

SURVIVAL RESEARCH: LIKE SHOVELING SAND AGAINST THE TIDE

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Abstract: For nearly 160 years, maverick scientists and scholars have been providing very credible evidence that consciousness survives physical death and continues on in other realms of existence. However, mainstream science, orthodox religion, and the educated world have rejected and ridiculed the evidence. This paper examines the reasons for the rejection and ridicule. The focus is on the mediumship of yesteryear, which was much more dynamic than the phenomena of today.

In his 1989 presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), the late Professor Ian Stevenson pointed out that between 1910 and 1980 at least six presidents of the SPR asserted that telepathy had been proved, or nearly so. He wondered why, if telepathy had been proved by 1910, later presidents found it necessary to reiterate the claim.

Dr. Stevenson speculated that each generation of researchers tends to believe its methods superior to those of its predecessors and therefore they may have seen the earlier evidence as not so strong. He also theorized that mainstream science and the world at large did not hear the earlier assertions and therefore it was necessary to repeat them again and again.

Now, nearly three decades after the 1980 assertion, two years short of a century since it was first announced that telepathy had been proved, it does not appear that mainstream science is any closer to accepting it than it was then. In the Foreword to *Parapsychology and the Skeptics*, Dr. Rupert Sheldrake quotes Professor Peter Atkins, an Oxford chemist, as saying that “there is no reason to suppose that telepathy is anything more than a charlatan’s fantasy.” (Carter) In a BBC debate, Sheldrake asked Carter if he had actually looked at the evidence. Atkins’ reply was, “No, but I would be very suspicious of it.”

At his website, Sheldrake, one of the few present day scientists speaking out in favor of paranormal phenomena, mentions an August 2007 television debate with Richard Dawkins, a geneticist and author of the book *The God Delusion*. Sheldrake reported that Dawkins said he would like to believe in telepathy, but there just isn’t any evidence for it. Dawkins added that if telepathy really occurred it would “turn the laws of physics upside down” and that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.”

In effect, Dawkins was restating the precept of early 19th Century astronomer and mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace, which is that “the rigor of proof must be proportionate to the gravity of the conclusion.” Apparently, the ganzfeld experiments, considered the best in the area of telepathy, didn’t impress Dawkins, if he bothered to study them.

And so it is also with the evidence for the survival of consciousness at death, which goes beyond telepathy in defying the mechanistic laws of the universe accepted by mainstream science. Nearly all of the early psychical researchers concluded that the evidence for survival was conclusive. Consider these statements:

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), co-originator with Charles Darwin of the natural selection theory: *My position is that the phenomena of Spiritualism in their entirety do not require further confirmation. They are proved quite as well as facts are proved in other sciences.* (Wallace, 211)

Sir William Barrett (1844-1925), professor of physics at the Royal College in Dublin for 37 years, knighted for his contributions to mainstream science: *I am personally convinced that the evidence we have published decidedly demonstrates (1) the existence of a spiritual world, (2) survival after death, and (3) of occasional communication from those who have passed over.* (Barrett, 162)

Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), professor of physics and pioneer in electricity and radio: *I tell you with all my strength of the conviction which I can muster that we do persist, that people still continue to take an interest in what is going on, that they know far more about things on this earth than we do, and are able from time to time to communicate with us.* (Tabori, 72)

Dr. James H. Hyslop (1854-1920), professor of ethics and logic at Columbia University before becoming a full-time psychical researcher: *Personally, I regard the fact of survival after death as scientifically proved. I agree that this opinion is not upheld in scientific quarters. But this is neither our fault nor the fault of the facts. Evolution was not believed until long after it was proved. The fault lay with those who were too ignorant or too stubborn to accept the facts. History shows that every intelligent man who has gone into this investigation, if he gave it adequate examination at all, has come out believing in spirits; this circumstance places the burden or proof on the shoulders of the skeptic.* (Hyslop, 480)

Dr. Robert Crookall (1890-1969), a geologist who became a full-time psychical researcher in 1952: *The whole of the available evidence is explicable on the hypothesis of the survival of the human soul in a Soul Body. There is no longer a 'deadlock' or 'stalemate' on the question of survival. On the contrary, survival is as well established as the theory of evolution.* (Crookall, 186)

Based on the conclusions of these researchers and several dozen other very credible scientists and scholars, there should be no further need for survival research. We should be able to invoke the legal doctrine of *Res Judicata* – “It has been decided.” We live on! Case closed!

