

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH
PUBLISHED BY THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC., EDITED BY W. G. ROLL

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATIONS OF "MEDIUMS"

The study of so-called mediums is one of the most promising forms of survival research. Mediums are ESP sensitives who believe they can use their psychical abilities to communicate with deceased personalities. If this belief can be proven or disproven scientifically, theta research would be greatly advanced. The nature of ESP itself can only be fully understood when its range is known. The following remarks are offered to help more persons take an active part in this work.

One need not be experienced in mediumistic research to make a preliminary study. If the results are encouraging, a program of controlled research can then be initiated. At that stage, it is advisable to consult an experienced investigator or at least to become familiar with current methods of testing.¹

Our suggestions are limited to research with "mental mediums," that is, to persons who appear to use ESP for communicating with theta agents. Genuine "physical mediums" who seem to use PK (psychokinesis) for "materializations," etc., are rare and difficult to investigate. They will not be discussed here.

The first problem is how to contact a good medium. One approach is to attend spiritistic meetings since mediums often belong to such groups. Some mediums advertise in newspapers or in popular psychical periodicals, such as *Fate Magazine*; and articles about them are also found there. Inquiries from acquaintances are another possibility. Sometimes they lead to persons who are not professional mediums but are gifted and willing to cooperate.

¹Some of these are described by W. G. Roll in "Designs for Tests With Free Response Material," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 56, October, 1962, 184-195. Reprints can be obtained free of charge by writing to THETA.

FORMS OF MEDIUMSHIP

Mediumistic abilities take many forms. Some mediums operate in a deep trance where they appear to be controlled by other personalities, including the inquirer's deceased friends or relatives. Often, there is a "guide" or "control" who appears to seek out the discarnate personalities and generally adopts a supervisory role. Other mediums obtain their material by automatic writing or by indicating the letters of the alphabet on a Ouija board. Still others get impressions by looking at a glass ball, a blank wall, etc. Many mediums believe they get better results if they hold some personal ("psychometric") object which belongs to the inquirer. It is wise to bring a few such items to the session since a particular object sometimes does not "work" and the medium may ask for another. The procedure is also used to establish ESP contact with persons who are not present in person, including deceased owners of the object.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Very little is known about the nature of ESP, but one thing seems clear: at the time they receive an impression, most mediums do not know whether it is due to some form of ESP, including theta-ESP, or their own thought processes. They may not even know when impressions are due to sensory cues from the inquirer. Sensory information can be absorbed unconsciously and emerge later as part of a "communication."

Even with the best mediums, it is impossible to know how they will perform on a given day, with a given inquirer. Most of the factors that affect ESP are still unknown. Others are known but the investigator may have little control over them, such as the medium's mood during the session or his state of health. Certainly, if a medium is not feeling up to par, it is

advisable to postpone the session. Some mediums have opinions about when their ESP is likely to operate and when it is not. For instance, some believe their abilities work best on clear days and not at all during thunderstorms. If the investigator plans to use a psychometric object, he is advised to use one that was touched or handled frequently by the person to whom it belonged and little by others. Most mediums believe that only such objects are suitable. Objects that have been associated with strong emotions also are generally considered better than others. Whatever the factors are that influence ESP, it is usually best to go along with the medium's belief since the beliefs may, themselves, affect results. When and if the investigator is ready for controlled experimentation, a good way of starting might be to test some of the medium's opinions, for instance, by comparing objects which were connected with emotionally intense events with objects associated with more neutral ones.

It is a common experience for investigators to get results from certain mediums but not others, even though these performed well for their colleagues. Undoubtedly, the investigator's social skills play an important role. But unknown interactions between the investigator and the medium (and any hypothetical theta agents) may also help or hinder the ESP process. In this connection, it must be remembered that under normal circumstances, the person who consults a medium does so for strong personal reasons, for instance, in the hope of communicating with a deceased relative. This personal element, which is usually lacking in scientific studies, may be important. The investigator who can bring a personal involvement to the situation may have a special advantage. In any case, the investigator should not conclude that a medium who produces poor results with him will necessarily fail with others. Nor can he assume that others will repeat his own successes. His purpose should be restricted to finding mediums who work well with him.

