "Everything is in your head," in reality means more than that. As a result of more than twenty years of studies, Dr. Leaf developed scientific and spiritual guidance to liberate the mind from the harmful reaction on past and present experiences and start a healthy life. In this part, she gives a detailed explanation of the nature of thoughts and on what is toxic thinking. The academic explanation of the function of the main hormones is concluded with the spiritual philosophies' situation on how it is possible to gain control over the complicated system of neurons and what positive results this could bring.

Part Two is called *Stress*, and the title of the part is quite self-explanatory. Dr. Leaf explains how stress chemicals affect the body and which emotions mainly result in stress. The primary emotions that cause stress are the rage, fear, anger, anxiety, and bitterness; short-term and long-term effects of those emotions on the body result in various levels of stress. Nevertheless, the important thing is to remember that these effects start to appear right from childhood (Leaf, 2009, p. 24). Dr. Leaf explains the possible effects of stress on the body and why it is unhealthy to have stress. Some of the possible outcomes, according to the author, are

depression, phobias, insomnia, anxiety, fatigue, and headaches. Long-lasting stress can also contribute to the development of some severe health problems; some of them are hypertension, angina, or coronary artery disease (Leaf, 2009, p. 31-33). Leaf also gives a detailed explanation of the particular effects of stress on the digestive and immune system, using scientific data and simple words.

Part Three is implementing the research on the nature of the thought. A reader is to study the theory, available from the author's academic research and the other researchers. The next step is that a reader implements the received knowledge and tries to analyse his current state of mind and develops his program of detoxification of his mind. This is done by following the guidelines of Dr. Leaf, using observation and knowledge gathering. She labels the stages of this knowledge search as "gather, reflect, journal, revisit and reach" (2009, p. 38). Together with the more profound explanation of the nature of the thought, this part explains to the reader the importance of the observation steps and what each of them aims at. Dr. Leaf explains that our genes have way less effect on our health and state of mind than expected. The recurring self-work on detoxified thinking can help stay healthy and with better health due to the uniqueness from the humans' system of the brains and hormones work, which Dr. Leaf calls the biggest blessing from God (2009, p. 37).

The final, fourth part is the description of the brain change program aimed at detoxifying the brain and body and improving the life and health quality of readers. The robust feature of this part and the whole book is that the author sets the description on how the next 21 days of the program will pass and what a reader can expect. Dr. Leaf uses the Apostle Paul's words to calm the reader's mind down and prepare for the program, saying that it is essential to let the past go and think about building a better future.

The part is divided into chapters and subchapters. Each chapter concentrates on the description of "the Dirty Dozen" after each is a practical part called "Brain Sweep." They consist of the guidelines for the reader on how to reflect on the presence of each element of the "Dozen" and how to build the program of mind detox. A reader first is supposed to *Gather* the initial information, answering the general questions. In the next chapter, *Reflect* consists of several specific questions that narrow and clarify the possible issues that generate the appearance of the "Dozen" element. Sub-chapters *Journal* requires the reader a continuous daily reflection on the task the author puts, different for each kind of "the Dirty Dozen." The *Revisit* sub-chapter gives guidance on how to reflect on the issue from the spiritual point of view and how God can help improve the situation. *Reach* gives practical guidance on how to use received scientific knowledge, God's Word, and self-observation to improve life and clean the brain from toxic thoughts.

The conclusion that makes the author is that the book *Who Switched Off My Brain* is the beginning of the way to life free of toxic thinking. This book's conclusion is different from the typical conclusion of an academic text, and reminds more of the final words to encourage the will of the readers:

"This book was created alongside the scientific arena to stun you, excite you and motivate you to recognize the truth: God has given you the gift of free will. This empowers you to take control of the very thing that creates everything about who you are – your thought life" (Leaf, 2009, p. 157).

Since the points which support the hypothesis and subject of this book were not re-stated in conclusion made by the author, they were clearly and widely described within the main body of the work. Dr. Leaf supported her thesis, using the points of the harmfulness of the stress,

explaining the results of the stress and, in particular, saying how stress elements appear and what may be their consequences. For example, it was thought-provoking that lack of touch of the loved ones could result in stress and severe health conditions of babies.

Discussion and Analysis

Though the book of Dr. Caroline Leaf is not structured as the classical academic work, it still can serve as significant research since the thesis is developed, explained, and proven in detail throughout the chapters. Sandra Dixon and Gabrielle Wilcox used the Leaf's work in the research on the counseling implications of Neurotheology, to support the idea on the relationship between the positive thinking and religious lifestyle, and how the religious counselors can use the experience of Dr. Leaf to change harmful thought patterns to the healthy and positive lifestyle and behavior (Dixon & Wilcox, 2016, p. 97-98). In some way, this book has very similar theoretical basics and techniques with the book by Rite A. Schulte, which is also a handbook that combines scientific research and God's Word. The religious basis is used more profoundly, but both books can be used together to reinforce each other (Schulte, 2018). Also, the idea of the changing life through changing the brain was developed by Daniel G. Amen, whose work was also used and recommended as further reading by Dr. Caroline Leaf in her book. This book overviews the possible effective ways to minimize the level of negative emotions and gives more practical recommendations, stating that strong psychological health is the best way to improve a person's life (Amen, 2008). Both ideas and style of their application were used for the work on negative emotions control, to explain the importance of mental peace and resilience (Hendricks II, 2019, p. 16).

The reviews of the work online or in the media are not numerous, particularly for this book, but they are positive. Dr. Leaf included some feedback to the book itself, and they are both opinions

of scholars and people who read this book that are not academia. Personally, I do agree with all of them, and my opinion is that this book is a must-have for most people who struggle with the stressful life of contemporary society and for those who want a deeper understanding of the human emotional intellect. This book is one of the tools of establishing positive interpersonal connections, full of love and empathy.

The reader still should be aware of the work which he or she is supposed to do while reading to experience the positive outcome of the reading. Only reading through the practical task will serve as the entertaining activity, and might not bring any possible changes or the expected results. Also, this book uses a lot of God's Word, so a reader may need additional research on spiritual topics to be able to fully do the practical tasks and implement further conclusions to life.

To sum up, this book is a significant work that can serve for basic self-understanding and self-help. This is the simple explanation of how a human neurological system works, how it affects psychological and physiological health, and what are the possible ways to avoid the harmful effect of toxic thinking. This book is an important contribution to this topic since every reader without a degree in medicine or neurology can understand the topic and understand the basic steps which are to take to improve the life quality and get free of the toxic impact of the stress.

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