Yet, the research of those early pioneers has been filed away in dust-covered file cabinets and all but forgotten. It has been repudiated, rejected, refuted, resisted, and ridiculed. Mainstream science has smirked, snickered, scoffed, and sneered at it. In an article titled *The Mystery of Consciousness* (*Time Magazine*, January 29, 2007), Steven Pinker, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, states that “attempts to contact the souls of the dead (a pursuit of serious scientists a century ago) turned up only cheap magic tricks.”

In the December 27, 2007 issue of the *Arizona Daily Star*, David Sbarra, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Arizona, is quoted as stating, “I can say with 100-percent certainty that there is no scientific evidence that individuals are capable of channeling with dead relatives...”

Recent authors waving the banner of science, including Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens (*god is not great*), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*), Victor J. Stenger (*God: The Failed Hypothesis*) and Michel Onfray (*Atheist Manifesto*) indirectly dismiss the evidence for survival by dismissing God. They

all seem to take a deductive approach, i.e., assuming that God must be identified or discovered before survival can be considered., or no God, no survival. None seems to have seriously considered taking the inductive approach of finding God by looking at all the evidence in favor of survival.

While the case for spirit communication and, concomitantly, survival, was seemingly made a century ago, we have more recent evidence for survival coming to us through research in the areas of reincarnation, near-death experiences, clairvoyance, and induced after-death communication. However, scientific fundamentalists have also found ways to dismiss that evidence. Indeed, it seems that those involved in paranormal research that ultimately leads to the question of whether consciousness survives physical death must continually reinvent the wheel. In the engineering profession, they speak of reinventing the *square* wheel, which, in effect, means ending up with a result worse than the standard already achieved. It often seems that survival research is doing just this.

One would assume that the evidence for survival would be welcomed as good news, since total extinction or obliteration of the personality is not a particularly inviting thought for most people. “The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life,” wrote Carl Jung, the pioneering Swiss psychiatrist. “Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance.” (Jung, 325)

And yet, the subject is still met with scorn and contempt by mainstream science and orthodox religion, while the media makes light of it, taking serious reports about paranormal phenomena and translating them to tongue-in-cheek “spook” stories.

Why are mainstream science, orthodox religion, and the media so reluctant to accept the evidence for spiritual phenomena and survival? Why hasn't the evidence stood the test of time? Why does it seem that researchers are continually “shoveling sand against the tide”? Basically, as I see it, there are three reasons: 1) The phenomena are complex, confusing, and unnatural; 2) There are some alternative theories that are more appealing to scientific fundamentalists; 3) Fear, ego, and power are obstacles that many intelligent people are unwilling to transcend.

Current Research

Before considering some of the phenomena studied by those researchers of yesteryear, let's consider the more recent survival research. The primary scientific evidence for survival today seems to be coming from the near-death experience, which suggests that the mind is not the brain, that we have two bodies – a physical one and a spiritual one. However, the debunkers have all kinds of theories in their arsenals to attack the validity of the NDE. According to Harvard's Pinker, the NDE is “not the eyewitness report of a soul parting company from the body but symptoms of oxygen starvation in the eyes and brain.” (*Time*, 62) Generally, the arguments against the NDE being evidence of a spirit body include:

- * The Oxygen Deprivation Theory
- * The Dying Brain Theory, which seems to be another way of saying the same thing as the Oxygen Deprivation theory – that it is all confused and paranoid thinking.
- * The Medication Theory, which says that NDEs are caused by medication or drugs.
- * The Mental Instability Theory, which is self-explanatory.
- * The Defense Against Dying Theory, which holds that the NDE is simply a self-defense mechanism for the person who is confronted with extinction. a : Debunkers also claim that the NDE is simply a self-defense mechanism for the person

* The Religious Expectation Theory, which suggests that the NDE is fulfilling the experiencer's expectation of dying

* The Cultural Expectation Theory, which holds that the NDE is fulfilling the expectations of a particular culture.

* The Hearsay Theory, which says that the NDE is pieced together after a trauma from bits and pieces of information gathered from medical personnel while the experiencer floated in and out of consciousness.

* The Temporal Lobe Seizure Theory, which holds that brain seizures cause illusions, hallucinations, and feelings of despair and the NDE is simply such a seizure.

The knowledgeable NDE researcher and student can offer evidence to overcome every one of these theories, but they still remain as obstacles to the full acceptance of the NDE as evidence of survival of consciousness. Moreover, many uninformed people who hear the debunker's theories tend to accept them as the final word, thereby dismissing all the evidence offered by the NDE in favor of survival.

