

Empire of Mind

The Secret History of Positive Thinking

A presentation by Mitch Horowitz

The injunction to “think positive” seems like it has always been with us. But PEN Award-winning historian and popular voice of esoteric ideas **Mitch Horowitz** (“solid gold”—David Lynch) demonstrates how the concept that *thoughts are causative* is far newer—and deeper—than most of us realize.

From the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson to mega-sellers like *The Power of Positive Thinking* and *The Secret* to pop-spiritual concepts like “Law of Attraction,” Americans have long wondered whether the hidden potentials of the mind can bring us wealth, health, and happiness. Most serious people dismiss positive thinking as an immature or unrealistic response to life. But Mitch asks us to look twice. In this lively and intellectually substantive presentation, he seriously considers the remarkable history, sweeping impact, compelling possibilities—as well as the ethical shortfalls—of positive-mind philosophy.

Mitch shows that positive thinking, rather than a soft-headed philosophy based in bromides and inspirational calendars, began with occult and mental-healing experiments of the late-eighteenth and early-to-mid-nineteenth centuries. He explores how positive-mind metaphysics have proven remarkably foresightful of contemporary advances in neuroscience, addiction and OCD treatment, stress and recovery programs, as well as in today’s most intensely debated findings in quantum physics.

Mitch demonstrates that a thoughtful consideration of the background, methods, and results of positive-mind spirituality make blanket dismissal virtually impossible. He also looks critically at the contradictions and ethical dilemmas of positive thinking—and considers how these shortcomings can be fixed or reformed to remake positive-mind philosophy into a persuasive and mature approach to life.

This journey through the positive-mind revolution highlights:

- How the ubiquitous injunction to “think positive” bubbled up from occult and mystical subcultures of the mid-nineteenth century before becoming the closest thing America has to a national creed.
- How this once-outsider philosophy revolutionized mainstream faith—including today’s evangelical culture.
- The remarkable personalities that shaped positive thinking, such as philosopher William James, Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, and French mind theorist Emile Coué (who coined the world-famous but misunderstood mantra: *Day by day, in every way, I am getting better and better.*)

- Iconic figures whose lives were impacted by positive-thinking philosophy, including suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Black nationalist Marcus Garvey, and President Ronald Reagan.
- Finally, Mitch pragmatically and squarely considers the all-important question: *Does it work?*

This unforgettable and unexpected presentation will give you a wholly new outlook on the history—and possibilities—of a belief system that you only thought you knew.

Mitch Horowitz is a historian of alternative spirituality and one of today’s most literate voices of esoterica, mysticism, and the occult. He is among the few writers on alternative spirituality whose work touches the bases of academic scholarship, national journalism, and subculture credibility. Mitch is a writer-in-residence at the New York Public Library, lecturer-in-residence at the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles, and a PEN Award-



winning historian whose books include [Occult America](#); [One Simple Idea: How Positive Thinking Reshaped Modern Life](#); and [The Miracle Club](#). *The Washington Post* says Mitch “treats esoteric ideas and movements with an even-handed intellectual studiousness that is too often lost in today’s raised-voice discussions.” He has discussed alternative spirituality on CBS Sunday Morning, Dateline NBC, NPR’s All Things Considered, CNN, and across the national media. Mitch is collaborating with Emmy-nominated director Ronni Thomas on a feature documentary about the occult classic [The Kybalion](#), shot on location in Egypt and releasing in January 2022. Mitch received the Walden Award for Interfaith/Intercultural Understanding. The Chinese government has censored his work. Visit him at MitchHorowitz.com