

# Deepak Chopra's 'Physics'

## It Starts with a Swindle

Deepak Chopra attempts to connect fundamental concepts of physics to consciousness and spirituality. He started (ab)using physics with his book *Quantum Healing*. But does he pass the first test of a true scientist: professional integrity?

SADRI HASSANI

Crackpot scientists are very fond of abusing and trivializing science—especially physics—and particularly fundamental physics. It is therefore critical to fight crackpot science where it hurts the most: at the fundamental level. While there is much critique of the promoters of pseudoscience and their ideas are debunked at the *factual* level, few profound analyses of the fallacy of the way they misuse fundamental science are available. My purpose in this article is to help fill this gap.

One of the early trivializers of fundamental physics is Deepak Chopra, whose indiscriminate use of words such as *quantum*, *energy*, *field*, and *non-locality* renders them as frivolous as a burp after a course of tandoori chicken. Accordingly, it is worthwhile to examine his “physics” and unravel the egregious conceptual blunders he incessantly concocts, especially when these blunders serve as the foundation for the conclusions that he touts as scientific facts to his readers and followers.

### The Book

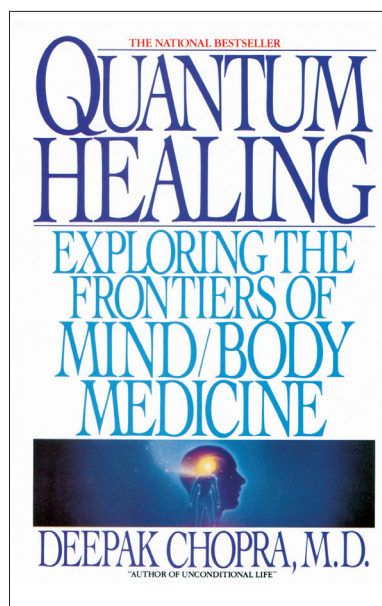
Chopra came to prominence by publishing *Quantum Healing*, a trend-setting book on mind/body medicine in which he beguiles his readers into believing that Ayurveda, the traditional Indian medicine, has a scientific basis. His mission ever since has been to tout the message that the universe is conscious, that conscious-

ness creates and governs matter, *and that modern physics is at the heart of this message*. The pernicious tactic that he uses for this purpose is to decorate his speeches and writings with the names of famous physicists such as Einstein,

Planck, Schrödinger, and Heisenberg and to attribute his own ideas about mind and matter to them.<sup>1</sup>

Since *Quantum Healing* initiated the fashionable trivialization of one of the greatest scientific and intellectual achievements of mankind, it is instructive to present for the layperson a rigorous scientific evaluation of that book's content. But first we have to evaluate the professional integrity of the author. After all, the primary premise of science is honesty. Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann were credible scientists before their hasty announcement of the discovery of cold fusion in March 1989, after which they fell out of grace in the scientific community (Huizenga 1992). Does *Quantum Healing* stand the test of scientific honesty?

The book's title heralds a revolutionary idea that demands a level of intellectual integrity from the author equal to that of other revolutionary scientists. This integrity is, in part, exhibited by the way scientists usually acknowledge individuals who had a role in shaping the ideas expressed in the work. Einstein, in his article on the groundbreaking special theory of relativity, acknowledges Michele Besso, an obscure friend of Einstein's who worked at the Bern's patent office at the same time that Einstein did (Einstein 1952). In a separate account of how special relativity was born, Einstein elaborates on the conversations he had with Besso and how those con-





versations helped consolidate his idea of the relativity of time (Hassani 2010, 362). Similarly, Planck's two seminal papers that originated quantum theory contain numerous mentions of the physicists who helped him shape the quantum idea. His gratitude is especially manifest in his Nobel Lecture in which he attributes his discovery of the electromagnetic quanta to Ludwig Boltzmann, the creator of statistical mechanics, by declaring ". . . this problem led me automatically to a consideration of . . . Boltzmann's trend of ideas; until after some weeks of the most strenuous work of my life, light came into the darkness, and a new undreamed-of perspective opened up before me" (Planck 1918).