Before the NDE and other Out-of-Body research came into existence, the focus was more on evidence for reincarnation, apparently beginning with the Bridey Murphy case, as reported by Morey Bernstein in his 1956 best-seller, *The Search for Bridey Murphy* and reaching a climax with the 1988 book, *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Brian Weiss, M.D. In between was some very impressive research carried out by Ian Stevenson, M.D., highlighted by his 1966 book, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. However, the skeptics and debunkers could not be satisfied with that research, either, arguing that all of the so-called past life memories were nothing more than memories stored in the subconscious from this lifetime, perhaps from stories heard during childhood, or from books and movies.

Dr. Gary Schwartz of the University of Arizona did considerable research on the clairvoyant/clairaudient type of mediumship and reported on it in his 2002 book, *The Afterlife Experiments*, offering some pretty convincing evidence of survival. However, the debunkers jumped all over him, claiming that his protocols and methodology were faulty and dismissing it all as pseudoscience. And then several of the mediums studied by Schwartz charged him with profiting from the research at their expense, thereby attacking his credibility. Thus, the impact of Schwartz's research has been limited.

Today, due to television programs featuring clairvoyants like John Edward and Lisa Williams, more and more people are becoming familiar with this type of mediumship. To the discerning person, it can be very evidential and convincing, but the communication between the physical and spiritual realm is so complex that it leaves many doubts, even among open-minded skeptics. The primary theories advanced by the debunkers are:

* Fraud – the medium or someone working for the medium gathered information about the sitters beforehand.

* Cold Reading – the medium is fishing for answers and subtly drawing information from the sitter, then feeding it back to the sitter in a deceptive manner.

Moreover, both the debunker and the uninformed person expect communication to be as simple as talking to someone on the telephone. For example, I was watching a segment of the Lisa Williams program not long ago when Ms. Williams seemed to be giving a very evidential reading to two sisters and a brother. Their deceased mother was the alleged communicator and was apparently passing on things that were beyond cold-reading, research, or pure guessing by the medium or her staff. The two sisters were in tears as the evidential information was communicated by Williams. Then, as Williams mentioned that she was losing contact with their mother and asked if they had any questions, one of the sisters asked if her mother gave her name. Williams paused and

said she could not get the name. No doubt this raised suspicion among a large percentage of the viewing audience. How could Williams possibly be in touch with the mother when she couldn't even get a simple name? Of course, this also works against the fraud theory, since if research had been done beforehand Williams would certainly know the name of their mother. I will return to the communication problem later in this paper. .

A more recent phenomenon is Induced After Death Communication (IADC), as pioneered by Dr. Allan Botkin, a clinical psychologist who worked extensively with veterans suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome. In IADC therapy people grieving the death of someone or otherwise disturbed by someone's death, are asked to focus directly on their sadness during eye movements administered by the therapist. The typical IADC involves the patient reporting having seen a deceased person and that deceased person having told him or her that everything is OK and not to grieve. In a number of cases, the deceased person relates information previously unknown to the patient. The patients have included atheists and skeptics as well as believers and religious.

The focus of IADC therapy has been on healing rather than offering evidence of survival. Thus, there has been little in the way of reporting that lends itself to survival research.

Complex, Confusing, and Unnatural Physical Phenomena of Yesteryear

All the recent evidence – NDEs, past-life regressions, clairvoyance, and IADCs – appears to fall well short of the evidence of a century ago, as observed by Wallace, Barrett, Lodge, Hyslop, Crookall and many other scientists and scholars who undertook psychical research. They observed two types of phenomena, generally classified as physical and mental. Unfortunately, the physical mediumship did not easily lend itself to scientific testing and was abandoned by most of the researchers representing the Society for Psychical Research, the leading research organization of the day. It was, nevertheless, studied, observed, and reported by enough investigators that there should be no doubt as to the reality of the phenomena. This physical phenomena included communicating raps and taps, tilting and turning of tables, levitations of tables and humans, apports, spirit photography, direct voice, direct writing, partial materializations of human forms and full materializations.

What could possibly be more evidential than having a deceased person – one recognized from earthly life – materialize (take shape) right in front of you, speak to you in the same voice and mannerisms identified with that person when in the flesh, talk about things known only to the two of you, then watch the materialized person evaporate into the floor, all of this being witnessed by others in the room?

Absolutely ridiculous and not worthy of consideration, the skeptics screamed after seeing photographs of some of the materializations, which often appeared to resemble stage dummies or props. Some were not full materializations. At times, only the upper portion of the body would appear, often just a head or a face. The same peculiarities presented themselves in the phenomenon called spirit photography – where spirits would show up in photographs by purported mediumistic photographers or where there was a medium present in the photography studio.

