

Excerpt from Elements of Wisdom and Folly  
**SHAKE THE SHAMAN'S RATTLE . . . PLACEBO POWER**

by Ernest Kinnie, PhD  
<http://www.wisdomfolly.net>

**Abstract**

Your ancestors sometimes made mistakes, like when they assumed that the rattle-shaking shaman at the time of the winter solstice, stopped the sun from going further down toward the horizon. Sure enough, the sun stopped sinking and began to rise again. They made the mistake of assuming that the shaman was responsible because they confused association with causality. Don't make the same mistake.

Use the placebo effect to create powerful sugar pills. Can you believe that in drug outcome experiments, sugar pills often do as well, if not better than the target drug?

**Key words**

psychology, self-help, self-heal, growth, strategy, technique, method, association, causality, superstition, gullibility, authority dogma faith, placebo, superstition, faith, self-heal, self-help

You are hard-wired to find pattern and meaning...wonderful skills that keep you alive, as it did all of your ancient ancestors. "Deer come here to drink this time of year." "That mushroom is tasty, that one will make you very sick." Luckily for you, they were great scientists, using the same test-observe-retest paradigm that modern scientists use. Maybe their technique wasn't quite as elaborate, but the results they obtained were eminently more useful than most of the experimental information coming out of our universities.

But they sometimes made mistakes, like when they assumed that the rattle-shaking shaman at the time of the winter solstice, stopped the sun from going further down toward the horizon. Sure enough, the sun stopped sinking and began to rise again. They made the mistake of assuming that the shaman was responsible because they confused association with causality.

Hugely important that you be very clear about the difference between association and causality. The rattle-shaking shaman was associated with changing the direction of the sun, but in no way caused that change. But people back then would have no way to

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know that, so I've often wondered what very brave, very foolhardy person was the first to stop the ritual. You might even find a few rituals of your own if you looked carefully at your life. I wonder what would happen if you stopped shaking your rattle.

On the other hand, although the shaman's rattle may not be what caused the sun to stop moving lower and lower toward the horizon and disappearing forever, his ability to do so in the eyes of the tribe gave him and his rattle great power and the ability to "heal" the sick. The self-healing abilities of the human body were mobilized by the mask and rattle...a great example of the placebo effect.

So, use the placebo effect to your advantage. Use your imagination. Here is one simple way. Buy sugar pills and a particularly attractive pill box. If anxious, label it **RELAXED**, if depressed...**HAPPY**, if tired...**ENERGIZED**, etc. And take a pill as needed. Don't worry, your brain and body will react even though another part knows that they are only sugar pills. The labeling and your intent gives them power and the brain responds, just like the shaman's rattle.

You could actually create a very nice, noisy rattle to use, but friends, neighbors and coworkers might not take well to your conversion to shaman-hood.

Taken from [Elements of Wisdom and Folly](#) available in the Real Psych Solutions Store.

I suggest you write down what happens to you as you move through the book. The words **WHAT I FOUND** will be the cue to do so. Seriously consider keeping a journal to record what you find, as the writing down itself adds to the experience, and you will continue to learn about yourself as you later read what you wrote. With a little courage and imagination you can have some really interesting experiences.....and add some useful behaviors to your repertoire.

### **WHAT I FOUND**

#### **About Ernest Kinnie, PhD**

I'm a retired PhD clinical psychologist with many years experience as professor, therapist, consultant and supervisor. Wrote THE MAGIC THEATER, the psychology of adjustment, published by Harper and Row, long ago, and now have the time to revise and enlarge, using what I have learned over the years. You are invited to explore the insights, adventures and strategies that have been most useful in my life, and in the lives of friends, students and patients.

Ernest Kinnie