MEDIUMS HAVE MOTIVES

It is important to realize that like other human behavior, mediumistic activities are motivated. A medium not only possesses a certain type of ESP ability, but uses it for certain purposes. The investigator should attempt to discover what the motives are and try to satisfy them as best he

can. If he does not, he cannot expect good results.

A medium might be compared to a performing artist. Like the artist, he has a certain skill which he displays in public. The motives of both may be numerous and complex. Among them, often, is the need for a livelihood. It is no more reprehensible for a medium to require remuneration for demonstrating his skills than it is for the musician. It is advisable, however, to determine in advance what the medium expects. Mediums who have other sources of income often do not ask fees. They are rewarded by showing their abilities to an appreciative inquirer and sharing their insights with him. Others, again, will give their time freely for the purpose of scientific research.

HOW TO BEHAVE

People are often at a loss how they should react during mediumistic sessions. The inquirer's behavior is likely to be an important factor in shaping the results. It may help him conduct himself in the best manner if he regards the medium as a performing artist and himself as the audience. If he expresses doubts about the existence of deceased communicators or the medium's abilities to contact them, this is likely to affect the performance adversely. In the same way, it might inhibit a violinist if he believed that his listeners disliked the composer whose piece he was playing or that they thought little of his own abilities.

The Society for Psychical Research² outlines some behavior traits that are likely to block results. By recognizing them, the investigator may learn to avoid them.

"The unresponsive give the unhelpful impression that they are not interested. This is liable to discourage the medium or Control, who may feel that nothing has been recognized as correct. As far as possible one should try to acquiesce and appear interested; otherwise the medium or Control may feel it is not worthwhile to continue talking.

"The talkative may overstimulate the medium's subconscious activity, with the result that they only receive back an over-elaboration of material they themselves have given, while genuine material is blocked.

"The persistent questioner is liable to

²Hints on Sitting With Mediums. London, Society for Psychical Research, 1950.

bewilder and hinder the communications and get nothing whatever. A tactful sitter can, however, steer the communications in the direction of topics of special interest without either cross examining . . . or giving away information, much as an ordinary conversation between friends can be steered.

"The argumentative, contradictory, and self assertive are all unsuitable. Such tendencies should be strictly suppressed, or the sitter will defeat his own purposes in having a sitting."

The investigator should also anticipate that the medium will have special requests about the conduct of the session. A medium may wish to begin with a prayer or other form of religious ceremony. In the course of the session, he is likely to ask the inquirer for indications as to whether or not he is on the right track. It is tempting to regard this as "fishing" for information which later will be reproduced in a psychical guise. It should be remembered that ESP impressions are usually indistinguishable from the medium's private thoughts and associations and that a medium is likely to feel uncertain and insecure without clues about how he is doing. In exploratory investigations the inquirer is advised to provide such guidance and to keep track of exactly what information was revealed so that it later can be separated from the other items. If it turns out that all the information produced by a medium was normally supplied, this is a significant result which will help the inquirer waste no more time with that medium.

PRECAUTIONS

The purpose of an exploratory investigation is to determine if there are grounds for controlled research. The inquirer should not expect results that stand up to scientific scrutiny. He only needs to know if there is a case for going ahead.

If possible, at the time of the session, the medium should not know the name or anything else about the inquirer. Most mediums will accept anonymous sessions arranged by telephone. Alternatively, a pseudonym can be used. Personal belongings, such as handbags and clothing which might contain letters or other information should remain under control of the inquirer both before and after the sitting. Inevitably, the inquirer will give away information by his physical appearance, facial expressions, replies to questions, etc.,

and by the psychometric object if one is used. He should keep careful notes of information supplied in such ways. A record should be made, preferably on a tape recorder, of the medium's statements and the inquirer's responses. Most mediums have no objection to note-taking or tape recording. On the contrary, they regard it as an indication of the value of their statements that they are carefully recorded.

As with any other skill, there is no necessary relationship between the possession of mediumistic abilities and being a more or less honest person. Mediums are as likely to be honest or dishonest as the next person. For those mediums who operate in a state of lowered consciousness, such as in a trance state, there may be less control over what they say and do, resulting in the simulation of psychical effects. Undoubtedly, too, otherwise genuine mediums have been known to cheat when their ESP abilities gave out in the effort to satisfy their clients. Some investigators have made a specialty of exposing mediums by allowing or even encouraging them to operate under conditions where cheating was easy and then catching them when they used the opportunity. The important question is not whether a medium sometimes cheats but whether he sometimes produces genuine psychical effects under conditions where cheating and other known factors were ruled out.