The discerning researcher came to understand the peculiarities and problems. The key to both materialization and spirit photography seems to have been the ability of the spirit to project his image into the ectoplasm (mediumistic fluid) or onto the photographic plate. While Dr. Charles Richet, the 1913 Nobel Prize winner in medicine, reported witnessing a number of partial and full materializations, one spirit informed him that he

could not materialize because he could not remember what he looked like when in the flesh.

After dying in the Titanic disaster of 1912, William T. Stead, a renowned author and social activist, began communicating through several mediums. He explained that there were souls on his side who had the power of sensing people (mediums) who could be used for communication. One such soul helped him find mediums and showed him how to make his presence known. It was explained to him that he had to visualize himself among the people in the flesh and imagine that he was standing there in the flesh with a strong light thrown upon himself. "Hold the visualization very deliberately and in detail, and keep it fixed upon my mind, that at that moment I *was* there and they were conscious of it." (Stead, 89-90)

Stead added that the people at one sitting were able to see only his face because he had seen himself as only a face. "I imagined the part they would recognize me by." (Stead 90) It was in the same way he was able to get a message through. He stood by the most sensitive person there, concentrated his mind on a short sentence, and repeated it with much emphasis and deliberation until he could hear part of it spoken by the person.

On March 14, 1874, Alfred Russel Wallace, the evolutionist quoted above, visited a professional photographer with Mrs. Guppy, a medium, in hopes of obtaining a spirit photo. In the first photo, a half-figure of a man holding a sword appeared. Wallace could not identify the man. In the second and third photos, Wallace's mother appeared, although it took close examination by both Wallace and his brother to realize it was her. "How these two figures, with these special peculiarities of a person totally unknown to [the photographer] could appear on his plates, I should be glad to have explained," Wallace wrote. "Even if he had by some means obtained possession of all the photographs ever taken of my mother, they would not have been of the slightest use to him in the manufacture of these pictures. I see no escape from the conclusion that some spiritual being acquainted with my mother's various aspects during life, produced these recognizable impressions on the plate. That she herself still lives and produced these figures may not be proved; but it is a more simple and natural explanation to think that she did so, than to suppose that we are surrounded by beings who carry out an elaborate series of impostures for no apparent purpose than to dupe us into a belief in a continued existence after death." (Wallace, 196-198). Wallace added that he was in the dark room when the plates were developed and he saw the images take form.

As Wallace and other researchers came to understand them, the spirit photographs were "thought-forms" projected onto the photographic plates by the communicating spirit, not actual images of the spirits in their celestial form. The quality of the photographs depended upon the ability of the spirit to project his or her image onto the photographic plates. Apparently, such abilities vary widely among spirits, just as artistic ability and the ability to focus or meditate varies widely with humans.

Occasionally, the photographs resembled portraits taken of the person when in the flesh and it was assumed by debunkers that the photographer somehow obtained a copy of an old photograph. No consideration seems to have been given by the skeptics to the possibility that the best recollection the spirit had of his earthly appearance may have been a favorite photograph. It is unlikely that the spirit would have projected an image of himself shaving or putting on makeup in the morning or in some unflattering recollection. The unrecognized man with a sword in the first Wallace photo may have been a person who best remembered himself as a warrior and managed to focus only on his torso in projecting the image. It could have been an ancestor of Wallace's or a simple "gate crasher," as many communications have indicated that low-level spirits are hanging around the medium waiting to communicate or take part in whatever was going on. There were also many reports of "impostor" spirits – spirits pretending to be famous people or someone known by the sitter.

And so it was with other physical phenomena observed by the old researchers. They defied natural laws and were beyond scientific testing, while often lending themselves to allegations of fraud. Of course, there were apparently many charlatans who devised tricks that simulated the various phenomena. Is it any wonder that scientific investigators wanted nothing to do with such phenomena?

Problems in Communication

There was also much confusion and misunderstanding concerning the mechanics of spirit communication. To begin with, mediums had their “spirit controls,” who claimed they were relaying messages from deceased friends and relatives because they (the deceased friends and relatives) were unable to communicate directly. Various communications suggested that it took some practice for a deceased person to use the medium’s organism. Thus, the “control,” who had mastered the technique was a go-between.

Soon after his death in 1892, George Pellew began communicating with Dr. Richard Hodgson, a psychical researcher, through Leonora Piper, the renowned Boston medium. Pellew told Hodgson of the difficulties he was encountering in communicating, pointing out that there is a conflict between the spiritual ego, or mind, of the communicating spirit and the material mind or ego of the medium that is very difficult to overcome. He explained that when Piper went into trance, her ego left the body, just as when a person is sleeping, and although her brain is left empty, it is very difficult for the communicating spirit to control it. He also mentioned that it was much easier to communicate with someone in “sympathy” with him, e.g., a friend or relative, than it was to communicate with a skeptical researcher. He said that to those in his sphere, we humans are “sleeping” in the material world and are in what to them is a “dream-life.” For them to communicate with us, they have to enter this sleep state, which adds to the confusion.