Such acknowledgements of the discoverers of scientific ideas are not only a sign of honesty but also a reminder that science is a collective enterprise encompassing not just the invention

of a single person but the collaboration of a community that stretches across the globe and extends into the past and future. In order to contribute to science, one first has to learn the relevant contributions made to it by other scientists; one can see further only "by standing upon the shoulders of giants," and any "new kind of science" that undermines—or even disagrees with—the well-established and empirically tested ideas without presenting good evidence to the contrary can only be the invention of a crackpot.

Chopra ought to be held to as strict an integrity standard as the scientists he is so fond of mentioning in his speeches and writings. This is so not only because he is writing about (his distorted version of) science, but also because he commands millions of followers who *literally* regard him as a prophet. His words, fogged by a plume of terminology stolen from science—a discipline revered and trusted, albeit misunderstood, by the public—are powerful maxims and mottos for his disciples.

#### **The Swindle:**

##### **The Disappearance of Maharishi**

An intellectually honest author of a nonfiction work writes a second edition only when there are substantial changes in the content of the work, usually several years after the original edition. These changes, and the reason and purpose behind them, are clearly stated in the preface of the new edition, while the preface of the earlier edition is also kept in the book for comparison. The hardcover edition of *Quantum Healing* came out in 1989 and its paperback edition in 1990. In the Introduction, Chopra narrates his meetings with "one of the greatest living sages," who imparted to him some ancient techniques that "would restore the mind's healing abilities" (Chopra 1989, 2–4; also available online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/IntroToFirstEd.pdf>). In one of the meetings, the sage tells Chopra:

I have been waiting a long time to bring out some special techniques. I believe they will become the medicine of the future. They were known in the distant past but were lost in the confusion of time; now I want you to learn them, and at the same time I want you to explain, clearly and scientifically, how they work.<sup>2</sup>

From his words, one gets the unmistakable impression that, were it not for his contacts with this great sage, Chopra would not have come across the "discovery" described in his book. In fact, he feels so much indebted to the sage that he dedicates the book "With a full heart and deepest thanks to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi" (Chopra 1989; also available online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Dedication.pdf>). As Maharishi's influence on Chopra's "discovery" is evident throughout the book, one might think that, like an honest scientist, Chopra is acknowledging the conversations he had with the sage and how those conversations might have helped shape his ideas. However, that would be premature thinking, because the acknowledgment appears only in the *printings* of the book up to the fourteenth.

The sixteenth and subsequent printings<sup>3</sup> *seem to be* the "second edition," because they contain a single page titled "Preface to the New Edition." However, the usual practice of imprinting "Second Edition" on the cover is foregone. Furthermore, unlike any ordinary new editions, *no preface to the first edition* is retained in the new edition. So, why write a preface to the "new edition?" A conspicuous change in the new edition is that all citations of Maharishi's name are erased; the meetings with him, which were the starting point of quantum healing, are not mentioned at all; the crucial "primordial sound" techniques, which were "the strongest healing therapies in Ayurveda" and were prescribed for incurable diseases such as cancer, are gone; there is no mention of the revelation of "some great secret" that took place after meeting with Maha-

rishi; no mention of how Maharishi taught Chopra “how to pierce the mask of matter.” Therefore, the new preface is most likely a smokescreen for Chopra’s deletion of the name of the person who implanted the idea of the book in his mind.

This deletion is shamelessly manifest in the bibliographies of the two “editions.” In the bibliography of the earlier printings of the book, Chopra writes “I enthusiastically recommend the following eleven books, all of which entered into my own education on these fascinating subjects” (Chopra 1989; also available online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Biblio1.pdf>). Two of those eleven books are by Maharishi. In the bibliography of the sixteenth and later printings, he also recommends *eleven* books, *but he lists only nine!*<sup>4</sup> You can guess which two are missing. In an act that should make both Chopra and his publisher ashamed of themselves, and in a frenzied rush that can be ascribed only to charlatans and fraudsters who want to hide the evidence, Chopra erased all traces of Maharishi’s name and the guru’s influence on *Quantum Healing*, but he forgot to count the number of the remaining books in its bibliography.

Does the “second edition” contain substantial changes in the content of the book? Although Chopra mentions the change in *his* views in the preface of the new edition, he doesn’t say how the change affected its *content*. In fact, if you compare the pages of the first and second editions, as I did, you’ll see practically no change in the content except for the removal of any reference to Maharishi. What makes all of this suspicious is that there is absolutely no explanation for any of these changes in the book itself.

