

The Afterlife Experiments

IN THE EARLIER STAGES of its development, infant humanity lived in conscious contact with higher Beings, making the need for religion, but not moral guidance, redundant. In the present Epoch “the Gods and creative Hierarchies have withdrawn from active participation, that man may work out his own salvation.” Now the guidance of ordinary humanity is the work of Elder Brothers. The Brothers, it seems, are still like the original brothers Cain and Abel in that they have different points of view, different agendas. There are twelve Brothers for each of the seven Lesser Mystery Schools, of which the Rosicrucian Order is one. Moreover, since there are many more than 84 Adepts, just as there are many more high school than college graduates, it is not surprising that unanimity on how best to assist evolving humanity is not always easily achieved among the our spiritual elders.

Take, for example, the question that arose in the mid-nineteenth century, as to whether humans were sufficiently evolved that they could benefit from a disclosure of certain spiritual truths. As reported by C.G. Harrison in *The Transcendental Universe* (reviewed in the July/August 1999 *Rays*), “Brothers of the Left,” let’s call them conservatives, proposed that only the interests of the few should be addressed; while the “Brothers of the Right,” liberals, were of a more democratic persuasion and advocated a more general dissemination of occult knowledge. The justification for continuing to conceal the fact that there is an unseen world around us, as real as the world of senses, was becoming increasingly moot. The concern was, how could this revelation be made safely? The concern was warranted. What Harrison describes as the “Frankenstein monster” of spiritualism was produced. Experiments were

made with individuals of a peculiar psychical organization—mediums—who, “one and all, declared that they were controlled by spirits who had departed from the earth.” Mediumship became a profession (especially in America), and mediums were exploited by “Brothers of the Left” for their own purposes. The attempt to withdraw from the experiment was futile; the door to extramundane influences was open and could not be closed. Not only was the spirit world demoted into an extension of the material world, nullifying the objective of inspiring advanced persons to raise themselves by adapting to spiritual realities, but every kind of impostor came forward to dupe the credulous public.

Viewed traditionally, both the ego and soul consciousness of the medium are suppressed so that the hypnotist or other controller can impose his will on the subject. It is impossible for the medium to enter the realm of the dead because the very members of his being which belong to that realm have been made inoperative. While the medium could produce phenomena that purported to issue from the spirit world, it *was* phenomena, material manifestation, be it vocal chords vibrated by an entity, poltergeist activity, or levitation (which is an etheric phenomenon and still part of the physical world).

Two eminent scientists, Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, and William James became convinced of the spiritual world through observations of mediumship. James, the father of American Pragmatism, physician, Harvard professor of psychology, and the author of “*The Varieties of Religious Experience*,” had studied the greatest mediums of his day with a view toward determining the possibility of the continuance of consciousness after physical death. Not only did James write (as reported in R. Laurence Moore’s *In Search of White*

Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture, Oxford University Press, 1977) that medium Leonora Piper had “supernormal powers,” he affirmed that “I should be willing now to stake as much money on Mrs. Piper’s honesty as on that of anyone I know, and I am quite satisfied to leave my reputation for wisdom or folly, so far as human nature is concerned, to stand or fall by this declaration.”

Well and good: There are honest mediums, who have real, paranormal abilities. But more to the point, are a medium’s abilities to be desired and sought for? Max Heindel’s says emphatically, No! In fact, no person may become a member of the Rosicrucian Fellowship who is a medium. Why? Because the medium suppresses the Ego-consciousness and surrenders the spiritual independence that are hallmarks of the Rosicrucian path of development. We may say, however, that not all mediums are equal. The medium is a messenger, albeit without conscious control over what their message shall be, or where and when they may obtain it. Nevertheless, Heindel acknowledged that involuntary clairvoyants have something to offer us. For this reason he included in nine issues of the *Rays* magazine the results of psychometric investigation by Elizabeth Denton, even as he said “We need hardly to warn our readers of the danger of attempting to awaken the passive phase of this faculty.” Heindel said he was publishing these articles from June 1916 to February 1917 because they reveal what is in the memory of nature: “We now give for the benefit of our readers a series of fragments from Nature’s Secrets which embody the results of *passive impressions* obtained by Mrs. Denton from fragments of rock, etc., also a description of her method and ideas regarding her psychic gift.” Heindel also published her husband’s essay entitled “The Utility of Psychometry.”

The book under review here, *The Afterlife Experiments* (Pocket Books, 2002), is based on the work of genuine mediums who do not conform to our common understanding of the term. These persons are able to make contact with the spirits of the deceased in the desire world by inducing an attentive, recollected state of “mind” that attunes them to this extraphysical dimension. They retain complete awareness of their physical surroundings and can interact with their subject and with experimenters

who are conducting the “readings.”