On February 19, 1901, a few weeks after the death of pioneering psychical researcher Frederic W. H. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, his good friend and fellow researcher, made contact with Myers through the mediumship of Rosalie Thompson. Initially, Myers struggled to communicate. “Lodge, it is not as easy as I thought in my impatience,” Myers said. “Gurney says I am getting on first rate. But I am short of breath.” (metaphorically out of breath?) (Lodge, *Survival*, 291)

Myers went on to say that he was confused when he first arrived on the other side, before he realized he was dead. “I thought I had lost my way in a strange town, and I groped my way along the passage,” he said. “And even when I saw people that I knew were dead, I thought they were only visions. I have not seen Tennyson yet by the way.” (Lodge, *Survival*, 292)

Myers continued, explaining that in attempting to visualize the surroundings at the Lodge home during the sitting, it was as if he were looking at a misty picture. He could hear himself using Thompson’s voice, but he didn’t feel like it was his “whole self” talking. He said he was having a difficult time in remembering things. In fact, he could not recall his mother’s name. Nelly, Thompson’s control, took over from Myers and explained that Myers was still in a state of confusion and would remember a great deal more in time.

On May 8, 1901, Lodge and his wife again sat with Thompson. Nelly communicated and said that she had not seen Myers since they put the “umbrella” up. Lodge did not understand what was meant at the time, but some weeks later, after hearing about a purported message delivered by Edmund Gurney, a co-founder with Myers of the Society for Psychical Research, on February 7, 1901 through a medium referred to as Miss Rawson, the umbrella reference made sense. Gurney, who had died in 1888 and was apparently assisting Myers in adapting to his new environment, said that too many people

were calling upon Myers and it was interfering with his rest. "What we want for him now is to rise, and to forget earthly things," Gurney said through Mrs. Rawson, going on to explain that if people continued trying to communicate with Myers that he would be forced to hover near the earth plane, thereby making him earthbound. (Lodge, *Survival*, 306)

Thus, the "umbrella" was apparently put up by Gurney and other friends on that side to shield Myers from the demands being placed upon him by people trying to communicate with him, people who had come to recognize him as a leader in the field of spirit communication.

Nelly further told Lodge that there was too much "undercurrent of suspicion" on his (Lodge's) part and that this "befogged" her. He needed to be more sympathetic for her to give him things. Lodge tried to reassure her that he was not trying to be hostile and would do his best to overcome what doubts he had. Perhaps because Lodge and Myers were good friends, Nelly was able to get through the "umbrella" and bring Myers to speak. But Lodge recorded that the speech coming from Thompson's vocal cords was very feeble and confused, much of it gibberish, at least what he could make out. Yet, he was able to understand and record a number of things during the hour and a half sitting.

Myers repeated that communicating was much harder than he had realized when he was in his earthly shell. "Lodge, it is just as they say, you grope in fog and darkness," Myers said. "They keep on calling me. I am wanted everywhere. I hear them calling, and I cannot tell who it is at first...I want to concentrate in a few places, or in one place, and not to be split up...Do appeal to them not to break me up so, and leave me not clear in one spot...How easy to promise and how difficult to fulfill." (Lodge, *Survival*, 301)

Nelly again took over from Myers and said that Thompson was calling Myers too often, not allowing him the proper rest. She added that Myers informed her that some communication purportedly coming from him was not from him, and yet it was not fraud. He said he didn't understand it yet and so couldn't explain it. He added that others informed him that when he (Myers) was in the flesh and thought he was receiving messages from a particular spirit it was not them. And yet they knew about it, and it was not fraud. "He does not know how it is worked, but he is studying, and he thinks it will help a great deal if he can understand how the cheating thing that are not cheats are done," Nelly said. "It is not cheating, and yet it is not him doing it..." (Lodge, *Survival*, 303)

Lodge later learned that during the last half hour of his sitting with Thompson, Margaret Verrall, an automatic writing medium as well as a member of the SPR, was attempting to receive messages from Myers. Among the few words she was able to get were: "No power," and "Doing something else tonight." (Lodge, *Survival*, 305)

Three months after his death in 1930, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had become an avid spiritualist when alive, began communicating with researcher Harry Price through the mediumship of Eileen Garrett. "I myself did not recognize the difficulty there would be in getting through the wall or density that stands between us," Doyle communicated. "I am within a slower system but outside your sympathetic system." (Fuller, 215)