#### **The Blunder: ‘Explanation’ after Maharishi’s Death**

As a regular contributor to *The Huffington Post*, Chopra hurriedly wrote an article on February 13, 2008<sup>5</sup> (available online at [\[ak-chopra/the-maharishi-years-the-u\\\_b\\\_86412.html\]\(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deep-ak-chopra/the-maharishi-years-the-u\_b\_86412.html\)\). It is important to examine the highlights of this article, as it narrates Chopra’s tumultuous relationship with Maharishi, especially because the article is filled with numerous accounts of intimate encounters of the two, containing outlandish claims that often resemble miracles.](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deep-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

### **In the bibliography of the sixteenth and later printings, he also recommends eleven books, but he lists only nine! You can guess which two are missing.**

Chopra begins the article with reporting the publication of his book, *Perfect Health*, in 1991, at least six years after he met Maharishi. He does not mention his earlier book, *Quantum Healing*, by far his most influential book, the germ of the idea of which was planted in his mind after several meetings with the guru. He completely ignores that in 1985, right after his meetings with Maharishi, he quit his job at the New England Memorial Hospital to establish the Maharishi Ayurveda Health Center in Boston ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepak\\_Chopra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepak_Chopra)). He forgoes the fact that it was in this Center that his ideas for writing *Quantum Healing* took shape (Chopra 1989). He does not explain why he changed the name of the center to Ayurveda Health Center in the later printings of the book.

Chopra continues: “When I was in meditation I had a vision of Maharishi

lying in a hospital bed with intravenous tubes in his body breathing on a respirator.” He immediately takes a chartered airplane from Chicago to Delhi only to find Maharishi exactly as he saw him in his vision. Because of the seriousness of Maharishi’s condition, it was decided that he should be flown to London. Chopra flies to London and makes arrangements for Maharishi to be admitted to a private hospital. As he was standing outside the hospital, watching an ambulance navigate the snarled traffic, one of the accompanying doctors ran up with the news that Maharishi had suddenly died. Chopra rushes to the ambulance, “picking Maharishi’s body up and carrying him in my arms through London traffic.” However, after twenty-four to thirty-six hours the attending informed them that Maharishi was recovering miraculously.

But the recovery was somewhat slow. “There was a point where the doctor informed us that [Maharishi] had severe anemia and needed a blood transfusion. When they typed and cross-matched Maharishi’s blood, I turned out to be the only match.” After the hospital, Maharishi was moved to a country home in the southwest of England where “I spent hours personally nursing him.” In all, Maharishi was out of circulation for almost a year; few in the Transcendental Meditation movement knew where he was. After he was fully recovered, he was flown via helicopter to the small village of Vlodrop in Holland.

It is not clear who decided to move Maharishi out of sight. What is clear is that he remained in Vlodrop while Chopra “was sent, as one of his main emissaries, on a routine of almost constant jet travel. . . . Everywhere I went I was given the respect accorded to my guru, bringing with it a level of pomp and ceremony that verged on veneration.” In July 1993, Chopra went to see Maharishi in his private rooms to pay “his respects,” at which time Maharishi said, “People are telling me that you are competing with me. . . . I want you to stop traveling and live here at the ashram with me.” He also

wanted Chopra to stop writing books. After delivering what amounted to an ultimatum, “I was given twenty-four hours to make up my mind.”

## Could Chopra’s actions be anything but an intention to smear the facts?

February 13, 2008, when the article appeared in the *Huffington Post*, was just eight days after Maharishi’s death and more than fourteen years after Chopra broke up with him some time in the second half of 1993. Chopra must have had the article ready when Maharishi was still on his deathbed. What reason could one have to wait over fourteen years to tell such a self-praising, intimate story of a relationship between oneself and another person, and then publish the story right after the death of the latter? Could it be anything but an intention to smear the facts?