THE ASSESSMENT

In evaluating the material afterwards, the inquirer needs to disregard the following items from his assessment: (a) Statements that could have been inferred from the appearance or demeanor of the inquirer. For instance, if the inquirer speaks with a European accent, it is likely that he has "travelled across water." (b) Statements referring to information obtained by the inquirer's replies to questions from the medium. Suppose that the inquirer replies affirmatively when the medium says, "I see university buildings; are you a college professor?" If the medium later says, "I see you surrounded by young men and women," this could have been inferred from the earlier reply. Even if the inquirer does not overtly reply to a question, he should consider the possibility that he does so unconsciously, by facial expression, quickened breathing, and the many other ways that thoughts and emotions are revealed. (c) Statements that could be true

for most people. Some items can easily be recognized as applying to nearly everybody of the same age or sex as the inquirer. The parents of an elderly inquirer are likely to be dead, and a statement to that effect could not be regarded as evidential. Many other things are true for a great number of people though this may not appear at first to be the case. It is a good idea if the inquirer shows his records to someone else of about the same age and background and asks him to check the statements as if they were intended for him. If most of the statements apply also to this other person, it is unlikely that they contain evidence for ESP.

It is best if the names and events the medium produces are specific and apply only to few, if any, persons other than the investigator or whoever was intended. The most desirable results consist of descriptions of events that are unknown to the inquirer. These may be future events in his life or episodes in the lives of others, such as the owner of a psychometric object. It augurs well for controlled research if the medium produces such material in the course of exploratory sessions.

THE CANDLE OF VISION¹

By A E

This volume, first published in 1918, was written by the Irish poet and author, G. W. Russell, under the penname A. E. It is unlike the books that generally are reviewed here. Mainly, we are concerned to keep abreast of scientific studies that touch on the survival issue. This is a visionary and literary, rather than a scientific, work. But as a mystic's account of his inspirations, it may serve as background material for theta research.

Russell was one of the luminaries of the Irish literary renaissance at the turn and first decades of the century. The visionary experiences which form the contents of the present book were stimulated by his exposure to theosophy through the poet, W. B. Yeats, a friend and countryman.

Most of Russell's visions came in periods of meditation and he has some interesting suggestions about methods to facilitate

such experiences. During sleep, too, he occasionally had a "glimpse of the high adventures of the unsleeping soul." Once, he felt himself float through space with others toward "a vast and glowing orb of light" into which some illuminated and liberated souls merged while he returned to his sleeping body. Such experiences are, of course, unverifiable. Some, however, are instances of apparent ESP. For example, Russell had a vision about a friend who was visiting abroad in which the details corresponded with his friend's experiences. The possibility that some of his impressions were veridical enhances the value of the others. It raises the question whether they, too, reflect something real, though not amenable to direct proof.

In some instances, Russell's visions concerned past events that were associated with a locality or house he happened to be visiting. These experiences suggested to him that everything in nature produces an "emanation or shadow of life and form" and is "a continuous fountain of phantasmal effigies of itself." These emanations, visible to the mystic, are unaffected by time, death, or physical destruction.

Russell's concept of emanations has interesting parallels in the thinking of some of the early psychical researchers who were his contemporaries. F. W. H. Myers and Sir Oliver Lodge were already suggesting that past events left "traces" on objects in their neighborhood and that gifted ESP subjects could detect them. "It sometimes seems," Myers said, "as though even inorganic nature could still be made, so to say, luminescent with the age-old history of its past." When present-day parapsychologists talk about "psi fields" and related concepts, it is largely in an attempt to come to grips with this apparent relation between matter and ESP.

Russell's work is also relevant to contemporary studies of the connection between ESP, creativity, and dissociated states. Images of events, distant in time and space, and the hidden affinities that exist between all things can be perceived, he believed, when the normal guards of consciousness are down, such as during sleep, meditation, and in the course of artistic creativity.

M. R.

¹New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, Inc., 1965, 175pp., \$5.00.