In 1917, the Rev. Charles Drayton Thomas, a psychical researcher, began sitting with the renowned British medium, Gladys Osborne Leonard. He quickly made contact with his father, John D. Thomas, and his sister, Etta, receiving much veridical information to prove their identities. However, he wondered why they had such difficulty in giving their names and the names of others. "It became evident that the giving of a name involved the overcoming of some obstacle, and that usually the difficulty, whatever it might be, was too serious to permit of success," Thomas wrote in his 1928 book, *Life Beyond Death with Evidence*. "There is unquestionably a difficulty in transmitting names

through trance mediums, though some give them more successfully than do others.” (Thomas, 218)

With Leonard, the information was usually transmitted by Fedra, her spirit control. That is, Leonard would go into a trance and Fedra would take over her organism. Fedra often spoke of herself in the third person, e.g., “Fedra is having difficulty understanding.” (Thomas, 219)

The discarnate Thomas explained the difficulty to his son: “One cannot sometimes get the names right. If I wish to speak about a man named Meadow, I may try that name and find that Meadow is not spoken rightly by Fedra. So I then wait and try to insert the idea of a green field, connecting it with the idea of the man described. We always try for a definite thing which will tell you exactly what we mean; but if unable to do that, we have to get as near to it as we can. Sometimes we have to depend upon slender links in giving you the clue.” (Thomas, 221)

As another example, the discarnate Thomas mentioned that when he tried to get the name Jerusalem through Fedra, she gave the word “Zion” instead.

Etta explained to her brother that it was much easier to send ideas to Fedra than it was to send words. She added that she could not get her husband’s name, Whitfield, through Fedra. “Is it not strange that I cannot say my husband’s name?” she communicated. “I can feel it, but cannot say it; that is, I cannot get it spoken. I get it on the surface, so to speak, but cannot get it into the medium’s mind.” At a sitting four months later, Etta again attempted to get her husband’s name through, but only succeeded in getting the medium to say, “Wh--, Whi---, Wht--.” (Thomas, 221)

Etta further told her brother that the more she tried to think on the name, the more difficult it was to get it through the medium’s brain, adding that she could not control the medium’s power of expression. “One may get a word into her mind and yet be unable to make her express it,” she explained. “Because it is in the mind it does not follow that her brain will take it. Unless the ideas in the mind are tapped on to the actual brain one cannot express them.” (Thomas, 107)

Etta likened the brain of the medium to a keyboard on a typewriter. “You can place your finger on the right key, but unless you tap it there is no expression. The brain takes or does not take from the mind.” (Thomas, 222) Trying too much for a certain word, Etta continued, results in the keys becoming “stiff” with apprehension.

Thomas noticed that Fedra could more easily catch a first syllable than the whole name, but sometimes she would catch only the first letter, which he understood was pictured for her by the communicator. When one communicating entity tried to get the word “Greek” through, Fedra struggled with “G--, Gre--, Grek, Greg, Greeg.” (Thomas, 224)

The “sympathy” factor mentioned by Nelly to Lodge was a recurring factor mentioned through many other mediums. It was pointed out by the spirits and the mediums that harmonious conditions were necessary and that negativity on the part of the sitters or researchers could easily prevent phenomena. The sitters often had to begin with prayer and singing to establish the harmonious conditions and then wait. They sometimes waited for an hour or longer before anything happened. D. D. Home told Sir William Crookes that the spirits could not produce any phenomena on Derby Day in England because there was too much negativity resulting from the drunkenness and gambling going on that day.

All of this complexity, confusion, and unnaturalness both in physical and mental mediumship frustrated researchers and played into the hands of the skeptics and debunkers, who wanted human conditions that would lend themselves to scientific observation and testing. The Waterloo of survival research seems to have come with the

mediumship of Mina Crandon, who used the pseudonym “Margery.” Her mediumship produced floating objects, levitations, and ectoplasmic arms and legs emerging from her body. In 1925, she was investigated by a committee formed by *Scientific American*. Three members of the committee were very impressed with the phenomena and certain that it was authentic. Three other members were certain she was a charlatan. The controversy caused a division among physical researchers and a defection by some key members of the American Society for Psychical Research, which never fully recovered from the controversy.