Any intelligent reader who is not mesmerized by Chopra’s insidious charm can see in the *Huffington Post* article the power struggle between an old guru and a conniving disciple who is trying to steal the guru’s congregation for personal gain. The reader can also detect Chopra’s egregious attempt at portraying himself as a superhuman being with a miraculous power of healing who can see events that are happening thousands of miles away. A follower, on the other hand, believes every word of the narrative and spreads the story to other potential followers. This is the audience for whom Chopra wrote the article. And this is the audi-

ence who should be made aware of his professional dishonesty.

Chopra’s removal of all references to Maharishi in the later printings of *Quantum Healing*—regardless of any personal conflict he may have had with the guru—reveals his lack of professional integrity, as by his own admission in the earlier printings, it was his numerous meetings with Maharishi that inspired him “to explain, clearly and scientifically, how [the Ayurveda techniques] work.” And his explanation of the conflict, hurriedly published in the *Huffington Post* right after Maharishi’s death, is a telltale sign of professional hypocrisy at its worse.

Paraphrasing a famous quote by the late Carl Sagan, extraordinary book titles require extraordinary professionalism. This article has documented sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Deepak Chopra’s professionalism in the writing of *Quantum Healing* is of such a low quality that it borders on charlatanism. ■

### Notes

1. In the keynote lecture (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-ijyqWzDrY&feature=kp>) that Chopra delivered in a meeting arranged by Salesforce in 2013, he repeatedly mentions the names of various famous scientists including Newton, Einstein, Planck, etc., to convince his audience that dark energy and dark matter are not only unknown but also “unknowable” and that scientists should not try to uncover the truth. The clip at <https://youtu.be/dA89wWI6ljo> compares Chopra’s message with another poet/prophet who also advised against seeking truth and was instrumental in paving the way for the Dark Ages.

2. The sage seems to have it backward. A technique that is in any way related to science comes *after* the prerequisite scientific knowledge has been gained. One doesn’t start with a technique and *then* ask for (or order) a scientific explanation. It is like the pope asking a devout Catholic scientist to find a scientific basis for the Hail Mary!

3. I haven’t seen the fifteenth printing, so I don’t know if Maharishi’s name is present there or not.

4. Because the “second edition” of *Quantum Healing* is only a fake, the dates appearing on the copyright page refer to the first “edition,” namely 1989 for the hardcover and 1990 for the trade edition. It is therefore hard to reference the “second edition”—which presumably appeared in 1993 or 1994 after Chopra broke

up with the guru—in the proper normal way. Only by looking at the printing number on the copyright page can one anticipate whether or not the book contains Maharishi’s name. As of the thirty-fourth printing that I purchased in 2013, Chopra has not corrected the bibliography: he still recommends eleven books and lists only nine! This bibliography can be found online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Chopras-bibliography.pdf>.

5. The date of the post has changed at least once since I first discovered it on July 2, 2011. On March 18, 2015, the date was changed to 12/31/1969 7:00 PM EST and the post appeared to have been updated on 11/17/2011! (Copy available online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Deepak-Chopra-The-Maharishi-Years-The-Untold-Story-Recollections-of-a-Former-Disciple.pdf>.) As I understand it, 12/31/1969 7:00 PM EST is the epoch time of some platforms, and is the default to which the system reverts whenever the date/time of a file is entered incorrectly. One occasion on which this could occur is when one tinkers with an existing date/time. I have kept a copy of the post as it appeared on July 2, 2011, showing its original date and time of publication, just in case the date changes again (copy available online at <http://skepticaleducator.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Deepak-Chopra-The-Maharishi-Years-The-Untold-Story-Recollections-of-a-Former-Disciple.pdf>).

### References

- Chopra, D. 1989. *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Einstein, A. 1952. *The Principle of Relativity*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Hassani, S. 2010. *From Atoms to Galaxies*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Huizenga, J. 1992. *Cold Fusion: The Scientific Fiasco of the Century*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Planck, M. 1918. Nobel lecture. Available at [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/physics/laureates/1918/planck-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1918/planck-lecture.html).



Sadri Hassani is professor emeritus of physics at Illinois State University and author of several books at graduate, undergraduate, and introductory levels.

His blog at [skepticaleducator.org](http://skepticaleducator.org) is devoted to exposing misconceptions and distortions of science by professional scientists. He wrote “‘Post-Materialist’ Science? A Smokescreen for Woo” in our September/October 2015 issue. Follow @SadriHassani on Twitter.