What is the overriding motive of people who search out mediums? They want to make contact with deceased loved ones. The key word is *love*, love which wants evidence of things not seen, wants substance of things hoped for: a word, some detail that the departed loved one is still living... somehow, somewhere. This motive gave rise to the “Afterlife Experiments” and the book that describes them. Its author, Gary Schwartz—Ph.D. graduate of Harvard, former professor of psychology and psychiatry at Yale, early president of the Biofeedback Research Society, early president of the Division of Health Psychology of the American Psychological Association, author of more than four hundred articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals and over six hundred papers presented at scientific meeting—might be the last person to embark on such investigations because he was so entrenched in modern scientific methodology and trained to be skeptical and rigorously objective. With such an orientation how could he agree to commit himself to mediums purporting to deliver messages from the presence of those absent?

While attending a conference of the American Psychosomatic Society in 1993, Schwartz met and was asked by clinical psychologist, Linda Russek, Ph.D., “Do you think it’s possible that my father is still alive?”

“I’m not sure,” Schwartz replied. “Would it matter if I told you that I thought it was possible?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Why would it make a difference what I think?”

“Because you’re a serious scientist, and if you think it’s possible, you probably have a good reason.”

Schwartz did have a good reason, but he had never shared his “hypothesis” with anyone because it was “so painfully controversial,” certainly for a highly credentialed scientist to entertain. His hypothesis, which he proceeded to explain, was that “mathematical logic leads to the conclusion that not only are all systems ‘alive’ to various degrees, but also that this information continues as a living, evolving energy system after the physical structure has ceased to exist.” Contemporary astrophysics has documented that 12-plus-billion-year-old photons, or packets of light, supposedly from the time of the universe’s conception (Big Bang), continue to exist.

If these “info-energy” packets persist in the universe today, why can’t human info-energy packets persist as well. Schwartz was not far from the nuclear forces describing human seed atoms.

Schwartz and Russek decided to collaborate in investigating the working assumption that “science can establish that love exists, that consciousness exists, and that survival of consciousness exists in the same way the science has established that gravity exists, that electrons exist, and photons from ‘deceased’ stars continue to exist.”

Since physics teaches that it is scientifically appropriate to infer the existence of invisible processes through careful observation in repeated experiments, it should be possible to infer the existence of invisible living info-systems—living souls and spirits—through systematic and careful experimentation.

The research that Schwartz *et al* have conducted to date suggests that “our common sense idea of death will ultimately turn out to be as ‘flat’ as our past common sense idea of a flat earth.”

The student of Western Wisdom Philosophy certainly requires no proof of the continuity of consciousness and the existence of “the dead.” But he may be able to make use of *The Afterlife Experiments* to appeal to those realists who demand the imprimatur of hard science. Moreover, the experiments provide “a scientific reason to believe what we already know in our hearts to be true.” Does this phrasing sound familiar? It echoes Heindel’s words that the Cosmo was written “to aid those who inherently feel that these things must be and to help them to see the light upon this great World-mystery...”

While no major university has a formal research program investigating the possibility of survival of consciousness after death, the University of Arizona, to which Schwartz transferred in order to conduct research more in line with his interests, agreed to permit his unconventional studies.

The challenge was how to fashion clinical procedures that precluded every element of chance or opportunity for deception or mere good guessing. Here is where the methodology of the sciences can both confirm belief and rescue unbelief. By the time the third series of “readings” was to take place, the experimenters had devised a three phase procedure that excluded areas where suggestion, inference, or

other forms of influence could intrude. In a pre-reading phase, a “contemplation” period, the medium wrote down information received about the unknown, unseen sitter. In a second “silent-sitter” phase, a phone connection was made between sitter and reader, who spoke her received impressions with the mute button turned on at the reader’s end. The entire session was taped and videoed. In the third phase the reader read the content of her pre-reading contemplation to the sitter and asked for denial or confirmation of items. There was an overall 65% accuracy of the data received by the reader. In some cases the sitter would deny the data given, or not be able to confirm it, only to subsequently discover that the information was correct. When readings were done in the same room, with a screen separating the sitter and the medium, electro encephalogram markings became assymetric at the time of the reading, ruling out the suggestion of telepathy, during which brain wave patterns tend to be parallel, indicating a mental conformity between sitter and medium.

While Schwartz’s work is ongoing, his partner, Dr. Russek, asked him why he continued to resist summarizing the data as a whole. Schwartz writes, “I was experiencing a growing professional and personal fear....I was brought up from an early age to believe that scientists are not supposed to believe in things,” though opinions are admissible. More, he continued to doubt. “My degree of doubt in the presence of all the data was frankly irrational.” He went through all the experiments again and came to the conclusion, based on science, that “we celebrate the existence of the human mind, which not only raises scientific questions but also evolves the wisdom to know when it’s time to stop obsessively questioning and accept the truth of the answers. That we celebrate the existence of living souls in a living and evolving universe. And that, with humility, we thank a Loving Essence that makes all of this possible.” That from a hard-core scientist faced with the facts, whose group’s motto is, “If it is real, it will be revealed. If it is fake, we’ll find the mistake.”

The epigraph to *The Afterlife Experiments* quotes William James: “In order to disprove the law that all crows are black, it is enough to find one white crow.” Schwartz’s investigations show that white crows abound, and that life continues beyond death. □

—C.W.