Dr. Joseph B. Rhine was one of the committee members who was certain that “Margery” was a fraud. He vowed to have nothing more to do with mediumship that required darkness, as did Margery’s. Rhine then pioneered a new form of research called parapsychology. While survival research was and still is considered part of parapsychology, Rhine and other parapsychologists became more interested in investigating extra sensory perception and psychokinesis (now called mind-matter interaction) than survival. Today, we also have a field called “consciousness studies,” which overlaps somewhat with parapsychology, but the tendency seems to be to delicately beat around the bush and not directly address the question of survival.

Alternative Theories

Of course, the primary theory opposing the survival hypothesis was fraud, and clearly there were many fakers posing as mediums and duping gullible, even intelligent, people. But it was Professor William James who said that it takes only one “white crow” to prove that all crows aren’t black. Leonora Piper was his “white crow.” Gladys Osborne Leonard was the “white crow” of England. However, researchers came to realize that it wasn’t always a black and white matter. Some “crows” were found to be white with dark spots. They offered genuine phenomena at times and seemed to be guilty of fraudulent phenomena at other times. This realization came with the Italian medium Eusapia Paladino. It often appeared that when phenomena did not manifest, Paladino, apparently not wanting to disappoint anyone, tried to make them happen. Most of her claimed fraud were simple touches and did not approach the more dynamic phenomena. Dr. Cesare Lombroso, one of the researchers, considered the possibility that what others saw as trickery was due in part to spirit activity not understood by humans as well as the possibility that it was due to the abnormal state of the medium while in trance. That is, the spirits were forcing her hands to achieve some result. Nevertheless, there was enough real fraud going on that the whole field was, in the public’s eye, badly polluted, and every medium was suspect.

Early researchers began to suspect that mediums were consciously or unconsciously reading the minds of the sitters, thus feeding back information that passed as communication from deceased loved ones and friends. However, when information came through that was clearly unknown to the sitter, this theory was discounted. But then a theory called teleteropathy was advanced, holding that mediums were able to tap into minds anywhere in the world and feed back information to the sitter. It was as if there were some complex computer in the ethers from which mediums could draw information. Gradually, the teleteropathy and related cosmic theories gave rise to what came to be called Super ESP. The term was apparently coined by Dr. Hornell Hart, who worked with Dr. J. B. Rhine as a parapsychologists at Duke University, in 1959. It held that the dramatizing powers of the unconscious, making use of a comprehensive form of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and retrocognition can create pseudo spirit personalities. This theory is subscribed to by many parapsychologists today, although they can’t really begin to explain how these pseudo spirit personalities obtain information unknown to the medium and the sitters and then carry on a conversation displaying

personality, emotion, and persistence. “If your imagination is incapable of conceiving the spirit hypothesis at all, you will just proclaim it ‘impossible’ and thus confess yourself incompetent to discuss the alternative seriously,” William James offered. “I myself can perfectly well imagine spirit-agency, and I find my mind vacillating about it curiously.” (Holt, 710)

As a number of people have observed, the Super ESP theory (or hypothesis) seems even more fantastic than the survival hypothesis. It as if there is an unidentifiable God but no afterlife. Interestingly, both the Super ESP advocates and those accepting survival invoke Occam’s Razor, the law that says the simplest explanation should be adopted.

Fear, Ego, and Power

In spite of evidence that would likely meet the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard in our judicial system, the cynics who call themselves skeptics are constantly on the attack, attempting to find mechanistic/reductionistic/rationalistic explanations for the evidence supporting survival. These “debunkers” are the fundamentalists of science. In an article appearing in the winter 2002 issue of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Dr. Arthur Hastings, professor and director of the William James Center for Consciousness Studies at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, addressed this resistance to belief. “The fear of being irrational is powerful,” he wrote. “In this Western culture, which is strongly rationalistic, the charge of being irrational is a damning one.” (Hastings, pg. 82)

Hastings further suggested that many scientists, acting out of fear, arrive at a *determination not to believe*. This, he concluded, is often a product of ego defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, projection, and dissociation. He discussed the Pam Reynolds’ NDE, considered one of the most evidential, commenting that if the case were taken seriously it would challenge accepted beliefs, self-identity, emotions, commitments, and scientific personas as well as raise fears and result in conclusions that would require deep shifts in belief systems.

Dr. John O’M. Bockris, a retired professor of physics, sees it much the same way. “It is simply hubris - that exaggerated pride in one’s own achievements which means that - and this applies in particular to professors at universities - those whose careers have been built upon certain theories - existing viewpoints - and who have taught a science based on these, are horrified to learn that they may not have been speaking the truth,” he explains the resistance to ideas outside of the existing scientific paradigm. (Bockris, Intro.) He blames these closed-minded scientists for leading many in the West to approach death without hope, thereby giving rise to a more materialistic and hedonistic world.

“The antagonism which it excites seems to be mainly due to the fact that [a spirit world] is, and has long been in some form or other, the belief of the religious world and of the ignorant and superstitious of all ages, while a total disbelief in spiritual existence has been the distinctive badge of modern scientific skepticism,” Alfred Russel Wallace opined. (Wallace, preface xv)

I recently discussed the resistance of academia to survival evidence with Dr. Stafford Betty, professor of religious studies at California State University, Bakersfield. His observations have been much the same as Wallace’s. “My atheistic friends resist even the slightest whiff of an argument for an afterlife,” Betty offered by e-mail. “I have not seen more closed minds. Why is this? Why would anyone resist such good news – the kind of news strongly supported by serious, in-depth research on the NDE, for example? I think I know. It is not so much that my hard-bitten friends hate the thought of living beyond death; what they hate is religion. And they associate religion with the afterlife. It doesn’t matter how hard you try to convince them that the contemporary case

for afterlife is not based on sacred texts, but on empirical studies conducted by well-credentialed social scientists or doctors. It doesn't matter. Their minds are set. Also, the older generation (in their 70s and 80s) grew up hearing that the only things that were real were material. Changing their minds on that score would threaten their very identity. So they bravely move toward death, trying not to think about it, and gritting their teeth when they have to. I think the young are less invested in metaphysical materialism than the elderly. Their minds are slightly more open, if only because of the barrage of Hollywood films set in an afterlife."

Orthodox religion, on the other hand, continues to resist this new knowledge nearly as much as mainstream science, obviously fearful that some of it is not consistent with established dogma and doctrine and will thus threaten the authority and "wisdom" of the governing church bodies. Fundamentalist Christians point to ambiguous and possibly distorted, mistranslated, or misinterpreted passages in the Old Testament having to do with "consulting the dead," and saying that the "dead know nothing" while ignoring conflicting New Testament passages which say we should "test" the spirits and "discern" the messages. They further cite a New Testament passage which they interpret as closing the book on truth and enlightenment, while ignoring passages which say otherwise.

Epilogue

It is only natural to wonder why we no longer hear of the dynamic mediumistic phenomena of a century ago. One might easily conclude that the absence or decline of such phenomena is evidence that it was all fraud and never really existed. However, some believers argue that we do have it; we just don't hear much about it because science isn't interested and because those involved know there is no point in making it public as it will only result in ridicule by the media. In fact, there have been recent credible reports of materializations and the direct voice phenomenon.

It is more probable, however, that there has been a decline in such phenomena because of changes in lifestyles. In those days before people were entertained by radio and television, it was not uncommon for them to socialize more and to experiment with such things as the Ouija board and séance circles as well as to spend more quiet time at home – time in which they could experiment with automatic writing and other forms of mediumship requiring a passive state. Consider the case of Gladys Osborne Leonard, one of the most respected trance mediums of yesteryear. In her autobiography, she states that she and two friends had 26 unproductive development sessions before obtaining results. Then it took another 18 months of development before she became a proficient medium.

Hamlin Garland, a very skeptical psychical researcher, reported on sitting silently in a darkened séance circle for as long as four hours before anything developed. With medium Mary Curryer Smith, he initially observed some very impressive phenomena, but then he went through 12 sittings of several hours each with no results before again witnessing good phenomena. It's hard to imagine anyone having that kind of patience.

Sophia Williams, one of the direct-voice mediums investigated by Garland, wrote a book on mediumship in 1946. In it, she states that she sat quietly each day for four years to learn the art of relaxation and complete detachment before her own mediumship began to really develop.

It's also possible those in the spirit world, seeing that their constant efforts to communicate with us were being rejected, and in fact resulting in the defamation of some good people, decided there was no point in further continuing with meaningful messages.

Then again, maybe we are not supposed to know for certain. During the 1850s, Victor Hugo, the distinguished French author, was sitting with a medium and communicating with a spirit that claimed to have been Martin Luther, when alive. Hugo

asked why God does not better reveal himself. To which the spirit of Luther replied: "Because doubt is the instrument which forges the human spirit. If the day were to come when the human spirit no longer doubted, the human soul would fly off and leave the plough behind, for it would have acquired wings. The earth would lie fallow. Now, God is the sower and man is the harvester. The celestial seed demands that the human ploughshare remain in the furrow of life." (Chambers, 104)

If absolute proof is neither desirable nor possible and the blind faith of religion falls well short of meeting the needs of the rational mind, it would seem that the best we can hope for is the conviction, or true faith, that has been given to those who have been able to properly test and discern the phenomena from the past 160 years.

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